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Tell the Con-Dem government:

NO CUTS!

Support 28 March pension strike

Martin Powell-Davies

NUT teachers' union executive,
personal capacity

War is declared! ...or at least, the next phase in the ongoing pensions action has been called - with NUT and UCU members in the 'post 1992 universities' going on strike across London on 28 March. Now we need your urgent support!

This is because the coalition government, while planning to cut taxes for the richest and to privatise our schools and other services, again in the interests of the 1%, remains dead-set on slashing public sector pensions. They want us to work longer, pay more and then get less.

These cuts mean that some teachers are being told that their retirement age will rise to 68. The attacks will also mean all teachers face pay cuts from April 2012 as pension contributions are increased.

Teachers in London will be among the hardest hit. Contributions will rise from 2012-14 by over 50%. An experienced inner-London teacher will see their annual salary fall by £1,500 by April 2014.

Many teachers outside London - who also voted by a big majority in the consultations to support strike action on pensions - are disappointed that they haven't been given the chance to strike on 28 March too. I and others argued for national action but regrettably the majority of the NUT executive voted for a strategy of regional action starting in London.

The best way, however, of making sure NUT conference in April votes to call on-going national action next term is to help those of us in London make sure that our 28 March action is a big success!

Because of what we do, teaching the children of other workers while they work, our strike will have a big impact on London. Last summer a desperate Tory education minister Michael Gove exhorted parents to 'run' the schools for a day but parents showed huge support for the 30 June strike.



photo Paul Mattsson

With schools, colleges and universities across the 32 London boroughs involved in strike action on 28 March a clear message will be sent to the government - public sector workers are not done with you yet!
More on the pensions campaign - see page 2

Support the action on 28 March

- Join the demo: assemble at 11am in Malet Street, London WC1E 7HY
- Send messages of support and donations to NUT/UCU branches to show the whole movement is behind us. Any messages sent to m.powell-davies@executive.nut.org.uk will be passed on
- Take resolutions calling for further united national action to your union branch



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Prepare for future struggle - build the trade union left

Unending misery – that's what this government has in store for us. NHS chiefs have been warned they will need to find a further £20 billion in 'savings' once the current target of £20 billion of cuts has been met!

If any of the trade union leaders had any doubt about the full character of the onslaught facing the working class and the trade union movement, it should be dismissed now.

In fact, the inevitable outrage that will follow the budget, put forward by a government of the rich for the rich, should be mobilised by the TUC in a national weekend demonstration to defend pay and pensions, the NHS and the welfare state as part of a programme of protest and strike action to end austerity.

The budget also puts into sharp focus the responsibility of Unison, GMB and others who moved so quickly to sign the government's Heads of Agreement pension non-offer before Christmas. This squandered the huge momentum built up by the historic 30 November (N30) public sector strike.

All the way through this struggle PCS, particularly Left Unity, the broad left in PCS, and the National Shop Stewards Network (NSSN), has acted as a lever to push for action. It is no coincidence that the TUC called the N30 strike the day after the NSSN mobilised trade unionists to lobby its meeting in London last September.

On 7 January Left Unity, in which Socialist Party members play a leading role, organised an open conference which attracted over 500 union activists. This was a rallying call for all those who wanted to reject the pre-Christmas sell-out and put pressure on the right-wing union leaders to reverse their decision. From

this, over ten 'rejectionist' unions met independently of the TUC's Public Sector Liaison Group to consider further coordinated strike action on a significant, albeit smaller, scale than N30.

Ultimately, however as the 1 April increased pension contributions near, only PCS, NUT and UCU on an all-Britain basis, along with Nipsa in Northern Ireland and EIS and UCAC in Scotland and Wales respectively, were willing to consider striking on 28 March.

Unfortunately, the NUT executive (NEC) last week voted against a national strike. We believe that this was a serious mistake and Socialist Party NEC member Martin Powell-Davies opposed this decision along with others. We believe however that the London strike, now joined by UCU in post-1992 universities and further education in London on the same day, presents a platform for NUT activists to fight for the NEC's decision against national action to be reversed at the union's Easter conference.

This was the complicated and frustrating position that confronted the PCS NEC on 19 March. There was an overwhelming vote in their consultative ballot to reject the pension deal and provide a mandate for further national strike action, coordinated with other unions. The fact that PCS is organised more on a group basis made London-only action more difficult.

After the NUT decision, the PCS leadership was faced with the prospect of the union striking nationally on 28 March, effectively on its own outside London.

While the UCU vote is welcomed, the absence of the NUT is a serious blow to effective national action. Teachers have significant economic power when they strike, as parents

often have to take a day off work to look after their children. The NUT can also be a lever on the other main teaching union, the NASUWT which is currently only operating a work to rule.

While it is understandable that some may be concerned that PCS is not now taking action on 28 March, the broad mass of the membership will welcome the rejection of the pension deal and the intention of the NEC to use the mandate to plan further national strike action with other unions as soon as possible, hopefully before the end of April.

Other unions

This not only potentially includes NUT and UCU, but also Unite and the firefighters' union FBU who will be voting shortly on final offers. Rejection of these deals should be the starting point of coming together with the PCS and the others to strike together. A fresh appeal to Unison, GMB, NASUWT etc who themselves have to vote on offers should also be made.

The PCS NEC correctly has to consider very carefully the effect on morale of its own members in taking action on its own and to guard against the union being isolated. Every activist and rep prefers to fight on the front foot but this isn't always possible.

The NUT decision has changed the situation, at least as far as 28 March is concerned. The PCS leadership has always weighed up carefully when to engage its members, who have taken both national and group action many times over the last decade and particularly over the last 18 months and on-going as they face a broad offensive in the civil service. In this concrete set of circum-

stances, the PCS NEC is justified in delaying the necessary national action.

Three national unions, PCS, NUT and UCU have decisively rejected the pension deal and reinforced their mandate for strike action. Activists in all other public sector unions should fight for their unions to do the same to force this government back on pensions, which would act as a warning about the rest of their attacks.

The numbers who joined Unison, for example, in the run-up to N30 shows that there is a mood to take action. After 1 April – when the effects of the right-wing union leaders' sell-out is clear in the pay packets – members of all public sector unions will demand a serious and determined strategy to beat the government back.

If a fighting strategy is to be implemented it is essential that decisions on the struggle are not left in the hands of these national trade union leaders. The Socialist Party has demanded that trade union members have democratic control of the negotiations at every stage.

Within the trade unions we need to begin to build fighting left organisations that struggle to ensure the trade unions fight in their members' interests. One demand of such organisations should be for regular elections of full-time officials and for them to be paid no more than a workers' wage.

The National Shop Stewards Network (NSSN) also has an important role to play in bringing together militant trade unionists. It will be giving its full backing to the 28 March action and continuing to play a vital role in pushing ahead for further coordinated strikes.

The sixth NSSN conference is on 9 June. See page 4 and www.shopstewards.net

A strategy to win the battle to defend pensions

John McNally

PCS vice-president, personal capacity

Public and Commercial Services union (PCS) members have voted by huge majorities to reject the government's final offer on pensions which is intended to make us pay more, work longer and get less. Members also voted for national coordinated action with other unions to win a fair settlement.

90% voted to reject the offer and 72% for further action. This is the best vote achieved in PCS and under the most difficult circumstances. Our members are determined not to allow the government to get away with stealing their pensions.

PCS has been at the forefront of the pensions campaign, arguing that the only way to stop the attack completely or win concessions would be to build the widest possible trade union alliance. The government intends to roll out pensions 'reform' across the public sector. Coordinated national action was always the best way to challenge it.

PCS showed it was possible to fight back while many other union leaders and the TUC stood back from the type of effective campaigning, including industrial action, that could challenge the attack. On 30 June last year PCS members, along with members of the education unions, including the biggest teaching union NUT, went on strike, demonstrating that workers are prepared to struggle.

It was the example shown on 30 June, along with the government's intransigence, that directly led to 30 November (N30), the biggest strike in many decades.



Lobbying the TUC to demand joint action photo Paul Mattsson

Had the unions pressed home the advantage then there is little doubt concessions would have been possible. But the TUC and other union leaders, particularly in Unison, the biggest public sector union, bowed down to an ultimatum by the government. This was designed to divide and rule, to call off the industrial action campaign to "consider" a so-called Heads of Agreement that offered no concessions whatsoever on the core issues millions struck against – paying more, working longer and getting less.

PCS played a key role in rebuilding a coalition of unions willing to continue the fight, particularly via the emergency 7 January conference called by Left Unity in PCS. In order to succeed the PCS national executive (NEC) has agreed that action had to take place in more than one pensions sector, the civil service and education being the most likely.

This is a defining battle and failure to stand up to the attack would give the government the green light to step

up their attacks on jobs, pay, privatisation and terms and conditions.

PCS members were clear, the government offer was overwhelmingly rejected and they would be prepared to take action to defend their pensions. This result was achieved in the context of major unions dropping out of the N30 coalition, continuing attacks from the government and a pay freeze that is hitting our low-paid members very hard. It was also won on the clear understanding that, as set out in the ballot insert, NUT, UCU and Unite would be part of the alliance that could deliver a "strong campaign". The campaign was due to be re-launched with a one-day strike on 28 March.

Unfortunately at their meeting last week the teachers' union NUT voted not to take national action on 28 March. NUT conference in a few week's time will debate whether or not to continue in the alliance with nationally coordinated action.

The lecturers' union UCU said it would take action in further edu-

cation colleges and post-92 higher education colleges, which are part of the teacher's pension scheme, this means they would not be taking action in Scotland. Unite has now decided to ballot its members in the civil service before taking action.

In these circumstances and despite the fact the Northern Ireland Public Services Association (Nipsa) would almost certainly have taken action, the PCS NEC has agreed not to take action on 28 March. To go ahead in such circumstances would mean in significant parts of the country only PCS members would be taking action effectively on their own. This is precisely what we told members we would not do, take action on our own or without a coalition of unions capable of pressuring the government into returning to the negotiating table.

Given these developments, the NEC agreed that PCS must continue to work with other unions to build for national coordinated action at the earliest possible opportunity and before the end of April if possible.

It was also agreed to organise mass constituency lobbying of MPs during the Easter recess, including cabinet minister's constituencies. PCS branches will support and organise local protests and campaign events against the government's cuts programme, including their latest vicious plans for regional and local pay.

We must honestly recognise that the NUT decision not to take national action on 28 March is a setback. But if its conference in a few weeks decides to build for national coordinated action then action before the end of April with a strengthened coalition is entirely possible and certainly what PCS will work for.

