

# After Nelson Mandela - continue the struggle for freedom and equality

**"If the ANC does to you what the apartheid government did to you, then you must do to the ANC what you did to the apartheid government." Nelson Mandela, 1994**

Sarah Sachs-Eldridge

The worldwide tsunami of responses to Mandela's death reflects the almost universal disgust at the system of apartheid and at racism.

It also shows the degree to which the mass movement in South Africa, of which Mandela is the most famous activist, continues to be an inspiration to millions of people.

In 1994 queues at the polling booths in the first election under conditions of full suffrage were the proof that brutal systems can be overthrown.

The singing, dancing crowds at the football stadium for Mandela's memorial service celebrate that victory.

But their determined booing of current corrupt South African President Jacob Zuma shows that long speeches in praise of Mandela will not cut across the deep-seated unpopularity that besets Zuma and the other 'dignitaries' that turned up. Tory axe-man Osborne had to endure similar jeering at the London Paralympics.

Like Zuma, these world leaders hope that some of Mandela's status will rub off on them because, like Zuma, their anti-working class, pro-capitalist policies inspire nothing but opposition from the masses. Twenty years after apartheid South Africa is the most unequal country in the world.

In 1994 Mandela warned that no leadership can be given a blank cheque: "If the ANC does to you what the apartheid government did to you, then you must do to the ANC what you did to the apartheid government."

In August 2012 the Zuma ANC government sent the police to shoot down striking miners at the Marikana mine in Rustenburg.

This massacre was a watershed. It clearly showed that the ANC and its Tripartite Alliance partners govern in the interest of the mine bosses and the capitalist class.

Following Marikana the strike committee, with other sections of the working class at the forefront of the struggle against job cuts, repression and privatisation, formed the Workers And Socialist Party (WASP).

This was a vital step needed to begin to give the heroic South African working class its own political voice alongside its industrial strength.

The Democratic Socialist Movement, the Socialist Party's sister party in South Africa, has been to the fore, working with leading trade union activists.

WASP's programme includes democratic nationalisation of the mines and big business. It has adopted the miners' demand for a living wage of R12,500 a month. It opposes all privatisation.

Since its foundation WASP is growing rapidly. This week the 50,000-strong National Transport Movement has officially confirmed it has affiliated to WASP.

The South African National Civic Association Transkei region (Eastern Cape) will be holding a rally on 16 December, the day after Mandela's funeral to announce its affiliation to WASP. Sanco has 6,000 members just in Umtata near Qunu where Mandela will be buried.

And the National Union of Metalworkers, with over 300,000 members is holding a conference later in December in response to the clamour among its rank and file for a break with the ANC.

The South African working class has had a speedy school in betrayal in the 20 years of ANC rule. But the booing of Zuma highlights that the masses, after burying Mandela will be ready to bury Zuma and the ANC! WASP is attracting workers because of its clear programme of struggle and socialism.

It is WASP and those fighting oppression, austerity and capitalism around the world who stand in the real tradition of the mass struggle to overthrow apartheid.

- Build the Workers And Socialist Party
- Fight for a socialist alternative

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## The lessons of his legacy

**Weizmann Hamilton and Thamsanga Dumezweni, Democratic Socialist Movement (CWI South Africa)**

Nelson Rolihlahla Mandela is rightly revered worldwide as a statesman ranking along great figures of history like Martin Luther King. He is recognised for his role in the defeat of one of the most reviled regimes on the planet and one the most odious systems of oppression and exploitation in history. He has acquired the status of universal hero not least because of his demonstration in practice of his commitment to self-sacrifice for a noble cause - the national liberation of the black majority. This is captured by his declaration, during the Treason Trial, that non-racialism was a principle that he was prepared, 'if needs be', to die for.

His willingness to make the ultimate sacrifice for the cause is borne out by the fact that he personally undertook the task of establishing the ANC's armed wing, Umkhonto we Sizwe (MK), secretly paying visits to countries like Algeria to seek support for the armed struggle leading him to be installed as MK's first commander-in-chief.

His steadfast refusal to accept any kind of compromise from the apartheid regime in exchange for his freedom, choosing instead to endure twenty-seven years of incarceration, reinforced his stature as a man of principle and integrity committed to the service of his people in sharp contrast to today's unprincipled, corrupt political elite that is seen by many as trampling on the legacy he entrusted to them.

The current ANC leadership falsely portrays the defeat of apartheid as the more or less inevitable culmination of the continent's oldest liberation movement's hundred-year long march to victory. There can be little doubt, however, that, in terms of commitment, political and ideological outlook, strategy and tactics the ANC that endeared itself to the masses is the one of Mandela.

### **Mandela transforms ANC**

As part of a new generation of young leaders in the 1940s, inspired by the colonial revolution that shook imperialism at the end of the second world war, Mandela and his comrades, principally, Walter Sisulu and Oliver Tambo, shook up an ANC leadership whose character until then was determined by the road along which they had sought salvation for the oppressed - begging the Queen of England to release the black oppressed from bondage while pledging, as subjects, their undying loyalty to her and the British empire.

From an organisation whose methods consisted of pleas and petitions, Mandela and his comrades, having taken control of the ANC Youth League and adopting the 1949 Programme of Action, converted the ANC for the first time into an organisation committed to achieving its objectives by mass action - defiance campaigns, bus boycotts, anti-pass law protests and stay-aways.

From this followed the adoption of the Freedom Charter, whose radical demands reflected the extent to which the working class masses had come to influence the outlook of the ANC, in contrast to the pre-Mandela leadership's hostile distance corresponding to their class separation. From that point onwards up to liberation in 1994, it was possible for the antagonistic class aspirations of the working masses and those of the middle class - the aspirant black

capitalist class - held in common subjugation by the white minority regime, to co-exist in the same organisation under the same programme in mutual commitment to overthrow white minority rule. It would not matter... until it mattered. Until, that is, the time came to implement the Freedom Charter.

The next elections will be taking place twenty years since the end of apartheid. The historic 1994 elections symbolised the triumph of the national liberation struggle - the lifting of the yoke of racial oppression and the opening of the doors to a society in which black people, now a head taller, could stand side-by-side with their white counterparts as equals. Assured by the promises of a better life for all and the strength of their numbers, the black majority embraced the generosity Mandela championed towards the white minority. Mandela's leadership, it was believed, had averted a racial civil war thought unavoidable.

With a leadership that demonstrated an apparently single-minded determination to lead its people to freedom, there was no reason to doubt the promise of a better life for all to come. Through Mandela's leadership, a new democratic dispensation based on what has been described as the most progressive constitution in the world had been ushered in. On its foundations there would arise a new, 'rainbow nation', from which racial oppression and its companions - poverty, illiteracy, disease, homelessness - would be banished 'never again', in Mandela's words, to return. In this new SA there would be equality of opportunity for all in a nation 'united in its diversity'.

## **Reality looks different**

As SA completes the second decade of democracy, reality looks rather different from the promise that came out of the negotiated political settlement worked out in the early 1990s. Although the racist FW De Klerk government duly vacated the seat of political power for the ANC, and the ANC has been regularly returned with large majorities, for the overwhelming majority little has changed.

A striking feature of the eulogising of Mandela, is the conflicting class interests converging around what appears to be a common public manifestation of a nation united.

The 'nation' that Mandela has bequeathed is as unreconstructed today as it was before the end of apartheid, disaggregated into its two main social forces - the working class on the one side and the capitalist class on the other. SA is reputed to be the most unequal society on Earth. As many as 8 million are unemployed, 12 million go to bed hungry, millions are excluded from decent education, health and housing.

The ruling ANC elite is exhibiting the same characteristics as the one which it replaced - corrupt, inept and with an insatiable appetite for self-enrichment and power. Even worse, whilst condemning apartheid order policies as a crime against humanity, the representatives of the new elite are displaying a growing infatuation with similar methods of rule as their predecessors, taking shelter behind repressive legislation such as the Secrecy Act, the National Key Points Act and the Traditional Courts Bill to secure their grip on power, and to keep the nation in the same sort of dark secrecy and repression as the apartheid regime.

