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Obituary

Bob Crow: A great fighter for the working class

1961-2014

Peter Taaffe, Socialist Party general secretary

The Socialist Party is shocked and deeply saddened by the death of Bob Crow, general secretary of the Rail, Maritime and Transport union (RMT).

The outpouring of grief and solidarity in response to his death confirms the major impact he had as a trade union leader - undoubtedly one of the best known - for his steadfast approach to standing up for his members.

Our thoughts are with his family. We also send solidarity to RMT members.

Where the Evening Standard once tried to portray him as the 'most hated man in Britain', commuters interviewed on the news paid tribute to his principles in standing up for what he believed in, and for those who elected him. Westminster and town hall politicians can only dream of such a tribute.

The RMT's February strike on London Underground was a beacon for workers suffering under Con-Dem austerity and fearing a precarious future.

Every attempt was made to undermine the union and to ridicule Bob - but the strike had huge public support.

The RMT took the battle to London Tory Mayor Boris Johnson, who has shown in his sick-making eulogy to Bob what depths of hypocrisy can be plunged.

Even the most anti-union papers had to acknowledge that the union forced an utterly arrogant and intransigent Johnson to the negotiating table.

That battle must be continued to a victory for the RMT against ticket office closures and job losses.

Building resistance

Bob's approach to building resistance was reflected in the RMT's founding of the National Shop Stewards Network (NSSN), giving trade unionists a powerful body in which to fight austerity and to build pressure on the TUC to call a 24-hour general strike, a campaign which Bob wholeheartedly backed.

Bob had just agreed to attend this year's NSSN conference on 5 July as a key speaker. Under his leadership the RMT was a tireless defender of trade union rights, alongside the PCS and the POA prison officers' union.

Mirror columnist Kevin Maguire gave Bob a fitting tribute: "in an era of political bland, he was a trade union leader who would tell it how it is".

This included on matters political. "Bob told me he favoured the formation of a new workers' party, I said he was doomed to fail."

Kevin will be proved wrong and Bob Crow will be vindicated. But Bob didn't just talk about these things with journalists.

Among RMT members and the working class he made the case for the building of a new mass workers' party.

Bob was due to be the lead candidate for 'No2EU - Yes to workers' rights' in the 22 May European elections and was a co-founder and steering committee member of the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) since 2010.

Under his leadership two RMT conferences voted for the union to fully participate in TUSC, alongside the Socialist Party and others.

RMT members are among the workers and anti-cuts activists standing as council candidates in the biggest left-of-Labour challenge for generations.

Socialism

Bob Crow always defended socialism as the necessary alternative to the rotten capitalist system. We often shared a platform with him, and he spoke at our Socialist Party annual 'Socialism' events on a number of occasions - including last November - receiving many ovations for his tenacious stance.

Among RMT members Bob had enormous respect and support for his uncompromising position of fighting in their interests, including fighting for renationalisation of the railways.

When the RMT come to the democratic process of electing a new leader we hope they choose someone who will honour Bob's memory by being a fighter for the working class, including for the establishment of a new mass workers' party with TUSC as a first step, for socialism and for international solidarity, as Bob was.

The affection for Bob Crow sums up the urge of the working class for a powerful, fighting leadership.

It is fair to say that if the entire trade union leadership was made up of fighters like Bob, or like Mark Serwotka and the left socialist leadership in the PCS, and other lefts in the trade unions, the battle to stop the cuts and kick out the Con-Dems would be in a much advanced state.

But in his passing, Bob Crow also reminds us of the strength of the British working class to produce such fighters. He will be greatly missed, but we will fight on.

Best tribute is to fight on

Tribute from John Reid, RMT London Transport regional council president and Socialist Party member:

I have personally lost a friend and comrade and the socialist and trade union movement has lost a great leader. I pass my heartfelt condolences to his partner and his children and grandchildren.

Members of the RMT loved him as a man who, along with other activists, rebuilt our union into a fighting trade union which was never on its knees and was prepared to fight and strike if necessary for our members.

He was a passionate socialist and Millwall fan and worked tirelessly for his members. He believed in building a socialist alternative to Labour and helped to initiate the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC).

