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# Syriza victory shows austerity elite can be beaten

**That's the message ringing out from Greece in the aftermath of the country's parliamentary elections on 25 January. Workers and young people around Europe and the world were inspired by the victory of left party Syriza, which increased its vote from less than 5% in 2010 to be the biggest party - all on the basis of making a stand against cuts and debt.**

**Working class people in Greece and beyond will be keen to ensure the Syriza leadership carry out the promises it has made. We must use this example to build a mass working class party here which can stand firm against cuts, crisis and capitalism.**

## Greece: Syriza comes to power in historic election

**What we think:**

### An inspiration for workers and youth across Europe

Pay restraint, savage cuts in public services and mass unemployment have been the diet of workers across Europe for years. Many governments have been ejected from office, only to be replaced by other parties that have continued to offer the same thin gruel. Now in Greece, for the first time, the endless parade of pro-austerity governments has been broken.

Syriza, a left anti-austerity party, has won the elections. This was despite a massive campaign by the capitalist class, in Greece and internationally, to try and frighten Greek workers by saying that voting against austerity would lead to disaster. Correctly, the Greek working class and a big section of the middle class concluded that they had already suffered disaster at the hands of the capitalists and the troika and that the time for change was long overdue.

Throughout Europe, including in Britain, millions are avidly following events in Greece and wondering if it is possible to build a mass party that is opposed to austerity in their own country. Meanwhile the capitalist pro-austerity politicians are quaking in their boots. In Britain Labour leader Ed Miliband's response to Syriza's victory said everything about the road a Labour government would take: "Who the Greek people elect is a decision for them. We have set out our path for Britain: to make sure our country is fairer and more prosperous and balance the books." In other words Labour will continue with the same old austerity that we have suffered for the last five years. This was proved yet again last week when all but five Labour MPs voted for the Con-Dems proposal to build an additional £30 billion of 'deficit reduction' into the plans of the next parliament.

But Greece is a stark warning to the Labour Party. Its Greek sister party, Pasok, was in power from 2009 to 2012 and carried through eye-watering cuts. It has now been punished by the Greek electorate - receiving less than 5% in Sunday's election. Syriza meanwhile has gone from less than 5% of the vote to being the biggest party. The same fate that has met Pasok could face Labour in the coming years. Those trade union leaders and left Labour supporters who have praised Syriza

need to realise that it took the creation of an alternative to the equivalent of Labour before anti austerity policies could win an election.

It is crucial that workers in Britain begin to create a new party that will stand for the millions not the millionaires. The Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) is preparing the ground for such a party. TUSC involves a wide range of trade unionists (including the transport workers' union RMT), socialists and anti-cuts campaigners. As Dave Nellist, leader of TUSC explained:

"On 7 May we intend to stand over 100 parliamentary candidates and 1,000 council candidates in Britain's elections, all challenging in the same way as Greek workers have done, the idea from all the big parties promoting austerity that 'there is no alternative'". We appeal to all those who are inspired by the election result in Greece to join us in building TUSC's election challenge in May.

We also appeal to you to consider joining the Socialist Party. The victory of Syriza marks an important step in breaking with austerity. However, to be able to do so completely and permanently requires breaking with capitalism - a system that always puts the profits of the 0.1% before the interests of the majority - and building a democratic, socialist society. This would require taking into democratic public ownership the major companies and banks that dominate the economy in order to put their huge wealth and resources to use to meet the needs of all.

The elections in Greece will put discussion on socialism - what it is and how to achieve it - on the agenda for a new generation. If you would like to know more apply to join the Socialist Party or get in touch with your local Socialist Party branch.

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## **Greece revolts against austerity - is socialism on the agenda?**

### **Socialist Party public meetings**

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## Interview with a Greek socialist

**On 26 January, following the sensational election result in Athens, Niall Mulholland (CWI) spoke to Andros Payiatsos, from Xekinima (CWI Greece).**

**What is the importance of the Greek election results?**

We can describe the result as of historical significance. It represented the collapse of the old forces that ruled Greek politics for decades. Also, the rise of a new left formation, Syriza, which shot up from 4-5% in 2010 to 36.5% now on the basis of a left, pro-working class programme.

In Greece there has been a total collapse of 27% of the GDP - worse than the occupation by the Nazis in World War Two from the point of view of economic collapse. Official estimates say 6.3 million out of the 11 million population are around or below the poverty line. Unemployment stands at 26-27%, youth unemployment around 55%. Around 100,000 youth have left the country.

These are the conditions under which the Syriza government is called upon to find solutions.

**Today Syriza announced a coalition with Independent Greeks - why were they not able to reach an agreement with the Communist Party (KKE)?**

Syriza appealed to KKE to form a government of the left parties. KKE refused - this is an outcome of the general sectarianism and isolationism of the Communist Party, who use the fact that there are ideological and political differences to say no to any kind of collaboration with any force of the left in Greece.

The KKE claims to be very proud because it increased its vote by 1% from June 2012. This is ridiculous because they got 5.5% now and 4.5% then, yet back in 1981 the KKE had 11%. This is the most devastating crisis of Greek society in decades and they are very proud to have received 5.5% - it's scandalous!

So this allowed the Syriza leadership to go into an alliance with 'Independent Greeks' to form a new coalition government. It is fair to say that a section of the leadership, the more right wing, were always in favour of a coalition government with the Independent Greeks, although they never publically stated so

The Independent Greeks began as a populist split from New Democracy (traditional right wing party) in 2012. At that time, Samaras (previous New Democracy prime minister) performed a summersault - from proclaiming to be against the memorandum (austerity deal signed with the IMF), to signing up to a new memorandum the minute he was in government. The Independent Greeks come from the right wing. They have no relationship to the working class or left polices. They support the market and the capitalist system.

They don't call for exit from the EU or the Eurozone but they are against the memorandum and austerity. They have a mild nationalistic (they describe it as "patriotic") character. They don't stand against the EU and the Eurozone but they might be willing to go along with such a policy if it comes to a serious clash with the Trioka.

It's a force that cannot provide any sort of sustainability for coalition with Syriza. It means that the new coalition government will be an unstable formation because it bases itself on forces that represent opposite camps.

**The reaction of the left and workers to the Syriza victory internationally has been very enthusiastic - what about in Greece?**

The rise of Syriza seems to be acting as a catalyst in relation to formations of the left and for social movements across Europe to go on the counter-offensive. The potential is definitely there for this.

In Greece it's not the same. The best way to describe the situation for the mass of workers and youth is that they heaved a huge sigh of relief at the election results but there is no wild jubilation. Syriza has put "too much water in its wine" to use a Greek expression - watered down its programme too much, particularly in the recent period.

Workers believe things cannot be as bad as before - they had a strong feeling that they had to put an end to these barbaric attacks by the government and Troika so they voted Syriza en masse. But they are very doubtful about what the next day will bring.

This was reflected by the fact that the central Athens celebrations on election night attracted about 5,000 people - not even half the membership of Syriza in Athens. Workers feel very restrained and some are even sceptical about the Syriza victory but they are very pleased that they punished Pasok and New Democracy, the main Troika parties.

**The neo-fascist Golden Dawn managed to hold up its vote, despite a clampdown by the State, including imprisonment of many of its leaders. Should this be of concern to the left?**

It should be of very serious concern for the left. Despite all mass parties of the left tending to underestimate the dangers of neo-fascism, Golden Dawn has shown that it has a quite significant hard core of voters of hundreds of thousands.

It is an openly Nazi organisation now, and clearly murderous. Despite this, it was able to maintain a similar vote to 2012. This means that the danger of neo-fascism will come back to the fore again in the future, particularly if a Syriza-led government is seen to fail working people and the middle classes - the left has to be prepared for this.

**What do you think will happen in talks between the new Greek coalition government and the Troika and, in particular, Chancellor Merkel's government in Germany?**

This is a crucial question. It's clear that both sides want to negotiate and come to a compromise. Otherwise they know this could cause a chain reaction and a major crisis in the Eurozone. But the question is if they can come to a compromise.

Merkel and the Troika would probably be ready to grant an extension to the repayment of the debt, which would mean some lessening of the burden on the budget in Greece. But, on the other hand, there are things that Syriza cannot avoid being seen to try doing - that are considered by society, by Syriza voters and by Syriza's left rank-and-file, as basic and immediate.