While regrouping the union alliance cannot be solely contingent on a decision at the NUT conference, a positive decision would be an extremely significant boost to putting together a credible alliance to win concessions.

NUT and UCU are to take action in London only on 28 March and PCS will offer whatever support and solidarity it can. But we will not join that action because it is not the type of industrial action response we consulted our members on – large-scale and effective national coordinated action across at least two sectors.

PCS reps have worked hard to win the ballot and build for 28 March and there will clearly be disappointment. However we must always treat our members with respect, they have repeatedly shown they are prepared to follow the NEC's call for action but to ask them to take action on 28 March when the coalition we worked so hard to put together to win concessions is clearly not properly in place would be an abrogation of responsibility to low-paid members whose loyalty and determination has been a beacon to the movement.

The NEC is absolutely confident that the best way to proceed is to recognise we must now re-group. In the coming weeks we must put together the type of coalition we told members in the ballot was required if we are to win on pensions.

PCS will continue to work for the widest possible trade union alliance that recognises the fight against the pensions robbery as part of a broader fight against the government's austerity agenda. PCS will now do all it can to build for effective action in April.

Budget: far from 'all in it together'



Hannah Sell
Socialist Party deputy general secretary

Asked about the Con-Dem budget, Simon Hughes, deputy leader of the Liberal Democrats pleaded for "a budget for the millions not the millionaires". There is not a snowball's chance in hell of Tory Chancellor Osborne delivering such a budget.

Only six of the 29-strong cabinet are not millionaires themselves, and it is absolutely clear that the budget will mean an escalation of this government's policy of ever-increasing austerity for the many and tax-cuts for the few.

Opinion polls show a majority of the population - 67% - want to keep the 50p rate of tax on earnings over £150,000, yet Osborne has made clear he wants to cut it. An overwhelming 92% of the population want the budget to take some measures to force the rich to pay more, but they will see exactly the opposite in Osborne's budget. The pleadings of the Liberal Democrats have been ignored; it seems the budget will not even have a fig leaf to make it appear that the rich are being asked to pay their share.

The cuts in corporation tax to 'the lowest level in the Western world', as Osborne famously declared, will continue apace. By 2015 an average of £5 billion a year in government income will have been lost as a result. And far from clamping down on tax-dodging by the super-rich and the major corporations, the budget will contain changes designed to make it far easier. The proposals have been masterminded by a senior manager of the international corporate tax accountants KPMG. He was seconded

to the treasury for 20 months to develop the rules that will be pushed through in the small print of the budget. His speciality: 'advising multinationals on tax-efficient cross-border financing and restructuring' - tax avoidance by another name!

For the 99% the budget will deliver a very different diet - unending misery. Regional pay - which is an attempt to break up the national collective bargaining power of the trade unions and would dramatically

6 Only 6 non-millionaires in the Con-Dem cabinet

increase the wealth divide between London and the South East and other regions; a measly increase of 11p an hour in the minimum wage for workers over 21, and not a penny's increase for young people; plus a dramatic acceleration of privatisation. The roads, Royal Mail and the NHS are among the public services being offered up to the private vultures.

The trade union movement needs to recognise the budget for what it is; a further declaration of war on the

living standards of the majority. The organised working class needs to respond with an escalation of intransigent opposition to the government. An immediate next step should be a mass mobilisation for a national Saturday demonstration against austerity and in defence of public services, alongside further strike action.

Attempts at 'concession bargaining' - accepting some cuts in the hope of avoiding others - are doomed to failure. This brutal budget comes in the wake of the TUC leaderships' attempt to do a rotten deal on pensions in the hope of avoiding further attacks by the government. It could not be clearer that weakness only invites more aggression. Yet unfortunately, it seems that the TUC leadership is continuing this approach.

Alongside an industrial campaign against austerity, a political alternative is also needed. New Labour has repeatedly made it clear that it would not reverse the vicious cuts being implemented by this government.

Workers need a political voice that really does stand for the millions not the millionaires. The Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) brings together trade unionists, socialists and anti-cuts campaigners to stand in elections on an anti-cuts platform, and is an important step towards creating such a voice.

The Low Pay Commission has been widely reported as unanimously agreeing the paltry proposals on the minimum wage, including its freezing for young people; yet the Commission's membership includes John Hannett, general secretary of the shopworkers' union USDAW, and Frances O'Grady, deputy general secretary of the TUC. If they did not support the Commission's proposal they should say so immediately. If they did, trade unionists should demand that they immediately stand down to make way for those who are prepared to stand up for workers' interests.

What we think about the so-called "workers' budget"

Regional pay

George Osborne's provocative announcement of the government's intention to introduce regional pay can only be seen in light of the surrender of the right wing union leaders over the pension battle. The attempt to regionalise public sector pay will have a devastating impact on what are already economically deprived areas such as the North West, Northern Ireland, Wales and the North East. These areas have never recovered from 30 years of deindustrialisation and the public sector represented young people's only chance of securing any kind of stable work. With the abolition of national pay scales and the pinning of public sector increases to average wages in the private sector the government will visit a new wave of devastation on working class people. Osborne's agenda is simply to break up collective bargaining, weaken the public sector unions still further and pave the way for yet more privatisation. Brendan Barber has correctly said that any imposition of regional pay will further depress an already des-

perate economic situation. As always though the TUC leaders do not point to a way for workers to fight back against this but simply wring their hands and turn their backs.

At the recent North West TUC AGM the PCS union moved a motion condemning regional pay and committed the NW TUC to coordinating a campaign against it including coordinated industrial action. A massive trade union campaign coordinated by the TUC must begin now. The government is looking to finalise its plans by July and the union movement must be out campaigning actively against this immediately.

Every union branch must pass motions committing to defending national collective bargaining and demanding that their union ballot for strike action to defend it. Motions should also go to every trades council demanding that the TUC locally and nationally live up to its words and defend our rights.

Alex Davidson
PCS branch secretary

Defend what's left of hard-earned Sunday trading laws

The government announced its intention to allow the expansion of Sunday trading for eight weeks during the Olympics in London. Since 1994 shop-workers have faced the continual erosion of Sunday rights, beginning with the introduction of Sunday opening and resulting in a situation where now the majority are on single time. As socialists most of us don't have any sentimental attachment to Sundays from a churchgoing point of view but we have since the early 90s been in the forefront of campaigns against having to work on the one day a week where

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we could rely on not being pulled in to do a shift.

Most London shop-workers are paid a monthly salary and this means that overtime is generally unpaid. You often have to stay longer if the customers linger etc. If laws change for eight Sundays we will be working three or more extra unpaid hours in the busiest possible period. And who is to say they won't relax the law indefinitely? Most of us are excited about the Olympics coming to our hometown but we won't be getting the chance to watch much of it if we are continually either in work or in endless tourist-ridden tube and train queues to get there and back.

As a member of the Usdaw NEC Robbie Segal campaigned vigorously to preserve Sundays as a day off, but, without the backing of the union nationally, Sunday working was brought in.

It's time for Usdaw to grow some teeth, call action like the RMT has done recently and fight back by bringing the West End to a standstill.

Alex, London

50p tax rate

By the time you read this the 50p top rate of tax for earnings over £150,000 will have gone. Osborne's decided that 50p tax doesn't fit with 'Britain's open for business'.

The Institute for Directors has been lobbying to get rid of it because it 'deters people from setting up businesses they would otherwise open'. They got what they wanted out of the budget.

Hang on, though. Even Osborne doesn't believe income over £150,000 should not be taxed at all. The rate will have dropped to 45p or 40p [edit here in light of actual budget decision] ie a reduction of 5p or 10p in the pound.

Is this really what was stopping all those entrepreneurs setting up hundreds of businesses to soak up those made redundant from the 'bloated' public sector?

Is someone with a good business idea, and with the prospect of making a fortune, really going to say to themselves: 'You know what? That extra 10p in the pound, it's a killer. The more I think about it, I don't think I'll bother opening that chain of care homes /string of convenience stores /design consultancy.' And if 5p or 10p in the pound is all it takes to put them off, what does that say about Osborne's entrepreneurs?

Paul Gerrard

Race to the bottom

The government wishes to scrap national pay bargaining and reduce public sector wage rates in poorer areas. Is this the way to help poor workers? I think it's to pay for cutting the 50p tax rate. And, in this race to the bottom will MPs have their pay cut?

Roger Cudd

Road rage

When I read about David Cameron's new plans to privatise the roads and fund them with toll gates, it struck me that the Tories really don't know anything about Welsh history or the Rebecca Riots. I'll get my dress!

Ben, Swansea

TUSC AGAINST CUTS

The Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition list for the London Assembly elections: ●**Alex Gordon**, president of transport union RMT ●**Nick Wrack**, TUSC national committee ●**April Ashley**, Unison executive, representing black women members ●**Sian Griffiths**, Fire Brigades Union ●**Steve Hedley**, RMT London organiser ●**Ian Leahair**, FBU national committee member ●**Gary McFarlane**, anti-racist activist ●**Martin Powell-Davies**, executive member for Inner London of the teachers union NUT ●**Merlin Reader** postal worker ●**Joe Simpson**, assistant general secretary of the Prison Officers Association ●**Jenny Sutton**, lecturers union UCU ●**Nancy Taaffe**, library worker made redundant, former chair Waltham Forest Unison ●**Jackie Turner**, GP ●**Lee Vernon**, Young Members convenor for London and southeast of the civil service union PCS ●**Lesley Woodburn**, Unite rep on southeast regional TUC LGBTQ committee. Candidates are in a personal capacity **If you want to stand as a TUSC candidate in local elections in your area this May, check out the TUSC website at www.tusc.org.uk/candidates.php**

Join the fightback! Join the Socialists!

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Hospital workers fight bullying

A Unison member.

More than 300 people, mainly Carillion employees and their families, marched in Swindon on 17 March, in a lively and noisy demonstration. They were protesting against the bullying and harassment they have been subjected to by the company.

Carillion is one of the original PFI contract holders for Swindon's Great Western Hospital. It is a private company contracted by the NHS to provide domestic and cleaning services. Its employees are mainly women originally from Goa in India.

Paulo Fernandes, a GMB union rep at the Swindon Hospital, told the Socialist: "The management don't recognise our chosen union even though the GMB is the biggest union among the Carillion workers. Now the government want to privatise the NHS as well. For everyone bullying will be worse and so will pay."