Instead of the fulfilment of the dreams of equality and prosperity the masses had been led to believe lay in store for them under democracy, its benefits have accrued to only a tiny minority. Far from the promised 'Rainbow Nation' of equals, SA today resembles, as ANC secretary general Gwede Mantashe has himself admitted, 'an Irish Coffee' - black at the bottom, on top a thin layer of white cream sprinkled with chocolate.

A common theme running through the overwhelming majority of evaluations of Mandela's life is that the conduct of his successors in the ANC leadership and his squabbling family represent not just a departure from everything that Mandela stood for, but constitute the desecration of his legacy. Does this assessment stand the test of close scrutiny?

Capitalist commentators would have us believe that SA would have been if not the country of our dreams then at least a better place had Mandela's successors continued to walk in his footsteps. The truth, however, is that this is precisely what they did, at least in respect of all the fundamental questions of policy on which the ANC's near twenty-year rule has been based.

## **Mandela and Gear**

Mandela played the decisive role in the abandonment of the Freedom Charter and everything the ANC was believed to have held sacred until then. The decisive break was the adoption of the Growth, Employment and Redistribution

(Gear) programme in 1996. Gear was to bring the ANC government incrementally into open collision with the working class - in the workplace, townships and squatter camps and tertiary education institutions and introduced the first serious strains in the Tripartite Alliance. The difference between Mandela's reign and that of all his successors is more in style than substance.

Somewhat unfairly, for instance, Mbeki, who proudly proclaimed himself a Thatcherite, has come to be personally associated with Gear. Yet Gear was adopted under Mandela's presidency. In spite of the fact that Mbeki spearheaded the adoption of Gear, he did so with Mandela's (and that of the rest of the ANC leadership including the SACP's) full blessing.

Within the period between his release in 1990 and the ANC's accession to power four years later, Mandela's position swung from an unswerving commitment to the Freedom Charter and a reaffirmation of its nationalisation clauses at its heart as fundamental to ANC policy, to a declaration, well before the ANC entered parliament that privatisation - at the heart of Gear's original strategic objectives - was now the ANC's fundamental policy. It was Mandela that led the ANC to power with the promise of jobs for all, and the same Mandela who declared in parliament after Gear had been adopted that the ANC government was 'not a job-creating agency'.

In performing this heart transplant, Dr Mandela did not consult the patient. Whereas the adoption of the Freedom Charter was the culmination of the most democratic process in the ANC's history, the adoption of Gear was profoundly undemocratic.

The Freedom Charter was the summation of the in-puts of thousands of workers in urban and rural areas and of people of all walks of life across the country whose proposals were written on pieces of paper and forwarded to the Congress of the People there to be incorporated.

Gear on the other hand was developed behind the backs not just of the membership, but of the majority of even the ANC cabinet itself.

It was adopted and implemented in 1996, and presented to the membership at the ANC's Mafikeng conference in 1997 as an accomplished fact after it had already been approved by big business.

As former MK leader, SACP Central Committee member and Intelligence Minister Ronnie Kasrils confirms, in an admission astonishing for its honesty, under Mandela's leadership, the ANC betrayed the 'poorest of the poor' to domestic capital and imperialism in the Codesa negotiations.

## **Business pacts with Mandela**

Quoting Stellenbosch University's Sampie Terreblanche, Kasrils writes: '...by late 1993 big business strategies - hatched in 1991 at the mining mogul Harry Oppenheimer's Johannesburg residence - were crystallizing in secret late-night discussions at the Development Bank of South Africa.

'Present were South Africa's mineral and energy leaders, the bosses of US and British companies with a presence in South Africa...'

What transpired out of these 'late-night discussions'? Kasrils reveals: 'Nationalisation of the mines and [the commanding] heights of the economy as envisaged by the Freedom Charter was abandoned.' Kasrils describes how the ANC leadership prostrated itself before domestic capital and imperialism: 'The ANC accepted responsibility for a vast apartheid-era debt... a wealth tax on the super-rich to fund developmental projects was set aside, and domestic and international corporations, enriched by apartheid, were excused from any financial reparations.

'Extremely tight budgetary obligations were instituted that would tie the hands of any future governments; obligations to implement a free trade policy and abolish all forms of tariff protection in keeping with neo-liberal free trade fundamentals were accepted. Big corporations were allowed to shift their main listings abroad.'

The roots of the ANC leadership's latter-day disenchantment with the constitution, and their growing exasperation with the parliamentary democracy itself, are to be found in the trampling of their own internal democracy.

Contrary to the propaganda of the old regime, the ANC leadership, despite its embrace of the SACP, was never infected by the 'disease' of communism.

Mbeki, whose ideological outlook has falsely been portrayed as fundamentally at variance with that of Mandela's, in stating such was merely echoing within earshot of the working class what Mandela had made crystal clear already back in 1956, within a year of the adoption of the Freedom Charter, and later at the Treason Trial in 1964.

He did not want the Freedom Charter to be confused with socialism. The Freedom Charter, he explained '...is by no means a blue-print for a socialist state.

'It calls for the redistribution, but not nationalisation, of land; it provides for nationalisation of mines, banks, and monopoly industry, because big monopolies are owned by one race only, and without such nationalisation racial domination would be perpetuated despite the spread of political power.'

As we have pointed out before, the ANC's support for nationalisation has never been as a step towards the abolition of capitalism, but to use the state to accelerate the development of a black capitalist class in much the same way as the Nats did for the development of an Afrikaner bourgeoisie.

As Mandela explained in the Treason Trial: 'The ANC's [nationalisation] policy corresponds with the old policy of the present Nationalist Party which, for many years, had as part of its programme the nationalisation of the gold mines which, at that time, were controlled by foreign capital.'

## **Mandela before elections**

The ANC finds itself at this point in history, not because it has been derailed from the historical path it plotted for itself, but because this is where, given its history, social character and historical purpose, it has always been headed.

The ANC's surrender of the mandate of the Congress of the People at Codesa was no deviation from this path.

In fact it was the fulfilment of the ANC's historical mission. It was signalled in Mandela's Treason Trial speech where he made clear the leadership's preparedness to compromise even on the fundamental principle of majority rule based on one-person-one-vote by offering to negotiate for a limited number of seats for blacks for a fixed period to be followed by a gradual increase after a fixed period.

He signalled this further by engaging in secret negotiations with representatives of the apartheid regime's intelligence services and big business as early as 1985 for which he had no mandate from his own organisation.

The 'talks about talks' that followed in the form of more high level engagements with the regime were preceded by talks with members of the political establishment in 1987 in Dakar Senegal.

The abandonment of the armed struggle without any consultations with the MK cadres or even Chris Hani, proved that the armed struggle had always been nothing more than a propaganda of the deed tactic to force the regime to the negotiating table. Codesa was the logical sequel.

The Nobel Peace prize was conferred on Mandela and De Klerk to perpetuate the myth that the negotiated settlement was the fortuitous confluence of the conversion on the road to Damascus of an Afrikaner-led capitalist establishment and a Mandela-led ANC leadership magnanimous in its victory.

But as even Mandela felt obliged to point out, the country was liberated not by him or the ANC leadership but the working masses themselves.

If imperialism and the capitalist establishment in SA exerted pressure on the apartheid regime to negotiate with the ANC it was because they understood that the struggles of the masses - from the 1973 strikes in Natal to the 1976 uprising of the youth to the insurrectionary movement of the 1980s spurred by the establishment of the UDF and in particular the socialist consciousness of the workers of Cosatu - posed a mortal threat to their system.

Had white minority rule be overthrown by an insurrection of the masses, the future of capitalism itself would have been threatened.

The behind-the-scenes negotiations with Mandela had convinced the more far-sighted strategists of capital that Mandela was a man they could do business with.

Mandela had never contemplated the abolition of capitalism. His problem was not capitalism per se, but a capitalism that favoured one race against the other. For this the ruling class is forever grateful to Mandela.

The ANC leadership was never committed to thoroughgoing transformation of SA society. Far from desiring the overthrow of capitalism, it sought accommodation within it.

With capitalism now in the throes of its worst crisis since the 1930s, the incapacity of this capitalist government to fulfil the expectations of the people has become more and more acute. The crisis of capitalism is reflected now in the ANC itself.

## **New workers' party**

Almost as if conspiring to effect a symmetry in the life cycle of the party he led so heroically and that of Mandela himself, history appears to have determined that Mandela's demise should coincide with the implosion of the ANC.