Syriza will have to concede, as a minimum: the minimum wage back to the pre-crisis levels; social benefits to the completely downtrodden layers of society; aim to reinstate labour relations which have been completely deregulated; put an end to the conditions of slave labour which are frequent practice in the private sector - where workers are forced to work up to 12 hours a day, seven days a week without even overtime pay; get rid of the goldmines in Halkidiki, which is a huge environmental issue; reinstate workers to their jobs at ERT, the national broadcaster.

If Syriza doesn't deliver these in the very first period of its government, it will immediately mean a major crisis inside Syriza - so it will move in the direction of carrying out these things. But, while basic to resolving the humanitarian crisis, these measures actually tear apart the programme applied by the Troika over the last four years.

Would the German ruling class be willing to make this kind of compromise with the Greek coalition government? This is doubtful, to say the very least. Therefore, while there can be no certainty about what the balance of forces will be, I believe that after these Greek/Troika negotiations the possibility of a default on the debt will come back forcefully.

We say that if Greece is forced to default and out of the Eurozone, a left government should immediately introduce capital and credit controls and a state monopoly of foreign trade, as part of a wide programme that needs to be introduced today anyway.

This should include nationalisation of the banks and the commanding heights of the economy, workers' control and management and planning of the economy to deal with the crisis and to safeguard workers' rights and living conditions.

#### **What role will Xekinima play in the next period?**

The leadership of Syriza will use the Independent Greeks as an alibi for not applying the necessary policies. So we have to demand a consistent pro-working class programme. If this means a crisis in the government and early elections then this is how it should be.

The main role that we can play, together with other forces of the left, is to campaign for these types of policies, particularly through the rank-and-file movements. I think that a major effect of this government on society, in the first instance, will be to provide a breathing space for the working class and the social movements. And then workers will mobilise to take back what they have lost over the past years.

In this situation, the Syriza government could shift left and even carry out policies which are far beyond what the leadership now envisages. Our main task is to help build the power and independent action of the working class.

The only solution to the crisis is a socialist programme. Any government which doesn't provide these policies will end up in crisis. For example, we call for Syriza to enact debt repudiation, to introduce a living wage and living pension, massive investment in welfare, health and education. A socialist programme also entails taking the big corporations into public ownership, under democratic working class control and management, for the benefit of the majority.

A socialist programme pursued by a left government would find an even more powerful echo than Syriza's current victory has across Europe. Working people everywhere would emulate the Greek workers. It would pose the need to struggle for a socialist confederation of Europe, on a free and equal basis.

During the election campaign, Xekinima was not able to come to an agreement with Syriza about standing candidates, but Xekinima still had a campaign during the election. How did that go?

We had a very good campaign, particularly taking into consideration that there were only eleven days of campaigning. The Syriza leadership would not agree to the candidates we proposed standing on local Syriza lists because they knew we would have MPs elected and that they would have been a pole of left opposition inside and outside Syriza.

Nevertheless Xekinima understood that what was necessary for society and the working class was a victory for Syriza in these elections. We had a very powerful campaign - every day we distributed close to 9,000 leaflets and we sold nearly 250 papers.

This brought us into contact with many people. We are planning public meetings in the various neighbourhoods in the next weeks because it wasn't possible to hold them during the election campaign.

- This is a shortened and edited version of an article available at [www.socialistworld.net](http://www.socialistworld.net)
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## On Twitter

#Syriza formed in 2004 & got 3.3%, 2007 5%, 2009 4.6%. Tonight it looks like >30%! Who's to say what anti-austerity #TUSC could do?

**Dave Nellist, TUSC national chair**

A new chapter has been opened by this ΣΥΡΙΖΑ victory - one that will ask new questions and mean relearning old lessons - but tonight workers of the world are celebrating!

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

Greek voters say NO MORE AUSTERITY! They need our support

**Matt Wrack, FBU general secretary**

#Syriza points the way to ending the era of austerity across Europe. Nobody should underestimate the anger and demand for change here.

**John McDonnell, Labour MP**

A great victory in Greece for Syriza. Anti-austerity is on the march. What Syriza does today TUSC will do tomorrow.

**Tony Mulhearn, Former Liverpool City Councillor**

#Syriza victory is a new chapter. Needs to default on debt, nationalise banks and big companies and introduce capital controls

**Tony Saunois, Secretary, CWI**

Whopping victory 4 #Syriza boosts left-wing parties & anti-austerity movement Europe wide #TUSC @TUSCoalition

### Socialist Students

The Greeks have reached the right conclusion that austerity can be rejected and that there is an alternative #celebrate #Syriza #GreekElections

**Helen Ridett, London nurse**

Media will still refuse to accept that there is a party in UK against austerity cuts. Not true. #voteTUSC there is an alternative! #Syriza

**Nicky Downes, Coventry teacher**

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## Is the Green Party the answer?

**Widespread electoral disillusionment with the Tory, Labour and Lib Dem establishment parties has opened up a political vacuum which the far-right populist party Ukip is hoping to fill. However, the Green Party standing on a left leaning programme is also increasingly gaining support and members. Claire Laker-Mansfield questions whether the Greens provide the answer to the lack of working class political representation.**

### Why are the Greens growing at the present time?

Positive polls, increasing membership as well as a prominent campaign to be included in the television 'leaders debates', means the Greens have their largest national profile for many years. But it's important to put the Greens' recent growth in its broader context.

The 'two-party' system which has dominated the country's politics is breaking down. Combined support for the Tories and Labour has reached historically low levels. And no wonder. United on the fundamentals, all the main parties are in agreement on the need to place the bill for the economic crisis at the feet of working class people. Austerity is the order of the day, and Labour, who many would look to for protection from the onslaught, are offering nothing substantially different. In fact, they have committed to matching the Tories' spending cuts targets in the next parliament.

With such little difference between the main parties the question of an alternative is becoming increasingly pressing. It is into this wide political vacuum that previously 'fringe' parties - like the Greens but also the right wing populist Ukip - are attempting to step. This is the context in which the Green party is experiencing what its leader, Natalie Bennett, describes as the 'Green surge'.

In sharp contrast to the mainstream parties of British capitalism, the Greens have an increasing membership. Including their Scottish party, they claim to number over 40,000 and have overtaken UKIP in size. Their electoral support is also on the up. Recent polls have placed the party on an average of around 6%, some polls higher - ahead of the Lib-Dems.

A substantial part of the party's support is coming from younger voters, who are often among those most disillusioned with the out-of-touch establishment parties.

**They say they oppose cuts. What is their record on this?**

The Greens have 160 councillors, but it is in Brighton, where the party has a minority administration in control of the local council, that they have had the most opportunity to demonstrate their politics in practice.

Elected on an anti-cuts ticket, many hoped that Britain's first Green council would offer an alternative to the slash and burn approach of both the Tories and Labour. Like most councils, Brighton was hit with a big cut to funding from central government. But far from acting as a line of defence against the vicious Con-Dems - the Greens have obediently passed on the pain. More than £50 million worth of cuts have been inflicted on the city since the Green council was elected - resulting in its huge unpopularity locally.

The only idea the Green council had for 'mitigating' the effects of government cuts was to instead force the cost of the economic crisis onto working people in the form of council tax rises.

Contrast this approach with that of the fighting stance taken by Liverpool city council (led by supporters of the Militant, now the Socialist Party), in the 1980s. Also operating in a time of austerity, this council won over £60 million in extra funding from the Tory government and led a mass campaign of working class people to defend its stance against Thatcher. But unlike the Liverpool council leaders the Greens have neither the confidence nor desire to mobilise the full force of the working-class against the vicious Con-Dems.

On the contrary, the Green council has brought itself into direct confrontation with some of the best organised and militant sections of workers in the city. As part of a so-called equal-pay deal the council attempted to cut the pay of the city's low-waged bin workers by as much as £4,000, ripping up a union agreement. This provoked wild-cat strike action, followed by a determined month long strike of bin workers.

Could Brighton council be dismissed as a one-off? The evidence suggests not. Even where the Greens have only a handful of councillors and little to lose by at least voting, if not actively campaigning, against cuts, they have failed to do so consistently.