At RMT conference in 2013 he opposed a resolution seeking to distance the union from TUSC, and the resolution was defeated.

Bob was also closely involved in initiating the National Shop Stewards Network in an attempt to rebuild the left fighting traditions of the trade union movement.

Our task is to honour our fallen brother by building the trade union and socialist movement.

The representatives of the ruling class in their obituaries have stated that the RMT has grown from around 50,000 members to just over 80,000 in the 12 years of Bob's leadership, bucking the trend of falling trade union membership.

Bob's brand of socialism and trade union militancy has been a resounding success resulting in thousands of our members receiving decent pay and conditions.

The RMT will continue to defend the traditions built by Bob and others, of building a union committed to socialism and trade union militancy.

Tributes to Bob have come not just from RMT members who have in their hundreds posted moving tributes and have put up notice boards at stations, but have also come in their hundreds from working class people in Britain and internationally.

A tribute on a QPR football site sums this up: "London has lost a son. Bob cared for the members of the RMT, didn't matter if you swept a platform, cleaned a tube carriage or drove the tube, Bob got those workers a safe environment to work in, a decent wage which led to a better standard of living for the ordinary man/woman..."

I for one believe he was right to stick up for his members. Why should his members suffer for the mistakes of city bankers? ... RIP"

Stop press: Solidarity with John Reid

John has been suspended pending investigation following a complaint against him made while he was carrying out his lawful duties on the picket line in the February strike to defend jobs and ticket offices. John is president of the RMT's London Transport regional council.

- Please send messages of support to jjpreidie@yahoo.co.uk

Miliband wouldn't share Durham platform with TUSC supporter

Ed Miliband has paid a somewhat mealy mouthed tribute to Bob Crow. An event in 2011 showed how he really felt about the man he calls "one of the labour movement's major figures".

Miliband pulled out of speaking at the Durham Miners' Gala because, according to a Northern Echo report: "union firebrand" Bob Crow, a TUSC steering committee member, had also been invited to speak.

Miliband's spokesman said: "the decision to invite Bob Crow onto the platform at the Gala means Ed is not able to attend this year.

"He doesn't want to share a platform with someone who is not a Labour supporter and who has attacked Labour many times in the past".

Miliband was set to be the first Labour leader to turn up at Durham since Neil Kinnock in 1989. Kinnock himself, followed by Tony Blair and Gordon Brown, broke the tradition of Labour leaders attending this celebration of working class solidarity in 1990, during the anti-poll tax movement, as part of the long march of transforming Labour into New Labour.

In 2013 - days after Miliband's attack on Unite over Falkirk - and for the first time in 115 years, there was not a Labour

MP on the platform.

Bob Crow, in contrast, told the Echo that "it is the greatest honour in the labour movement to be invited to speak". Bob went on to call for a new party of workers when he spoke.

Watch the video on the TUSC website: <http://www.tusc.org.uk/videos>

TUSC

Bob Crow was an inspirational union leader who tenaciously defended his members' jobs, pay and conditions - head and shoulders above most other union leaders.

Bob also recognised, well before most other union leaders, that the overlapping austerity agenda of the big parties meant working people have to start again and build anew.

As part of his legacy, on 22 May, TUSC (the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition) will stand the largest number of left of Labour candidates seen in this country for over 60 years.

Dave Nellist, Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition national chair

Spontaneous solidarity

Jac Berry

A few years ago I met Bob Crow. Our anti-cuts group was due to have a meeting at the RMT office. Unbeknownst to me, we were double-booked with the Medway RMT branch AGM.

I was coming straight from work at the hospital, running late and in uniform and when I burst into the room packed full of RMT members, listening to Bob Crow in full flow about the McNulty report. I was just like "oh, I'm from the anti-cuts group... have we double booked?"

Crow set the tone saying 'we should be honoured to be joined by our sister from the nurses' union'. He invited me onto the platform to address the meeting about NHS cuts and privatisation. What a legend!

Socialist Party members remember:

Rebel councillors join tributes to Bob Crow

The 'rebel two' Southampton city councillors Keith Morrell and Don Thomas have issued the following statement: News of the death of Bob Crow came as a huge shock to us, and so many people who knew and respected him.

He fought tirelessly for his members and for working people in Britain and across the world.