There is little doubt that the ANC's fast eroding cohesion will accelerate after Mandela's passing. With him will be buried the last rays of its halo as a liberation organisation.

Thus while the capitalist class mourns the imminent collapse of its Codesa salvation, the working class has awoken to the sounds of the guns of Marikana - the party they believed for so long to be their own is in fact the party of the bosses.

What happened in reality was an exchange of political captains of capitalism; the racist white government was replaced by a 'non-racist' democratically elected government based on the black majority.

The establishment of the Workers and Socialist Party (WASP) represents an historic step forward: the reclamation by the proletariat of its class and political independence, its liberation from the ideological and political prison camp of the ANC and the Tripartite Alliance in which it was incarcerated for nearly two decades.

The march towards a socialist SA, from which the working class had been diverted since 1994, has now resumed.

The capitalists and their spokespersons are justified to be worried about the death of Mandela. Even if some of them are shedding crocodile tears, the point is that he gave SA capitalism a new lease on life.

It is almost twenty years now since his ANC came to power. These twenty years have consistently revealed the brutality of capitalism - poverty, unemployment and inequality to which his ANC leaders refer as triple challenges. Under capitalism they cannot do away with them.

Only under socialism will the workers rid society of these capitalist evils. It remains for the workers and youth of today to follow what is the best example set by Mandela - selfless and determined struggle - but also to learn that in the struggle we are fighting a compromise with a class enemy is impermissible, because they inevitably lead to betrayals of the masses as capitalism cannot meet their aspirations.

More importantly, they must learn that the working class should only rely on its independent political leadership, organisations and programme to transform society in its own interests and those of the poor, for a socialist South Africa and a socialist world.

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# **Support the Workers And Socialist Party**

The Workers And Socialist Party (WASP) offers condolences to all those in South Africa and internationally who are mourning Mandela's passing.

WASP was launched one year ago by committees representing striking miners following the 16 August 2012 Marikana massacre.

Then 34 striking miners at the Lonmin mine were killed by police armed with automatic weapons deployed by the ANC-led government.

They were demanding nothing more than a higher minimum wage to lift themselves and their families out of crushing poverty.

The ANC-led government not only turned a blind eye to the miners' suffering but was prepared to drown their demands in blood.

Many miners were forced to leave the National Union of Mineworkers, which refused to support the struggle, and set up their own independent, shaft-based, worker-controlled strike committees.

It is these committees that took the decision to launch WASP, to give workers the political voice that the ANC's betrayal has denied them.

In the wake of Mandela's death, WASP said: "As we mourn let us remember that Mandela himself called upon us to act against the ANC government if it does not fulfil the expectations of the masses, in the same way as we did against the apartheid regime.

"Under the Zuma administration we have experienced what would have been previously considered unthinkable - that a democratically elected government would train its guns on workers striking for the very things Mandela championed, a better life for all, slaughtering them in an act of premeditated murder.

"More than any other event the Marikana atrocity - which revealed once and for all that this is a government of the mining bosses and the capitalist class as a whole and not the government of the people that elected it into office - should inspire the working class to act on Mandela's advice.

"Mandela's ANC - the ANC that defeated apartheid - is dead and cannot be resurrected. We must not allow the grief that millions feel - and WASP shares - at Mandela's passing to distract us from the urgent tasks facing the working class today.

The greatest way to honour what Mandela represented to the working class is to continue the struggle for a society where all can live free from the scourges of deprivation, unemployment, inequality and poor services: a socialist society. This is what WASP, born in the furnace of Marikana, stands for."

Even before the Marikana massacre, the ANC was rapidly losing support - 12.4 million did not vote in the last elections such was the disillusion.

Workers take strike action to improve their poverty wages, entire communities protest at the lack of water, sanitation, roads and housing, and young people protest at the cost of education and the lack of jobs that has left youth unemployment at 50%.

WASP has been established to unite the struggles of workers, communities and youth. WASP stands for:

- 1) the nationalisation of the mines**
- 2) a massive programme of job creation with a living wage**
- 3) investment in infrastructure of road, water, sanitation, decent housing and social services**
- 4) free education**
- 5) free healthcare**

WASP is organising workplaces, communities and young people to nominate their own representatives to stand as WASP candidates: the best people to represent the interests of workers are workers themselves.

Even a small group of WASP MPs in the next parliament - which is entirely possible - would be a major step forward for the working class of South Africa.

In October the metal workers' union Numsa confirmed it was debating whether to leave Cosatu, which would in effect mean leaving Cosatu's tripartite alliance with the ANC and the SACP.

Numsa is South Africa's biggest union with 360,000 members and this step has the potential to have an enormous impact on the development of a new party for the working class.

## **International appeal**

WASP is appealing for international labour movement support to help make this potential a reality. Messages of support and the publicising of the campaign will be vital.

But what is most crucial is the funding necessary to wage an effective election campaign.

The money for the election deposits alone is R605,000 (£38,000). This is the money that must be raised before a single poster or leaflet is even printed.

In total we need to raise R2 million (£125,000). A step forward for the working class of South Africa is a step forward for workers around the world.

- You can find details of how to donate online at: [workerssocialistparty.co.za/donate](http://workerssocialistparty.co.za/donate)
- South Africa: From apartheid to Marikana - [www.socialistworld.net/doc/5997](http://www.socialistworld.net/doc/5997)

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# **Cameron 'kowtows' to Chinese dictatorship**

## **Western capitalist leaders put business before lofty 'principles'**

**Vincent Kolo, chinaworker.info**

David Cameron, like many other Western leaders visiting China, abandoned any pretence of defending 'democracy' or 'human rights' in order to secure new profitable deals for British capitalism.

Even before his visit, the Prime Minister's office stated he had no plans to meet the Dalai Lama, as he did in May 2012, and recognised this had 'saddened China'.

In response to Cameron's meeting with the Tibetan Buddhist leader the Chinese dictatorship scuppered a planned visit to China in April 2013, and demanded that the British government "recognise its mistake".

British capitalism - with its own bloody history in Tibet - made sure Cameron performed the required 'self-criticism' so as not to jeopardise financial and business links with the world's number two economy. During the Beijing meeting with new Chinese President Xi Jinping, Cameron declared: "We do not support Tibetan independence".

To rub salt in the wound, Beijing's state-controlled media dismissed Britain as "just an old European country," claiming it was only of interest "for travel and studies". Such comments reflect the increasingly nationalistic tone of regime propaganda.

US imperialism is irked by Cameron, whose Beijing visit preceded that of Vice President Joe Biden.

Through Biden, Washington attempted to pressure Beijing over a potentially dangerous conflict with Japan over air space and disputed uninhabited islands in the East China Sea. The British government's fawning will have encouraged Xi to stand firm on the Japan issue.

## **Staunch allies**

In the business magazine Caixin, Cameron portrayed the British government as the staunchest allies of Beijing in multinational forums such as the G20 and EU, and the most open to Chinese investment.

The British delegation landed a number of billion dollar deals ranging from British big business investment in Chinese hospitals to Chinese investment in Britain's high-speed railways and nuclear sector.

British capitalism, the former 'workshop of the world' - a mantle that has shifted to China - is becoming even more parasitic and finance-based.

The unrepentant finance sharks of the City of London want to position themselves as the major global centre for the booming offshore trade in the Chinese currency, the renminbi.

The government has already opened the way for major Chinese investment in nuclear power - with Chancellor George Osborne offering up to 100% control to Chinese firms.

Chinese investment is also on the cards in the £50 billion HS2 high-speed rail project. The Socialist Party's sister organisation in China, organised around chinaworker.info, warn that both nuclear and high-speed rail development in China are clouded by serious safety issues.

The Wenzhou high-speed rail disaster in 2011, which killed 40 people, highlighted major deficiencies with the Chinese authorities' approach to copying, merging and 'improving' foreign technologies from several different, incompatible national systems.

The same approach has been taken for nuclear power, with blind expansion and unsafe construction practices adding to safety fears.

China's industrial safety problems are rooted in unbelievable levels of corruption, almost non-existent controls, and the lack of even minimal public scrutiny or democratic checks. Above all they are rooted in the total ban on trade unions in China.