I spoke to some of the workers, who told me managers at Carillion had strongly hinted to them that favourable decisions regarding shifts and holiday allocation could be had in return for 'gifts'. Some staff said they had



Angry workers on the march photo Matt Carey

their working hours reduced with no notice or negotiation whatsoever.

Other workers told me that when they had first turned to Unison to help them they got little support, so they approached the GMB instead. While there were a lot of local members of Unison with their banner on the march and they expressed their

total solidarity, the union's regional office has complained that GMB are 'poaching their members'.

Joining the march were members of Wiltshire FBU, Unite, NUT, CWU and others. At the closing rally in the shopping centre, Andy Newman of GMB explicitly accused Carillion of 'bribery and corruption'. According

to the GMB, the senior Carillion HR manager involved in the Swindon dispute was the HR manager who dealt with the blacklisting organisation that led to the exclusion of thousands of trade unionists, many of whom are construction workers, from employment (see below).

Among other speakers was Anne Snelgrove, Labour's prospective candidate for Swindon. She didn't mention that the New Labour governments' privatisation policies opened the door to unscrupulous firms like Carillion.

The Carillion workers are angry and determined. They have already been on strike earlier this year, taking action in three 24-hour strikes and a three-day stoppage in February and a five-day stoppage earlier this month. 17 March was the start of a seven-day strike.

They have also held demonstrations outside Virgin Telecom, Zurich Insurance and Nationwide Building Society who, the GMB alleges, have all been supplying workers to cover the strike days. It would be great if the courage being showed by the workers was matched by all our union leaders.

In brief

NSSN conference

National Shop Stewards Network 6th annual conference:
Saturday 9 June 11am - 4pm
Friends Meeting House, Euston Road, London NW1 2BJ

Speakers include:

- Bob Crow, transport union RMT general secretary
 - Mark Serwotka, PCS general secretary
 - A leading Rank and File member of the construction workers' campaign
 - Kevin Courtney, NUT deputy general secretary
- For more information see:
www.shopstewards.net
Contact the NSSN at: info@shopstewards.net or PO Box 54498, London, E10 9DE

TUSC

Mick Dooley, a prominent activist in the battle to stop the big building companies imposing a 35% pay cut, has been confirmed as a candidate for the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) in the London Assembly elections. Mick described in a recent interview for the Socialist, that he has been a campaigner for construction workers' pay and conditions for many years.

He has also campaigned for building workers' union Ucat to become a fighting trade union. An employment tribunal recently found that the right-wing leadership of Ucat had acted unjustifiably in banning Mick from standing in the union's general secretary election. This follows an exposé of financial malpractice in the union and an illegal election.

Mick was even expelled from the union earlier this year. Mick said about TUSC: "We are the serious alternative voice for the people of London. We are not controlled by establishment politicians, we are trade unionists who know what the real world is because, like you, we work in it, we live in your streets and our kids go to your schools. Our presence in City Hall will ensure that mainstream politicians will not lead us by the nose to suit their own agendas, that's why I am standing, it is our city not theirs."

Gove puts the boot in

Education Secretary Michael Gove has sacked the governing body of a "failing" school at the centre of a row over attempts to make it an academy. The education department rang the interim headteacher and the chair of governors of Downhills Primary School in Haringey, north London before 8am to tell them that the governors have been replaced with a high-profile "interim executive board". At the same time Gove has issued an Academy Order, naming the Harris Federation as the preferred sponsor.

Parents have been campaigning against the academy and recently voted against it. There are no parents on the new unelected board and none of them even live in the Tottenham area, where the school is. The chair and others on the board are connected to the Harris Federation. Harris has donated millions to the Tory party over the years.

Where's the government's 'localism' and 'parental choice' here?

For more industrial and trade union reports and analysis go to
www.socialistparty.org.uk

MMP packaging: workers still locked out

149 workers at Mayr-Melnhof Packaging (MMP) in Bootle, Merseyside have been locked out of their workplace in a dispute with management over planned redundancies.

Workers have picketed the main-gates, initially by day, but since March have progressed to 24-hour pickets on a shift system that mirrors their attendance on any normal working day or night. Workers knew that some redundancies would be made but these were going to be on a voluntary basis.

Now management have come back with an even worse offer and proposals and a lock-out to add to the uncertainty.

Workers at MMP in Deeside are currently balloting whether to join the dispute.

Messages of support can be sent to: mayrmerseypeople@gmail.com

For more on this, including more pictures and an account of a night on the picket line, see www.socialistparty.org.uk



photo Stillshooter

Construction workers demand better pay and conditions

Around 70 rank and file construction workers met in Manchester on 17 March to discuss the victory against the bosses' attempt to impose Besna contracts - cutting wages by up to 35%. There was a determination that any trace of Besna must be stamped out.

In the battle against Besna rank and file construction workers have led the struggle and put pressure on Unite to eventually put its weight behind the campaign.

The bosses and Unite have signed a joint statement advocating a 'modernisation' of the JIB national agreement. But the bosses will see this as an opportunity to get most of what they were planning in the first place.

The sparks and other construction workers have produced massive profits for Besna firms like Balfour Beatty and they rightly want improvements in their pay, terms and conditions not workplace 'austerity measures'.

Therefore, the sparks are determined that there will be no Besna

mark 2 and why it's vital that the rank and file committees continue to ensure that a check can be kept on union officials participating in talks.

Unite have been forced by the campaign to bring the rank and file into the negotiations with seven on the union-side committee alongside seven Unite stewards.

Basis for talks

The 20 demands agreed at the rank and file meeting in London on 7 March to take to the union-side meeting as the basis for any talks were also discussed and agreed.

The need to step up the fight against blacklisting and agency working was explained by Steve Acheson from the platform. Everyone in the room supported this.

Dave Walsh, Socialist Party member and Unite plasterers' branch secretary from Liverpool, pointed out that this was an ideal time to recruit new members and organise the sites. Because of the transient

nature of the industry a continuous recruitment campaign was necessary. Dave offered to organise a Liverpool trades council meeting to help build support.

Andy Bentley, Socialist Party member, National Shop Stewards Network Staffordshire organiser and Unite construction sector member, said: "We have to make it quite clear to the bosses that the longer they drag out the talks or muck about agreeing to the demands, then the stronger and more organised we will become on the sites with such a campaign."

A call was made at the end of the meeting for support to be given to Steve Acheson's long running campaign against blacklisting by visiting his regular protests. It was also agreed to meet again in four weeks.

Protests will continue outside Manchester central library every Wednesday to call on the Labour council to pressure its main electrical contractor, one of the 'Dirty 7' - NG Baileys, to stop blacklisting.

Abolish the blacklist!

Blacklisted construction worker Steve Acheson told the Socialist:

"On our banner it quotes John McDonnell MP, 'construction blacklist: one of the worst cases of human rights abuse ever in the UK'. The labour movement has got to start tackling blacklisting, which we now know involved the security services, police and union officials.

Blacklisting continues in the absence of real trade union involvement. I've spent ten years in the last 12 blacklisted and out of work, deliberately exiled for no other crime than raising health and safety concerns in the second-most dangerous industry in the country. Quite rightly, every form of discrimination is abhorrent to a civilised society. Why then do we tolerate this abuse of human rights?"

Student walkout: Socialist Students show what could have been

Claire Laker-Mansfield
Socialist Students

The one thing not lacking on our university campuses, in our schools and at our colleges is anger. We've already seen the Con-Dems triple fees and scrap EMA. Now students face courses cut to the bone, teachers and lecturers worked to breaking point. In addition huge parts of our education being sold off to the highest bidder - mostly private sector fat cats who cut corners, not to mention wages, conditions and service quality, to increase their profit margins and make a killing.

So you might think that with all this anger in the air an organisation like the National Union of Students (NUS) calling national action, with all its resources and authority, could galvanise this latent rage and channel it into a serious movement to defend education. And of course that would be entirely possible if the leadership of NUS weren't, at its core, an utterly bankrupt group of careerists, wedded to the politics of New Labour and fundamentally not opposed to austerity.

When NUS announced that it was calling a national walkout for 14 March the news was greeted warmly by Socialist Students members and anti-cuts activists. But it soon became clear that NUS had no real intention of organising anything of the sort.

NUS leadership

In reality, the move was taken by Liam Burns with one eye on his bid for re-election as NUS president in April. He feared the fate of Aaron Porter, his predecessor, who was forced to leave office after one year (rather than the usual two) because of the rotten role he played in the student movement of 2010 - failing to support the movement or call any further action after the initial NUS backed demonstration on 10 November.

But while Liam Burns feared this fate, he also feared mobilising a real movement against the government. This is partly due to being worried that being seen as a 'radical' might halt his speedy selection as a Labour candidate post-NUS, but also because his New Labour politics mean he is unable to see any real alternative to cuts and privatisation.

The other thing which held back



photo Sheffield Socialist Students

a mass mobilisation for an NUS walkout was the demands that 14 March was 'officially' organised around.

Rather than taking on the demands of the student movement - against fees, cuts, privatisation and for the reinstatement of EMA - the 'walkout' was instead organised around the somewhat incomprehensible slogan 'come clean'.

This referred to hidden course costs as well as the way that the government is attempting to implement privatisation through the back door. Both of these are important issues (although there are lots more), but they are in no way clearly articulated in the slogan 'come clean'.

So it was left to ordinary anti-cuts activists and Socialist Students to try to organise action for 14 March. In many universities the student union was completely hostile to calling any action whatsoever for this day.

Lever

On some campuses, Socialist Students groups successfully acted as a 'lever' on the local student union, helping to push what would have otherwise been a passive or even hostile union into building for action. This meant that at universities like Brighton, Sussex, Birmingham City and Lincoln small walkouts and demonstrations were organised with the student union's backing.

Elsewhere, even without this backing, Socialist Students activists

were able to organise some walkouts, an example of this is at West Lancashire College, where around 30 students walked out to protest. In other places, too numerous to mention, Socialist Students organised and mobilised for demonstrations, rallies and walkouts.

Time for change

The hugely successful events that Socialist Students organised are evidence of what might have been. Our demands - no to fees, stop cuts, bring back EMA and no to privatisation - gained enormous support, with a surge in people applying to join Socialist Students in the last month.

It is time for ordinary students to reclaim NUS and student unions generally. We need a leadership worthy of the task of defending education against the capitalists and their representatives in parliament, bent on making us pay for their crisis.