It was a privilege to work with Bob, who was tremendously supportive of the stand we took here in Southampton to represent the people who elected us onto the city council.

Early on in their stand against the Labour council's cuts Keith and Don were invited to speak to the RMT executive council and later, in June last year, to the RMT's annual conference.

They conclude: "We drew great strength from the personal example he set of tenacity, principle and belief in the working class, trade unionism and socialism. Bob will never be forgotten".

Tribute from Tony Mulhearn, Liverpool 47 and Liverpool Socialist Party:

Demonised in life by the right-wing media, in death Bob's qualities as a fighter for his members are now given massive coverage.

Bob displayed courageous and implacable opposition to the cuts policies of the Con-Dem government. He recognised that the Labour Party embraced policies little different from the Con-Dems and no longer represented the interests of the working class.

Bob will be sadly missed and difficult to replace at a time when working class leaders of such conviction are scarce. We send our deepest condolences to Bob's family at their terrible loss.

Len Hockey, branch secretary, Unison, Waltham Forest health branch at Whipps Cross Hospital

Members of Unison at Whipps Cross Hospital would like to pass on our sincere condolences to the family of Bob Crow.

He passed away at our hospital and we offer our full support and solidarity to the RMT trade union.

Members at the hospital, including porters and domestic workers, that attended meetings nationally and in Walthamstow, east London, at which Bob spoke over the recent years, have drawn encouragement and inspiration at the speeches Bob gave.

Bob's life and activity is an example for our class and our movement to emulate in the battles we must wage to defeat once and for all austerity, poverty, inequality and injustice.

Lois Austin, TUSC mayoral candidate for Newham:

Bob stood up for things that most people agree with - such as decent living standards for all and renationalisation of the railways.

Under his leadership the RMT, like the PCS civil service union I work for, fought for its members, refusing to bow down to the Tories or wait in hope for a Labour government.

The forerunner of the RMT, the Society of Railway Servants, founded the Labour Party. But today Labour is just like the Tories.

Today, the RMT is helping to build TUSC, which was backed by Bob Crow since it was founded in 2010, to get back the political voice for workers.

In July 2011 Bob was among the 10,000 people who took part in a march and rally in Derby, which called on the government to support Bombardier. I remember Bob speaking that day and he was the best speaker on the platform.

Chris Fernandez Unison rep, personal capacity, Derby

For some tributes in a leaflet format:

<http://www.socialistparty.org.uk/txt/314.pdf>

Stop the destruction of care in Britain

The underfunding of social care and the cuts in pay and conditions of care workers as a consequence of the government's austerity measures is a national scandal.

In the following articles, campaigners and workers in the profession speak out on how these attacks are wrecking the provision of social care and also how to fight back.

A North West social worker

Social work, in essence, is about protecting and helping the most vulnerable and needy to make the most of their lives.

Yet social work has been at the sharp end of austerity programmes, even before the current crisis. People who use the services, the army of unpaid carers and those employed in social work, have felt the impact of these cuts.

Cash-strapped councils have demonstrated they prefer to make cuts to services for vulnerable people rather than organise campaigns to stand up for their communities and refuse to implement cuts.

Across the whole of the social care sector, the emphasis is on saving money rather than people's needs and enhancing lives.

Figures produced by Directors of Adult Social Services shows that over the last three years, budgets across the country for Adult Social Care have fallen from around £18 billion to £15 billion.

This is against a background where demand for services is growing as people live longer. The number of people aged 90-plus is expected to treble over the next 20 years.

Meanwhile the government's proposed Care Bill will cap residential care costs for the better off at £72,000, while the availability and quality of care for the many is squeezed further.

For those using services, positive developments quickly turn into negatives as councils seek to save money.

Personal Budgets were introduced for adults from 2007; the stated motivation was to give, to those who are willing and able, more control and choice in the organisation of their care packages.

Whereas someone may have previously been given five days at a day centre, now they are given a Personal Budget from which they may choose three days at a day centre, and two days on a different activity.

However, rather than receive a Personal Budget equivalent to the cost of five days at a day centre, they may, for example, get the money equivalent of four days.

This may lead to people accessing cheaper care, from unqualified sources. That is not choice or control, it is cost cutting.