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# **Cops Off Campus: NUS must call a national demonstration now!**

**Claire Laker-Mansfield, Socialist Students national organiser**

The shocking brutality meted out against peaceful protesters at the University of London (UoL), witnessed by millions via the internet, has sent shockwaves through the student movement. This was a deliberate and concerted attempt to crush protest through brute force. It is clear that police and university management worked together in order to first remove protesting students from their own campus, and then attack demonstrations taking place outside.

Within the closed towers of a marketised higher education institution, dissent, debate and protest are dangerous and threatening. As far as UoL's management is concerned, student representation and democracy are easily disposed of

luxuries. This is most clearly demonstrated by their attempt to close down the University of London Union (ULU) - one of the attacks that sparked the protests.

It's not just at UoL where there has been a crackdown. At Sussex University, where students have been fighting the privatisation of campus services, five students were suspended for their role in the campaign. This follows a series of occupations and a violent eviction by the police carried out last year. They were later reinstated under huge pressure from the campaign but as we go to press disciplinary action is still being pursued against them.

## **Sending a message**

Elsewhere, at Birmingham, individual students have been targeted by the university's management with legal costs for obtaining an injunction against an occupation. Injunctions seem to have become the 'go to' response to occupations. On 4 December UoL's management obtained an injunction banning all 'occupational style protest' on any of their campuses. Across the country, university managers are uniting with a clear message: protest will not be tolerated.

Students must respond to this repression with a mass campaign to defend democratic rights. It's important that there is an escalation of protests at both UoL and Sussex. The student union at Sussex responded quickly and called an emergency members meeting and then a student strike in protest at the suspensions.

Crucially, we need to organise solidarity demonstrations on campuses across the country. Socialist Students was key in calling the second national 'Cops Off Campus' day of action on 11 December.

Socialist Students is also demanding that the National Union of Students (NUS) lives up to its name and immediately calls a national demonstration as a first step in building a mass campaign for democratic rights as well as against fees, cuts and privatisation. Since the campaign to save ULU started, the right-wing leadership of NUS has given it zero worthwhile support. As cuts and privatisation have rained down on our campuses, NUS has remained inactive. It's time for those who lead this union to stand up and fight or stand aside.

## **Defence campaign**

We also have to take measures to defend protesters against the police, and to support those who have been arrested and victimised for their role in campaigning. Our movement should be bold in its demand for the police to drop all charges against protesters.

We must also fight for a student and trade union-led inquiry into the brutality. NUS has called on Boris Johnson to organise an inquiry! This is the man who has said he would like to see even tougher anti-union laws brought in to effectively ban strike action for underground workers. No inquiry led by him and his cronies would have any legitimacy in the eyes of students and workers.

The trade union and anti-cuts movements needs to take preparation and well-organised stewarding of demonstrations very seriously, including youth and student demonstrations. Stewards need to help protect participants from potentially brutal or punitive actions by the police, guard against the role played by provocateurs and ensure the maximum degree of unity and collectivism, where our greatest strength lies.

This brutality, just like that which took place during the 2010 student movement, gives lie to the notion of the state as a neutral force within society. Under the blows of police violence ordinary people learn the true role of the police within a capitalist society: to protect the interests of the rich and powerful. For those who want to see a society run in the interests of the 99% it's necessary to understand the role of the state.

Democratic and civil liberties have been won by working people over generations of struggle and must be vigorously defended. But it will only be when capitalism is completely removed and a socialist society built, that our rights and freedoms can be fully protected and developed to a higher level.

## **Socialist Students says:**

- NUS: call and mobilise a mass national demonstration to defend democratic rights on campus

- Drop all charges against arrested protesters
- Drop all charges against the Sussex Five
- For the right to demonstrate on and off campus
- For a student and trade union-led inquiry into police violence at the University of London
- Workers and students unite - For trade union organised stewarding and 'legal observers' to help defend demonstrators
- Build a mass, national campaign against cuts, fees and privatisation - we will not be cowed!

## Sussex

On 3 December an occupation of the conference centre at the University of Sussex left to join picket lines, in solidarity with the strike in defence of fair pay in higher education. We had been occupying since 26 November, despite best attempts by university management to starve us out by refusing to allow supplies up to where we were staying. The occupation was in solidarity with the strike, and in protest against the privatisation of university services.

On 4 December five of us received an email from the university notifying us that we have been suspended indefinitely from our studies, and that we were banned from campus.

We fully condemn this draconian move to suspend students for exercising their right to protest. We have been singled out as "key organisers" and "instigators" of the movement which has been ongoing since May 2012 and has involved hundreds if not thousands of students.

**Adriano Mérola**

## Exeter

On 3 December student support was organised at both the university and the college in Exeter for the higher and further education strike. A short occupation was organised at Exeter University in the Queens building senior common room from 5pm until 11.30am the following day.

At the college, the picket line was strong. Students at the college stood with their teachers and brought a (much appreciated) large flask of coffee which was supplied by a local café. Students from the college also took coffee up to pickets on the main university campus. There was a lot of discussion among students about the strike and how we can unite to beat back the vicious Con-Dem government.

**Jesse Dodkins Exeter College Socialist Students**

## Coleraine

On the evening of 2 December, students at the University of Ulster's Coleraine (UUC) campus began an occupation of the senior common room in opposition to plans to close the space.

The Socialist newspaper in Ireland spoke to Chloe Gault, a member of UUC Socialist Society and an organiser of the occupation.

"The Senior Common Room is one of the only public spaces at UUC where students and staff can relax and socialise. It's an essential space for clubs and societies on campus. It also has historical importance for the student movement and as a space where students from across the sectarian divide come together to mix and discuss. When we heard of management's plans to close it and turn it into a 'corporate dining room' for the great and the good, we felt we had to act.

"At the same time as management is holding down staff pay, student services are being cut to the bone. As far as I'm concerned, students and staff are in the same fight. Attacks on staff pay hit morale and impact on our education. We need to stand together. We've developed a very close relationship with the staff. We've been visiting their picket lines and they've been coming up to support the occupation.

"Most students here understand the importance of what we're doing and have been really positive. We've already got great support from activists from further afield, through Twitter and so on, but also some have come to visit us - even driving up from Belfast and bringing us bags of food! NUS-USI [the official student organisation in Northern Ireland] has also been very supportive.

"So far, management has simply ignored us because we have the right to be in our common room 24/7. Perhaps they hope we'll just go away - they're wrong! We're in this for the long-haul, until the future of the SCR is guaranteed."

Tweet @occupycoleraine and email [occupycoleraine@outlook.com](mailto:occupycoleraine@outlook.com) with your messages of support!

See [www.socialiststudents.org.uk](http://www.socialiststudents.org.uk) for reports from the 11 December day of action and further protests

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## **Osborne's budget statement - work 'til you drop or fight back!**

The Tories brayed and shouted, they stamped their feet, they cheered as multi-millionaire George Osborne, the self-styled 'Iron Chancellor', rained hammer blow after hammer blow on the living standards of all but the super-rich.

Osborne pledged to claw public spending back to its 1948 level. The Con-Dems are forging ahead with their attempt to roll back the welfare state and with it all the hard-won gains made by the working class in the 20th century.

The Autumn Budget Statement contained a further £3 billion in cuts over the next three years, a below inflation increase of only 1% for out-of-work benefits, and the introduction of a cap on welfare spending.

But Osborne boasted that Plan A for austerity was working. The weak economic recovery, however, is fuelled by increased consumer spending, which is based on rising household debt and spending savings, and a housing bubble. In fact, Osborne has reverted to the policy of economic growth through financial speculation and debt that triggered the crisis in the first place.

### **No investment increase**

All the post-election talk of the "march of the makers" and boosting manufacturing has been shelved - there has been no increase in investment.

Meanwhile it is business as usual for the rich, who seem to live in another world - even RBS chairman Philip Hampton said he felt like he was having an out-of-body experience when one banker complained to him that his bonus was only £4 million.

The changes to the retirement age are particularly pernicious. They represent an offensive against the successes won by public sector workers in 2005 against the Blair government's threats to pensions. Plans to extend the retirement age to 68 and 69 will be brought forward to the mid-2030s and 2040s.

With the prospect of a pensions commission that would periodically review the date people got their pension on the basis of life expectancy, Osborne posed the threat of an open-ended retirement.