Just last week Socialist Students member Jack Poole came within five votes of winning the position of president at Brighton University student union. This is a signal of what is to come. At NUS conference Edmund Schluessel and Lizzy Grey are standing for the NUS NEC on a record of fighting cuts and a programme to take the movement forward.

Those incapable of leading the struggle must be swept aside. Now is the time to fight for our future.

See www.socialiststudents.org.uk

No to workfare - fight for a genuine alternative

Paul Callanan
Youth Fight for Jobs national organiser

Cait Reilly, one of the young people forced to work for free under the existing schemes is in the process of a judicial review of the government's workfare policies. Young people are also fighting back through continued Youth Fight for Jobs protests. But help from on high is not at hand.

Last week a Labour Party youth conference took place. At the top of the agenda was discussion around the Con-Dem workfare scheme. But in a depressingly predictable turn of events the talk wasn't about posing a real alternative that can offer real

jobs on good conditions. Instead the key note speaker, party leader Ed Miliband unveiled Labour's workfare-lite scheme.

This scheme bears an uncanny resemblance to the present ones being touted by the government. As with all the others it would entail a subsidy going to big businesses - though this time for taking on young people on minimum wage for six months.

Young people will be 'offered' this after six months unemployed but will lose their benefits if they refuse. So basically nobody will be paid Job-seekers Allowance for more than six months at the end of which you have to accept a job of their choosing.

And of course there is no guarantee

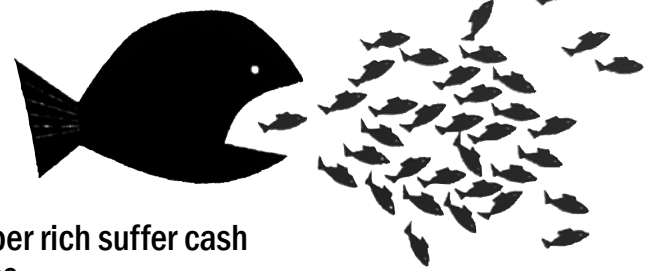
of a permanent job at the end of the six months. Labour are so wedded to the ideas of capitalism that they cannot come up with genuine solutions to the problem of unemployment.

Youth Fight for Jobs and Education have called for a day of action to take place on Wednesday 21 March to coincide with yet another cuts budget being announced by the Con-Demolition. We are putting forward a budget for the '99%'.

We demand that the government invests in the public sector and rolls out a programme of public works to provide socially useful jobs that pay decent wages and give decent conditions.

For more info see www.youthfightforjobs.com

Them...



Super rich suffer cash piles

It seems that 'Broke Britain' ain't so broke. Cash holdings of big companies in Britain are standing at £731 billion. That's cash sitting in banks not being invested because of 'lack of confidence in the market'. The deficit for 2010/11 was £110 billion. So the cash lying idle could pay it off nearly six times over. In other words it could not only pay it off and end the cuts but also create millions of jobs by investing in infrastructure and public services, funding free education for all, etc, etc. But where's the point in that?

Happy birthday!

Topshop owner and tax dodger, Sir Philip Green, turned 60 recently. You're probably hoping he had a lovely day - chocolate cake, new aftershave and a nice meal with the family. No,

£6.5m

Cost of Philip Green's 60th birthday celebrations

no, no - that just won't do. Green held a joint party with his daughter, who turned 21, in the exclusive Rosewood Makayoba resort in Mexico. A DJ doesn't cut it for this birthday duo - they flew Stevie Wonder, Robbie Williams and Michael Bublé to perform at the event. Sausages on cocktail sticks wouldn't suit the crowd either - guests, including Simon Cowell and Gwyneth Paltrow, were treated to caviar and £225 a bottle champagne. Even the toilets couldn't be mundane and were glammed-up with mirrored walls and luxury black toilet paper. All a steal at a mere £6.5 million. You can see why

the millionaire's government saw fit to make him their 'efficiency czar'.

PFI socialism

The Guardian recently quoted a risk and compliance officer at a major bank as saying: "I remember in my first few weeks I sat down with one of the structures products guys. He was selling so-called PFI deals, where local authorities buy a complicated financial instrument to pay for, say, a hospital. I asked him: where's the benefit for the local authorities in this? He was aghast. 'What are you, a socialist?'" Quite.

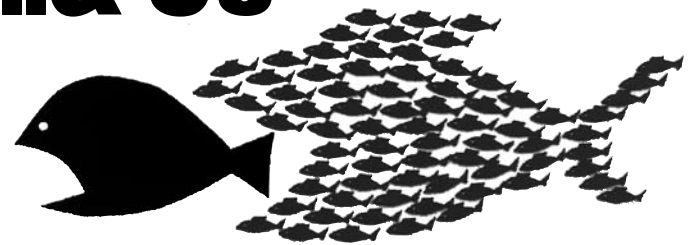
Greek tragedy

The austerity imposed on Greece by the Troika is having devastating consequences for working class and poor people in the country. 40% funding cuts to hospitals have led to a massive increase in infectious diseases including malaria and tuberculosis. An increase in prostitution and drug use as well as the closure of needle exchange services has meant a big increase in HIV/Aids too - in 2011 the number of sufferers increased by 1,250%. Families are struggling to buy food to the extent that teachers no longer expect children to do PE because many are too weak.

Muppets

Goldman Sachs - "a great vampire squid wrapped around the face of humanity" - typifies the dog eat dog nature of capitalism. Recent revelations by an ex-employee show that there is nothing 'moral' about Goldman Sachs and the other great firms that really rule the world, despite what David Cameron would have us believe. Goldman Sachs is "toxic", customers are "Muppets", etc. It helped to build the colossal debt mountain before 2007. It 'earned' revenues of \$29 billion last year and distributed more than \$12 billion to its staff in pay and bonuses, as much as the GDP of Albania!

...& Us



From @davenellist this week

Remploy factories are not for sale or closure #GMB convenor vows 2 fight closures #solidarity #nssn

Anniversary of 84-85 miners' strike sees me at Daw Mill in @bbcpolitics tv piece #solidarity #nssn

Unbelievable! There really is a 'Cuts Council of the Year' award + #Coventry Labour Council is shortlisted!!

Watch #KillingFields then challenge Sri Lankan regime's crimes with @tamilsolidarity



CAPITALISM IS NOT WORKING

Unless you are part of the richest 1% then life under austerity is getting increasingly difficult. Here Peter Taaffe, Socialist Party general secretary, looks at the nature of capitalism – a system driven by the search for profit and riven by crisis – and the basis for building a socialist alternative.

“Now almost five years old, the economic crisis rumbles on. In order to assess how much economic progress it has undone, the Economist has constructed a measure of lost time for hard-hit countries.

“It shows that Greece’s economic clock has been turned back furthest: it has been rewound by over 12 years.

“Elsewhere in the euro area, Ireland, Italy, Portugal and Spain have lost seven years or more. Britain, the first country forced to rescue a credit-crunched bank, has lost eight years. America, where the trouble started, has lost ten” (Economist, 25 February).

This is an astonishing admission of failure – “progress has [been] undone” – by a staunch defender of capitalism.

It bears out the contention of the Socialist that today this system – based upon production for profit and not for social need – has become a colossal obsolete machine for the destruction of wealth and the lives of working people in Britain and worldwide.

The Economist further estimates that the loss of property wealth from British households is £500 billion compared to its previous peak. American households have lost “a whopping \$9.2 trillion” (the total wealth produced in the year for the US is about \$14 trillion).

Portugal and Spain have been thrust back to 2008 on this measure and Ireland “was richer in 2006”.

Measured by real gross domestic product (GDP) per person, a third of the 184 countries the IMF collects data for are “poorer than they were in 2007”.

But absolutely no conclusions are drawn by this august journal other than to prescribe “more of the same”, brutal and “endless austerity”. Capitalist economists are like witch doctors of old, incapable of rational explanation and therefore falling back on quackery.

Why has society arrived at this impasse? Where is it written that millions of workers and youth must be thrown on the scrapheap, with millions more forced into impoverishment even when they have a job, often part-time?

Based on exploitation

It is not down to an act of God or similar to a natural disaster. It is rooted in the very character of capitalism, explained very simply by Karl Marx more than 100 years ago. Exploitation of the working class is at the heart of the system. Profit, which provides the driving force for capitalism is, in the words of Marx, “the unpaid labour of the working class”.

From this flows all the inequalities of capitalism, which have been underlined dramatically even during the current

crisis.

The share of wealth accruing to billionaires has increased exponentially while that of the working class quite obviously has diminished. The working class cannot buy back the full product of its labour power.

However, the system keeps going by ploughing part of the surplus extracted back into production. This in turn creates new factories, workplaces – the means of production, the organisation of science, technique, etc. – but at a certain stage all the same contradictions reappear. Hence the instability of capitalism, which oscillates between booms and slumps.

This is akin to breathing in and exhaling. In older organisms, this becomes weaker. In the modern era, the booms have become weaker while the recessions or slumps have become deeper.

This is reflected in the present crisis, the “worst ever”, a “great stagnation”. To maintain their profits, the bosses will shut down factories and workplaces, like opening and shutting a box of matches, if needs be.

Cash piles

However this crisis is not one of ‘profitability’. The capitalists are literally drowning in profits. They are hoarding cash: “almost €2 trillion in the Eurozone, and £750 billion in the UK” (Financial Times – 12 March).

They are thus betraying what Marx called their “mission” to develop the means of production.

This was the only justification of capitalism in the past which, despite all the horrors of the Industrial Revolution, the slave trade, etc., at least drove society forward.

But now they refuse to invest in factories which would at least soak up the millions of unemployed. Why? Because there are few industries to invest in and no incentive to create more factories because of the weakened state of British capitalism, arising from the massive de-industrialisation of Britain in particular, but also in the advanced industrial countries as a whole.

Germany’s manufacturing base accounts for 20% of its economy but Britain’s is just 10.5%!

When the capitalists resorted to a massive orgy of investment in the financial sector, it resulted in a piling up of fictitious capital which finally collapsed in 2008, wreaking havoc in the lives of millions in the process.

George Osborne sought to justify the savaging of jobs in the public sector by claiming that the private sector would fill the gap, rising like the ‘phoenix from the ashes’. We replied that ‘the phoenix’ had unfortunately already flown to China and parts of Eastern Europe, precisely because of the previous policies of deindustrialisation of Thatcher, reinforced by Tony Blair and Gordon Brown.

It is the frenetic and restless search for a ‘profitable outlet’ for hitherto ‘idle’ capital which drives the ruinous and harmful programme of privatisation of the Con-Dem government.