This can increase stress upon carers. Carers, family or friends who provide unpaid care, are increasingly taken

advantage of, with more and more expected of them.

There has been a much greater acknowledgement and awareness of the carer's role, and many people want to help in supporting a relative or friend.

But increasingly this is exploited and carers are pushed into a more demanding role, to the detriment of their health, welfare and lives.

Privatised care

People, often older, who are in receipt of home care or residential care services, are at the sharp end of Tory cuts. The bulk of home care and residential care across the country has been privatised.

For residential homes many families are left with little alternative but to pay 'top up' fees, as the homes cannot provide even basic care from the ever-decreasing money they receive from councils.

For home care, many calls are now squeezed to 15 minutes, when care workers have to get in and out quickly.

There is no time for 'soft' care - having a cup of tea and a chat, treating people as humans, with a dignity and respect that can enhance life.

For those care workers in the private sector, the reality is low pay and poor working conditions. With zero-hour contracts, pay below the minimum wage (60% of home care staff are not paid travel time) no sick pay, little training or career opportunities, these workers are among the most exploited in the country.

With an unsurprisingly high turnover of staff, people using the service suffer as well through a lack of continuity of staff, and missed and late calls.

Social workers are in an increasingly fragile position with many councils looking at privatising social work.

At the best of times social work is a demanding and complex role, though it can also be rewarding, but now the role is becoming intolerable for many.

In a pressurised atmosphere, cuts place unprecedented demand on services. Workloads are growing in all sectors and the opportunities for genuine social work are shrinking.

Increasingly they are pressed by a finance-driven culture, to focus on how care packages and costs can be reduced.

Integration of health and social care, while in theory offering some benefits, is being guided by the need to reduce costs, and is accompanied by privatisation and increasing workloads. Mental Health Services are particularly bearing the brunt of this.

Meanwhile, children have their futures blighted by these cuts.

As poverty increases, and the birth rate increases, so will the demand for services to protect young people.

The scandal of failed services in Doncaster and Birmingham, as a result of cuts will, sadly but surely, be repeated elsewhere.

Common struggle

A fightback to defend these essential services is desperately needed, and there are the first signs of this.

There have been notable successes in defending services - such as mental health services in Salford, which we can build upon.

There has also been a welcome growth in user groups, to advocate for and defend services.

Trade unions in the sector need to work with these groups; it is not a choice between services or jobs, it is a common struggle, as well-paid and motivated staff lead to better services.

In social care, as with other areas of the public sector, it is time to put people's needs first. We need a broad based campaign to defend jobs and services, and to stop cuts and privatisation.

- No cuts! For a fully funded care system
- A living wage, and trade union conditions, for all working in social care
- No further privatisation (including transfers to social enterprise etc) of any social care services
- Return of care services (home, day and residential care) to local authority control
- Free quality social care
- A positive framework to end poverty and provide full support to carers
- Personal budgets based on need not cost
- Reinvestment in local authority care services
- Reinvestment in social work - to allow genuine social work with manageable caseloads, to protect and assist those who require support

The amount spent on social care services for the elderly has been cut by £1.2 billion (15.4%) since 2010 despite the population aged over 65 growing by one million between 2005 and 2013.

The government has redirected £400 million from the NHS but this still leaves an £800 million shortfall.

The care needs of some 800,000 older people are not being met

(source: Age UK)

M&S style austerity

Former Marks and Spencer chief executive Sir Stuart Rose has been appointed an adviser to the NHS. The Tory press sang hymns of praise to Rose's 'big business expertise'.

The press were quieter about Rose's current job as chair of private equity firm Bridgepoint Capital. This company owns at least three private health businesses in Britain including one of the private care giants Care UK.

Care UK was paid £190 million a year from public money to treat NHS patients in 2012. Its profits soared up to £38 million in 2010 while its staff pay dropped by an average 1%.

Over 100 Unison members at Care UK in Doncaster have recently taken seven days strike action against attacks on pay and conditions and subsequently voted to undertake a further seven days strike unless the company rescinds its vicious pay cuts (see page 12).

In 2010, Rose was one of a gaggle of big business types to write a public letter congratulating Cameron's Tories on their plans "to institute widespread cuts in public services and state benefits."