The outlook for young people is bleak. Youth unemployment has been rising since 2010 - and now consultants PwC have calculated that today's youngest teenagers could have a state pension age of 75 and those born today could work until 77. Or not as the case may be.

Osborne justifies the changes on the basis of rising life expectancy but according to the Office for National Statistics this has actually fallen since 2009. One third of men and one quarter of women will not live long enough to claim their pensions in the mid-2030s. Lower life-expectancy is concentrated among the poorest.

Many workers will fear that the new age for the state pension will be used as the yardstick in occupational pension schemes in the public and private sector. This will invalidate one of the main planks in the 'deal' that was agreed to by the right-wing union leaders to scupper the N30 pensions strike.

Union members should call for an emergency meeting of the TUC General Council to organise a 24-hour general strike against this latest vicious instalment of the cuts and the austerity offensive in general.

The Con-Dems can only get away with these blatant class attacks because of the absence of a political opposition to austerity in parliament and the failure of most of the trade union leadership to harness the growing anger against austerity and mount a real fight.

Frances O'Grady, the leader of the TUC, acknowledged that the statement "was a major blow to the hard-working people who get so regularly name-checked by this government" but she offered no way forward.

The huge demo and public sector strikes that took place in 2011 showed the potential for a determined fightback until it was sold out by the right-wing trade union leaders. In the last months firefighters, teachers, university lecturers and probation officers have been on strike, proving that where a lead is given workers take the opportunity to express the boiling anger against cuts and austerity. Firefighters are continuing their battle to defend pensions in a strike on 13 and 14 December.

## **Labour government**

But still the TUC leadership cower in the trenches, waiting for a Labour government which has pledged to carry on with the austerity policies demanded by the bosses and the super-rich.

The few crumbs that Osborne dropped, such as the £50 reduction in fuel bills and scrapping the fuel duty increase, were partly a reaction to Labour's pledge to freeze energy prices. But mainly it was an acknowledgement of the popular anger beneath the surface over falling living standards while big business and the banks pile up profits.

But anyone who thinks that a Labour government will do more than dole out the same few crumbs is mistaken.

Ed Balls, in a pathetic performance, pledged that Labour would stick to the Tory spending limits outlined in the autumn statement.

In fact, a struggle now, including setting the date and preparing for a 24-hour general strike, is the best way to inform a future government that austerity will be resisted.

Meanwhile Labour leaders such as Rachel Reeves mount campaigns to save one of the cruellest cuts - the ill-fated Universal Credit - instead of signing its death warrant by pledging to undo it in government.

Yet when even a hint of opposition is given, such as when Labour said it would abolish the bedroom tax or freeze energy prices it gets overwhelming public support.

In fact the public is normally far to the left, such as the mass support there is for re-nationalisation of the energy companies. But it gives a glimpse of what can be achieved by a fight.

Who can doubt that if a 24-hour general strike had been built for in 2013 it would have ignited a mass movement against austerity which could have driven the Con-Dem government of millionaires back?

A new mass workers' party is urgently needed to put forward that political alternative to austerity, linked to struggle.

The Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition, whose leadership includes the RMT transport union, will be standing hundreds of candidates in the local elections in 2014 as a step towards building such a party.

# Millionaire Osborne: The plan is working

## Working class people: Oh no it isn't!

The 400,000 people using foodbanks, the hundreds of thousands who have lost their jobs, the people hit by the vicious bedroom tax and cuts to disability benefits, households struggling under historic levels of debt, the workers trying to get by with, on average, £2000 less. For none of us does it seem like the plan is working. Only the super-rich, with their £400 billion of wealth, could seriously think things are improving.

Not content with the devastation already wreaked, this government of the rich, for the rich, are ratcheting up the attacks even further. They want us to work even longer. It is to be made even harder for unemployed young people to claim meagre benefits. Further massive cuts threaten essential public services and jobs.

Millions will have to wait longer for a state pension. The planned rise to 68 will be brought forward to the mid-2030s, and will then rise further. People now in their forties will not get the state pension until they are 68, and those in their thirties will have to wait until they are 69.

But this continued austerity is not inevitable. In recent weeks higher and further education workers, teachers, probation officers, firefighters and housing workers have been striking, and the RMT transport union is preparing for a major battle in the new year. All those trade unionists who are fighting the cuts will want their trade union leaders to coordinate strike action. The Socialist Party will continue to campaign for a 24-hour general strike.

With a few notable exceptions - such as when Socialist Party members managed to get on BBC breakfast today - the worker's voice is absent in all the news coverage.

Osborne actually said "We're all in this together" again. He can only keep saying this because he faces an opposition that puts no alternative

Labour's shadow chancellor Ed Balls correctly points out that for most people there is no recovery, but Labour promises continued austerity. Labour councils have meekly passed on the cuts, and are now expected to pass on more.

This is why in the 2014 council elections the [Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition](#) is planning on standing a record number of working class candidates against cuts.

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**In response to the pension age changes, [Youth Fight for Jobs](#) spokesperson Ian Pattison said:**

"We're faced with the impossible situation where one million young people are looking for jobs that don't exist; many others are pushed into precarious zero-hour contracts, as older workers are forced to carry on working past when they want to retire.

"We've supported fire-fighters taking strike action this year. Their retirement age is also being brought up; well beyond when they're able to healthily do the demanding job.

"The Con-Dem cuts, which Cameron gleefully claimed would continue, are only exacerbating the situation.

"Jobs are being lost, but not replaced, to the detriment of everyone. After long years of hard work; low pay and pension cuts are keeping people from retiring.

"Young people are disproportionately at the sharp end of these attacks on pensions. It is part of a toxic agenda that is leaving our generation on the scrapheap. At this rate, will young people like me, ever see retirement?"

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# Strike action can stop cuts

Nancy Taaffe, Waltham Forest

"I do believe in fairies, I do believe in fairies, I do, I do, I do believe in fairies." So says Peter Pan when trying to bring Tinker Bell back to life in the famous children's story.

And so it seems when George Osborne stood up to give us his fairy story that was "The Autumn Statement".

He believed that all he had to do was repeat one message over and over again and people would believe it against their actual experience.

First came the sugar: 'the economy is improving'. Then came the pill: the cuts will continue nevertheless.

The Con-Dems have got away with making us £2,000 a year poorer since 2010.

They have been allowed to reconfigure work that means five million of us are now on zero hour contracts. 631,000 public sector workers have lost their jobs through the cuts, and I'm one of them.

The only reason the bosses have got away with this is because the Labour and right wing trade union leaders have allowed them to.

It's as simple as that. The Mansion House speech and now this statement is the ruling class emboldened.

Imagine how different it would be if there had been the 24-hour general strike we are fighting for.

The dutiful Labour councillors who made the budget cuts in 2010, arguing that we just had to swallow the medicine and the good times would be with us again have merely paved the way for more cuts.

They bear responsibilities for this budget. Why wouldn't Osborne predict that cuts would continue until 2020 and beyond when they believe no one will fight them on these cuts.

There is NO recovery for the majority of us. Osborne is away with the fairies if he thinks we believe that.

I hope the winds that have engulfed this country on the day of this dark news are a harbinger for the anger that will ensure in the labour movements ranks when they understand what needs to be done.

I would urge anyone reading the Socialist to not wait for leadership from those that have failed us so far but get in touch with the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition and help us build the platform in 2014 to challenge the politics of cuts.

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## "Making us work longer for less"

Janice Godrich, President of the Public and Commercial Services union (PCS)

Osborne's autumn statement delivered nothing for millions of ordinary people across the UK. The Tories' policy of making us work longer for less continues.

Raising the pension age even more is disguised by mealy-mouthed comments about how good it is that people are living longer.

It ignores the reality of the shorter healthy life expectancy of the poorest people by simply reflecting the increasing life spans of the healthy and wealthy.

Two thirds of Britons will fail to reach the state retirement age of 68 free from disability.

The additional £2.1 billion worth of cuts in civil service spending will lead to further job losses and privatisation.

Government departments, already struggling under budget cuts and the loss of tens of thousands of civil servants, will simply not be able to cope, leading to a deterioration in services to some of the most vulnerable groups in society.

