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NHS in crisis

Reverse all cuts and privatisation

Pete McNally, TUSC Worcester candidate

The scene: a Medical Incident Officer - a standby doctor normally called upon for major accidents - arrives at Worcestershire Royal Hospital to treat patients who have been waiting for hours, untreated in ambulances outside the hospital. Can there be a clearer example of an NHS in crisis?

Waiting times

Accident and Emergency waiting times at Worcestershire Acute Hospitals NHS Trust hospitals saw only 77.9% treated within four hours in the week ending 19 April, compared to the national target of 95%.

This is the NHS trust where five A&E consultants quit on the same day as they felt trust management had undermined Alexandra Hospital in Redditch. This is the same NHS Trust which tried to ban an ambulance paramedic from "their" premises when he raised safety concerns.

Trust chairman Harry Turner has admitted the hospital is too small. It was designed to treat 45,000 A&E patients per year, but is expecting 75,000 this year, rising to 95,000 in future.

It was conceived it seems to serve only Worcester, but takes patients from south Worcestershire as well. No-one in authority anticipated this as it would have meant looking at a map!

Clearly local A&E provision is inadequate. The Royal Worcestershire is yet another hospital in crisis due to cuts and privatisation (see box). Only the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition stands for a properly funded, high-quality, free National Health Service under democratic public ownership and control.

Stop PFI rip-off

I spent a week in Worcestershire Royal a year ago. The care and treatment I received was out of this world. State of the art equipment, pioneering techniques and amazing staff all contributed to my clean bill of health. However, the financial black hole faced by the NHS trust means that the future of such treatment is at risk.

It was built in 2002 under New Labour using the Private Finance Initiative (PFI). By 2032 when the contract ends the NHS will have paid £852 million, over ten times the original construction cost. Annual repayments to PFI company Catalyst are £25-£30 million.

The problems which Worcestershire hospitals currently face go back a long way. In 2005-6 Worcestershire Acute Hospitals NHS had a £31.8 million deficit, £7 million of which was due to PFI. Since then we've been fighting cuts in jobs and services.

The trust's Kidderminster Hospital has lost its A&E. Campaigners have seen off concerted attempts to close children's services, maternity services and are currently fighting against the proposed closure of the A&E at Redditch's Alexandra Hospital.

Sean McCauley, Worcester Socialist Party

Editorial from the Socialist 854

After the election: prepare for the battles to come

While no one yet knows which political party or parties will be in government after the general election, many of the tasks facing the trade union and anti-cuts movement after polling day are already clear.

With both Labour and the Tories promising further devastating public sector cuts, the need to build a massive, united, anti-austerity movement will be even more pressing. However, like during the last few years, the leaders of the TUC are not preparing to map out a determined anti-austerity agenda after the election - far from it.

If Tory leader Cameron manages to form the next government, many of those union leaders - lacking confidence in struggle - will be pessimistic about challenging it; full of foreboding and gloom. But such a government would in reality be extremely weak, resting on the votes of only around a third of people who cross their ballot paper. This would amount to not much more than a fifth of the total electorate if the turnout is similar to the 65% of the 2010 general election.

Labour government

On the other hand, if the new government is led by Labour, in all likelihood with a similarly weak base, those same union leaders will be disseminating false hope and urging a 'wait and see' approach on their members who are desperate for measures to improve living standards.

However, as the Socialist has long said, while some of Labour's limited pledges will be welcomed - such as temporarily freezing energy prices, scrapping the bedroom tax, extending free childcare and capping rent increases within three-year contracts - they will be merely tinkering at the edges of the problems working class and middle class people currently face.

A certain period of 'wait and see' by workers would be understandable. It would also be complicated if Labour attempts to rule as a minority government or in an unstable coalition, because Miliband and Balls could then try to blame some of the other parties for its failure to deliver any substantial pro-working class measures.

But workers presently unable to hold back from fighting job losses, privatisation or low pay, like striking council workers in Bromley, Barnet and Glasgow, would very quickly be asking what the new Labour-led government will do to help them and whether continued action will be necessary.

And it would only be a question of time before other council workers, firefighters demanding the safeguarding of their pensions, low paid workers needing a £10 an hour minimum, young people with no affordable housing, NHS workers in need of a substantial pay rise, and so on, would have

to enter into struggle to try to drag pro-big business Labour kicking and screaming into making some concessions.

After the election

Post-election, the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition will continue to build its profile as the only effective, pro-working class political alternative to the parties representing big business. But at the same time, coming back to the fore will be the urgent need to develop trade union, student and community based struggles to defeat austerity.

Whether the election outcome is a Labour or Tory led government, either way preparation for mass struggles will be crucial. This is particularly so when bearing in mind the malaise and likely shocks to come across the Eurozone and world economies, which will be used by the next government to justify more austerity.

There are a number of national trade union conferences taking place in the weeks after election day during which Socialist Party members will argue - in fringe meetings and on conference floors - for a coordinated counter-attack against the latest assaults on trade union rights - in particular those recently hitting the PCS.

We will also be calling for serious preparation to build anti-austerity action. The 9th annual conference of the National Shop Stewards Network (NSSN) on Saturday 4th July will be an essential event in the diaries of workers and anti-cuts activists who want to help coordinate struggles and campaigns and discuss how concrete steps can be taken at grassroots level to build mass, effective action.

A vital part of this will be discussion among rank and file trade unionists together with union leaders who stand firmly on the left, on how the unions can advance as leading, fighting vehicles of struggle capable of attracting hundreds of thousands of new members and followers. Whatever shade of austerity is adopted by the new government, these issues will be essential.

Establishment witch-hunt in Tower Hamlets

Paula Mitchell

In a blatantly undemocratic political act, an Election Court judge has barred Tower Hamlets Mayor Lutfur Rahman from office.

The establishment media have formed a baying pack spitting hatred and bile at Rahman, Britain's first Bangladeshi Mayor.

The judgement has let loose a nasty backlash against 'multiculturalism' and anti-racism, displaying astounding double-standards.

Rahman has, for example, been found guilty of 'undue religious influence'. Yet no such charges were brought when, in 1980s Liverpool, the Liberals invoked the Pope to try and stop Catholics backing Labour candidates who supported the Militant (forerunner of the Socialist Party).

A big dose of revenge by Labour - who ousted Rahman from the Labour Party only to be defeated by him in the 2010 mayoral election - is mixed with outright racism against a Bangladeshi council

leadership. But mainly the institutions of the ruling class want to crush any hint of rebellion. It is outrageous that the Labour Party has been complicit in this.

Lutfur Rahman has not led an anti-cuts battle. His cabinet has forced through millions of pounds in cuts just the same as Labour councils have.

But he did introduce measures the Socialist Party supports - the preservation of an Education Maintenance Allowance and council tax benefit, for example. He wasn't seen by the establishment as 'one of them'.

This judgement should not be interpreted as meaning that austerity cannot be fought by councils. But it does show that a ruling class determined to drive through savage cuts cannot be fought by partial measures on a local basis alone.

Rather than 'Tower Hamlets First', what is needed is to put the working class first and mount a struggle based on mobilising working class organisation and resistance, locally and nationally.

There has been plenty of time since Rahman's election in 2010, and even since the investigation began last year, to refuse to implement the cuts and build up a mass campaign based on the community and trade unions in the borough and appealing to rebel councillors and trade unionists nationally.