In Bristol they joined a 'rainbow' cuts coalition and are largely indistinguishable from the other parties within it. They have failed to propose or support alternative 'no cuts' budgets, compared for example to the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) councillors in Southampton.

When she was asked how the Greens might act following this year's elections, the Green party's leader - Natalie Bennett - felt unable to offer any guarantees that Green MPs would act as a defence against cuts in parliament.

When pressed on what the Greens might do in a potential hung Parliament, Bennett argued that, while the Greens would not favour a coalition with the Tories, or Labour, they would be prepared to vote for Labour party cuts budgets as part of a 'confidence and supply agreement'. Internationally, Green parties have proved very willing to join pro-cuts coalitions and right-wing governments, in Germany and Ireland for example (see box).

**Some see them as a left alternative to the main parties. Do they have socialist policies?**

The Green Party describes its political philosophy as one of 'fairness', for the benefit of 'people and planet'. But while these are admirable aims, they do not claim to have a socialist programme.

The Greens' propose a range of progressive and radical sounding policies which, especially when compared to the cowardice of Labour on so many issues, make for refreshing reading. The party supports renationalisation of the railways and wants to abolish tuition fees, for example. They have also come out in favour of a £10 an hour minimum wage - something socialists are calling for.

But here, as with many of their policies, the devil is in the detail. The Greens claim this policy would only be realisable by 2020, allowing time for big business to 'adjust' to the new wage, but also allowing for inflation to diminish its value.

Clearly the Green party feels it has to balance the needs of workers against the interests of big business. Unlike socialists, they don't place themselves unapologetically and consistently on the side of working-class people against the super-rich 1%.

In their 2010 manifesto the party pledged to match the Labour government's target of halving the deficit by 2013 - a target it argued would be possible without big cuts to services but by instead raising taxes. A close look at their tax policies again reveals the unclear nature of their class loyalties. While they advocated a small increase in corporation tax, they also supported a range of consumer taxes, often dressed up as being environmentally friendly. These would take no account of the consumer's ability to pay and therefore would hit poorer people hardest.

Without a socialist foundation to their ideas, the Greens are forced to basically accept the economic framework set out for them by capitalism. Socialists fight for a society run to meet the needs of all rather than to provide profit for a few. There is enormous wealth in society - enough to provide decent jobs, services, housing and more for everyone. The problem is that this wealth is concentrated in the hands of a tiny few. Statistics brought out by Oxfam this week have shown that the richest 1% own almost as much wealth as the bottom 99%.

Socialists say we need to take the wealth off the 1%. We see the working class - who create society's wealth and provide its services - as the most important force in society. When organised, the working class has the potential power to stop cuts, win improvements, and ultimately to transform and run society. Socialist ideas represent a summary of the economic interests of the working class. These interests are inevitably in conflict with those of big business and the capitalist class, whose profits are generated through the exploitation of workers.

**Climate change and environmental destruction threaten the planet; surely this is the first priority to deal with before we discuss how to get rid of capitalism?**

Dealing with the environmental crisis the planet faces is urgent. The Green Party is right to point this out. Indeed, the fight to protect and improve the environment is one that has been a part of the workers' movement throughout its history. But climate change cannot begin to be tackled by governments beholden to the interests of big business. Challenging the environmental crisis requires that you challenge the system itself.

Under capitalism, profit trumps all: the needs of people, the state of the environment - you name it. Even minor tinkering and regulation made with concern for the planet can invoke the wrath of big business, which, wherever possible, will pass any extra costs they face onto ordinary people: For example so-called green taxes. Even the modest 'green levies' the government has applied to the energy companies, supposedly with concern for the environment, have simply been passed on to consumers - adding to fuel poverty and failing to dent the companies' profits.

Nationalising the energy companies would certainly be a good place to start in dealing with the climate crisis - something the Green party does, in words, support. After all, you cannot control what you don't own. But this principle applies to more than just the energy companies.

Tackling climate change really requires the ability to democratically plan an economy as a whole. Think of the damage that companies like car manufacturers and agricultural giants could continue to do to the environment if left in private hands. Indeed, this planning would need to be carried out not only within the boundaries of a single nation - but as part of an international plan.

Socialists are internationalists - we see the struggle of workers around the globe as intrinsically linked to the fight to change things here. We support and fight for every possible improvement in the lives of working class people - including for reforms that can benefit the environment. But we don't stop there. We understand that unless reforms are linked to fighting to transform society and change the system, they can be taken back at a later stage. The fight to end climate change is therefore one which must be part of an overall fight to end capitalism - something the Green party is not committed to.

Indeed, the Green party's acceptance of a capitalist economic framework has already tainted their environmental record. Brighton council - controlled by the Greens - is ranked 302nd out of 336 local authorities for recycling!

**Can the Greens offer a working class political voice? Could they be part of creating a new mass working class party?**

The Greens are clearly not what you could describe as a party of the working class. While they have some policies that might benefit workers, they do not base themselves on working class organisations - such as trade unions - and nor are they committed to a socialist programme. Their record - both in Brighton and elsewhere - has demonstrated the consequences of this in practice.

The growth that the Greens are currently experiencing is an expression of the deep desire for a real alternative that exists in society - particularly among young people. Really this thirst for an alternative should be met by the workers' movement. Were the trade unions to take the bold step of setting up their own political party, building on the work already done by the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition, many of those currently looking towards the Green Party - in spite of its limitations - would find a new home under this banner.

While individual Greens may well play a role in the future development of a new party, the key task for socialists and anti-cuts activists is not to build support for a party like the Greens, but to campaign and fight to build a real, working-class political alternative.

For more detailed analysis see Claire's article in the new issue of Socialism Today: [www.socialismtoday.org](http://www.socialismtoday.org)

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## Greens' record in Ireland

The record of the Green party in the Republic of Ireland can give us an insight into the potential role we could see their sister organisation in Britain play in the future. In government, the Irish Greens consistently put the interests of the market ahead of those of working class people and the environment.

Following the Irish elections in 2007, the six elected Green TDs (MPs) joined a coalition government with Fianna Fail and the ultra-free market Progressive Democrats.

Like the Greens in Britain, much of the Irish party's support had come from those wishing to protest against big business politics and the destruction of the environment

Before entering government the Irish Greens had prominently supported a campaign fighting against the proposed construction of a natural gas pipeline through Kilcommon, as well as the construction of a refinery at Bellanaboy.

On joining the coalition, the Green TD Eamon Ryan was appointed as Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources. He went on to oversee the construction of this pipeline and refinery in government.

In 2008, the financial crash plunged the Irish economy into recession, with the government bailing out Irish financial firms.

In April 2009 an emergency budget - supported by the Greens - began a brutal programme of austerity - with the cost of the bank bail-outs billed to the Irish working class.

In November 2010, Ireland accepted a bailout from the Troika (International Monetary Fund, the European Union and the European Central Bank), and agreed to a huge €15 billion austerity package in return. However, in December 2010 the Irish government announced a further €6 billion in cuts. This was described as the 'most draconian budget in the history of the state'. It was not until January, with scandal erupting around the cosy links between the taoiseach (prime minister) and the chairman of the bailed out Anglo-Irish bank that the Greens finally decided to leave the government, triggering an election.

In the elections that took place in March of that year, voters punished the Greens for their betrayals. The party experienced a wipe-out and lost all six of its TDs.

The fortunes of the Irish Greens can be contrasted with those of principled anti-austerity campaigners such as the Irish Socialist Party (the sister party of the Socialist Party in England and Wales) - currently celebrating a string of electoral successes. On the back of a mighty campaign against water charges, Socialist Party member and Anti-Austerity Alliance candidate Paul Murphy recently won a sensational by-election victory in Dublin South-West, to become one of three Socialist Party TDs. The Greens candidate in this by-election scored 1.9%.

Electoral success was a serious test for the Greens. In practice the party showed that it is prepared to do what's necessary to protect capitalism despite the costs to people and planet. No wonder then, that this party has been discarded by working class and young people, who are instead looking towards a genuine alternative.

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## **Government welfare cuts: No to sanctions!**

**Steffan Bateman**

Millions in the UK are suffering the effects of unemployment. For many it's a daily struggle with a complicated bureaucracy, the effects of poverty and the countless rejections from job applications.