PCS will continue to campaign against austerity using all tools at our disposal. Our members' living standards are falling. Those in work are joining those out of work living in poverty.

We will continue to do all we can to organise action against these attacks, as well as working with those campaigning against the attacks on unemployed and disabled people.

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## **The creation of 'slave learners'**

### **A UCU member**

Those of us working in further education (FE) are facing attacks on our pay, conditions and pensions - just like everyone in the public sector.

FE lecturers have seen the value of our pay fall by 15% over the last four years and have begun a campaign of strike action over a 'final' pay offer of 0.7%, which the employers want to tie to an end to national agreements on working conditions.

We're also facing an increased workload and the additional stress that it causes.

FE colleges are part of what's still referred to as 'the post compulsory sector'.

While that's never been entirely true - some school-leavers have always had to go to college out of economic necessity - the fact that the overwhelming majority of students are there because they want to be, not because they've been forced, has been important to anyone working or studying in our colleges.

The Chancellor's plans will turn a whole layer of young people - who'll already feel let down by the education system and society as a whole - into educational conscripts: 'slave learners' alongside the slave workers on workfare schemes.

The Chancellor's message seems to be 'the economy is improving, so working class people need to suffer more'.

The result will be even more pressure on the already overstretched FE system.

The scheme doesn't even begin to tackle the real problems that young people are facing - unemployment or a life of low pay, lousy working conditions and zero-hour contracts.

It won't create a single new job for those young people. It's yet another stick to beat them with, and part of a cynical ploy to reduce the youth unemployment figures - on paper at least - by making it harder to claim benefits.

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## **Shake up the establishment parties**

### **Dave Nellist, TUSC chair and ex-Labour MP**

Osborne thinks that austerity is working, but the queues at foodbanks and pay day lenders tell a different story.

This government of millionaires might think things are improving, but most ordinary working class people are facing a Dickensian future rather than a bright recovery.

This government of the rich, for the rich, want us to work even longer. It is to be made even harder for unemployed young people to claim meagre benefits. Further massive cuts threaten essential public services and jobs.

And where is the working class voice in all this? Ed Balls correctly points out that for most people there is no recovery, but Labour promises continued austerity.

All those Labour councils who have meekly passed on the cuts since 2010 are now expected to pass on even more.

It's time to make a stand. In the 2014 council elections the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition is planning on standing a record number of working class candidates against cuts.

There are a growing number of anti-cuts councillors, prepared to stand up for ordinary people, including TUSC supporters and Southampton Councillors Keith Morrell and Don Thomas.

In 2014 socialists, trade unionists and many ordinary working class people want to shake up the establishment parties in Britain.

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This version of this article was first posted on the Socialist Party website on 5 December 2013 and may vary slightly from the version subsequently printed in *The Socialist*.

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## **Fight for our NHS: Public health, not private profit**

**Alison Hill**

The latest measure of the cuts crisis in the NHS is the revelation that some patients are being forced to wait in ambulances outside hospitals because there is no bed for them and no staff to treat them.

The BBC recently asked all UK ambulance services for their waiting figures. This revealed that many patients have to wait in ambulances outside hospital for at least an hour, many around two hours. One ambulance in Wales was 'queuing' for six hours 22 minutes!

NHS England claims waiting times are improving but these figures relate to the summer months.

Now the cold winter weather is beginning to bite and people face ever-rising fuel bills, particularly older people who are vulnerable to cold-related illnesses.

These can only be exacerbated if they have to wait outside hospital in an ambulance for hours on end.

Scandalous situations like these are of course a direct result of the Con-Dems' policy of cuts and privatisation.

This has led to staff shortages and the closure of A&E departments entirely in some areas, putting further pressure on those that remain.

But we shouldn't let Labour off the hook.

They paved the way for privatisation while they were in office and they championed the Private Finance Initiative which is bleeding our hospitals and health service dry while lining the pockets of the construction bosses.

Labour councils are also cutting services such as homecare and are doing nothing to increase the amount of accessible housing.

So frail older people get stuck in hospital with no suitable home to go to. And the ambulances line up outside with more patients needing hospital care.

Care workers working in the community are having to fight the cuts in their pay and conditions. Some find themselves working for less than the minimum wage because council contractors don't pay them for travel time between visits.

None of the establishment parties can be excused from the mess they have made of the NHS and the care services in general. Time for organised action to rebuild what we have won in the past.

Time for a 24-hour general strike against austerity and cuts. Time to build a new mass workers' party which can really represent the interests of working people.

### **The Socialist Party fights for:**

- No cuts. Abolish the Health and Social Care Act which allows the further selling off of our NHS to private companies in England
- End big business profiteering from the NHS: Abandon the Private Finance Initiative which is bleeding the NHS dry
- End NHS job losses and low pay. No downbanding
- A fully publicly funded high-quality NHS, free for all at the point of use
- United action to defend the NHS - the TUC must name the day for a 24-hour general strike against austerity

### **New pamphlet:**

## **Defend the NHS!**

**A compilation of articles by campaigners fighting to stop the destruction of the NHS**

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## **MPs' pay rise scandal**

# **Struggling workers say 'fight poverty pay'!**

**MPs are set to receive a bumper pay rise of 11% in 2015, bringing a backbencher's annual salary up to £74,000. This pay hike - in contrast to years of austerity driven pay freezes meted out by the very same MPs to low-paid public sector workers - is supplemented by expense claims that would make a fraudster blush!**

"Unison members will be mad and disgusted that MPs' pay has shot up while we are still enduring a three-year pay freeze!"

In January we will be stunned by high gas and electricity bills as well as being hit by massively hiked transport costs.

What do these MPs do anyway? They don't represent us! Are we not worth decent pay? Come the new year, members will be more determined to fight the pay freeze which is crushing us and our families."

**April Ashley, assistant branch secretary, Southwark Unison (personal capacity)**

"At a time when UCU members are in dispute following years of real-terms pay freezes, the MPs' pay rises will be a slap in the face for our members.

"We work hard to provide a high-quality education to all students, while neoliberal governments have systematically underfunded us and pushed towards the sell-off of post-16 education.

"We need to kick them out and get political representatives who will defend education!"

**Thomas House, UCU union (personal capacity)**

"PCS workers in the frontline in jobcentres and call centres in Lincolnshire have had to put up with a pay freeze for several years.

"We also have to deal with claimants who are in an even worse financial situation than us.

It sticks in the throat seeing MPs line their pockets. It shows the utter contempt of the establishment for working and poor people in Britain."

**Nick Parker PCS branch secretary, DWP Lincolnshire**

Several cabinet ministers have attempted to deflect public criticism by saying they won't accept the pay rise, conveniently ignoring the fact that they already receive a higher salary than backbenchers - £134,565 - and enjoying other perks, such as a gold-plated final salary pension scheme.

Indeed, this worker-bashing cabinet of 29 ministers includes 23 millionaires. Labour's shadow cabinet also has at least seven millionaires.

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## Austerity and the new working poor

**The privileged position of these establishment politicians is even more galling in that news of their forecast pay rise coincided with a report by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation (JRF) charity which shows a big increase in the numbers of working poor in Britain (see below).**

**At the same time, the New Economics Foundation think tank says: "Workers on low and middle incomes are experiencing the biggest decline in their living standards since reliable records began in the mid-19th century."**

**Some of the JRF report's main findings:**

- The number of workers paid below the living wage (currently £7.65, £8.80 in London) rose from 4.6 million to five million in 2012.
- 50% of working families in poverty have an adult paid below the living wage
- The fall in median income over the last two years has wiped out all the gains of the previous decade, the JRF said.
- Median incomes in the UK in 2011-12, in real terms, were just below what they were in 2001-02 - £367 a week compared with £368
- Incomes of the poorest 10% have been falling since 2004-05.
- Average incomes have fallen by 8% since their peak in 2008. As a result, around two million people have an income that while above today's poverty line, would have been below the poverty line in 2008
- 6.7 million working families are living below the poverty line - a rise of 500,000 from 2012
- Julia Unwin, chief executive of the JRF, said: "Hard work is not working. We have a labour market that lacks pay and protection, with jobs offering precious little security and paltry wages that are insufficient to make ends meet."
- The government can claim that the number of pensioners in poverty is at a 30-year low... But, 6.3 million retired and unemployed families are living in poverty
- 400,000 families have been hit by a double whammy of benefit cuts from the 'bedroom tax' and council tax benefit. Two-thirds of these families were already in poverty

## Them & Us

### Universal fiasco

Universal Credit (UC), the brainchild of work and pensions secretary Iain Duncan Smith, is in meltdown even before its launch.