The Socialist Party and many other TUSC supporters in Tower Hamlets think that a mayoral candidate is needed that stands on this bold platform of anti-austerity in deeds as well as words. The cuts that will rain down from the new government can be fought; Tower Hamlets can still be defended.

For background and more about how councils can fight the cuts, see 'Tower Hamlets: Government attacks local democracy' at www.socialistparty.org.uk/issue/836/19780

Further in depth material will follow on www.socialistparty.org.uk dealing with the many issues raised in the judgement.

Rent controls? Another Labour fudge

Simon Carter

It's a testament to housing campaigners, including socialists in TUSC, that the Labour Party has finally felt compelled to offer a mild redress to the housing crisis, by proposing to peg private landlords' rent rises to the rate of inflation for three years.

Currently, private sector renters are spending an average of 40% of their incomes on rent. But like Ed Miliband's promise to raise the minimum wage from £6.50 an hour to £8 an hour by 2019, it's a case of too little, too late.

In fact, the detail underlines Labour's 'fudge' policies. On the one hand Labour has to address working class electors' needs, while on the other hand it reassures the 'markets' by saying this cap will not prevent private landlords jacking up the rent at the start of a new tenancy.

Housing shortfall

The only concession here is that the new tenant will have to be informed about the previous tenant's rent level.

But if a new renter thinks that the new rent is unacceptably high, what legal recourse do they have? And where else can they be housed? That is especially the case as more and more social housing is sold off, becoming buy-to-let properties.

That's why the Socialist Party calls for the reintroduction of rent controls, so that a local authority can set a legally enforceable 'fair rent' to prevent rip-off private landlords exploiting vulnerable tenants. This would include the power to reduce high rents (see box).

But the other key housing issue is the lack of affordable housing - reflecting the failure of successive Labour and Tory-led governments and local authorities to build sufficient numbers of council homes.

In 1954, 207,730 social housing units were built nationally. Yet, in 2013, the total was only 22,510, despite a large population increase.

Labour is proposing to eventually build 200,000 homes - far less than is recognisably needed. And it's unclear where the funding for this housing will come from.

Also, any government housing investment programme will inevitably be at the mercy of further austerity cuts by Labour. And, given that Labour councils have shunned council building in favour of 'public/private partnerships', it's likely that most new houses will be let at or near market rent levels.

Effectively dealing with the housing crisis means rejecting reliance on the capitalist market - where housebuilding last year slumped to its lowest level since the 1920s. Instead, it requires rent controls and a massive council house building programme, funded by nationalising the banks and the giant construction companies.

"For most of the 20th century there was rent control in the UK. Until the Thatcher government abolished rent control in 1988 you could take your landlord to a Rent Tribunal and have your rent reduced. Tenancies created before 1988 still have this right. Rent Tribunals still operate for them and the legislation is still effective so it would be relatively easy for a new government to extend the reach of tribunals as an emergency measure."

Nancy Taaffe, TUSC candidate in Walthamstow

And the rich just get richer!

Membership of this club doesn't come cheap. In fact, it'll cost you a minimum of £100 million to be featured in the Sunday Times Rich List.

The latest tally of the UK's richest 1,000 individuals and families reveals a combined wealth of £547 billion. That figure covers assets, property and shares but excludes what they have salted away in onshore and offshore bank accounts.

And while us mere mortals have seen our pay and savings shrink to next to nothing since the 2008 capitalist recession, these masters of the universe have seen their collective wealth double. And yet the pro-austerity politicians still insist there is no money around to maintain services.

The ever-widening wealth gap between the 0.1% super-rich and the overwhelming majority blows a massive hole in the Tories' much vaunted 'trickle down' theory of economic prosperity. Indeed, the situation in Britain is better explained by a 'hoovering-up' theory of inequality!

The current rich list includes 117 billionaires - up from 104 last year. Of these, 80 reside in London - giving the capital the unenviable record of hosting more pound billionaires than any other city in the world, and helping to push property prices into the stratosphere.

Top of the pile with £13.7 billion, is Ukrainian capitalist tycoon Len Blavatnik. His empire, which includes Warner Music Group, swelled by £3 billion last year. That must be of cheer to his fellow countrymen and women shivering in a bombed out basement in Donetsk.

The owners of Selfridges and Primark - Galen and George Weston and family - have also enjoyed a profitable year, seeing their wealth leap upwards by £3.7 billion to £11 billion. No doubt, their outsourced south Asian clothing workers are looking forward to a bumper wage rise!

Of course, capitalism is an economic system not just a conspiracy of rich people. As such it requires a socialist transformation by the working class to end inequality. That said, a wealth tax levied on the 1% would be music to our ears, Mr Blavatnik.

Britain's richest people increased their wealth by over £28 billion last year.

The Equality Trust reckons that £28 billion could:

- Provide 1,889,963 Living Wage jobs for a year, or 1,035,154 jobs paid at an average salary or,
 - Pay nine months' worth of energy bills for every UK household or
 - Pay the grocery bill for all of the UK's users of food banks for at least 20 years or
 - Pay a year's rent for over 2.5 million households
-

Them & Us

Viva Cuba?

Rent control to stop excessive rents being charged by rip-off private landlords is very popular. A Generation Rent (a private sector housing campaign group) survey found that 59% of respondents backed rent controls with only 7% of people in opposition, while 34% had no opinion. Among private sector tenants, 77% backed controls and even a majority (56%) of homeowners supported controls.

A Ukip spokesperson responding to Labour's half-hearted measures condemned rent controls saying: "It was tried in Cuba and it didn't work". However, the same survey found that 58% of Ukip voters support rent controls!

HSBC move

Life is tough in Britain says banking giant HSBC. It has threatened to relocate its HQ from London because of 'tough banking regulations', despite posting profits of £12.2 billion for 2014. This is a 17% fall, after racking up fines for attempted manipulation of foreign exchange rates and compensation for the mis-selling of payment protection insurance.

In 2012 HSBC was fined nearly \$2 billion after being found guilty by US authorities of money laundering for Mexican drug barons.

This year HSBC admitted that its Swiss private bank held accounts for tax-dodging clients. Cheerio!

Price of austerity

The Trades Union Congress, using data from the Office for National Statistics, has found that the coalition government's period in office was the worst five-year period for living standards - when real disposable household income per head actually fell - for at least half a century.

Food for thought

While HSBC chief executive Stuart Gulliver took a hit on his overall pay last year - falling to a measly £7.6 million from £8 million in 2013 - the Trussell Trust (which operates the majority of foodbanks) says more than one million people, including almost 400,000 children, received three days' food from them, compared to 900,000 last year.

Land of make-believe

You couldn't make it up - unless you happen to be Grant Shapps. The Tory housing minister has been accused of secretly editing his own Wikipedia entry, and those of political opponents, using a fake online identity. Administrators of the online encyclopaedia discovered that the anonymous account had systematically removed references to his past dodgy business activities and instead cast Shapps in a positive light.

Rewarding failure

It seems that capitalism rewards failure if you happen to be a company executive. The latest example of this skewed practice concerns the ex-boss of Morrisons supermarkets, Dalton Philips. In addition to having his pay doubled last year to £2.1 million he will receive a £1.1 million 'golden handshake', despite being sacked after the company's sales and profits nosedived.

The Socialist election schedule

This bumper May Day greetings issue of the Socialist lasts a fortnight from 30 April to 13 May.

The next scheduled issue of the weekly newspaper was due out on the day of the general and local elections, 7 May. This would mean producing it without any results and analysis of the elections for readers. Consequently, we will instead post online an initial response, followed by a longer analysis of the elections.