Working class people generally can go to hell in a handcart so long as the capitalist system finds a way out. This



Olav Handman 19/03/12.

is why we say it puts profit before social need.

Everyone agrees that the NHS is a great historical conquest. Even the butcher of the NHS, Andrew Lansley himself, is forced, hypocritically, to pay lip service to this.

Yet it is still in the process of being privatised. The Tories deny that but, as Mandy Rice-Davies said, “they would say that wouldn’t they?”

When the present bill is finally bludgeoned through parliament against the wishes of the British people, 49% of the allocation of beds will be for private patients.

As sure as night follows day, following in its wake, as former Tory Chancellor Nigel Lawson openly admitted on Newsnight, will come charges for visiting doctors and going to hospital, increases in prescription charges, etc.

In other words, we will be back to the situation of our fathers and forefathers in the 1930s when the poor and working-class did not call on the services of doctors because they could not afford to pay.

Britain will be in the same position as the US where it is quite simply a question of “no job, no money, no doctor”.

The craven capitulation of some of the Liberal Democrats – Shirley Williams and her supporters – on this issue, set alongside the actions of the Tory stooge Clegg, is likely to seal the historical fate of this party.

Save the NHS

Like the National Liberals in the 1930s, they will be absorbed by the Tories and what is left nationally will be a just a rump. Similarly, some doctors’ representatives, after admirably opposing the government on this issue, have now shown a “flexibility” of their spines, but not principle, in agreeing to now collaborate in implementing the NHS bill.

They will not bear the burden of the privatised NHS which will result from the Con-Dems’ measures.

It will be up to the labour movement to resist this might and main. The poll tax was defeated after it became ‘law’. Mass action – refusing to pay this hated tax – trumped ‘respect’ for an unjust law!

The opposition to the government measures by the New Labour front bench is hypocritical. Every time the Tories are attacked on television by New Labour spokespersons on privatisation of the NHS and the rest, they simply reply “but you started this”. Who introduced ‘foundation hospitals’, the ‘internal



SNOUTS DOWN BOYS ITS BONUS TIME AGAIN

market’, etc., to which they have no answer!

This is because they have swallowed hook line and sinker the dirge of George Osborne: “The British government has run out of money because all the money was spent in the good years.” (Telegraph, 26 Feb 2012)

Arrant nonsense! What about the £750 billion cash pile, mentioned above, which the greedy bosses are sitting on and refuse to invest? Then there is the £120 billion a year in tax avoidance by the rich, which the PCS trade union has highlighted.

This is almost equal to the total government budget deficit of a £143 billion which they intend to eliminate in four years of eye-watering cuts. There is also the ‘unused capacity’ which is not utilised under capitalism for one reason: it does not pay the bosses to do so.

Their press admits as much: “The cold reality... is the British economy has shrunk by more than 10%. It faces many more years of depressed living standards, high unemployment and public spending cuts. Those fabled sunlit uplands are a long way off” (Financial Times).

Cuts, cuts and more cuts

10% of the British economy – GDP stands at £1.75 trillion – probably amounts to the equivalent of the budget deficit of £143 billion. Therefore, if this 10% could be mobilised, brought back into production, the deficit would be eliminated at one fell swoop. The only thing that stands in the way is the capitalist system itself.

If it cannot afford the basics of human existence, we cannot afford it. One thing is sure: further suffering is inevitable on a capitalist basis.

Already, the average British household is £1,000 a year worse off as a result of this government’s measures.

Even the middle-class will suffer through the loss of child benefit. The poor will suffer most. The welfare changes due to the merger of several benefits into universal credit will make 150,000 of the country’s poorest single parents as much as £68 a week worse off, potentially punishing 250,000 children further into poverty, reports ‘Save the Children’.

Public sector workers face five years

of real pay cuts. Therefore, the ground is prepared for an uprising of public-sector workers and others – which will exceed the mighty pensions strikes of the past year – even if the pension struggle abates temporarily because of a lack of leadership of the trade unions.

And not just in Britain, as the events in Greece, the forthcoming social explosion in Spain, Portugal and the ongoing battle in Ireland indicate.

Therefore, this is the best time to pose a clear socialist alternative when working people are in action and on the move.

In housing, which is a disaster area for working people, particularly for young people, in 2010 only 102,570 properties were built and yet there is a crying need for a massively expanded house building and renovation programme.

In the 1930s, the number of new dwellings built each year averaged over 300,000, half a million in 1935 alone.

How easy it would be to bring together the unemployed building workers and the ‘idle’ capital that would be generated by increased public expenditure? This, in turn, could be paid for by the increased tax income from those drawn back into the workforce on trade union rates of pay.

Lengthening dole queues

Then there is the obscene and contradictory spectacle of lengthening dole queues – enforced idleness – alongside massive overwork.

Many workers are forced to work two or even three jobs in order to make ends meet. Young people, as we see, are forced to work for nothing, a modern form of slavery.

The immediate introduction of a 35-hour week without loss in pay would begin to overcome this ‘contradiction’.

“But it didn’t work in France,” claim the bosses. But it did; the 35-hour week created, according to the French Socialist Party, 400,000 extra jobs between 2000 and 2006.

It was abolished by Sarkozy and with what result? A massive increase in unemployment, which in France is higher than in Britain, standing at more than 10% and climbing.

But while we demand reformist measures such as these, fighting for every improvement in the lives and conditions of working people, we realise that there is no such thing as permanent security, secure jobs, reasonable and rising living standards under capitalism.

On the contrary, what was won today and yesterday can be taken back by the capitalists tomorrow.

Under this system, the workers are like Sisyphus in Greek mythology. He toiled to push a boulder up to the top of the hill only to see it roll back down again. He was compelled to repeat this task throughout eternity!

This can only be changed by taking over the commanding heights of the economy. The centralisation and concentration of capital – the piling up of wealth and ownership into the hands of a tiny minority, of the 1%, or the 0.1%, has simplified the task of the workers’ movement.

Of the 100 largest economic entities in the world, 52 are corporations and 48 are countries. The top 500 companies – a handful of billionaires – control 70% of world trade. The top 200 companies have combined sales which are equal to 28% of world GDP but they employ only 0.82% of the world’s workforce.

Miliband’s myth

Ed Miliband’s “responsible capitalism” is also a myth. The system as a whole is responsible for mass unemployment and growing poverty. Here in Britain, 150 companies control 70 to 75% of the wealth. By taking them over – with compensation on the basis of proven need – we will begin to use all the idle capacity to get the unemployed back to work and initiate a socialist plan of production.

This, in turn, would generate increased wealth and lift millions out of poverty in



Britain. Applied not just in Europe but throughout the world, it would result in undreamed of plenty.

The nightmare of one billion people on the planet who go to bed hungry every night would evaporate.

We will be able to generate extra resources through using the full potential of production but also by eliminating waste and advertising, etc., and use these for the benefit of society.

The programme for the socialist transformation of society, the initiation of the discussion to prepare the basis for a real democratic socialist plan of production, must be at the heart of discussions in and around the industrial battles currently taking place.



photos Paul Mattsson

TIME TO FIGHT FOR SOCIALISM

Sri Lanka's Killing Fields: War Crimes Unpunished

Review by Tamil Solidarity

Manny Thain
Secretary, Tamil Solidarity

It is nearly three years since the Sri Lankan regime declared victory against the LTTE, the Tamil Tigers. That so-called victory cost the lives of at least 40,000 Tamil civilians. Hundreds of thousands were rounded up in squalid detention camps. Thousands have disappeared. The north and east of Sri Lanka is under military occupation. The wounds run deep and are still fresh, the suffering unbearable.

One of the few voices raised against the regime of president Mahinda Rajapaksa has been Channel 4. On 14 March, it screened its second documentary on the war, Sri Lanka's Killing Fields: War Crimes Unpunished.

Horrific footage showed sustained attacks on a United Nations food convoy, trapped in the first of the supposed 'no-fire zones' along with

hundreds of thousands of civilians. Despite sending GPS coordinates, UN bunkers continued to be shelled.

After UN staff had made frantic calls to the Australian high commission in Colombo, Sri Lanka's capital, the shelling shifted away from the bunkers but remained inside the no-fire zone. Clearly, the authorities had direct knowledge of the situation and the army was in full control of the shelling.

'Hostage rescue operation'

In mid-April 2009 the Sri Lankan army blasted a line through the middle of the no-fire zone, claiming that this was a 'hostage rescue operation'. In reality, it was a full scale military assault.

Tens of thousands of people were dumped into huge detention camps. On 22 April army spokesmen insisted that no heavy artillery had been used and no civilians had been killed. The UN says the death toll was at least 15,000.

The Sri Lankan regime deliberately understated the numbers of people in the no-fire zones. UN figures show that, by the end of April, well over 125,000 people remained trapped. On 28 April Rajapaksa went on CNN to say that there were 5-10,000.

By 3 May the no-fire zone consisted of an area no more than a mile across. Field hospitals, overwhelmed with dead and dying, were shelled. The regime refused access



A London Tamil protest in 2009 photo CWI

to the Red Cross.

LTTE fighters who had been captured or surrendered were executed. Sexual violence was perpetrated against female Tamil Tigers.

Channel 4 highlighted the execution of Balachandran Prabhakaran, the 12-year-old son of the LTTE leader. He had been shot many times.

Geopolitical interests

Sir John Holmes, then head of the UN's humanitarian operations, admitted that the Rajapaksa regime "ran rings around the UN". It knew

that, for geopolitical reasons and commercial self-interest, no government was prepared to speak out against the massacres.

There was, Holmes said, an "implicit green light", a deadly "diplomatic dance" which allowed the regime to continue with its brutal policies with impunity.

At the 2011 Commonwealth meeting in Australia, Rajapaksa shook hands with Queen Elizabeth II, and Sri Lanka was named as the venue for its next heads of government meeting in 2013. No wonder his regime feels it can get away with murder.

Party news

Leicester NHS

Leicester Socialist Party members attended a public meeting about the NHS called by Labour MP Jon Ashworth. Over 250 people turned up. However, while opposing the Health and Social Care Bill, Ashworth basically said that there is nothing we can do to stop it! Although he was critical of the Con-Dems' demolition of our public services, predictably he failed to mention that Labour's 1997-2010 governments were responsible for privatising parts of the NHS. People openly criticised Labour. One woman gave the poll tax campaign as an example of how people defeated government bills before, even after they were passed. The turnout in Leicester shows that people are willing to fight the government over the NHS.