The £2 billion project, with its 'simplified monthly payments' to replace five existing benefit schemes and 'save millions of pounds', is so behind schedule and full of IT glitches that it won't be paid to an estimated 700,000 claimants after a planned 2017 deadline.

Make no mistake, UC isn't designed to "simplify" an archaic benefits system, it is designed by the Con-Dems with tougher eligibility criteria to cut further social welfare at the expense of the poorest and most vulnerable in society.

Already, under the government's pilot scheme, benefit claimants are having to borrow money from family and payday loan sharks in order to survive through the month.

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### Austere times

Remember 'Big Dave' Cameron's "we'll all in it together" rallying cry as his government pushed through the biggest austerity programme in living memory? Yes, we're all still laughing, cynically!

But, apparently, some people have taken the message to heart, including Princess Michael of Kent. The "Pushy Princess" has cut back by not eating out in restaurants. "That's too extravagant".

Instead, "we invite people here [Kensington Palace]. I cook. Well, if I'm giving a dinner party I get help". Luckily, her bijou palace pad only costs her £70 a month in rent, so that should cut down the housing benefit claim.

And forget about taking the luxury limo for a spin, it's public transport for now on. "I love easyJet", says the frugal aristo. "It's the only direct route to Biarritz". And yet, some people continue to knock the royalty...

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### Struggling to survive

Food on the table or heat the home? Increasingly for many low-income households it's less food to eat.

A Real Life Reform survey found that such households in October were spending a miniscule £2.10 a day, per person, (down from £3.27 in July) on groceries as many had run out of cash after paying essential items such as rocketing energy bills.

Increasing numbers of people are also relying on food banks to feed themselves each week. And, as this column pointed out in the last issue, personal debt has soared as people are forced to use rip-off credit cards and payday loans to buy essentials.

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### Housing lockout

According to the National Housing Federation the number of working people claiming housing benefit has soared by 109% since the 2009 recession.

The Federation also points out that half of people's disposable income is paid out in rent and that this figure will rise to a staggering 57% in ten years' time.

Moreover, by 2020 house prices will have risen by an unaffordable 35% 'locking out home ownership forever', it added.

So who's benefitting? The NHF says that the government's £24 billion expenditure on housing benefit is simply going to line the pockets of private landlords rather than into building new houses.

It also points out that in England alone 240,000 new homes are needed each year but that between 2009 and 2013 house building fell by 10% to 107,000.

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## What we saw

### 2013 Scrooge award?

One of the most famous Christmas stories is 'A Christmas Carol' by Charles Dickens, in which Ebenezer Scrooge, a miserly banker who pays poverty wages, is shown the true spirit of Christmas by the ghosts of Christmas past, present and future.

Poor Bob Cratchit, his bookkeeper, has to beg Scrooge to be allowed Christmas Day off work.

But even Dickens didn't foresee the real ghost of Christmas future. This advert can be seen on the underground for the Dickens museum in London:

"A Very Dickensian Christmas

Join us in 2013 for the most Dickensian Christmas London can offer!

Open Christmas Eve, Christmas Day and Boxing Day"

**Paula Mitchell**

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## December floods

### "Daddy, there's water on the floor"

**Health workers and Socialist Party members Liz and Keith had their homes flooded out on 5 December in Rhyl, north Wales. Liz spoke to Roger Shrives about what happened:**

I had a text at work from Keith saying we've got a flood. I rang him thinking it was a pipe burst. He said "there's water coming in the house".

We've got a three-year old adopted son who said "Daddy, there's water on the floor". We thought he'd spilt a drink but water was coming up through the floorboards.

When Keith opened the door, water came rushing in. He turned the electricity off but within 20 minutes water was up to his knees.

He tried to grab a few belongings but our little boy, TJ, and our dog were on the bed and he couldn't get out the front door because the fuse box was on fire, so he tried to put that out.

By then the water was waist-deep. Keith was met by the fire brigade who took TJ off him.

Our neighbours were all in the same state and our friends couldn't come and help us because the area was closed by flooding.

When I parked my car, Keith, TJ and the dog, shivering and wet, were with the fire brigade who were ready to take them off to a leisure centre.

We stayed with friends that night but then contacted the insurance company who put us in a hotel - we found half our street's in there! There were many vulnerable old people, some of them worried about their insurance. Many don't have it as the premiums are quite high.

There are some 'independent brokers' ie scammers going round the streets but charging people 25% commission!

We could be out of our home for months. Nearly all our furniture is wrecked along with the floorboards. So it's a question of drying out what's left and rebuilding the rest.

Despite years of cuts, the public services were very good. Within half an hour, the fire station down the road was ferrying people around. So were the police and the RNLI had dinghies.

Without them, people would have suffered even more.

The Citizens Advice service was also there. Housing people could tell us that our council tax bills were suspended as our homes were ruined. We wouldn't have known that.

After about an hour at the leisure centre, people who went there say, clothing and food started arriving.

The area had had experience last year with floods at nearby St Asaph. When we went back to our home, the electricity people were giving out advice leaflets.

The council are putting out skips and running normal bin services. The fire brigade are pumping out gardens.

The insurance companies are telling us to get accommodation which would be paid for. Local estate agents are not replying to calls, but a housing association with no properties available is trying to sort things out for us.

We are registered for flood alerts. We occasionally get amber alerts where they say no action is required.

But this time there was nothing. The size of the crisis was a bit of a freak of nature - some walls came down, the moon was causing high tides. The warm weather and high winds added to the problems.

Public services and public spirit saved the day. The firefighters were saying to everyone "are you all right?" and inviting my little boy to "come and sit in the fire engine."

People in the hotel are letting people use their laptops to sort out problems.

You sometimes hear the idea that people are "too greedy for socialism" but, except for the insurance scammers, events like this show people's public-spirited nature.

We need to fight to keep our invaluable public services and build on that good nature to create a socialist society based on cooperation not competition.

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## Swansea councillors: which side are you on?

Which side are you on? That question should be asked of every Labour councillor in Swansea as they prepare to vote on butchering £45 million of jobs and services.

As I sat in my Unison stewards' meeting, listening to a long list of cuts proposals, discussed by the Labour cabinet and outlined to union officers, I felt myself first getting down, then angry and finally determined that this must be where we draw a line in the sand and say: "no more cuts!"

These proposals will take the number of Swansea council job losses to around 1,200 since Con-Dem austerity began, with nearly another 700 to go on top of around 500 already cut. Councillors say that they want to minimise compulsory redundancies, but accept many likely volunteers have already gone in previous rounds.

They also propose axing, selling or reducing a whole range of services, including:

- Outsourcing large parts of social services, slashing spending on transport and scrapping the community meals service
- Handing over remaining council-run leisure services to other providers, as well as parks. Bowls clubs have to maintain and upkeep greens
- Transfer community centres and upkeep costs "to communities". A trust for culture will be set up, preparing the way for outsourcing of cultural resources. Pennard Library is to close
- Shutting, selling or offloading Plantasia that showcases plants from different climate zones. There's no word in the council's plans for the various exotic animals housed there
- Scrapping school crossing patrols for lights-controlled crossings, regardless of how dangerous the roads are
- Increasing school meal charges
- Closing public toilets or handing them to another provider
- Stopping the cleaning and upkeep of bus shelters
- Selling the Civic Centre

Some union members think the council should increase council tax to reduce attacks on jobs. But an increase in council tax is a cut in the living standards of ordinary people. And even a big hike in council tax will only put a small dent in the cull of jobs and services proposed.

Stewards passed a resolution opposing the cuts and committing to balloting for strike action to resist compulsory redundancies. This is a vital part of preparing the fightback, which will need to unite council workers with service users in opposition to all cuts.

We need to be prepared to put up our own anti-cuts candidates in future elections against Labour councillors who carry out Con-Dem cuts.