The print edition will resume on 14 May and contain a summary of events and the most likely post-election political prospects.

Election results and analysis will begin on 8 May - see our website at www.socialistparty.org.uk

125 years of May Day

Learn the lessons of past struggles

CWI statement

This year marks the 125th International Workers' Day, or 'May Day'. The original call for workers' demonstrations around the world on 1 May was made in July 1889 at the International Socialist Workers Congress in Paris. That founded the international organisation that became known as the 'Second International'.

1 May was chosen to mark the 1886 'Haymarket Massacre'. During a general strike in Chicago demanding an eight hour day, a bombing took place that resulted in a frame-up trial and, in 1887, the execution of four workers' leaders and activists on "conspiracy" charges. Such was the success of the 1890 May Day that in 1891 another international congress decided it should become an annual event.

The original aim of May Day was to show the strength of the workers' movement, draw a balance sheet of its recent experiences and to re-affirm its resistance to capitalism and war, its fighting spirit and objective of socialism.

Launched at a time when, in many countries, the workers' movement had started to grow steadily, and in some cases rapidly, May Day initially expressed the socialist optimism of that time.

But much water has flowed under the bridge since that first international May Day. Despite the building of many powerful workers' organisations and despite thousands of often bitter and bloody struggles and revolutions, the world remains dominated by capitalism.

Austerity

The capitalist ruling class carries out endless 'austerity', driving down living standards and eroding working conditions. The globe is plagued by conflicts, imperialist armed 'interventions' and terrible civil wars, including Yemen, Syria, Iraq and Ukraine.

The recent tragic drownings of desperate refugees in the Mediterranean are the responsibility of imperialist warmongers and capitalist EU, whose actions have helped create the largest number of refugees since WW2.

This does not mean nothing has been achieved by years of workers' organisation and battles. In many countries important gains were made for the working class: democratic rights for all and social services, education and public health gains were conquered.

Workers' higher living standards are the result of mass struggles or the threats of struggles. But, as the current crisis shows, all these gains can be threatened and even removed so long as capitalism remains in place.

Today, while we are facing one of the worst ever crises of capitalism, when even the strategists and thinkers of capitalism cannot put forward an optimistic perspective, we have to recognise that the workers' movement is, in many countries, facing severe crises.

The conservative union leaders have failed to lead and to develop militant struggles to effectively resist austerity and other attacks on working people and the poor. Building combative, democratic trade unions remains a key task facing the working class.

This is not in any way to say that struggles have disappeared. On the contrary, struggles are regularly seen around the world. Every decade since the first May Day has seen big class battles and revolutions occur somewhere.

Now we are seeing a tremendously important radicalisation and the beginning of struggles in the US, the number one imperialist power, particularly around the demand for a \$15 an hour minimum wage and against police brutality.

Many parts of the world have seen working people and youth protesting and fighting for their demands over the past year. Brazil saw mass protests around the World Cup and students protested in Chile, a powerful strike wave took place in South Africa, strikes increased in China. Belgium has seen powerful strike movements and mass protests against new taxation are taking place in Ireland.

It is not only strikes and protests - January saw the election of a Syriza government that pledged to oppose austerity in Greece.

Two stunning by-election results that saw Socialist Party (CWI Ireland) members elected to the Irish parliament showed that the working class will resist austerity. In Africa there are renewed movements against authoritarian regimes. Burkina Faso's dictator, Compaore, was removed after 27 years in power.

These are just some of the latest examples of working people being prepared to struggle. Even if there are long periods of what appears to be acquiescence and hardly any class struggle, this does not continue indefinitely.

However, in many countries the past disappointments and defeats are weighing heavily on the workers' movement - a situation made worse by the offensive that the ruling classes launched.

Ideological offensive

This offensive has not simply been in terms of lower living standards but also included an ideological offensive against the ideas of collective action and socialism. The propagandists of capitalism have also used the counter-revolution in North Africa and the Middle East - imperialist armed interventions, the growth of religious and ethnic sectarianism and bloody civil wars - to counter the worldwide enthusiasm sparked off by the 2011 revolutions in Tunisia and Egypt.

What has happened since the 'Arab Spring' is not an argument against revolution. But for real, lasting change, a mass, united workers' movement has to be built which has a clear socialist programme and an understanding of what concrete steps are needed to end the rule of capitalism and its elites.

In building such movements, socialists have to be able to answer the questions of whether 'socialism' failed in countries like the former Soviet Union. This means explaining the two essential elements to beginning to create a socialist society - namely the taking over of the commanding heights of the economy and the vital democratic control and planning of these resources in the interests of the majority. This requires stringent measures to prevent the development of a new privileged, bureaucratic elite.

The many experiences of so-called 'socialist', 'social democratic' or 'labour' governments, which failed to carry out their promises and tried to work within the straitjacket of the capitalist system, still calls into question the idea of socialism as the viable alternative to capitalism.

The Syriza government in Greece is in danger of ultimately failing in its aim of confronting austerity because of its refusal to mobilise popular support for a break with capitalism. Internationally the workers' movement has, unfortunately, seen many such lost opportunities, which is why the building a force with clear socialist ideas and a confidence to end capitalism is so important.

US

Despite these complications, the idea of socialism as the alternative to capitalism will revive as more and more look for a way out of the impasse facing the world. At this moment, this is seen most clearly in the US, partly because until now the idea of socialism in that country has been weak. The breakthrough election of socialist Kshama Sawant to Seattle City Council in 2013 was an indication of the important radicalisation beginning to affect sections of US society.

The dead-end of capitalism is seen by the mess its ruling representatives have made of the last two decades when, in some areas, they had a 'free-run'. This ended in a mighty crash that led to economic stagnation, at best.

We have also witnessed the piling up of huge contradictions due to many economic, social and environmental crises, at a time when the rapid development of science and technology offers huge potential for humankind. Yet capitalism still cannot even provide safe water to every human being and presides over vast inequalities in all parts of the world.

Tasks

The task for socialists and worker-activists is not just building, or rebuilding, combative class organisations, vital as that is. We must also learn lessons from the last 125 years and skilfully apply them to today's situation.

Firstly, we must argue that the key to changing the world is through ending capitalist dictatorship over the economy. Secondly, we must build mass forces that can win support for a bold socialist programme, especially among the working class, poor and youth.

This is not done in the abstract, but through active propaganda and participation in the struggles that inevitably will arise. In this way, socialists can provide an answer to the question of "what can be done?" and help create a mass movement that will, finally, achieve the objectives of the founders of May Day.

Ireland: crucial stage for water charges

The first bills for water charges are being sent out in April and May to all homes in Ireland. This is a key time for the movement against the charges. Meetings, including street meetings like the one pictured here, and demonstrations are taking place all the time in an attempt to build a mass movement of non-payment of the tax. See www.socialistparty.net

Greece: gold mining meeting

150 people attended a public meeting organised by Xekinima (CWI Greece) in Thessaloniki about the struggle against gold mining in Halkidiki. The event was transmitted live by the workers of the national broadcaster ERT which was shut down by the previous government and has been under workers control and management since.

Socialist plan or capitalist chaos

Peter Taaffe, Socialist Party general secretary

The 'S' word - socialism - dare not speak its name in this election. Apart from the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) - with its brilliantly effective TV broadcast and general programme for socialist change - none of the big or even the smaller parties have been prepared to offer any alternative to the existing capitalist system.