One of the most cynical attacks on the unemployed is the increasingly harsh benefit sanctions regime, forcing many into dire poverty by taking away their only source of income. This could be for a week, or under 2012 Tory legislation, three years!

Claimants have been sanctioned for trivial reasons such as arriving a few minutes late to a meeting, or not applying for a job when waiting to start a new job!

It is estimated that over one million sanctions were given out to those claiming Jobseeker's Allowance, and Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) during 2013-14. Under government pressure those numbers are only going up. Hundreds of thousands of sanctioned claimants have been forced to turn to charitable foodbanks in order to survive.

Those who suffer from mental illness and those kicked off ESA by Work Capability Assessments are the hardest hit by sanctions.

The way sanctions are used is coming under widespread criticism. Unite Community trade union has offered a lead in opposing sanctions, calling for a national day of action on 19 March, around the slogan "No Targets for Staff - No Sanctions for Claimants". Socialists will be supporting actions up and down the country.

The failure of benefit sanctions can even be seen by the companies brought in by the government to administer the system. The Employment Related Services Association, which represents private profiteers like G4S, A4E and Serco, has recently said: "For the vast majority of jobseekers, sanctions are more likely to hinder their journey into employment."

When criticism is even coming from scandal-ridden businesses that make millions out of public services, you'd think that the main parties would take notice. However, hated Department for Work and Pensions secretary Iain Duncan Smith has continually defended his massive increase in targets for sanctions.

## **Opposition?**

That doesn't mean the supposed opposition has been any better. After the court of appeal ruled in February 2013 that it was unlawful to sanction those who refused to work for free in workfare schemes, the government had to put in a bill to avoid paying compensation to claimants unfairly sanctioned.

It was Ed Miliband who ordered Labour MPs not to vote against. A disgusting and hypocritical move from a party that is meant to be tackling the "cost of living crisis".

But it's not just spitefulness from the Tories that has led them down the road of harsh sanctions.

They have encouraged a cynical view of benefit claimants as 'scroungers', rather than victims of capitalism, to justify cuts in government welfare spending and to try and divide the working class.

Another reason for sanctions is to use the fear of being unemployed as a stick to beat workers into accepting lower pay and worse conditions.

To fight sanctions and attacks on those in and out of work we need organisations that stand up for the working class and not the bosses, unlike the establishment parties. The capitalist system in its drive for increased profit cannot solve unemployment, or the other pressing social problems. To solve these we need system change.

In a letter to MPs, church leaders point out that the removal of living expenses through sanctions, excluding housing benefit, for three years equates to a £11,000 loss, while the largest fine for a criminal offence which can be imposed in a magistrate's court is £5,000

There are many shocking stories about the effects of sanctions and the almost arbitrary way in which they are imposed by targets from central government. One example is a dyslexic jobseeker interviewed on BBC Radio 4. She had struggled to deal with lengthy and complicated forms and received little practical support. She was sanctioned after failing to meet her target of 48 "job seeking steps" by only completing 47 job applications.

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## **New attacks on poor households**

A key element of the Tories' general election programme is the immediate introduction of a further cap on welfare payments to jobless households and the ending of housing benefit for 18-21 year olds. This is despite the poorest 10% of households suffering an average 4% fall in income since the coalition came to power in 2010.

In contrast, Britain's richest 100 people have seen their collective wealth rise by £15 billion since 2008 and now have the same wealth as 30% of UK households (18 million people). The UK is the only G7 country to record rising wealth inequality in 2000-14.

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## **Tories and Labour refuse moratorium on fracking**

**Steve Score**

This government cares more about profits for energy companies than it does about what happens to people. They still plan to "go all out" for fracking - the extraction of gas by pumping high pressure water and chemicals into shale rock. This is despite evidence of health and environmental dangers.

The Infrastructure Bill currently going through parliament aims to make it easier for energy companies to drill under people's homes without their permission.

But with the general election looming and under pressure from anti-fracking campaigns, the government has made some small concessions - for example fracking would not take place in national parks, areas of outstanding natural beauty and areas where water is collected for domestic use.

However, Labour used this partial U-turn as an excuse for not voting for an amendment that would put a moratorium on fracking until its implications were further investigated. In reality they have the same big business interests at heart as the Tories.

Yet the cross party parliamentary Environmental Audit Committee had proposed that fracking in the UK should be suspended because it would make it impossible to meet carbon reduction targets.

The government argues that it is 'cleaner' than coal, but is prepared to back massive investment in an industry that causes climate change rather than shifting to renewable energy and environmentally sound alternatives on the scale that is needed.

Cameron wants a repeat of the large expansion of fracking in the US. Energy companies are lining up to profit. The links the Tories have with the industry were revealed by a leaked letter from George Osborne to ministers telling them to make "personal priorities" of intervening to fast track fracking and to help the "asks" of shale gas company Cuadrilla. This would include getting involved in local planning and offering public land for drilling.

Yet again it proves that defending the environment and getting rid of the system that operates on the dictates of profit are linked. A socialist solution is needed, and an alternative to the big business parties.

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# Davos summit: 'The pitchforks are coming!'

**Caroline Vincent**

The annual World Economic Forum (WEF) was held in Davos, Switzerland, last week. A global elite of world leaders, intellectuals, philanthropists, entrepreneurs and representatives of big business gathered to focus their 'talents' on the most pressing issues in the world today. Inequality and poverty were high on the agenda.

On the same day, Global Justice Now released a report titled *The Poor Are Getting Richer and other Dangerous Delusions*, designed to undermine some of the assumptions that the Forum promotes. One myth that the report set out to bust was that of 'trickle down' economics - we shouldn't envy the filthy rich, as we'll eventually get richer too! In fact the opposite has turned out to be true.

Take a look at the growing inequality in the UK. Wages have fallen since the economic crash in 2008, but they hardly rose during the preceding boom years, with profits going to a tiny elite. Meanwhile consumer debt has tripled over the last 20 years as we've struggled to make ends meet. The proportion of UK income controlled by the super-rich has doubled since 1970, with the top 1% now owning as much as the bottom 55%.

Trickle down hasn't worked, because the super-rich don't use their money in ways that benefit the rest of the population. They spend it on luxury goods, or hoard it in offshore accounts.

Rather than address this widening inequality, the government has hit us with austerity measures that seem endless. Whilst the richest 80 people in the world have doubled their wealth, we've suffered attacks on our wages, pensions and vital public services.

## **Nervous**

But there are consequences of inequality for the rich too. They're becoming nervous. Anti-capitalist mass-movements have sprung up all over the world in response to the "planned poverty" that has been dished out to the majority. And anti-austerity parties like Syriza in Greece and Podemos in Spain have made electoral breakthroughs.

At a packed Davos session a retired hedge fund manager made an interesting revelation. His former peers are planning their escapes. They've been buying airstrips and farms in remote locations just in case they need to make a quick getaway! Perhaps they're heeding the advice of multi-millionaire Nick Hanauer who warned fellow oligarchs last year that "the pitchforks ARE coming!"

Even Christine Lagarde, Managing Director of the International Monetary Fund pointed out, "excessive inequality is not good for sustainable growth." Indeed, as our wages are driven down it means we can no longer afford to buy the products that the capitalists need to sell us to make their profits.

Oxfam's Winnie Byanyima - who co-chaired the WEF - made suggestions for tackling the problem. These included a clampdown on tax dodging from corporations, investment in public services, a living wage and provision of adequate safety nets for the most vulnerable. All things that socialists would agree with and campaign for.

Ultimately though, capitalism is a system that creates crises and inequality. Worldwide millions of people have fallen into poverty as a result of its failings. It can't be fixed to be 'nicer'. Only a socialist planned economy is capable of delivering a decent standard of living for all of us.

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**Air traffic controllers in Switzerland must have had a busy time with 1,700 private jets flying in the rich and famous to attend the Davos shindig. Business was also reported to be brisk at the Belvedere Hotel which held 320 parties in five days, with billionaires and world leaders gorging on 1,500 bottles of champagne and prosecco, 1,300 mini pretzels and 1,350 chocolate-covered strawberries.**

Membership of the WEF at \$50,000 and entry to the summit at \$20,000 shouldn't have presented any difficulty to billionaires like Jeff Greene from the USA who left his cramped 53,000 square feet LA mansion and jetted in accompanied by his wife, kids and two nannies. But in fairness to Jeff he does consider that "lifestyle expectations are far too high and need to be adjusted so that we have less things and a smaller better existence."