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## **Why I've donated to the Socialist Party Christmas appeal**

**Following the launch of the Socialist Party Christmas Appeal in issue 792 of the Socialist, Portsmouth Socialist Party member Sarah Welch explains why she has donated £1,000 to the appeal.**

"I've been a socialist for a long time. I was quite active in 1984 in the miners' strike. But then, although I had socialist policies, I wasn't very active and I have only just joined the Socialist Party.

"But I've always been a socialist, and I felt the donation was something I wanted to do. My dad had died in August, and he left me some money, and I just felt that I wanted to give it to the fighting fund because it was a really good cause.

"My son's disabled and I've been a carer for him mainly. Like all disabled people, he's been hit by the cuts.

"I've been involved in defending the Independent Living Allowance as they've stopped giving it to new applicants and they're making cutbacks within that.

"I've just recently written to my local MP, because the 'war on welfare' petition got 100,000 signatures, so we're asking for it to be heard in Westminster, and I've written asking for it be heard in the main chamber.

"It being Christmas time, with all that's going on with the energy companies, some people are going to have a terrible time not even being able to afford to heat their homes.

"I feel our fight is even more important now as the cost of living crisis takes hold and more and more people are driven into poverty.

"I've donated to the Socialist Party as I know the money will go towards fighting back on these issues."

**Can you donate? Every donation - whether £1,000 or £10 - will help support the fight against all cuts and for a socialist alternative to austerity.**

You can donate using the form below, at [www.socialistparty.org.uk/donate](http://www.socialistparty.org.uk/donate) or by phoning 020 8988 8777.

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## Obituary: Joel Lane, 1963-2013

It is with great sadness that I report of the death of our comrade Joel Lane.

Joel joined the Socialist Party along with his mother Ella in 2009 and immediately became one of the familiar faces at Birmingham branch meetings and on stalls.

During branch discussions Joel made meticulous notes and always made insightful contributions. He was a gifted writer, and whenever he was asked to introduce a discussion would provide thought provoking and well-researched material.

After meetings he would often apologise for not volunteering to do more activity, we needed to remind him that he was in fact one of the stalwarts of the branch and was one of our most solid and consistent activists.

Two areas in which Joel had a particular interest were the government's attacks on the NHS, and literature.

Numerous pieces of his work have been published and he has received awards for his writing, much of which explored the theme of urban decay in post-industrial cities.

He contributed excellent articles to the Socialist and Socialism Today, one which sticks out in my mind being a piece on the well-known writer of noir fiction, Dashiell Hammett.

Joel came from a family steeped in the traditions of struggle and the labour movement: his grandfather was a socialist who, as a member of the Communist Party, was expelled from the US in the 1920s.

Joel's parents met in the 'Committee of 100', a direct action group which grew from CND in the 1960s.

Joel himself didn't become politically active until relatively late in his life, joining the Labour Party for a brief period in the 1990s but eventually finding his political home in the Socialist Party.

A fine example of Joel's creative abilities was his last contribution to the Socialist: a short but powerful poem, published in the issue following Margaret Thatcher's death:

### Iron Rations

Rust finally stopped your mouth.

But your pieces are buried  
in our streets, offices and playgrounds,  
coiling like barbed wire, cutting  
like knives, and their poison  
has a half-life of forever.

Joel recognised that in order to rid society of poison we must struggle for socialist change. I am proud to have worked alongside him in bringing that change a step closer.

**Ted Woodley**

Funeral will be on the afternoon of 23 December at Robin Hood Crematorium, Solihull. Family request no flowers but any donations to the Terrence Higgins Trust.

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## Message to our readers and contributors

**To all our readers and contributors,**

The Socialist thanks our readers and subscribers for your support during 2013. Without your continued financial support it would be difficult to maintain the weekly paper.

We are very grateful for the marvellous material that has been sent in by our 'citizen journalists' from their experience of life in 'Austerity Britain'.

Over the year we have been moved by depictions of the reality for working class people, angered by the exposés of the lies, greed and hypocrisy of those who defend crisis-ridden capitalism, heard otherwise forgotten working class history - and been proud to report the news of the struggle to resist the cuts and capitalism.

Trade unionists, anti-cuts activists, and young people involved in struggle have all contributed. Socialist Party members and those we work with in campaigns have made their voices heard in the pages of the Socialist.

We look forward to continuing to fight against austerity together in 2014 - standing no-cuts candidates in the 2014 May council elections with the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition, campaigning for a 24-hour general strike with the National Shop Stewards Network and others in the trade unions to unite our struggles and show the strength of the working class in action, and standing firmly for internationalism and socialism.

**In solidarity,**

**The Socialist editors**

- This is the last issue of the Socialist for 2013. The next issue will be out on 9 January 2014.
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## Building TUSC in byelections

### Liverpool

In spite of a media blackout, with the Liverpool Echo only publicising the TUSC Riverside ward candidate on election day, John Marston received 49 votes, a respectable 3.6% of the vote.

Labour, if not the candidate, received wall to wall coverage in the Echo for their 'brave' management of the cuts.

The abysmal 11% turnout, reflecting the 'no vote' mood which has permeated British politics, was reinforced by the appalling storms on election day.

Labour's candidate took 1,055 votes. The Greens took 144 votes. Ukip came third with 119 votes.

It was a virtual wipe-out for the two other mainstream parties. The Con-Dems managed only 103 votes.

TUSC conducted a lively campaign with Socialist Party members and allies distributing quality leaflets and the only Party organising a public meeting.

The campaign firms up the basis for TUSC to build on. The 89% who didn't vote are a key target for future activity.

**Tony Mulhearn**

## **Glasgow**

Jamie Coccozza, standing as a Scottish Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (STUSC) candidate in the Glasgow Shettleston ward byelection, ran a dynamic campaign that has laid a base to challenge Labour and the SNP in the future.

Under the single transferable vote system, Jamie came fifth out of 12 candidates with 68 first preference votes, 1.8%. The turnout was 17%. Labour, campaigning on the record of their popular recently deceased councillor, comfortably beat the SNP.

STUSC came behind the Tories and Ukip, but ahead of the Lib Dems and Greens that both have the advantage of a national profile.

The Labour candidate's first preferences took him over the quota so second preferences were not counted. If they had been it is likely Jamie's vote would have increased.

SNP activists said they told voters it was a "two horse race" between Labour and the SNP, as Jamie and STUSC were widely mentioned on doorsteps.

Our campaign was an enthusiastic mobilisation of working class fighters in the community, as Socialist Party Scotland activists were joined by local anti-bedroom tax and anti-cuts campaigners.

**Matt Dobson**

## **Cardiff**

The results of the votes for Katrine Williams in Splott ward, and myself in Riverside ward, were 4.5% and 3.1%, respectively.

Both results are an improvement on the last election and each vote shows support for an alternative and a new mass workers' party. Labour won both polls, but in Riverside we beat the Lib Dems.

The campaigns in Cardiff were run simultaneously, with limited resources, yet we still contested against all the establishment parties who have national recognition, high funding and constant media coverage.

We must also show to each person who came across us in the election that we are not just here to pay lip-service during elections, but as candidates and as the Socialist Party that will stand up for their interests and defend every job, every public service, against austerity and against the current government and future governments who continue to value money ahead of people.

**Joel Beer, TUSC candidate**

## Why don't you stand?

If there is a byelection in your area and you're prepared to stand as a TUSC candidate, get in touch. One thing you will need to do is to get a Certificate of Authorisation from the TUSC National Nominating Officer to hand in with the nomination papers to the local council returning officer. An application form is available on the TUSC website at [www.tusc.org.uk/candidates.php](http://www.tusc.org.uk/candidates.php)

The TUSC national steering committee is also appealing for candidates to come forward for next May's local council elections. To get what the BBC calls 'balanced media coverage', parties need to contest 15% of the seats up for election - that means 625 TUSC candidates in the 2014 local elections. Could you be one of those? Check out the TUSC website for details.

Remember - if there is no trade unionist or socialist candidate standing as an alternative to the austerity parties, a cuts candidate will win unchallenged.

## Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition conference

**Councillors can make a difference... but only if they are prepared to fight**

**Come to the conference to discuss TUSC's campaign in the May 2014 local elections**

London - Saturday 1 February - 11am-4.30pm

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

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<http://www.socialistparty.org.uk/articles/17871>