And yet an otherwise deadening election campaign - with the Tories, Lib Dems and Labour 'marketing' themselves as just slightly different brands of the same soap powder - has at least one advantage. It has revealed that they have no alternative to a system which relentlessly grinds down working people and the poor.

In the Socialist Party's manifesto we have shown how democratic socialism would liberate production from the shackles of private capitalist ownership. How? By bringing into public ownership the 150 companies that produce most of the wealth, the working class could plan and organise society for the benefit of all. The owners of the big monopolies exercise a thinly veiled capitalist dictatorship, which determines what will and what won't be produced, according to how much profit can be made.

A democratic socialist plan of production would immediately soak up 'unused capacity' - probably between 20 and 30% today - which would allow the unemployed to be put back to work on a decent wage, with a minimum of at least £10 an hour and probably more.

If the minimum wage had kept pace with what is paid to the chief executive officers of the FTSE 100 stock market index companies, then it would now be worth almost £20 an hour! Together with other measures, this would generate big increases in health spending and education, and eliminate overcrowding and homelessness through a crash housing programme of at least one million new dwellings. This would allow incomes to rise, leading to a spiral of growth.

The owners of these 150 giant monopolies are, in reality, a dictatorship of capital, which has brought ruin and suffering to the majority of the British people, and promises even worse in the future. And the main parties have bent the knee to them by supporting different degrees of 'austerity'.

Profit

Capitalism in the past was a relatively progressive system, which developed science, technique and labour: the means of production. The engine of the system was the creation of profit through the labours of the working class.

Profit, said Karl Marx, is "unpaid labour", that portion of the wealth which working people create but that they don't receive in wages. This 'surplus value' is then divided into rent for the landlords, interest for the bankers and the rest pocketed by the industrial and other capitalists.

Most of this profit, in the heyday of capitalism in the 19th century and the first part of the 20th century, was ploughed back, through investment in factories and other means of production. Only a portion was kept back for luxuries, to enhance the lifestyle of the 'have yachts'. Their historical function, said Marx, was as "trustees" for the development of capitalist production. They achieved this for a time by investing this surplus into production, so ensuring that the system was driven forward.

However, capitalism reveals today that it has reached a dead end. It is no longer a progressive system as capitalist ownership of industry, and thereby the domination of society, exercises an enormous drag on the further progress of society. This is revealed strikingly in the facts and figures supplied by the capitalists and their media.

Cash piles

We read that profits are booming but they are not being invested back into production. Instead, they are stashed away in cash piles, amounting to a huge \$7 trillion at least worldwide - more than one third of what the US produces in a year! Clearly, the capitalists are betraying their 'mission' to develop production and thereby society. Don't take our word for it - look at what their friends in the media say!

The Financial Times, house journal of the big financiers, wails about "shareholder pay outs of up to \$1 trillion to 'blue-chip' firms." The same paper complains: "The buybacks [are seen] as rewarding company executives and their share option plans, and argue that a focus on shareholder returns at the expense of investment could damage the performance of the economy in the future."

In other words, capitalism today has become completely parasitic, concerned more with short term results, feathering the nest of the executives that manage them and their largely idle shareholders, rather than investing in building factories and workplaces; in short, the provision of jobs.

Europe and America, the 'developed' economies, are plagued by unemployment - mass joblessness in the case of Europe - or underemployment. The World Bank reports that there are at least 201 million unemployed throughout the world. This is an underestimate, yet they also calculate there will be at least 212 million workers unemployed by 2019.

Working conditions

As to those who manage to get a job, 700,000 workers in Britain have zero-hour contracts that, conveniently for the bosses, are described as being 'on tap'; in other words, "the reserve army of unemployed" described by Karl Marx 100 years ago as an essential component of capitalism.

If a story can sometimes speak louder than numerous facts, then Paul Mason's account recently in the Guardian of a London woman hotel worker who cleaned 17 rooms in one-day for wages of £48 says everything about the brutal treatment of the low paid and desperate in Britain today.

The misnamed 'work and pensions' secretary, Iain Duncan Smith, even wants to change the description of low-paid slave labour - for that is what it is - from 'zero hours' to 'flexible working'. Cameron has tried to conjure away the million forced to rely on food banks by disgracefully explaining this as a "lifestyle choice" - the so-called something for nothing culture!

It is not an accident that in Britain today Poundland stores are booming - with a record £1 billion annual turnover reported - as are Lidl and Aldi, indicating the growing impoverishment and drastic tightening of the belt for working class families. This while Tesco and other 'better class' outlets close or mothball stores.

One in three GPs plan to retire in the next five years. The NHS, already severely weakened by Tory and Labour privatisations, is now being threatened with the introduction of charges for treatment, including visits to the doctor 'whoever wins the election'.

But it is hardly necessary to convince the working class that there is something seriously wrong. Even the defenders of capitalism can no longer, as they did following the collapse of Stalinism, extol triumphantly the 'superiority' of their system.

It is clearly failing. Therefore, they have had to fall back on the threadbare argument, put forward by Winston Churchill and others in the past, to the effect that 'capitalism may be deficient but all the other alternatives, including socialism, are worse.'

Russia

They invoke the 'spectre' of what happened following the Russian revolution. "Look, the attempt of the workers to take over society ended with a monstrous totalitarian regime".

The truth is that, initially, Russia carried through a revolution, beginning with the 'Ten Days that Shook the World'. The political system - the election and recall at any time of all officials who received no more than a worker's wage - was the most democratic and fairest yet seen, which threatened to spin over into an international movement.

It did not develop because the revolution was isolated in one country, and an economically backward one at that. In this situation, a bureaucratic degeneration took place personified by the rise of Stalin, with the working class elbowed aside and power concentrated over time into the hands of a bureaucratic, dictatorial elite. This was a gross caricature of democratic, liberating socialism which the Bolsheviks originally stood for and what we advocate today.

Andrew Neil, on the BBC Daily Politics programme, sought to frighten viewers by jeering at Dave Nellist, spokesperson for TUSC, that we stood for "Bolshevik expropriation" of the big capitalists and implied that we would not be able to "afford" compensation, as we claimed.

We would defend stubbornly what Lenin, Trotsky and their followers did in taking over industry and establishing a workers' state in 1917. But conditions in Britain are entirely different to then. We live in a highly developed, culturally advanced society.

Nationalisation

What outraged Neil was our call for the taking over of the banks - public ownership - so that they could be run in the interests of working people. Precisely because we understand that the capitalists and those who represent them like Neil would start shrieking about unfair "expropriation", we added that we would give "compensation" on the basis of "proven need."

In other words, the small and perhaps medium- sized shareholders would receive compensation at much more generous rates than welfare recipients today. Others may even be compensated, that is assuming that they could not find gainful employment!

How would this be paid for? By the extra resources which we have already said could be generated by a socialist and democratic plan of production.

There is overwhelming evidence to indicate widespread hostility to the marauding and outright corruption of the big banks and the corporate elite. There is massive support for the maintenance of the National Health Service, as there is for the renationalisation - taking back into public ownership - of the railways.

That is why the last Labour government, through gritted teeth, had to take over and refurbish the East Coast line after the privateers had ruined it, with commuters up in arms. This was so popular with workers and rail passengers that the Tories decided that this example of popular public ownership should be squashed. They have sold it back to the spivs and speculators who ruined it in the first place!