It's not just austerity and privatisation, of course, it's M&S-style austerity and privatisation. But it's bad news for the NHS and we must fight his plans.

Low-paid homecare staff working for Apex Care have been subjected to gagging orders and other draconian measures after their union, Unison, launched a campaign alleging the company has flouted minimum wage laws and imposed

punitive changes and sanctions on its workforce.

Staff on zero-hours contracts must get management permission to do other work, even if it is voluntary.

Apex has also refused to provide staff with a copy of their employee handbook, insisting that staff may book an appointment to view the handbook in an office

'Person centred' or 'profit centred'?

I have worked in residential care homes run by the public, voluntary and private sectors. I want to describe a few of the outcomes I see in private care for two groups of people who really are 'all in this together'; the residents and the staff.

Nowadays in social care the central core standard is that services should be provided on a 'person centred' basis.

Simply put, it means that all aspects of a service should be designed and run with the needs of the service user as the driving principle.

This alone should rule out private care, recognising the simple fact that when you introduce the extraction of a profit from the public kitty you also extract a range of things from the service.

Services move from 'person centred' to 'efficiency centred' (cuts - make no mistake) and 'profit centred'. You can't easily separate the impact on staff and residents.

Savings on salary means less pay and less staff - this means less positive interaction, less or no outings for residents who need two-to-one care in the community, less attention to safeguarding.

For the staff it means low morale and a clear message that you're not valued. It means staff competing for sparse overtime opportunities to make up a living wage.

Low motivation in staff means damaged relationships throughout an organisation; it means a much diminished environment for vulnerable residents.

Where will there be any scope to prioritise resident needs? Instead our care homes are fast becoming little more than holding and containment tanks.

Beyond this, another saving for the emerging care entrepreneurs impacting on services has been in the removal of sick pay.

Not rocket science this one either: workers who are unwell and low paid will be forced to attend work. If their illnesses are infectious, the risk to residents in their care is obvious.

Recently I lost £170 in wages when I got a tummy bug. That was a new one for me joining the private sector - it's the first time ever I've paid someone for diarrhoea!

'Pushed to the limit'

I'm a support worker for adults with learning disabilities in Milton Keynes. The council's horrendous cuts are directly affecting the individuals I support, including a price hike and stricter boundaries for community buses.

Last year's budget also included cuts to homeless services, disabled children's services, dementia care and youth

services. All the Labour councillors voted through the proposals.

Within my service the managing director sent a report to say our wages will remain frozen. The staff have not seen any pay increase since April 2009, this is despite working for a private charity, not a public sector service.

According to the charity's report it met its financial target in 2011. I wonder why the target didn't allow for standard pay increases.

The financial report also stipulated that a handful of staff had received bonuses of as much as £120,000 that year.

Service users are also losing funding, services and even having their incredibly modest food shop budgets reduced.

Meanwhile staff are being pushed to the limit, working illegal hours just to make ends meet. This is having a detrimental impact on the quality of care being provided.

Some staff worked Christmas Day, Boxing Day and New Year's Day with no additional pay, just the basic salary.

Night shifts pay the same as day shifts and we are only given one weekend off a month, even the part-time staff.

24-hour and overnight shifts don't allow eight hours of sleep as you are not allowed to get ready for bed until 11pm and you must be ready for your shift at 7am.

There are regular shortages of basic sanitation supplies such as gloves, hand towels and hand wash. The site has so many broken and faulty lights that people are falling down the steps.

Unsuitable staff are regularly hired as the job is so unappealing for a starting rate of £6.77 with six months' probation.

Despite an employment tribunal ruling last year saying care providers must pay staff the national minimum wage, take into account travel time and when someone works overnight on a sleepover shift, compliance is undermined by local council commissioning practices, such as reduced fee rates, not paying for travel time and 15-minute care visits, particularly in home care.

A survey by the United Kingdom Homecare Association found that the overwhelming majority of care providers were only paid by local councils for contact time with clients. Less than 2% of providers were paid anything at all towards travel time

We can defend services

Last year Salford Council set out a plan that would have led to the closing of vital groups and drop-ins for mental health service users and the privatisation of the remaining services offering them one-to-one support.