Having few things is something most of the world's population has already achieved thanks to capitalism!

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## **Quantitative Easing: Socialism for the rich!**

If you're in a hole, stop digging. But not it seems if you happen to be the European Central Bank (ECB) dealing with the depressed Eurozone economies.

The ECB has announced quantitative easing (QE) measures ie printing new money, amounting to a staggering €1,100,000,000,000 (€1.1 trillion), in order to stimulate economic growth.

This high-risk strategy assumes that the recipients of this ECB largesse ie the banks and other capitalist financial institutions, will provide private industry with new investment. But why would capitalists rise to the bait with a current excess of capacity in industry?

Indeed, political economist Richard Murphy has rubbished the ECB's QE measures, saying: "Because... there is no demand for new cash for private sector investment in the EU, or beyond it, this money will not be invested in new productive capital. Not a new job will be created as a result. Not a single social need will be met. Instead the money will be used for speculation... There will be a boom. A bust will follow.

"But in the meantime market gamblers will celebrate their profits, acclaim their abilities, and demand their bonuses.

"A few will get very rich indeed. Many will pay the inflated commodity prices and vast numbers of young people will end up priced even further out of property markets, where a few will purchase considerable portfolios and yet more trophy apartments that prevent access to housing at affordable prices to millions. This will be socialism for the rich."

**Dave Carr**

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# 'Defenders of democracy' mourn despot's death

**Simon Carter**

On 11 January Barack Obama and David Cameron, together with 40 other world leaders, marched arm-in-arm through Paris after the Charlie Hebdo events proclaiming the values of free speech and other democratic rights.

Two weeks later these same politicians jetted to Saudi Arabia and attended the funeral of absolute monarch King Abdullah and endorsed the succession of his half-brother Prince Salman to the throne.

The fact that this oil-rich state has one of the worst human rights records of any country on the planet clearly doesn't register on Obama's and Cameron's democratic radar.

So repressive is the Saudi regime that political opponents, 'non-believers', and hapless foreign workers are routinely put to the sword or subjected to long prison sentences. And in the case of the recently jailed liberal internet blogger Raif Badawi, subjected to 1,000 lashes.

But such repression is of little concern to western leaders compared to maintaining the Saudi regime given its geopolitical importance. As well as being a reliable large oil exporter and buyer of western armaments, the House of Saud is a useful counterweight to the regional influence of the Iranian regime.

## **Blind eye**

That also means turning a blind eye to the Saudi regime's decades-long sponsorship of reactionary Sunni jihadist groups which have spawned the various branches of al-Qa'ida and more recently Islamic State.

Only recently when these same groups turned their weapons on the Saudi regime was there a shift in strategy. Nonetheless, the Saudi leaders used this potential threat to their rule to further clamp down on its domestic opponents and minority Shia population.

But while ostensibly countering the region's Sunni Jihadists, it has allowed its home grown imams of the Wahhabi sect of Islam to continue propagating a sectarian, ultra-conservative political agenda.

However, the regime remains fearful of being overthrown. Its vast oil wealth has not prevented high rates of unemployment among its overwhelming young population.

And the sharp fall in world oil prices could impact on the regime's ability to buy social peace. Saudi rulers' lavish, decadent western lifestyles also don't sit well beside the pious Wahhabi zealots.

So Western governments fear that the Saudi succession could open up an irreconcilable chasm in the country.

That is why Obama, Cameron, et al, have all quickly signalled their support for the new Saudi king - and to hell with democracy!

# Them & Us

## Dangerous driving

Comedian Al Murray's reactionary alter ego character - the pub landlord - must be wondering just how ludicrous his general election manifesto must become to out-trump Ukip.

The latter's latest nonsense outburst comes from Lynton Yates, its parliamentary candidate in Charnwood, Leicestershire. His party leaflet called for benefit claimants to be banned from driving cars and instead use buses. He also reckons, in a disingenuous environmental claim, that such a ban would remove six million vehicles from our roads. Presumably, Yates intends removing adapted mobility cars from disabled people.

Of course, the use of public transport should be encouraged. But ensuring that it's affordable, accessible, reliable and safe would require public ownership and substantial government investment - two policies that Ukip opposes!

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## Dark side of the moon

"Fall in real wages prompts 40% rise in workers with second jobs"... "The UK is becoming a nation of toilers. With living standards at their lowest in a decade and real-term wages falling 8% since the financial crisis" (Financial Times 26/1/15).

Officially, there are now 1.2 million workers with second jobs, up 450,000 since 2006. But that leaves out workers forced to 'moonlight' with second jobs in the so-called grey economy, which has grown to an estimated 3% of GDP.

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## Head of the queue

Thousands of City Link workers were shafted when the courier company folded without warning over Christmas, with the government picking up the tab for redundancy payments.

Another 1,000 self-employed and agency workers were also sacked, with some self-employed drivers owed more than £20,000. However, while these workers are likely to find themselves at the back of the queue for payment Rentokil Initial, which sold City Link for £1 in 2013, will scoop a multi-million payout when the courier firm's assets are sold.

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## Worse off

Austerity: 'We're all in it together' is the government's unconvincing slogan. But according to the Institute for Fiscal studies the poorest UK households have suffered the most from the Tory/Lib Dems coalition welfare cuts and tax rises. The average household is now £1,127 a year worse off since 2010. The income of the lowest 10% of earners fell by 4% whereas the richest 10% suffered a 2.6% drop.

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## Lording it

If readers believe that feudalism was swept aside during the English revolution then think again. 84,000 'manorial rights' claims were issued to home owners (including freehold properties) in the last two years. These claims allow lords of the manor to mine underneath their land, to hunt, shoot and fish on the property, and even to stage fairs!

In October 2013, 500 households in Welwyn Garden City received notices telling them that Lord Sainsbury (former Tory leader in the Lords and supermarket owner) had registered claims to manorial rights over their properties.

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## TUSC: Gearing up for its largest anti-cuts election challenge yet

**Paula Mitchell, London region Socialist Party secretary**

"Fantastic day, fantastic conference, fantastic people" tweeted Red Labour Hull councillor Dean Kirk on his way home from addressing the conference of the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition on Saturday 24th January.

In homes and workplaces, all over social media and even reflected in the mainstream press, the question is being asked: "If they can do it in Greece, can we do it here?"

The weekend that ended with the history-changing election victory of Syriza in Greece, began, in London at least, with a conference of hundreds of trade unionists, socialists and community campaigners, planning another little bit of history - the biggest electoral stand of anti-austerity candidates in Britain in most of our lifetimes.

In opening the conference, TUSC national chair and former Labour MP (famously a workers' MP on a worker's wage) Dave Nellist explained that while TUSC won't be forming a government in May it will be fielding over 100 parliamentary candidates, providing a national alternative to the anti-working class austerity of all the main parties.

Transport union RMT executive member John Reid announced that the RMT has set aside money to support TUSC candidates.

Joe Simpson, assistant general secretary of the POA prison officers' union declared his intention to stand in Enfield North and explained how he was putting the case within POA for it to support TUSC candidates and join the RMT on the steering committee of TUSC.

Other platform speakers in the morning session were PCS NEC member Cheryl Gedling who is the chair of the Scottish TUSC, and NUT national executive member Stefan Simms, who announced that two members of the NUT executive will be standing for TUSC, which is more than for any other party.

### Local authority cuts

The conference not only discussed the general election campaign and programme in a rich and comradely democratic debate, but also held a very significant discussion on the importance of the local elections in England on the same day - 7th May.

While the general election will be what consumes press attention, the local elections are in many ways more directly the battleground over cuts. Labour councils have passed on Tory cuts to jobs, pay and services, implemented the bedroom tax, and privatised homes and services. Many are now setting new three-year cuts budgets, in the full knowledge that whoever wins the general election, the cuts in local government will continue.

In opening the afternoon discussion on TUSC's platform for the local elections, nominating officer Clive Heemskerk said that whoever wins the general election it's a "change of management", and we'll need councillors as our "shop stewards", fighting to defend jobs, pay and services.