Andrew Walton and Rebecca Christiansen

Kirklees Sure Start

Huddersfield Socialist Party continued the fight against cuts to local Sure Start centres on 17 March by collecting more signatures against the council's proposed plans. At a recent town centre demo, under pressure councillor Mehboob Khan assured protesters that none of the centres would close. However the recent cabinet meeting on 13 March failed to shed any real light on the council's plans. Staff redundancies and management restructuring are still threatened, leading to a diminished service for parents who use the child care centres. Privatisation cannot be ruled out.

The campaign will continue to show Kirklees council that we will not stand for cuts to our services!

Rob Bailey

St Helens success

The second monthly Socialist Party stall in St Helens, Merseyside was an even bigger success than the first! People of all ages queued to sign our petitions against NHS cuts and privatisation, expressing fears about losing our health service. We sold out of 38 copies of the Socialist, gave out 200 leaflets and raised £122 in fighting fund.

Carol Reid

Fighting Fund appeal

A fantastic Socialist Party 2012 congress finance appeal raised over £9,000 in donations and pledges. With fighting fund on 78%, Socialist Party branches need to make sure all money is paid in by the end of the quarter on Friday 30 March to go over 100%. Can you donate to the appeal? Call 0208 988 8777 to make a donation or go to www.socialistparty.org.uk/donate

• Friday 30 March is also the end of the January-March quarter for sales of the Socialist. Do you have sales money? Phone 020 8988 8796 or go to www.socialistparty.org.uk/admin/index.html

20 April Day of Action

A day of action to build the fight-back for the rights of Tamil people in Sri Lanka will be organised by Tamil Solidarity on 20 April. It will involve leafletting and other campaigning activity, a forum for debate and discussion, and a new play. See www.tamilsolidarity.org for details.

Youth demand future at Dundee sham summit

Matt Dobson

Youth Fight for Jobs (YFJ) disrupted Con-Dem Scotland minister Michael Moore's national youth unemployment summit on 15 March, with a large protest at Dundee College's Gardyne campus. Local trade unionists, anti-cuts campaigners and the Scottish Unemployed Workers Network, were involved

Clearly the Con-Dems wanted to bury record youth unemployment figures with a public relations circus in an area of high unemployment. Politicians from all the main parties gleefully accepted invitations, as did big business lobbyists.

A handful of unemployed youth were allowed to enter as long as they didn't utter a word of opposition. College students had their classes and campus disrupted. Guest speaker, Tory cabinet minister Iain Duncan Smith, was kept far away from protesters.

Dundee College student and YFJ activist Wayne Scott was interviewed by local and national radio and quoted in the press, explaining the reality behind the summit.

In 2010-11, Dundee College was



photo Dundee YFJ

decimated by the cutting of 20 courses and the closure of two campuses. College managers used police to block student protesters from getting back into college for classes. The car park was closed to students and staff for the whole day.

As the protest got larger and louder, politicians and big business dignitaries rushed past. We met a chief executive from a multinational energy company - she wouldn't say which one - who, in her words, wasn't interested in youth unemployment but saw the summit as a good opportunity to lobby UK and

Scottish government ministers.

Local MSP Jenny Marra tried to talk YFJ activists into joining Labour, but had no answers about her party not committing to reversing public sector cuts.

Scottish government cuts

The Scottish National Party (SNP) government's cuts amount to removing £55 million from college budgets. Health and social care students, who could see course places slashed, brought a banner they had just made after persuading their tu-

tor to let them join the protest.

The SNP's new youth employment minister Angela Constance invited three protesters, including Wayne Scott, into the summit. Wayne reported that Constance's reply to protesters' concerns was that "it would be impossible to not follow the cuts agenda passed down by Westminster".

For over a year, anti-cuts and unemployed activists in Dundee have publicly challenged Iain Duncan Smith to come and debate his ideas on the welfare state and unemployment. He had, until now, refused to come near Dundee, but the summit provided a safe photo opportunity.

Iain Duncan Smith visited one of two job centres in Dundee city centre - he is planning to close the other one! IDS and his aides sprinted past YFJ protesters into the building, helped by police and private G4S security guards, and later sneaked away through a back exit.

But the Tories won't escape us that easily! On 24 March, we will be demonstrating with trade unions at the Tory conference in Troon. Contact Wayne Scott on 07712607224, Matt Dobson on 07927342060 or email youthfightscotland@gmail.com

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SOCIALIST PARTY FIGHTING FUND

	£ target	£ received	January-March 2012	Deadline 30 March
North West	1,200	1,443	█	█
South West	1,400	1,545	█	█
East Midlands	1,550	1,554	█	█
Northern	600	580	█	█
Wales	2,300	2,150	█	█
London	6,100	5,344	█	█
Eastern	1,200	1,039	█	█
West Midlands	2,100	1,743	█	█
Yorkshire	2,900	2,367	█	█
Southern	1,200	763	█	█
South East	1,000	131	█	█
England & Wales	3,450	958	█	█
TOTAL	25,000	19,623		

The 'Kony 2012' phenomena

Charity's pro-US foreign policy is against interests of Africa's poor

Robert Bechert

Scarcely before has an idea spread so quickly across the world. Within days tens of millions watched Invisible Children's 'KONY 2012' video as it went viral across the internet and social media. Shocked at the story of killing, rape and child soldiers, demands multiplied that "something must be done" against Joseph Kony and the brutal Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) he leads in eastern and central Africa.

Invisible Children (IC) seemed to be setting the agenda as support rapidly mounted for its call for action against Kony. Within a few days this video engendered a surge of outrage, particularly among young people in the US, but it soon became apparent that all was not what it seemed. Questions have been raised as to why, in its last financial accounts, IC, a charity which is meant to aid Ugandan children, spent only 37.14% of its income in Uganda itself.

It became clear that among IC's major sponsors are fundamentalist Christian groups that have their own right wing, pro-capitalist agenda.

This is not to denigrate the millions who were enraged by the video's story and wanted to urgently do something, but these events are another example of how the ruling classes, the "1%", try to utilise, even manipulate, genuine popular anger for their own ends.

In this case the reality is that IC is calling on the US to maintain and deepen its military intervention against Kony and the LRA.

IC's March 7 letter to President Obama says: "...Your decision to deploy US military advisors to the region in October of 2011 was a welcome measure... However, we fear that unless existing US efforts are further expanded, your strategy may not succeed ... we encourage you to sustain the deployment of US advisors until the LRA no longer poses a serious threat to civilians..."

But the US government's policies in Africa do not start with what is in the interests of the vast majority of Africans. Only a few days before this letter was sent General Carter Ham, commander of the United States Africa Command (Africom), told the US Senate's Armed Services Committee: "Our operations, exercises, and security cooperation programmes continue to support US policy objectives in Africa, strengthen partnerships and reduce threats to America, Americans, and American interests emanating from Africa."

Despite Africa's current relatively high, largely raw material based, economic growth rate the majority

of its people are gaining hardly any benefit. In many countries real living standards are barely growing; often high inflation is actually cutting them.

It is Africa's continuing 'failure' to develop which is a root cause of the continual upheavals, oppression and wars that seem to mark out the continent. This is not something inherently "African", the world's other continents have not enjoyed war or oppression free history, but today in an imperialist dominated world the scope for a capitalist road to development in Africa is severely limited.

The tragic history of Uganda and the countries surrounding it are a sad example of this. Over the past decades Uganda has seen one dictatorship after another as competing ruling elites have attempted to retain power in a situation where democratic rights are crushed or limited because the local capitalist economy is too weak to be able to afford any meaningful, lasting concessions of this type.

Uganda's history

Uganda's current ruler Museveni came to power after the 1985 overthrow of Milton Obote. During his rule Obote had support among Acholis in northern Uganda, and they suffered after his overthrow.

Only last April and May protests against rapidly rising fuel and food prices were met with police repression and censorship by the authoritarian Museveni regime. Inflation running as high as 44% means that Uganda's poverty rate had started to rise.

Human Rights Watch, which supports the current campaign against Kony, admitted that: "The Lord's Resistance Army began fighting the government of Uganda in the mid-1980s partly as a response to the government's marginalisation of the people of the country's north." (March 9, 2011)

Kony himself is an Acholi. The IC, in its 'History of the War', describes what happened to the Acholis: "Starting in 1996, the Ugandan government, unable to stop the LRA, required the people of northern Uganda to leave their villages and enter government-run camps for internally displaced persons (IDPs). These camps were supposedly created for the safety of the people, but

the camps were rife with disease and violence. At the height of the conflict, 1.7 million people lived in these camps across the region. The conditions were squalid and there was no way to make a living. Thus a generation of Acholi people was born and raised in these camps."

It was estimated that around 80% of northern Uganda's population were forced into these camps or "protected villages" and, while most refugees have apparently left the camps, they are increasingly faced with disputes over whether they can return to the land that they once lived on and farmed.

But while the LRA's origins at least partly lie in what happened to the Acholi from the mid-1980s onwards it is beyond doubt that the LRA was not in any way a liberation movement protecting the Acholi, in fact it was another oppressor.

The LRA left Uganda in 2006 as peace talks started, but eventually these failed to result in an agreement. This led to a military attack on the LRA, the first operation organised by the then recently created Africom.

It is clear that, with its silence about what is happening now in Uganda and its open support for US military intervention, IC is, intentionally or not, mobilising support for actions that, while possibly finally crushing the now very small LRA, will not end the cycle of violence against children and adults.

IC cannot even claim that the Obama administration is serious about one of its main demands - stopping the use of child soldiers. Only last October the Obama administration signed waivers to ignore a US law so that US military funding would continue to go to Yemen, Chad and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) despite their continued use of child soldiers.

So while Kony is denounced for using child soldiers, the country the LRC is currently based in, the Democratic Republic of Congo, is not!

All this only goes to show that, despite all the humanitarian gloss, it is "national interests" which determine the policies of the US and other ruling classes.

Tragically, given the huge support it has gained in the past weeks, IC is following the foreign policy of the US government and is very selective

in what it denounces.

While denouncing Kony IC is silent about Museveni's abuses within Uganda, something which fits in with the US government's view of him as a key regional ally.

This silence on the real situation in Uganda leads to IC highlighting the International Criminal Court issuing of arrest warrants for Kony and two other LRA commanders but remaining silent about Uganda ignoring the December 2005 decision of the International Court of Justice that it must compensate the DRC for rights abuses and the plundering of its resources between 1998 and 2003.