Poll after poll indicates intense hostility to privatisation, which is synonymous in public perception with rip-offs from giant 'privateers'. However, the script has already been written: privatisation will continue, probably even if Miliband is elected. What will happen then would be job losses and a worsening of conditions at work, combined with the hiking of charges to the customer.

'Free enterprise'

The history of privatisation - since the Thatcher-inspired sell-off of the utilities in the 1980s, carried on by Blair and New Labour - is one of growing discontent with so-called 'free enterprise'. Even the Tories, only yesterday fervent apostles of the 'free market', seem to have embraced 'planning', which is back in vogue.

Osborne and Cameron incessantly intone on the necessity for their "long-term plan" to relentlessly cut the deficit and maintain austerity, in reality planned poverty.

Yet capitalism - which means the blind play of the productive forces - is, by its nature, incompatible with real planning. Like inequality, which is woven into the very foundations of capitalism, the chaos of the system cannot be magicked away or fully controlled, even by the government, not even by Cameron or Osborne. They are slaves, forced to carry out the demands of the capitalists: "You can't buck the market," claimed Thatcher.

We cannot fully control what we don't own. Even in the so-called postwar 'mixed economy' - which at one time encompassed in the state's hands 20% of industry - Labour and Tory governments were still compelled to bow to the market, to carry out in the final analysis its bidding.

The 80% in the hands of the capitalists will always dictate to the 20% and not vice versa. Former US President Clinton once exclaimed: "You mean to tell me that the success of the economic programme and my re-election hinges on the Federal Reserve and a bunch of f***ing bond traders?"

But the hysteria of those like Neil towards any suggestion of real socialist measures being implemented indicates a morbid fear that this is an idea whose time has come. The Occupy movement, with its tremendous slogan of support for the '99%' and opposition to the 1% - in reality the 0.5% - struck the nail on the head.

The new generation are reaching out. They are more certain of what they don't want - capitalism and its effects - than the alternative of real democratic socialism. But experience will teach them and increasing numbers of workers, and the Socialist Party will assist them in searching for the positive alternative of a new economic and social system, which is socialism.

Labour

Ed Miliband in this election has not taken one step outside of the system, has refused in reality to challenge the wealthy and powerful who are responsible for the chaos, the ills and stunted lives of millions of working-class people.

He has occasionally denounced the worst excesses of capitalism: the energy industries, greedy landlords, etc, which has alarmed the bosses. They are not certain that he will not be pushed into taking some radical measures.

But his central theme is to criticise the so-called "predatory" wing of capitalism. Like those who usually futilely spend their time on beaches looking for buried treasure, Miliband's quest has been to discover "responsible" capitalism. In vain!

The capitalists, no matter how some may be 'sympathetic' to the plight of the working class and poor, in the final analysis, seek the maximisation of 'profit' as their central goal. Occasionally, in an economic upswing, they can then allow a few crumbs from their rich table to trickle down to some sections of the working class.

Now, however, is not one of those periods. On the contrary, they are waging a brutal class war as Warren Buffet stated: "There's class warfare all right, but it's my class, the rich class, that's making war, and we're winning."

Possibilities

Capitalism cannot fully utilise even its own creations, such as new technology. In fact, this threatens the working class with even more mass unemployment and worsening conditions and, as a result, an intensification of the class struggle.

Yet these marvellous developments in science and technique are an expression of what Friedrich Engels called "the invading socialist revolution".

It gives us a glimpse of what is possible through democratic socialism. However, that can only be achieved if we fight for and convince working people, particularly the youth, that socialism is not just the wave of the future but is absolutely essential today.

Why you should join the socialists

Ask yourself the following questions:

Are you sickened that in the last year one million people had to rely on food banks?

Does the fact that the average chief executive takes home more in three days than one of their employees gets paid in a year make your blood boil?

Does seeing privatisation killing our NHS make you furious?

Do you shout abuse at the telly every time you see establishment politicians promising more cuts?

Do you agree with the idea of nationalising the banks and taking the wealth off the super-rich 1%?

Is it time for change and do you want to be part of making it happen?

If you answered yes to these questions then it's time to join the Socialist Party. Get in touch - www.socialistparty.org.uk 020 8988 8777

If we fight back we can win!

The Socialist Party fights for every possible improvement in the lives of working class people. Socialist Party members are campaigning for TUSC in the elections to help build an independent working class political voice. All over the country the Socialist Party is part of and leading campaigns to defend jobs, public services and the rights of working class people.

In Seattle it was Socialist Alternative, our co-thinkers in the US, who linked up with low-paid workers and the unions and led the successful battle for a \$15 an hour minimum wage.

Kshama Sawant wrote that: "A real mass movement must welcome everyone who wants to join the struggle, but history has shown again and again that movements are most effective when they have a core leadership that refuses to accept the limitations of capitalism and who can build mass support behind a vision of an alternative.

"In my election campaign in 2013 and in the movement for \$15, I learned that working people are inspired by an unapologetic, principled approach.

"Let's demand what people need to live a dignified life, not just what the political establishment says is 'realistic'.

"To push things forward, we've got to provide a vision of what's possible with the huge wealth working people create - and not confine ourselves to the crumbs this broken system of capitalism can 'afford' to give us.

"The victory in Seattle was an excellent first step. We must use the energy to spread the fight for \$15 nationally and to expand the struggles on other key issues facing working class communities. If we organise with a bold perspective and a socialist vision, we have a world to win."

What does joining the Socialist Party mean?

The Socialist Party asks everyone who agrees with our ideas to join us. The views set out in the Socialist will have given you a good taste of what we are about. Fundamentally the Socialist Party is fighting for the socialist transformation of society. See page 15 for our 'what we stand for' column.

We ask our members to be as active as they can and promote our ideas in their workplaces, trade unions, colleges and communities. This can be done in many ways including through reading, writing for and selling our newspaper, the Socialist.

We also ask our members to make a financial sacrifice to help build our organisation. Big business pours money into the parties that do its bidding, we get our financial backing from the people we fight for and struggle alongside - the working class.

We hold weekly branch meetings in local areas across the country to discuss and debate. There we all learn more about socialist ideas and the struggles of workers and young people, but also organise and plan our campaign action.

There is a role for everyone - taking on an organising position in your local branch, spreading socialist ideas, asking the questions that help everyone understand things better.

If you want to fight to change the world and transform the lives of workers and young people the Socialist Party is the party to join.

See www.socialistparty.org.uk/whatson for details of meetings near you - every branch is holding a post-election public meeting in the next few weeks

Why TUSC?

It's crunch time. As Britain heads to the polls - and awaits the outcome of subsequent political horse trading - who will fight for the interests of ordinary people?

Dave Nellist, national chair of the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC - see box below) speaks to the Socialist.

Why should people vote TUSC?

There is little to choose between in the establishment parties. All the main parties signed up in January to Tory Chancellor George Osborne's additional £30 billion of cuts by 2018.

In fact, there was an all-party consensus of 515 MPs in favour - and only 18 against. Of those against only five were Labour! So austerity wins whatever mix of parties forms the government after 7 May.

So to build the opposition against austerity - decent living standards, secure jobs on decent pay - we have to build a political alternative.

The Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) was formed five years ago by the late Bob Crow, then general secretary of transport union RMT.

TUSC exists to give working people an independent, socialist voice. Every vote for TUSC on 7 May helps build a new party for ordinary people.

How do you counter the argument that voting for Labour is the 'lesser evil'?

Whichever main party wins the election, it means a continuation of austerity.