Staff were told first and immediately informed service users, despite being warned not to. As far as our members were concerned service users had a right to know and their involvement would be vital in ensuring the cuts could not be enforced.

Using a number of tactics, including threats of industrial action and occupations of council meetings, the campaigners forced management back to the table.

This led to a six month process of meetings, which in the end reached an outcome that drop-ins and groups would remain (albeit at different locations and with different staff), no aspect of the service would be privatised and there would be new investment in a mental health centre to assist recovery.

However, less than a week after this was announced in early January this year, we were told that the budget for the staff

would be cut from this April.

If enforced this will mean that the developments we worked so hard for last year will be worth nothing. Again, staff and service users have decided to fight together.

The staff (all Unison members) have already gone into dispute with Salford council and have requested a ballot for industrial action from the union.

The service users, through their organisation the United Service Users Committee (USUC), organised a well-attended public meeting, linking this issue with proposals to cut the number of beds at Salford's psychiatric unit.

The meeting led to the formation of "Save Mental Health Services in Salford", which has now achieved even more public awareness because of the involvement and support of Beverley Callard, the actress who Coronation Street fans will know better as Liz McDonald.

The Socialist Party has been pivotal throughout the campaign. Also, one of USUC's lead organisers has already stood as a TUSC candidate and will be doing so again in May.

We have worked with all those sincere about saving these services, but at the same time have shared our ideas and views, which has generated a great deal of respect for us from all involved.

We have learnt two key lessons throughout this ongoing battle. The first is that no matter how difficult the challenge might appear, by working together, utilising the best ideas and employing the best tactics, staff and service users can defend care services.

The second is that under capitalism we will be forced to fight the same battles over and over again. That is why we need a socialist society.

NHS - under attack from private vultures

Andy Bentley

The government has launched its biggest single privatisation of NHS services so far by inviting private companies to bid for £1.2 billion worth of contracts to provide frontline cancer treatment in district hospitals and care for the terminally ill across Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent.

Private companies will compete to deliver cancer and end-of-life treatment for children and adults across the area - involving diagnosis and treatment such as radiology, radiotherapy, breast screening, chemotherapy, nursing and surgery for patients in hospitals, hospices and at home.

After the government and media's relentless four-year barr-age of largely untrue attacks on Stafford District Hospital they think the ground is well prepared to force through its first large scale privatisation of frontline NHS services in Staffordshire.

The government has also rushed through parliament an amendment to the Care Bill known as the 'Hospital Closure Clause' (HCC).

This allows unelected Trust Special Administrators who take over any 'failing' NHS Trusts in England to speed up closures or privatisation of nearby hospitals even if they are performing well.

So, conjuring up just one 'failing' hospital in every region would give the government the pretext to cut, close or privatise whatever they want nationwide.

But rushing the HCC through parliament also shows that the Con-Dems are still afraid of the opposition that these measures will face.

In response, Andy Burnham, Labour's shadow health spokesperson, said: "David Cameron has placed the NHS on a fast track to fragmentation and privatisation. The next election presents the last chance to change course."

But we cannot afford to wait for a general election hoping that Labour will save the NHS. The last Labour government saddled the NHS with a total of £215 billion of repayments for big business projects worth only £55-65 billion.

And decisive action is needed now to stop the government's latest privatisation plans.

Last year, 50,000 marched through Stafford against the government's plans to dismantle Stafford District Hospital, followed months later by over 1,500 at the first of six sham public consultation meetings.

This opposition, along with tens of thousands marching in Lewisham and elsewhere, gives a glimpse of the massive anger which exists nationwide against the crusade of closures and privatisation of the NHS, as did last year's trade union organised demonstration at the Tory conference.

It is now more urgent than ever that a plan of action is drawn up by the health trade unions, other unions, local communities, campaign groups, etc, against the dismantling and privatisation of the NHS, including strike action and standing 'no cuts' candidates in the May elections.

Such a campaign would receive the support of millions across Britain, have the potential to stop the privatisation juggernaut in its tracks and herald the end of this government even before the next general election.

It would also be a warning to any incoming government to keep their hands off the NHS.