In an inspiring session, the TUSC conference brought together rebel Labour councillors from around the country - all suspended or expelled for refusing to vote for cuts. Hull Red Labour councillor Dean Kirk, joined in the audience by fellow rebel Gill Kennett, summed up the feeling of all the councillors present: "Labour is not the party I joined".

From Leicester Independent Councillors Against Cuts, Barbara Potter said she stood for a council seat because she was active in her community, not in order to make cuts or implement the bedroom tax. The Leicester councillors held a "People's Budget" meeting so they could put forward a no-cuts budget - with the involvement of local people rather than imposed from above.

Leicester councillor Wayne Naylor pointed out that in Leicester the imposition of a city mayor obliterated democracy. He said that leaving Labour had been a big step, but it was the best thing he has ever done. Later Wayne tweeted: "The start of something different! Great to be here at the start!"

Suspended from his Labour group, Warrington Labour councillor Kevin Bennett said he had been trying to fight cuts from inside Labour but "enough is enough". He hoped to become a TUSC councillor very soon and also to stand for TUSC in Warrington South in the general election.

Mayor Pete Smith, of Walsall Democratic Labour Party, talked about his opposition to Labour cuts of £89 million to services for young, disabled and poor people. He said: "You're OK in the Labour Party until you try and change things ... We should be opposing all cuts, not allowing them to divide us over which cuts are acceptable. None are".

Nick Chaffey brought greetings from the Southampton rebel councillors and outlined how they had moved an alternative budget, defeating any challenges over legality. Due to his clear anti-cuts stance, Keith Morrell was overwhelmingly re-elected in May. Labour came in third place in his ward, showing how if an anti-cuts challenge had not been made, UKIP would have won.

There were also cheers for Nana Asante who was in the audience, the former Labour mayor of Harrow, now standing as a TUSC candidate in the general election.

## **Past experience**

Tony Mulhearn, one of the Liverpool socialist '47 group' of councillors who defied Tory Thatcher's cuts in the 1980s, has been selected to stand in Liverpool Riverside. As TUSC activist Karen commented, "if only all Labour councillors showed the same courage".

In the discussion, Nancy Taaffe from Walthamstow described the impact of the wide TUSC stand in Waltham Forest in May 2014, garnering 5,500 votes.

Socialist Students organiser Claire Laker Mansfield made the point that TUSC-supporting councillors are moving no-cuts budgets but we don't hear that about Green Party councillors. Instead, unfortunately, Brighton and Hove council - led by the Greens - has passed £50 million of

cuts. Brighton bin workers, whose pay was cut and who were forced to go on strike against the council, now refer to the Greens as "Tories on bikes".

Hannah Sell, speaking for the Socialist Party, said that this was a historic conference, at a time when we are seeing the fracturing of politics in Britain. The Labour Party in government could go the way of Pasok in Greece [which got under 5% of the vote in the Greek general election on the day after the TUSC conference].

UKIP and others from the right could step into the vacuum unless a national working class anti-austerity alternative is built. She put the case for a widespread stand: it means we reach the threshold for more media coverage, we reach more people, but most importantly it's preparation for what's coming after the general election.

Charlie Kimber reported that 15 SWP members will be standing in the general election as part of TUSC. He agreed that if we have lively campaigns now it can be preparation for something bigger after the election.

## **Federal structure**

Part of the discussion centred around the structures of TUSC, with Nick Wrack of the Independent Socialist Network (through which individual participants in TUSC are represented on its national steering committee) arguing for a party with individual membership.

Hannah explained that in the view of the Socialist Party, the current federal structure, enabling the participation of trade union representatives, along with the involvement of individuals as well at all levels, is the best for now. The ISN did not put forward any structural changes at this stage.

Commenting after the conference, Mohamed Ahmed said: "I'll be standing for TUSC in Leicester as a council candidate, where I've grown up. It's time to give back to the community".

The conference debated the programme of TUSC, with a number of amendments, on fracking, TTIP, the pension age and other issues. This included debating the best demands and slogans to use to unify working class people, when the capitalists and their media and political representatives try to divide us. Everyone agreed that it is not migrants who are to blame for the lack of housing or jobs, but the bosses and bankers, the rich and their political parties.

Jenny Sutton, TUSC candidate for Tottenham, read out a Labour Party leaflet in Tottenham which scandalously repeats the Tories' approach on immigration.

Senan from Tamil Solidarity and Hugo Pierre, TUSC candidate for mayor of Tower Hamlets last year, argued that we have to put across our ideas in a way that can give us the ear of all communities - black, white and newly arrived communities - class politics can cut across the racist agenda of the rich.

Disability activist Rob Punton spoke about how disabled people are being isolated and seen as 'part of the problem'. The audience applauded when he declared his candidature for TUSC in Birmingham - "I find it ironic that I'll be campaigning to join the bastards who abolished the Independent Living Fund!"

Trade unionists are standing for TUSC - such as RMT member Ted Woodley in Birmingham and FBU brigade organiser Simon Hickman in Manchester. Alistair Tice from Yorkshire reported that five Doncaster Care UK strikers are standing.

Clive Heemskerk reported at the end of the conference that 51 parliamentary candidates had already been agreed and there are indications of around 600 council candidates. Already, he said, this is an impressive list with more working class and trade union candidates than any of the main parties will achieve.

Supplies of leaflets and posters flew from the TUSC 'shop' and banners were ordered for use at protests, pickets and meetings around the country (order your supplies from [www.tusc.org.uk](http://www.tusc.org.uk)).

As one attendee, Jimmy, tweeted afterwards: "Full of hope and inspiration now after #TUSC15, great attendance, great speakers, the future looks good for #TUSC".

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This version of this article was first posted on the Socialist Party website on 26 January 2015 and may vary slightly from the version subsequently printed in The Socialist.

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## Election Appeal 2015

The Socialist Party is appealing for £50,000 to help fund our candidates for the 2015 elections, as part of the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC).

Thanks to Laurence Maples who has donated £10, Steve Williams £500, Ian Whitehouse £50, Neil Adshead £10, Michael Marx £5, Jon Dale £700, Clive Dunkley £100, Matt Whale £50, Tessa Warrington £300 and Alfie Lethbridge £100.

You can donate on [www.socialistparty.org.uk/donate](http://www.socialistparty.org.uk/donate), phone 020 8988 8777 to make a card payment, or post a cheque made out to "Socialist Party" to PO Box 24697, London E11 1YD. Please include a note to say your donation is for the "election appeal 2015".

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## End the housing crisis

- Cap rents, not benefits
- A mass programme of council house building

**Nancy Taaffe, TUSC prospective parliamentary candidate for Walthamstow**

Housing. A basic human need, one of the requirements for human life. Yet in London tonight, over 6,000 will sleep rough. More than 60,000 children will be in temporary accommodation. And the housing waiting list stands at in excess of 250,000 households.

Years of sell-offs, under-investment and welfare cuts have created a perfect storm, particularly for young people. We need to direct this storm to the door of the establishment which created the problem.

In the Labour years, the model used for housing was a form of 'Private Finance Initiative' (PFI). Lease deals forged an alliance of building firms, housing associations and public bodies such as schools, hospitals and libraries.

Public land was given to profit-making private interests in exchange for being allowed to rent back a slice of public space. It's privatisation by another name.

As well as causing well-documented spiralling costs, it stoked the fire of housing need. PFI further reduced housing stock already gutted by Thatcher's laws giving council tenants the "right to buy" their homes.

For 30 years, the Tories and New Labour told us that cheap credit would ensure the next generation a home.

In London, the average age that someone can buy their first house is 52!

In reality, it's all been engineered to stuff the bank accounts of all the main parties' rich mates. The international property fair "Mipim" is a point in case.

Every March, fat-cat property speculators booze and schmooze local authorities at a resort in France. Council leaders get a luxury holiday on us; international landlords get to snap up our London flats for 'redevelopment'.

The Socialist Party has always argued that the private housing model was a crime against the next generation. Many of the casualties of this crime will march on Saturday 31 January against London's housing crisis.

The march has been co-organised by the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC - see [www.tusc.org.uk](http://www.tusc.org.uk)).

TUSC is aiming to stand 100 MP candidates this May against all cuts and privatisation. We are the only group calling for genuine rent controls, an end to housing sell-offs and a massive programme of council house building.