Support for IC

Many US youth have donated to IC, others are buying its \$30 action kit while its action day on 20 April could generate wide support.

But, given IC's politics, there is a grave danger that this energy will simply be diverted into providing support for the Obama administration's drive to strengthen its influence in Africa at a time when other powers like China and Brazil are also competing in this latest version of an imperialist carving-up of Africa.

This questioning of IC's motives and policies does not in any way serve to deny the brutality and savagery of the LRA. But the only way to really act in the interests of children, the poor, the oppressed and working people in general is to help to build their own independent movements in Africa that have no trust in capitalist governments, foreign intervention and strive to struggle to change society.

Despite the horrors of war in east and central Africa we have already seen this year mighty mass movements in African countries against oppression, poverty and for change like the general strikes in Nigeria and South Africa.

The challenge for socialists is to help link young peoples' anger at crimes like those of the LRA and their desire to do something with building movements that can remove the capitalist system that distorts and poisons the lives of so many, rather than supporting those who seek to funnel anger into channels that do not begin to question the existing capitalist order.

The Committee for a Workers' International

The Committee for a Workers' International (CWI) is the socialist international organisation to which the Socialist Party is affiliated.

The CWI is organised in 45 countries and works to unite the working class and oppressed peoples against global capitalism and to fight for a socialist world.

For more details including CWI publications write to: CWI, PO Box 3688, London E11 1YE. email cwi@worldsoc.co.uk

www.socialistworld.net

The CWI website contains news, reports and analysis from around the world. Recent articles include:

image not available

South Africa: One-day general strike shows workers' willingness to fight back

200,000 workers march across South Africa.

Democratic Socialist Movement (CWI, South Africa) reporters

image not available

China: The fall of Bo Xilai

For the first time in two decades an open power struggle erupts within China's one-party state.

Editorial statement by chinaworker.info

image not available

Spain: 1.5 million march as workers gear up for general strike

Struggle from below for sustained programme of mobilisations to fight labour counter-reforms.

Danny Byrne, CWI

Fight or privatise: A tale of two councils

Councils across the country are currently setting their budgets. Whether Tory, Lib Dem or Labour, they all dutifully carry out the government's cuts. Socialists and anti-cuts campaigners call on them to defend the communities they represent and point to the record of the socialist-led Liverpool council in

the 1980s.

Former Liverpool city councillor Tony Mulhearn answers some of the slurs thrown at the 1983-87 council's record.

Clive Heemskerck shows how privatisation of council services is the real crime.

Liverpool's fighting 47

Right-wing politicians often besmirch the achievements of the 1983-87 Liverpool councillors, the '47'. They claim that Liverpool's financial problems were caused by irresponsible borrowing which left the city in debt in 1987 and which successive administrations had to resolve.

This argument is false. Listening to these arguments, you could possibly believe that Liverpool was the only local authority that borrowed money. The practice is universal, it is the only way local authorities can function, in fact capitalism itself functions on borrowing large chunks of finance for revenue and investment purposes.

When the Liverpool 47 took office in 1983 they faced a catastrophe, inheriting a historic debt of £150 million created by the previous Liberal/Tory alliance's financial recklessness and £10 million of unallocated cuts.

This was compounded by then prime minister Thatcher's policy of savage cuts in the government's Rate Support Grant (RSG) to the council of £30 million. The RSG was conditional on staying within government spending limits, any expenditure over these limits was penalised by losing £2 for every £1 'overspend'.

The Liverpool 47's campaigning activity resulted in £60 million being clawed back from central government. With this more council houses were built than in all other local councils put together between 1983 and 1987. That was on top of the nursery classes, job creation and



Liverpool in the 1980s photo D. Sinclair

sports centres that were opened.

When the government cut off the cash supply in a vindictive act, Liverpool was compelled to borrow from foreign banks. Liverpool's present council leader Joe Anderson quotes a £100 million loan that cost £157 million. But all the money that Liverpool city council borrowed (for the capital programme) was at interest rates similar to those available to all councils throughout Britain.

Taking into account the 16,000 jobs created in a time of desperate unemployment and decent homes built for thousands of families (a permanent asset to the city) the case for value is irresistible.

In fact, when Thatcher's District Auditor surcharged the 47 council-

lors and removed them from office in 1987, the debt per head of Liverpool's population was roughly the same as all other major authorities in England and Wales.

The opponents of the Liverpool 47 never say what policies they would have suggested. The only answer which would have conformed with Thatcher's policies and pleased Kinnock and his acolytes would have been massive cuts in jobs and services, the abandonment of the house-building programme and the breaking of every election promise made by the council.

That may be the avenue favoured by the right wing and its media backers but such a move was decisively rejected by the 47 councillors.

Lewisham - relying on social enterprise

Clive Heemskerck

All councils borrow as part of their normal activity, and on much worse terms than those achieved by the Liverpool 47. While Liverpool council was fighting Thatcher's government for more resources for council house building, the 'moderate' Labour councillors in Lewisham, south London were contracting out their responsibilities.

In 1986 they made a deal with Hyde Housing Association to build and redevelop properties on the old St John's hospital site. Hyde borrowed £13.5 million, on a 50 year index-linked loan, and leased the 148 homes to Lewisham council for 20 years, with the rents collected to be used to make repayments on the loan.

Many details of the 1986 deal are still kept by the present Lewisham Labour councillors in secret 'part two' papers not available to the public. But the bottom line was that Lewisham council would be liable for St John's debts if Hyde refused to meet the loan repayments after the leases expired in December 2006.

And that's what happened. The outstanding balance on the original loan of £13.5 million in 1986 had become £28 million by 2006,



Ian Page

even though Hyde had collected £37.8m (in 2006 prices) from Lewisham council over 20 years to meet its annual loan repayments! Lewisham's Labour executive mayor authorised council officers to borrow the money to meet the debts, without a full council vote.

As Ian Page and Chris Flood, then Socialist Party councillors in Lewisham, said when this came to light in 2006, at least it showed that councils can borrow money when they are forced to! But our job is to force them to spend it on council services rather than their 'social enterprise' or private business friends.

Review

Single and video: ill Manors by Plan B

Michael Wrack

The new single, and video, ill Manors, by rapper Plan B is conceived as a warning shout from the disenfranchised inner cities to middle England.

The video intercuts staged scenes of angry, violent youths in urban surroundings with real footage from last summer's riots. The lyrics mention the riots and suggests some reasons for the disturbances:

"Don't bloody give me that, I'll lose my temper

Who closed down the community centre?

I killed time there, used to be a member

What will I do now 'til September?"

No doubt aware of the risk of being accused of condoning the riots Plan B released a statement, explaining that the song aims to reignite the discussion around the riots, which was swept under the carpet without addressing the underlying issues.

He talks of "a very public prejudice towards the underclass." Much media focus is on Plan B's anger at the accepted use of the word 'chav' - ill Manors mentions the most frequently used acronym "Council Housed And Violent".

The statement explains: "These



Plan B - Ben Drew photo planbnews.com

kids are ridiculed in the press as they aren't as educated as others, because they talk and dress in a certain way... that makes them feel alienated. I know because I felt it myself growing up... They don't care about society because society has made it very clear that it doesn't care about them."

Coming out of East London's grime scene, Plan B is now bringing the discussion to a much wider audience than other artists could.

ill Manors raises important questions but stops short of offering any concrete answers.

We may get a fuller picture when Plan B's film, also called ill Manors, is released in May, but he's coming from the right place:

"We've had it with you politicians - you bloody rich kids never listen

There's no such thing as broken Britain - we're just bloody broke in Britain

What needs fixing is the system - not shop windows down in Brixton

Riots on the television - you can't put us all in prison!"

•Watch the video: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s8GvLKTsTuI&ob=av2e>

Smear campaign on Hillsborough?

John Cosgrove

Football rivalry is common in Liverpool between Liverpool and Everton supporters.

But fans stand shoulder to shoulder on the Hillsborough disaster of 1989. So recent "revelations" on Hillsborough have been greeted with anger.

A leaked document says that the then chief constable Sir Kenneth Oxford told Margaret Thatcher's aide, within days of Hillsborough, that the main cause of the tragedy that cost 96 lives was that Liverpool fans were "drunk" and "ticketless." He hadn't attended the game nor did he carry out any investigation in the days that followed.

These were lies and factually incorrect comments. The inquiry found the disaster's major cause was South Yorkshire Police's failings

in crowd control. The media in the past tried to shift the blame from poor policing to the fans. As the inquiry found that Liverpool fans were not to blame for what happened, who was?

No individual has ever been named as having a responsibility or duty of care.

The panel from the inquiry sifted through over 400,000 government documents on Hillsborough and many are still to be examined. So Merseyside people wonder why our chief of police's feeling that it was Liverpool fans' faults has been leaked? An attempted smear campaign?

Prominent public figures will surely be named in the documents. So the one leak from 400,000 that blames the fans is publicised.

In 1989 we called for a labour movement inquiry to determine who really was to blame, and we are still determined to win justice for the 96.

Socialism Today

The Socialist Party's magazine March 2012 issue:

●Striking back in austerity Britain - Peter Taaffe writes

●Scotland's referendum on independence - Philip Stott assesses the situation

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Defend the right to protest!

The eleven year battle for justice for those detained by police on the May Day demonstration in 2001 has finally come to an end. The European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) ruled against the claim of many of those held, led by Socialist Party member Lois Austin, that their right to liberty had been infringed by the use of the police tactic of containment of protesters - 'kettling'.

Various campaign groups met on the day of the judgement to discuss the next steps in the fight to defend the right to protest. Plans were made to issue guidance to protesters on what evidence to gather of police behaviour when on protests and also to organise a public meeting involving campaigns and trade unions.

Lois was keen to point out that the arguments that the Socialist Party made at the time have been borne out by events since - the tragic death of Ian Tomlinson and revelations about agent provocateurs operating in the anti-fascist and environmental movements etc.

As demonstrations, protests and strikes against austerity become more common, there are even more horrific policing tactics in the pipeline. The Independent recently revealed that, in London, the use of rubber bullets has been authorised 22 times in the last year. Scotland Yard is also considering making



On one of the 2010 student protests photo Senan

water cannon and Taser stun guns more easily accessible for the police.

We say:

- Build a mass campaign in defence of civil and democratic rights! Defend the right to protest

- Scrap the anti-trade union laws, defend the right to strike

- Stop victimisation of protesters by the police and in the courts

- Repeal all the draconian 'anti-terror' legislation and stop new repressive powers

- For the election of judges and the right to trial by jury

- For the police to be under the control of, and accountable to, the communities they serve. For trade union rights for the police

Adding insult to injury

Like thousands of other young people, angry at the Con-Dem coalition's attacks on education, Alfie Meadows marched against fees and cuts in London on 9 December 2010.