The Socialist Party is calling for;

- Immediate trade union-led action to stop large scale privatisation of frontline services across Staffordshire.
- Axe the Health and Social Care Act. Stop the destruction of the NHS.
- No cuts, closures or job losses in the NHS
- Scrap the dodgy PFI privatisation deals and cancel the debts. Kick big business out of the NHS
- End the postcode lottery. For a high quality, fully funded and publicly owned service in every area
- For a 24-hour general strike to link NHS workers with others in public and private sectors
- Support for the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition as the first step towards a new mass workers' party to defend the NHS

Inquiry into police spying must not be another whitewash

Socialist Party press release, 7.3.14

Under enormous public pressure the government has said it will launch an inquiry into the work of undercover police officers in relation to allegations that police spied on the Stephen Lawrence family campaign and other anti-racist campaigners. Campaigners will now have to fight to ensure this is not just another whitewash.

The Socialist Party has repeatedly protested against the racist actions of the police in relation to black and Asian communities. We have also opposed the outrageous and completely unjustified police activities against anti-racist, environmental, trade unionists and other campaigners; all must be fully investigated.

Police agent Peter Daley (real name Peter Francis) infiltrated Militant, the forerunner of the Socialist Party, in the 1990s. As a result large police files are wrongly held on socialists.

Hannah Sell, Socialist Party deputy general secretary, said: "We demand that any inquiry must encompass all of these victims of police spying and have the ability to compel witnesses to attend and investigate not just the role of the police but also the politicians in charge."

Lois Austin, former national chair of Youth Against Racism in Europe (YRE), which police spy agent Peter Daley infiltrated, is part of the Campaign Opposing Police Surveillance.

At the campaign's recent meeting she called for an independent public inquiry. She said there can be no trust in the police investigating the police or another establishment-run 'inquiry' whitewash. Not just the police tops but also politicians should be investigated about their role, including former home secretaries, both under New Labour and the Tories.

Lois is speaking on BBC Radio 2 today on these issues.

Hannah Sell, also former secretary of YRE, said: "We have no trust in a 'Hutton style report'. Tony Blair's recently revealed comment says it all. When Blair advised Rebekah Brooks to publish such a report into the allegations on phone hacking it showed how cynically establishment politicians view the desire people have for justice to be done.

"We demand a genuinely independent public inquiry involving democratically-elected representatives from the trade union movement and the anti-racist and environmental protest groups that have suffered infiltration."

To contact Lois please call: 07904 816502

To contact Hannah please call: 0794 833 1319

For more information see: <http://www.socialistparty.org.uk/articles/17340>

This version of this article was first posted on the Socialist Party website on 7 March 2014 and may vary slightly from the version subsequently printed in The Socialist.

Stop cuts and police repression in Tottenham!

The trial is currently taking place of Nicky Jacobs, one of those charged with the murder of PC Blakelock during the Broadwater Farm riots in 1985.

The riots happened in the aftermath of the death of Cynthia Jarret who suffered a heart attack during a police search of her home.

The original investigation into the murder saw teenagers interviewed naked and with no guardian present, evidence tampered with and hundreds arrested, with many violently attacked while in custody.

Relations between police and residents in Tottenham, particularly young people, have deteriorated over three decades during which a long list of people from or living in the area have died while in police custody. The Mark Duggan 'lawful killing' verdict has contributed to this.

When discussing with young people in the campaign to defend jobs, education and youth services in Tottenham (involving Youth Fight for Jobs, Day-Mer youth, Unite the Youth and Voice of Youth), police repression is a big issue.

The cuts are making the problem worse. As schools become academies, students express feelings of being constantly under surveillance.

The police commissioner has said he is open to ideas from local community leaders and politicians about how to improve the situation.

But the idea of asking the very people who are impacted by the police's behaviour doesn't feature.

Many young people in Tottenham are aware of the area's history with the police. Young black men are 28 times more likely to be stopped and searched and a Metropolitan police officer is 30 times more likely to stop and search a black person than a police officer outside of London.

There will be a presence outside the court during the seven week trial and YFJ campaigners plan to attend, along with Socialist Party members.

Going forward, we will continue with our campaign for decent jobs, access to education and for the return of funding to local services.