We are socialists and trade unionists who never bought into the lies of privatisation or austerity. And as Greece and Spain show, millions of workers across Europe agree with the ideas we put forward.

Join us!

- Rent control now! Democratic rent councils to decide fair levels in each area
- Stop council house sell-offs
- Councils should use their compulsory purchase powers on long term empty properties and use them as council housing
- A new mass workers' party to fight for affordable housing for all. Stand working class candidates in May's general and local elections to fight for these policies
- Nationalise the banks and biggest corporations. For a democratic socialist society that puts the needs of the majority, including decent, affordable housing, before the profits of the tiny minority

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## London march for homes

**Saturday 31 January**

Assemble 12pm at Shoreditch Church (for east London) or St Mary's Churchyard, Elephant and Castle (for south London), and march to City Hall.

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# Extra, extra! Socialist needs new sales!

James Ivens, The Socialist editorial team

No one can beat the Socialist on analysis and ideas. No one can even come close to the clarity and audacity of the programme we propose. All we need to do is get it out there. We need to sell it.

Who else has been working without rest for an electoral and industrial fight with the cuts-crazed bosses? And who explained it won't be Labour who does it? It will be the real working-class prizefighters we've been backing: unions like the RMT and PCS, and grassroots anti-cuts campaigners.

What other paper is seen on countless strikers' picket lines, students' occupations and renters' marches to save their homes? Not just reporting, but offering practical assistance when asked?

Where else can you sit in with the political white-water rides in Greece, Spain and the United States? And what other paper has sister parties right in there, mapping out where the river will fork?

Only the Socialist. And that's why anyone serious about landing a hit on the greasy snouts of the super-rich needs it.

We print stories by the real experts - ordinary members and workers directly involved in these battles.

But we can only reach as far as the Socialist Party's members will take us. Weekly sales in town centres are central to most branches' activity. But we want to reach the hands of all the angry, exploited and dispossessed.

And we can only keep on being the best if we have money. We're not a 'freesheet', paid for by capitalist advertisers. We depend on ordinary people buying our paper to keep it up.

All of this - input, influence and finance - is where you come in.

Carrying the paper with you everywhere you go is the first habit to get. We all end up in political conversations at work. The same in union branches, tenants' association meetings, and chance gatherings at school or university. When workers are angry, and are looking for answers - we need our paper to hand to sell.

You could also run weekly morning sales outside a major workplace in your area. What better way to make links with fighters and organisers in hospitals and job centres - or browbeaten retail workers?

Some have started to look for new times or locations for their campaign stalls. Your next political live wire could first find our ideas outside the station, storming home from work one weekday night.

And if you have potential regular buyers, have them subscribe!

The only way to achieve any of this is organising. How can you plan to do one extra thing to push the paper further? And how can your branch or region? Could you be their next paper organiser?

No one can beat the Socialist on what we have to say. So let's make sure no one can ignore it either.

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## **Lib-Lab political bung scandal**

### **Carlisle TUSC**

Labour parliamentary candidate Lee Sherriff has taken a £10,000 political 'donation' for her election campaign from millionaire property dealer Lord Oakeshott. Ed Miliband has approved the money, and Sherriff has refused to explain herself.

Lib Dem Oakeshott is a close ally of Business Secretary Vince Cable, who privatised Royal Mail and rejected transport union RMT's call to save jobs at City Link. He is plotting for a Labour-Lib Dem coalition government to continue austerity cuts, privatisation and anti-worker legislation.

His other aim is to prevent the public from democratically deciding on EU membership, saying of Ed Miliband "He has stood firm against the clamour for a referendum with considerable courage and nous." TUSC opposes all racist and anti-immigrant rhetoric and policies. We also oppose the EU, because it acts undemocratically in the interests of big business against working people.

### **Dodgy**

The Sherriff campaign's acceptance of this dodgy donation demonstrates once more the futility of trade unions putting their cash - and hopes - in Labour. Unions in Carlisle and elsewhere would do much better to back their own candidates against this mercenary lot. TUSC exists to help them do just that.

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## **Leicester marches for free education**

### **Thomas Barker, Leicester Socialist Students**

Profit has no place in education. The government is intent on making ordinary people shoulder the burden of the economic crisis. It is time that we stand up and call for an end to the marketising of education!

### **Action**

So as part of a national day of action, people across Leicester will march for free education 31 January. The march has been organised by student groups in Leicester including Socialist Students, and is backed by Leicester trades council and teachers' union NUT.

With the success of the student movement in Germany, as well as Syriza in Greece, it's increasingly clear that there is an alternative to cuts, debt, and privatisation. So whether you're fed up with low wages, extortionate rents, or crippling student debt, join the march to make your voice heard!

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## Burns' Night a blazing success

The annual "Alternative Burns' Night Supper" organised by the Carlisle Socialist Party was described by a journalist from the local paper as his best ever night out in the city. Mind you, that was at 1.30am, after six hours of music, poetry, singing, eating - and, yeah, OK, a wee bit of drinking - by over 40 people.

Our address to Burns, the "immortal memory", rescued the revolutionary democrat and internationalist from the parochial conservatives who have partly sanitised and partly vilified him since his death. How many guests at the Mayor's much-publicised supper knew Burns supported the American and French revolutions against the Hannoverian monarchy? Who knew he sent cannon to France, and formed a secret branch of the "Friends of the People" in nearby Dumfries?

After some poems and live Scottish and Irish music, we enjoyed haggis, neeps and tatties, followed by more modern music in open mic and karaoke sessions. What an enjoyable way to raise £132 and bust our fighting fund target!

I'm still recovering.

**Brent Kennedy, Carlisle Socialist Party**

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## Book review: Unison bureaucracy unmasked

**Maurice Sheehan, Ex-staff member, Unison**

I recently read Unison Bureaucracy Unmasked: The Defend the Four Story, a restrained account of a shameful episode in the history of Unison. Congratulations to Glenn Kelly, Onay "Kaz" Kasab, Suzanne Muna and Brian Debus (the four) for successfully challenging the decision to ban them from office for periods of three to five years.

The four were banned for producing a leaflet that challenged, in good faith, decisions made by the union's Standing Orders Committee (SOC) to the 2007 Annual Delegate Conference.

It is remarkable how some senior Unison officers, with access to the best labour lawyers and anti-racist education programmes, could formulate an allegation of "giving racist offence" against the four. The four used a cartoon of the famous 'three monkeys' on the leaflet to depict the SOC's attitude towards controversial conference motions.

On this allegation the Employment Tribunal (ET) stated: "it cannot be said that any reasonable person would or should have realised that the cartoon would cause racial offence, and that not to do so was somehow 'careless'".

### Costs

This case cost Unison far more than the compensation awarded and the legal costs. From 2007 to 2013, members and activists in London left the union in protest at the treatment of the four. Precious resources were diverted to place the three branches that the four belonged to into administration. The ET said the decision to do this "was done in a way to cause humiliation" to the four.

The ET also awarded aggravated damages against Unison for its treatment of Glenn Kelly, which was deemed "high-handed, malicious and oppressive".

I am told that following the final resolution of the ET case the union commissioned an internal report. The finalised report remains confidential. In the current climate of austerity we need more union activists, not less. Let's hope lessons were learned and that everyone is treated with dignity and respect when participating in the union's democratic structures.

You can order **Unison Bureaucracy Unmasked** from Left Books for £5 plus postage by phoning 020 8988 8789 or online at [www.leftbooks.co.uk](http://www.leftbooks.co.uk)

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## Why I joined the Socialist Party

**Lisa Bainbridge, Lambeth Socialist Party**

In 1997 New Labour swept to victory with a promise of a 'third way' for British politics. I'd just arrived in the UK from Australia. I grew up during the Cold War, and my politics didn't stretch much further than no nukes and vote Labour.

This changed after the attacks on the Twin Towers. I remember the moment it was announced the UK would be sending troops to Afghanistan. People said it would be over in weeks. I couldn't imagine how anyone could think that; the USSR had got bogged down there for decades.

A few brutal years later, Tony Blair announced we would be going to Iraq. I joined the march against the war in the hope the wishes of the many would win over the interests of a few. We know how that turned out.

Then came the financial crash. This was the moment, people were occupying the streets, capitalism was in crisis. The nature of capitalism had been revealed, rampant greed and corporate corruption laid bare.