Of course TUSC is mindful that a small number of Labour members still prefer a socialist alternative. So, before the election, we organised delegations to Labour candidates. We asked them where they stood on fighting austerity, trade union rights, a £10 an hour minimum wage, an end to zero-hour contracts, and so on.

Where Labour candidates gave a clear pledge to campaign on these demands, we decided not to oppose them. But regrettably, those candidates were only a very small minority.

Labour these days is more about managing the existing capitalist economy. It's not about what the trade union movement set it up to do 100 years ago - that is, to challenge capitalism and the rule of the rich.

A change in 'management style' is simply not good enough for working people. TUSC is standing to begin the process of building a proper independent voice for the working class.

What role do you see TUSC playing after the election?

Firstly, TUSC has been fighting hard to gain a voice in this election. We are fielding 135 parliamentary candidates and 630 council candidates.

Numerically, we're the sixth-biggest party in this election - with more candidates than the SNP and Plaid Cymru put together. But that hasn't translated proportionately into the mainstream media coverage we deserve.

So on 7 May there will be many people who still won't know about our socialist alternative. That battle for news coverage still has to be fought.

But since austerity isn't ending on 7 May, neither are the pressing problems facing working people. And neither are our efforts to fight.

There is going to be a host of local battles against cuts - to save local libraries, day care centres, youth centres, to oppose divisive free schools and academies, and more.

In the next two years there will be elections for the Scottish parliament, and councils around the country.

TUSC campaigners and candidates are embedded within local communities where those anti-austerity battles are taking place. So come the next round of elections, particularly in 2016, I believe we could start to win more victories.

This May we have 22 former Labour councillors seeking election as TUSC candidates. Even if Labour is part of the next government, Labour councils will continue to cut local services.

Some Labour councillors may resist those cuts, as happened in Southampton, Warrington, Hull, Leicester and elsewhere. They too will inevitably be forced out of Labour. The only place these anti-cuts councillors can find a home is in TUSC.

TUSC will grow. How quickly that happens depends, to an extent, on some of those in the trade union movement. How quickly will those currently supporting Labour be forced to break away, and instead help build a new workers' party? TUSC is proud to be a key part of this vital process.

Key working class fighters rally to TUSC

Trade unionists

Surrey TUSC

Local members of transport union RMT have voted unanimously to endorse their local TUSC candidate, Paul Couchman, in the general election.

On 16 April, RMT Feltham No 1 branch's well-attended meeting also voted to fund the election campaign to the tune of £200.

There were railway workers at the meeting from the local Spelthorne station, and a number were Spelthorne residents. One came into the meeting clutching a TUSC flyer, saying "I got this through the letterbox this morning and thought - that's Paul, he's coming tonight!"

Another local worker said to Paul: "You have my complete support.

"I will be voting for you and for the TUSC council candidates. And you might be surprised at the amount of support you will get."

Tenant campaign leaders

Hackney TUSC

The leaders of the New Era housing campaign have decided to give their backing to TUSC.

Lindsey Garrett and Danielle Molinari led the successful tenants' campaign against tripling rent last year. Their struggle gained prominence after celebrity support from comedian and activist Russell Brand.

The Socialist Party backed the campaign from the very beginning. Lindsey and Danielle have are now supporting party member and TUSC candidate Brian Debus, who was fully involved in the campaign.

At the time of the New Era victory, Brian said to tenants: "You have evicted Britain's richest Tory MP, and private-property speculating profiteers Westbrook. This goes to prove we are many and they are few.

"Your victory will be an inspiration to millions of others fighting the rapacious profit system the government is only too happy to promote."

Lindsey and Danielle have concluded that they need a political voice - and that none of the establishment parties are it.

Politicians expressed 'concern' at the plight of New Era tenants. But when trade union Unite tried to raise an emergency motion at London Labour Party conference, it was ruled out of order.

Labour only proposes limits on how quickly landlords can hike rent. It backs 'build to rent' schemes that support private landlords - which include many Labour councillors and MPs.

Brian stands for a mass council-house building programme - and controls on the level of rent we actually pay. TUSC also calls for public ownership of the banks and major construction companies.

The fighting spirit shown by New Era tenants and a growing number of other housing campaigns in London shows the potential for a party of working class fighters.

Justice campaigners

Paul Couchman

Last year, seven-year-old Zane Gbangbola was killed as a result of flooding in Surrey. His father Kye was paralysed from the waist down. Campaigners believe their cardiac arrests were caused by cyanide gas released from landfills by the flood.

For 14 long months, their family has been trying to get answers from the Tory council - which refuses to investigate. TUSC fully backs the Truth About Zane campaign. Parliamentary candidate Paul Couchman and our local council candidates have attended many of the campaign's protests, and have been very vocal in local trade unions in support.

TUSC has organised a protest against Tory Spelthorne council which Kye will be speaking at. The Conservatives have declined to investigate the River Ash flood. They also made the appalling decision to build an incinerator in Shepperton. And they have made reckless cuts to public services such as closing fire stations.

Only TUSC stands for a full investigation into the death and the flooding, and fighting all cuts to vital services.

Why I'm standing for TUSC

Terence Anderson, TUSC council candidate for Normanton (Derby)

I first came across TUSC on a campaign stall in Allenton. I realised we had the same ideals. I would like to save the NHS, nationalise our industries, defend public services.

Labour councillors are voting for cuts because they are scared they'll be kicked out of the party. Surely they can see what the cuts are doing to our community. Is it that they can't say no to cuts - or is it that they don't want to?

This is why I joined TUSC in this fight. On being asked to stand, I said yes. Why would I not grab this opportunity to represent my community?

Anti-cuts councillor set to defend seat

Nick Chaffey

This election campaign has shown the rising tide of anti-austerity anger at Westminster politicians and the cuts agenda.

In Southampton, protests against library cuts and benefit sanctions have had large turnouts. Our street stalls have met enthusiastic support for campaigns to save Woodside Lodge care home and the Bitterne NHS walk-in centre.

Hustings give a glimpse of the battles to come. Under the pressure of an angry electorate, Tory and Labour candidates give false promises to provide 'milk and honey' to the NHS. Meanwhile, they are preparing a £30 billion slaughterhouse cuts programme.

Left

The electorate is way to the left of the austerity consensus. In Southampton, TUSC councillors Don Thomas (pictured above left) and Keith Morrell have given a courageous lead: voting to oppose all cuts. By building a united campaign with council trade unions and the community, they fought successfully to save Oaklands swimming pool.

Keith was re-elected last year with 43% of the vote. This year, Don is standing for re-election on his record as an anti-cuts councillor. TUSC and Don support all those in the city who are fighting the cuts and maintaining a working class voice in the council chamber.

Pakistani pop star and activist Jawad Ahmad backs TUSC

Sarah Sachs-Eldridge

Jawad Ahmad is renowned in Pakistan for his songs and for his politics. He has a record of solidarity with the working class, poor and oppressed.

Jawad said: "I stand for equality and a classless society in Pakistan. The Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition is fighting for the same thing and against racism in Britain. TUSC, as I do, stands for a fairer society based on social justice instead of the rule of the 1%. I urge you to vote for TUSC in your area."

One of Jawad's songs, Sun Lo Kay Hum Mazdoor Hain, demands rights for garment workers. 300 were killed and 600 injured by a fire that destroyed a garment factory near Karachi, Pakistan in September 2012.