Our first meeting had 50 people at it from the different youth groups. The main problem is that everyone's talking about Tottenham, but no one is asking young people what it's like to live in Tottenham.

We are discussing bigger actions in the coming months, such as a protest march on 19 April from a job centre to a local college.

Helen Pattison

Them & Us

Poverty safari

The idle rich used to go on big game safaris. Now it seems that 'poverty safaris' are all the rage. Privately schooled, Oxford graduate and former editor of the world's poshest magazine, the *Lady*, Rachel Johnson (sister of Boris Johnson, Tory mayor of London) had a chastening experience by spending time with a low-income family in south London.

Afterwards she thinks her chums are envious of her: "Bizarrely, I think there's a lot of envy. 'Lucky old Rachel, she went on a poverty safari!'"

Where's my elephant gun!

Benefits Castle

At least ten people wealthy enough to make the Sunday Times rich list are coining in money from housing benefit (HB) claimants.

The Mirror reports that GMB union has researched this question and the Duke of Westminster, Britain's eighth richest man, possessor of a £7.8 billion personal fortune, gets paid £243,000 a year by councils paying out HB.

There may be more than eight of these rich individuals increasing their fortunes by dipping into the tiny benefits of the low-paid.

In 60% of cases, HB is paid directly to tenants so researchers cannot identify who the landlord who receives this benefit is.

But the media will probably still run programmes like Benefits Street while ignoring the blatant Benefits Castle.

Bankers

In 2013 Barclays and Lloyds banks made more new millionaires than lottery organisers Camelot. 335 punters shared £682 million from the lottery.

But Barclays laughed off declining profits, the Libor rate-rigging scandal, and threats of job losses for thousands of Barclays workers and gave £1 million plus bonuses to 481 senior staff. More modestly Lloyds gave 27 top staff almost £1 million each.

Eight Barclays fat cat bankers got £5 million while 54 got £2.5 million to £5 million. 74,600 workers at Barclays, about half the total staff, live on £25,000 or less a year.

Schools out

A flagship Free School run by a for-profit Swedish company is being put into special measures after being branded by Ofsted, the schools inspectorate, as 'a failure'.

The IES Breckland school in Suffolk has suffered mass resignations of staff, the standard of student work has declined since pupils started attending, and it doesn't meet requirements to keep children safe.

Free Schools are the bright idea of education wrecker Michael Gove and are an extension of the Academies Schools programme launched under Labour.

Independent of local authorities, and with little or no public accountability, companies and education trusts can set the curriculum and determine the (usually worse) pay and conditions of staff.

Crapita

Privatising giant Capita (often called Crapita for some reason) has, shall we say, a patchy record on competence in their businesses.

But Capita now has a new cunning plan designed to remove all doubts. It's a VRA lie detector analysing voice patterns, which is supposed to deter 'benefit fraudsters'.

The government's benefits-bashing plans tend to encourage crackpot schemes and some councils have already used VRA techniques.

But does the VRA machine prove anything at all? One expert said the whole idea was "closer to astrology than to science." Profitable for Capita, maybe, but very dangerous for benefit claimants.

Socialist Party national congress 2014

Preparing for a mighty upsurge in class struggle

On 8-10 March the Socialist Party held its annual national congress in Clacton. Around 300 delegates and visitors attended the very successful event. Branch delegates voted on resolutions and amendments agreeing both political perspectives and organisational aims. The congress showed enthusiasm throughout the Socialist Party for building from the opportunities we face, which was particularly shown in the sessions on finance and party building.

Over £13,000 was raised in a fighting fund collection and the congress launched an election appeal to help towards the costs of campaigns for the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition, No2EU - Yes To Workers' Rights and the Workers And Socialist Party in South Africa (donate at www.socialistparty.org.uk/donate).

Here we report from some of the sessions.

Dave Carr

"Why the hell hasn't there been a revolution!", exclaimed Doncaster delegate Mary Jackson, after she catalogued the vicious government attacks on people's living standards.

Earlier, Hannah Sell, deputy general secretary of the Socialist Party, had introduced the discussion on Britain by detailing the social crisis in the country, where average real incomes have plummeted by 7% in three years due to capitalist recession and austerity.