All Alfie had wanted to do was to exercise his democratic right to protest against government proposals to treble tuition fees, which were voted through the House of Commons that same day.

But the philosophy student from Middlesex University was caught up, with thousands of others, in vicious police kettles. When a group tried to escape the kettling, he received an almost fatal blow from a police truncheon, which it was later discovered had caused bleeding on the brain. Alfie required emergency brain surgery, and could easily have died.

To add insult to very serious injury, Alfie has since been charged with violent disorder, and has been told he will have to go through court proceedings before his complaint against the police will be considered by the Independent Police Complaints Commission.

Alfie's experience is not unique. Not only were around 30 protestors treated for head injuries that day, cerebral palsy sufferer Jody McIntyre was filmed being thrown from his wheelchair and dragged along the ground by police. Yet not one police officer has suffered any recriminations for their actions.

The case of Alfie Meadows should serve as a warning to the student movement. We must expect the state to sometimes meet our protests with repression.

We must defend the right to protest and stand in solidarity with victims of police violence. Importantly, we must take stewarding of our demonstrations very seriously indeed, and do everything we can to ensure that demonstrators are safe, know their rights and are prepared for every eventuality.

Alfie's trial starts on 26 March.
Sam Morecroft, Sheffield Socialist Students

I regret the judgment from the European Court of Human Rights today which found against Lois Austin who took a case against the British state for their use of the kettling technique on demonstrations. I fully supported Lois in her campaign and joined her and her legal team last September during her initial hearing at the ECHR court in Strasbourg.

Lois was detained on the street with 3,000 others during the May Day demonstration in London in 2001. Lois was kept for over seven hours in the rain, with no access to food, water or even toilet facilities.

This tactic has been increasingly used in Britain in the last few years, and is part of a general increase in repressive tactics against protest movements. It is unfortunate that the court did not find against this tactic - although I note the three dissenting views - but the campaign against repressive measures against protest will continue. I call on the trade union movement to campaign to eradicate all repressive anti-democratic laws from the statute books.

Paul Murphy
Socialist Party Ireland MEP

This is a very disappointing judgement, we have campaigned for eleven years to defend the right to protest and stop the use of routine kettling tactics against protesters. We note three dissenting judgements, which question the use of detaining protesters in a supposedly democratic society.

The campaign for the right to protest will continue and will go hand in hand with the fight against cuts, wars and erosion of civil liberties and democratic rights. Today many more people have the same views as the anti-capitalist protesters had in 2001, as we have seen with the international Occupy movement. In Britain we face years of austerity - the campaign will go on.
Lois Austin



Stroud: Labour lets NHS down again

Chris Moore
Gloucestershire Socialist Party

Gloucestershire group Stroud Against the Cuts has recently had a campaign and legal success in slowing down the privatisation of the county's NHS through the transfer of 3,000 NHS staff and community services to a social enterprise or Community Interest Company.

Despite this policy having been introduced by the previous Labour government, the local Labour Party, ever keen to portray their party as defenders of the NHS, invited Shadow Health Secretary, Andy Burnham and Shadow Public Health Secretary, Diane Abbott to attend a local anti-cuts meeting discussing the issue.

Stroud Against the Cuts members were not so sure about the invitation, recording a split vote when

asked if their attendance was useful for the campaign. An article about the meeting in a local paper underlined the fact that most people find it hard to tell the difference between the coalition government and Labour.

Under the headline 'Labour big guns back NHS protest' the name of Andy Burnham appeared below a photo of Health Secretary Andrew Lansley - most people never noticed.

Despite the build-up and billing, the 'big guns' fired blanks, failing to turn up for the meeting. It was left to a Socialist Party member to remind the audience that to be effective you have to know which way the big guns are pointing.

Private Finance Initiative (PFI) was used as an example. A scheme that meant buildings were built by private companies then leased back to the NHS at enormous profit, was introduced in the 1990s by

a Tory government, with Labour opposing it as 'backdoor privatisation'.

Yet when in government Labour massively expanded PFI. It shows that anyone believing Labour's promises to defend the NHS, such as their opposition to the Health and Social Care Bill, are likely to end up victims of what some may claim is 'friendly fire'.

If Labour really wanted to defend the NHS it could call on all council's under its control to call a referendum on the future transfer of NHS services to social enterprise and commit to stopping all forms of NHS privatisation, by supporting a national demonstration and coordinated industrial action, and taking all services already transferred to social enterprise and PFI back into public ownership.

But this is virtually impossible because just like its MPs are mistaken for Tories, so are its policies.



photo Dave Carr

STOP THE NHS SELL-OFF

National demo now!

Jim Thomson
South West Socialist Party

Devon county council (DCC) and Devon NHS are putting children's services out to tender. Two private companies, Virgin Health and Serco, are in the lead to win the contract.

This proposed privatisation - worth £130 million over three years - is the largest of its kind. Children's services provide care for the most vulnerable, providing support for children with disabilities and mental illness and coordinating respite and palliative care. It is outrageous that this care could be placed in the hands of private companies whose sole aim is to make more profit.

New Labour in government created the legislation which means that DCC and Devon NHS can dangerously open up services to the private sector. Now the Con-Dems want to finish off the NHS as a public service in England though the Health and Social Care Bill.

Massive cuts in benefits, education and council services are already hitting communities hard. Combined with tax hikes and food and fuel price rises, we are being squeezed. Meanwhile the richest

1,000 people in Britain increased their wealth by an average of £60 million in 2010. There is no shortage of money!

The capitalists and their political cronies hope to ride through the economic crisis by making more wealth at the expense of public services. We should see privatisation, like that in Devon, for what it is: a transfer of public money to the pockets of the super-rich.

But, even with the health bill written into law, we can still beat it. The poll tax was defeated, after it was introduced, through a campaign of mass non-payment led by the Socialist Party's predecessor, Militant.

Health unions should organise protests and strike action to save our NHS, starting with a national week-end demo.

Workers, families and communities also need a political alternative. Socialists welcome the 150 doctors and health workers who are considering standing in the next general election in opposition to the health bill.

However, any electoral alternative should oppose all cuts and privatisation. The Socialist Party is part of the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC), which is standing candidates in local government and London Assembly elections on 3 May.



photo Paul Mattsson

'Cameron's poll tax'

Medical students from Cardiff University, supported by Cardiff Against the Cuts, staged a mock funeral for the NHS in Cardiff.

The funeral was organised by Joe Rylands who said how the Health and Social Care Bill would open up the NHS for private sector companies.

I spoke to give support from Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition council election candidates.

A lone trumpeter played the funeral march which was interspersed with chants saying the NHS was not for sale. This was witnessed by hundreds of Welsh and French Rugby fans on their way to the Six Nations game, many of whom voiced their support.

The NHS could well be the poll tax of this government as Ross Saunders reminded all present: "The hated poll tax was on the statute books for three years before it was thrown out along with Thatcher as prime minister."

David Hamblin

Support anti-cuts candidates

What we stand for

The Socialist Party fights for socialism - a democratic society run for the needs of all and not the profits of a few. We also oppose every cut, fighting in our day-to-day campaigning for every possible improvement for working class people. The organised working class has the potential power to stop the cuts and transform society.

As capitalism dominates the globe, the struggle for genuine socialism must be international. The Socialist Party is part of the Committee for a Workers' International (CWI), a socialist international that organises in over 40 countries.

Our demands include:
PUBLIC SERVICES

- No to ALL cuts in jobs, public services and benefits. Defend our pensions.
- No to privatisation and the Private Finance Initiative (PFI). Renationalise all privatised utilities and services, with compensation paid only on the basis of proven need.
- Fully fund all services and run them under accountable, democratic committees that include representatives of service workers and users.
- Free, publicly run, good quality education,

available to all at any age. Abolish university tuition fees now and introduce a living grant. No to academies and 'Free schools'!

- A socialist NHS to provide for everyone's health needs - free at the point of use and under democratic control. Kick out private contractors!
- Keep council housing publicly owned. For a massive building programme of publicly owned housing, on an environmentally sustainable basis, to provide good quality homes with low rents.

WORK AND INCOME

- Trade union struggle to increase the minimum wage to £8 an hour without exemptions as an immediate step towards £10 an hour. For an annual increase in the minimum wage linked to average earnings.
- All workers, including part-timers, temps, casual and migrant workers to have trade union rates of pay, employment protection, and sickness and holiday rights from day one of employment.
- An immediate 50% increase in the state retirement pension, as a step towards a living pension.
- Reject 'Workfare'. For the right to decent benefits, education, training, or a job, without compulsion.
- Scrap the anti-trade union laws! For fighting

trade unions, democratically controlled by their members. Full-time union officials to be regularly elected and receive no more than a worker's wage. Support the National Shop Stewards Network.

- A maximum 35-hour week with no loss of pay.

ENVIRONMENT

- Major research and investment into replacing fossil fuels with renewable energy and into ending the problems of early obsolescence and unrecycled waste.
- Public ownership of the energy generating industries. No to nuclear power. No to Trident.
- A democratically planned, low fare, publicly-owned transport system, as part of an overall plan against environmental pollution.

RIGHTS

- Oppose discrimination on the grounds of race, sex, disability, sexuality, age, and all other forms of prejudice.
- Repeal all laws that trample over civil liberties. For the right to protest! End police harassment.
- Defend abortion rights. For a woman's right to choose when and whether to have children.
- For the right to asylum. No to racist immigration laws.

NEW WORKERS' PARTY

- For a new mass workers' party drawing together workers, young people and activists from workplace, community, environmental and anti-war campaigns, to provide a fighting, political alternative to the pro-big business parties.
- Trade unions to disaffiliate from the Labour Party now and aid the building of a new workers' party! Support the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition as an important step towards this.

SOCIALISM AND INTERNATIONALISM

- No to imperialist wars and occupations. Withdraw the troops immediately from Afghanistan!
- Tax the super-rich! For a socialist government to take into public ownership the top 150 companies and the banking system that dominate the British economy, and run them under democratic working class control and management. Compensation to be paid only on the basis of proven need.
- A democratic socialist plan of production based on the interests of the overwhelming majority of people, and in a way that safeguards the environment.
- No to the bosses' neoliberal European Union! For a socialist Europe and a socialist world!