Disasters

Hugo Pierre, TUSC candidate for Poplar and Limehouse, added: "This demand for workers' rights is all the more poignant now, two years after the collapse of the Rana Plaza factory in Bangladesh. Workers there are still fighting - not just for compensation, but the basic right to organise in trade unions. This is to ensure that future natural disasters don't become social disasters.

"We support the fight for better wages and safe conditions at work. Jawad's song is dedicated to the workers of Pakistan, India, Bangladesh and the world. TUSC joins Jawad in standing for workers' solidarity.

"The Sunday Times Rich List provides the latest figures to prove what TUSC says: there is no shortage of money. The problem is the super-rich are hoarding it while our services get cut to pay off the bank bailout.

"That's why TUSC stands for something completely different to all the major parties. To end cuts and austerity, we fight for democratic public ownership of our NHS, railways, public services, utilities and banks. We proudly stand for a democratic socialist society run in the interests of the millions, not the billionaires."

Why many class fighters won't vote Labour

A Leicester council tenant

In the Guardian on 22 April, Owen Jones said: "If you want to look in the eyes of those people pummelled by callous Tory policies, vote Labour - and be prepared to fight." He also said "Those who say there is no difference whatsoever are surely not being pummelled by the bedroom tax."

Well I am 'pummelled' by the bedroom tax, brought in by the Con-Dem government but policed by a Labour council. The Labour council has also slashed my council tax benefit in order to pass on government cuts. In neither of these cases did the council have to apply the national attacks. They could have opposed them - so why are my children still suffering the consequences? What about the cuts in benefits - including to people with disabilities - made under the last Labour government?

Sceptical

No wonder millions are sceptical that Labour will be different this time. Ask yourself - why, given that people are most definitely being "pummelled by callous Tory policies", are they not flocking to vote Labour? Surely if they trusted Labour to fight for them there would be no question about Labour winning with a sizeable majority. Of course millions will vote Labour, feeling they have no choice, and I can perfectly understand that.

But the truth is that, despite some policy differences, Labour advocates 'austerity-lite.' Labour is now a party that in its fundamentals supports big business in the same way that the Tories, Liberals and Ukip do. You say there is a £50 billion difference between the cuts the Tories would make and Labour. This is at best naive of you, and an out of date claim anyhow.

Did Miliband not promise to cut services every year until they eliminated the current deficit in government spending? Is this not written into the manifesto? Their cuts include welfare - again hitting the poorest. And shadow minister Rachael Reeves says Labour doesn't represent those on benefits!

Your main point is that Labour can be pushed by campaigning and concessions extracted - undoubtedly true. You think that those who say there is little difference between Labour and the Tories "do down every single person who has protested and campaigned over the last few years." Well that would include me then! I was on the protests against the bedroom tax, and the cuts in services being made by the local Labour council as well as on many other issues.

But you go on to say "Under the Tories? No chance." One of the most successful campaigns I was involved in was against the Poll Tax in the 1990s - which we won against Thatcher. And she was no less callous or determined than this lot of Tories! There are plenty of other examples too - the concession made by Thatcher to the Liverpool city council in the 1980s for one.

Alternative

More recently, with the massive public sector strikes on pensions a few years ago we could have won against the current government, if the leaders of some of the big unions (predominantly Labour affiliated) had not pulled the plug.

You suggest that the "lesson of the 1980s" is that if the Tories stay in power people will get so desperate that they would even vote for someone like Tony Blair. Surely the real lesson of the period since then is that unless we create a working class alternative, we will always end up with anti-working class politicians. That's why I am voting TUSC - because we need to break the cycle and start the process of creating that alternative.

You say the establishment is desperate for Labour to lose and ask "Do we wish to defeat it or not?"
Yes we do, but Labour is part of that establishment!

Labour Party link dominates CWU conference discussion

Socialist Party members in the CWU

The Communication Workers' Union (CWU) 2015 conference started on 26 April in the aftermath of Dave Ward defeating Billy Hayes to become the union's new general secretary.

Dave's election campaign had a more critical position over the Labour Party and, on the first day of conference, the major debate was on the union's relationship with Labour. Socialist Party members were prominent in this debate.

Paddy Meehan from Northern Ireland moved a motion to support anti-austerity candidates in Northern Ireland. But the motion was opposed by the leadership, despite Labour not standing candidates in Northern Ireland, and defeated. However, the motion got a very good response from delegates.

There were many motions on the agenda for the Labour Party debate, including those supporting the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition. However, the leadership backed a motion that recognised that the Collins Review changes to union affiliation rules would lead to reduced donations from the union to Labour, but that money instead should go to TULO (Trade Union and Labour Party Liaison Organisation).

This really means the money would still go to Labour through the back door. The motion was a device that, when passed, stopped all the other motions being debated.

Labour's policies

The debate happened just after Labour MP Angela Eagle had addressed the conference to claim that her party was totally different from the Tories.

But, as Judy Griffiths from Coventry said, Labour doesn't stand for the CWU policies of renationalising Royal Mail and BT, nor will it get rid of the anti-trade union laws. Even though the leadership's motion was passed, there was a lot of sympathy for Judy's opposition to it.

The deputy general secretary, Andy Kerr, argued that 'we shouldn't be having this debate eleven days before a general election'. But Socialist Party members pointed out that the union's link with Labour will be further tested after the election, especially if Miliband gets into government.

Dave Ward closed the conference saying that our priority shouldn't be whether we fight within or outside the Labour Party, it should be about increasing our industrial strength. CWU activists will be concerned that would signal taking the union down a non-political road. However, the last passed motion of conference committed the union to fight for any future Labour government to renationalise Royal Mail.

- The National Shop Stewards Network held a conference fringe meeting on the theme of stopping union busters. Over 20 delegates attended. NSSN chair Rob Williams went on

record as thanking the union for their continued support and Billy Hayes because on his watch the union affiliated to NSSN. Rob also said that the NSSN looks forward to working with Dave Ward.

Dundee porters force NHS bosses to retreat

Philip Stott

The strike by 117 Dundee hospital porters is gaining huge support from across the city and beyond. The Unite union members began selective strike action nine weeks ago and, as we go to press, are now in their fourth week of all-out, indefinite action.

Unite is demanding a regrading from the current band one - the lowest in the NHS - and back pay for years of lost wages. The majority of porters in Tayside are on band two, as is the case in the rest of Scotland.

After claiming that the porters had no case, NHS bosses have been forced onto the retreat. They have now offered that the porters grading can be reviewed by the Scottish Terms and Conditions Committee (STAC).

Determined

"The mood at Ninewells and Royal Victoria hospitals is solid and determined," porter and Unite senior steward Graham Nelson told the Socialist. "We'll go through the STAC process and see where it takes us. But we've made it clear that the strike goes on and we've refused any attempts to make the process binding. If we don't get what we want, we fight on until we do."

"Thousands of pounds have been collected in the buckets on the picket lines donated by NHS workers and the public. One doctor the other day put in £100 as he walked past. We've also had £5,000 from NHS Unite branch in Glasgow, £1,000 from Tayside Unite ambulance branch, £500 from Dundee University UCU and £250 from Dundee City Unison. We'd like to thank everyone for their support, and the local pub for all the free tea and coffee for the strikers."

Effect

The strike is having a major effect inside the hospitals. Reports of band eight managers - who are on £70,000 a year - desperately running around trying to cope with piles of work normally done by the porters - on £12,500 a year - are widespread.