But the more time passed, the more the mainstream media narrative changed. It was no longer due to exploitation and trading toxic assets. It was all caused by overspending on public services. Of course it was!

### Sorry

Labour just started apologising. I kept the faith for a while, until I saw Ed Balls announce Labour's promise to carry through Tory cuts. Labour was not speaking for me anymore.

The next day I saw Dave Nellist, chair of the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC - see page 9) on the BBC. It was the first time for a long time I'd heard someone with real ideas about how the lives of working people could be transformed. I immediately got on the website, registered my support for TUSC and joined the Socialist Party.

The night before writing this, I watched Syriza sweep to victory in Greece. For the first time since 1997 I feel change in the air.

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## Shapps' lies on housing

Tory party chair Grant Shapps claimed recently that Britain's council housing waiting list had fallen. This was because of the bedroom tax, he claimed: "Rather than the taxpayer paying for rooms to be empty, they're paying for people to live in these homes."

An article in Private Eye says yes, housing lists are down over the past two years. But two-thirds of the households removed from the list came from just a quarter of all councils that had slashed lists by a half, changing their allocations policy to exclude certain groups.

So the problems still exist but many cash-strapped local councils no longer even try to resolve them!

Shapps' boast of effective use of resources is nonsense. The amount of rent lost due to empty council houses rose 20% last year to £130 million. And social housing is left empty on average for five days longer than it was two years ago, before the unfair, unworkable bedroom tax came in.

A socialist housing policy based on high quality council house building, effective rent controls and nationalising the banks to ease the cost and availability of private housing would solve the problem. The harsh free market fantasies of Shapps and Co. have failed.

**Roger Shrives**

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## Inept waste site renationalised

**Mike Barker**

Sellafield nuclear reprocessing site is a poorly managed deposit for tens of thousands of tonnes of dangerous nuclear waste.

In 2008 a 17-year contract was awarded to Nuclear Management Partners (NMP) comprising URS Corporation, British firm Amec and energy company Areva to manage this waste.

These profit-obsessed capitalists were monumentally incompetent in overseeing this lucrative contract.

For years union officials raised concerns about their mismanagement of Britain's radioactive legacy. Now the critical work undertaken at Sellafield has finally been renationalised by the government.

No mainstream political party normally talks about renationalising public services. Former Labour MP Richard Caborn even gave advice to the corporations forming NMP and later became a non-executive board member for the firm. This is yet another example of the failure of privatisation.

### **No trust**

The bosses running the three corporations in NMP are not the type of people that we would entrust our library books to, let alone nuclear waste. One influential board member of URS Corporation Joseph W. Ralston, was vice chair of the US Government's Joint Chiefs of Staff (1996-2000) and is now a director of global war-profiteer Lockheed Martin.

Help us fight to renationalise vital utilities and public services, and work towards creating a socialist society where the future is controlled by us the workers, not the fat-cat profiteers who are destroying our lives.

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## **Usdaw elections: 'We need a winning, fighting union'**

**Socialist Party member Amy Murphy is standing for president in the Usdaw shop workers' union elections, as well as for re-election as a Southern division executive council member. The Socialist interviewed Amy about her candidacy.**

"I want to see the union saying 'enough'! We are one of the biggest growing unions and we need to put our members first.

We've got 180,000 members in Tesco, for example, so we're quite a formidable force. We need to be showing that and saying to these companies 'this isn't acceptable'.

We've got some fantastic reps that do wonderful jobs in quite difficult times and sometimes it feels like we're on our own. Reps need reinforcement.

If these companies flout the agreement we can't just say 'okay then' and roll over. We need to work with the reps we've got, take on board what they're saying and act upon it. It always feels like it's what the company wants and the members have to toe the line.

It would be wrong for me to say that strikes are the answer to everything, but I seriously believe that sometimes we've got no other alternative. They shouldn't be dismissed by the leadership.

We should not be frightened to upset the likes of Tesco. We do it every day as reps - we put out jobs on the line, we argue. We need the same kind of assurance from the top.

Usdaw also needs to support its young members. We need to recognise that they are our future, we need to organise them and it would be good to have a youth seat on both our executive and divisional councils.

I've been on the executive council for three years hoping that I could make some kind of a difference but it's quite plain from where I'm standing that there is no democracy. So one of the aims for me is to try to bring that back into Usdaw.

But also it should be a winning union for the membership. There doesn't seem to be much fight any more. I've been a member of Usdaw for 22 years and I've always challenged. The challenge seems to have gone from the leadership."

Socialist Party member Scott Jones is also standing for South Wales and Western division.

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## **RMT forces DLR bosses back**

Transport union RMT has called off 48-hours of strike action on the Docklands Light Railway (DLR), due to start on 28 January, after the employers agreed to all the union's demands.

The dispute with DLR operators Keolis/Amey was over the outsourcing of jobs and activities, new human resource policies that would have undermined working conditions, and the undermining of the role of RMT Health and Safety representatives.

All these proposals have now been withdrawn as a result of the threatened strike action, after a 95% 'yes' vote for action on a 70% turnout.

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## **NI Water workers' victory**

**Donal O'Cofaigh, Fermanagh Socialist Party**

Despite efforts by Stormont politicians and many in the Northern Ireland media to vilify them, striking NI Water workers have won significant concessions from management, leading to a suspension of their action on Tuesday 20 January, pending a ballot on the new offer.

The 'work-to-rule' action - with workers refusing any overtime and sticking strictly to their contractual obligations - started on 23 December. Management were trying to force workers to pay dramatically higher pension contributions - effectively a pay cut - from April this year.

The attacks on NI Water workers are aimed at paving the way for all-out privatisation of the service and, therefore, the introduction of water charges.

This victory is another example of the power of workers to resist and defeat attacks from the bosses when they stand united.

## **Public sector strike**

The NIPSA Northern Ireland public sector union is balloting for action over an imposed pay settlement and job cuts. If members vote yes, a public sector general strike could take place on 13 March.

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## **Workplace news in brief**

### **NHS strike suspended**

As we go to press, the NHS strike due to take place on 29 February over pay has been suspended following an offer from the employer. Members in the different health unions will now be consulted on the offer.

The dispute was triggered when the government refused to implement the Pay Review Body (PRB) recommendation of a consolidated 1% pay rise across the board.

Now more staff will get the 1% pay rise, with an extra one off £200 payment for lower paid workers.

But more could be won. Socialist Party members on the Unison health service group executive opposed the strike suspension.

Look out for more on the dispute in future issues of the Socialist and at [www.socialistparty.org.uk](http://www.socialistparty.org.uk)

## Tesco drivers' victory

The former Doncaster Tesco drivers are on the verge of an historic victory over their unfair dismissal by Eddie Stobart Ltd two years ago.

The dispute started in August 2012 when the workers were transferred from Tesco to Stobart's which then, in September, issued notices of termination of employment. Strikes then took place over four months, including indefinite action in December 2012, before the drivers were dismissed in January 2013.

In an employment tribunal, the drivers argued that Stobart's and Tesco agreed to make them redundant long before the workers were consulted.

An offer, recommended by the union, has been accepted by an overwhelming majority at a meeting of the drivers.

Search 'Doncaster Tesco Drivers' at [www.socialistparty.org.uk](http://www.socialistparty.org.uk) to read more about the history of this dispute.

## Police support

Police support strike action, due to take place on 23 January, was called off following an offer from employers of a 2.2% pay rise over two years.

Yet this seems to be little improvement on the original below-inflation offer of 1% a year.

One Unison rep told the Socialist: "Many colleagues are demanding information on why the union is not rejecting this so called 'offer' out of hand. It ties us in to more below inflation rises that workers have already rejected.

"I now face a very disillusioned and angry workforce who are confused and feel left in the dark."

## NSSN

Get your latest trade union news with the National Shop Stewards Network (NSSN) bulletin.

Sign up at: [lists.riseup.net/www/subscribe/shopstewardsnet](http://lists.riseup.net/www/subscribe/shopstewardsnet)

**Come to the NSSN conference:** Saturday 4 July, Conway Hall, Holborn, London WC1R 4RL.  
Put the date in your diary now!

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<http://www.socialistparty.org.uk/articles/20011>