The porters will lobby the Scottish parliament. The SNP has made much of being "anti-austerity" during the current election campaign. In practice they have been silent over the porters' dispute, a strike the health minister and Scottish Government could end tomorrow if they acted to ensure the porters were paid what they are due. The Dundee porters are proving that workers have real power when they fight.

Please send messages of support to Graham Nelson on 07749 241470.

**Donations to Unite, 110 Blackness Road, Dundee DD1 5PB (cheques payable to Unite).
Facebook: Support Ninewells Porters**

Support rallies behind Glasgow homelessness caseworkers' strike

Matt Dobson

The indefinite all-out strike of the Glasgow homeless caseworkers is still going strong after over a month. After weeks of trying to ignore the strike and the workers' case for fair pay, Glasgow's Labour councillors and management were forced to at least meet Glasgow City Unison on Friday 24 April.

There are reports of the accommodation stockpiled by the council in anticipation of the dispute running out and the service breaking down.

We have seen widespread public support for the strike in Glasgow and across the country.

Strikers in the North East of the city have picketed Barlinnie prison where a handful of caseworkers, GMB members, have stayed at work. This pressured management further.

Prison officers in the POA union stopped at the picket to give support and £340 was collected for the strike fund in one morning. Successful collections have also taken place at other social work offices.

Strikers have been speaking at union rallies and meetings across Scotland and to local community anti-cuts campaigns in the city.

Support

The Socialist spoke to Jenni, a striker from the North West Team, at a Castlemilk Against Austerity gig: "This is my first time on strike and you learn a lot. We need to be really organised as it doesn't look like management will give in easily.

"We need all the support we can get from workers, trade unions and people in communities."

Donations have been coming in such as £1,000 from the Mid Yorkshire Health Unison branch committee, where Socialist Party members play a leading role.

Before the talks started, strikers and supporters marched to the council and rallied outside. Jamie Coccozza from Unite subway driver's branch (in a personal capacity) and Socialist Party Scotland spoke in solidarity.

However the council, it seems, were only using this meeting to test the resolve of strikers. Unison branch secretary Brian Smith reported: "The council just offered an eight week review of the homeless workers case but with no guarantees of fair pay and regrading."

This was rejected by a strikers' meeting on 27 April and the strike continues, with a rally on 30 April, 12.30pm at City Chambers.

Please send messages of support, donations and requests for speakers for union branches and events to enquiries@glasgowcityunison.co.uk

Cheques to Glasgow City Unison, 84 Bell Street, Glasgow G1 1LQ

Facebook: Glasgow Homeless Caseworkers strike

MoD IT workers demand decent pay

PCS civil service union members working for computing firm CSC in Glasgow and Gosport took five days' strike action from 20 April for a fair pay award, following measly 'offers' of 0%, 0.3% and 0.4%. The workers have suffered effective pay cuts over the last ten years without inflation proofed pay rises.

CSC is a US multinational which provides IT contracts and pensions administration for the Ministry of Defence. It made profits of over £1 billion last year. Chief executive Michael Lawrie earned \$13.26 million in 2014.

PCS branch chair Harold told the Socialist: "The strike has been solid all week with large picket lines which have surprised management. We have a members' meeting next week to decide the next course of action and in the meantime there is an overtime ban and work to rule."

Send messages of support to h.good176@btinternet.com

Bromley workers escalate strikes

Socialist Party members in Bromley

Unite members working for Bromley council have begun a big escalation of the strike campaign launched to defend workers' rights and fight off mass privatisation.

Library service workers began four days of action on 28 April. All Unite branch members will be called out on 1, 7 and 19 May. Parks workers will take strike action on 5 May. Care workers and transport drivers will take action from 13 to 18 May.

The union is clear - this is a campaign that has to be fought to the finish. The Tories in Bromley are attacking workers' rights by attacking the trade union, and privatising every service that they can legally get away with.

Tory councillors have publicly shown they do not believe that trade union reps have any right whatsoever to time off for trade union duties - despite this right being clearly laid out by legislation. When it comes to attacking trade unions, the Tories have no problem breaking the law!

Public campaign

The campaign against privatisation is in particular highlighting services including libraries, passenger services and adult care. An exemplary public campaign has made clear that the people

of Bromley do not support library privatisation. Nor do they support the council proposal of replacing paid workers with volunteers.

Unite regional officer Onay Kasab said: "Bromley is at the forefront of the fight against privatisation. This strategy, relying not on the law but primarily on the power of strike action and campaigning with communities is an example to every trade union organised in local government."

What is now needed is coordinated joint union strike action on a national basis in defence of trade union rights and against privatisation. Bromley is not the only employer attacking trade union time off. Nor is it the only council privatising services. This requires a national response.

Bradford bus drivers strike against job losses

Hundreds of First West Yorkshire bus drivers and engineers were on strike in Bradford on 27-28 April, officially against the transfer of a bus service to the Halifax depot with a loss of eight jobs.

But in reality the strike is also over deeper grievances. For example, one shop steward explained there used to be 20 spare buses for every 100 in use for repairs, maintenance and breakdowns. Now there are as few as three, meaning buses services are frequently cancelled.

Shift lengths have increased. New starters have 12-hour shifts on lower pay. 90 jobs have gone in the last four years. An overtime ban on Sunday meant many services didn't run.

Iain Dalton

Wales: Hundreds protest against cuts to adult education

College workers and students fight Labour cuts

Staff and students across colleges in Wales took part on Wednesday in protests against £30 million of Welsh Labour government cuts to Further Education that will lead to the effective abolition of free adult education and hundreds of job losses.

There were very big protests across Wales. Jointly the trade unions UCU, Unison, Unite and GMB put out a call for people to gather at college gates and college workers and students responded enthusiastically.

At Bridgend college up to 200 students and college workers poured around the gates and enthusiastically chanted and waved union and home made banners. 60 demonstrated at Aberdare campus and 100 at Rhondda campus of Coleg Cymoedd.

There was an upbeat atmosphere but a quiet determination to stand up for the broad range of quality learning and training opportunities provided, particularly for adult education, which is seeing a 50% cut in funding in a single year!

The range of chances that colleges provide for adult learners in our communities will be seriously reduced if these cuts go through and where learners can find courses they could be much more expensive as colleges have to pass on the full cost price to learners. This is likely to price many out of education and training. Has the Welsh government abandoned the principle of 'lifelong learning' in its willingness to pass on Con-Dem cuts?

Workers and students were clear about what they think of Welsh Labour cuts to Further Education, summed up in the placard made by one lecturer: Betrayal! Next Wednesday (29 April) we take our protests to the Welsh government's doorstep as we demand they reconsider and give us the resources we need to deliver the high quality education we're proud of.

TUSC, as the only 100% anti-austerity party contesting the general election on 7th May stands shoulder to shoulder with all those standing up for Further Education. These cuts by the Welsh Labour government are just a taste of what a Miliband Labour government would be like and amply demonstrated that all the main parties are in favour of cuts. Students and workers grabbed leaflets from TUSC campaigners who supported the protest.

Dave Reid

This version of this article was first posted on the Socialist Party website on 23 April 2015 and may vary slightly from the version subsequently printed in The Socialist.

Barking bin workers walkout over pay cuts

GMB members working for the Barking and Dagenham refuse collection continued strike action against £1,000 annual pay cuts on 23-24 April. An eight day strike is due to start on 1 May, with negotiations with the Labour council taking place as we go to press.

<http://www.socialistparty.org.uk/articles/20637>