



Battle against austerity continues

SOLIDARITY WITH GREEK WORKERS

image not available

Voters - not only in Greece but also in the recent French presidential elections, the German regional elections, in Italy's local elections and indeed in the recent elections in the UK - have punished the ruling parties for making the working and middle classes pay for the failure of the greedy capitalist banks and the capitalist profit system as a whole.

But capitalist austerity has not only been given a huge thumbs' down in the political arena. Throughout Europe there have been massive workers' strikes and protests movements.

In Spain, a general strike in March has recently been followed by mass protests in the country's cities by the Indignados movement. In Greece there has been a succession of general strikes over the last two years.

The article right was written by Xekinima reporters (the Socialist Party's counterpart in Greece) and by members of the Committee for a Workers' International (CWI - the socialist international organisation to which the Socialist Party is affiliated).

Following the 6 May election earthquake in Greece, which saw a hammering of the pro-austerity parties and a huge rejection of the 'Troika' (European Union, the European Central Bank and the International Monetary Fund), the main parties failed to form a coalition government.

Attempts by the Greek president to oversee a 'national unity' government or to form a 'government of technocrats' also failed. New elections will be held no later than 17 June.

The supporters of Xekinima strongly supported the decision by the left-wing party Syriza to refuse to join any government with pro-austerity parties, such as Pasok, the former social democratic party, and the right-wing New Democracy.

Syriza (Coalition of the Radical Left) leapt from 4.6% to 16.78% (52 seats), to become the second largest party in the last elections, largely on the basis of its anti-cuts policies and call for a united left government.

Over the following week, the main political parties desperately tried to find a way to avoid new elections. The Greek ruling class is disorientated. Their traditional political tools of support, New Democracy and Pasok, saw their vote dramatically fall.

This was the result of years of their austerity measures that led to mass poverty and homelessness, a steep fall in living standards and rising suicides. By the end of 2012, GDP (total output) is predicted to contract by 20% (since 2008) and unemployment to rise by 25%.

Leaders of New Democracy and

Pasok, and most of the media, hypocritically blame Syriza for making the country return to elections. But Syriza's leader, Alexis Tsipras, correctly rejected their arguments, saying the political establishment wanted Syriza to become their "partner in crime" in making new cuts.

The aversion of the main party leaders to democratic elections is mainly because Syriza is tipped to become the largest party, according to opinion polls, winning anywhere between 20.5% to 28%. Syriza is the only party growing in the polls, while others are falling. New Democracy is projected to win 18.1% of a new vote and Pasok 12.2%, their lowest ratings in nearly 40 years. This reflects the huge popularity of Syriza's public opposition to yet more austerity cuts.

(continued on page 9)

the **Socialist**

The paper of the Socialist Party. Issue 718.

The Socialist, PO Box 24697, London E11 1YD Registered as a newspaper at the Post Office. Published by Socialist Publications, printed by Newsfax International. ISSN 1366-9621

The Queen's
Speech

what readers thought

This year's Queen's Speech has been dismissed by press commentators as 'lacking in substance'. But that doesn't mean it doesn't contain some more poison for workers. On this page readers of the Socialist tell us what they thought.

More attacks on workers and their rights

Paul Gerrard

The coalition government want to roll back employees' rights, just like they have rolled back public sector workers' pay. A new Bill proposed in the Queen's speech, The Enterprise and Regulatory Reform Bill, will increase the period of employment required, from one year to two, before you can take a case, such as unfair dismissal, to tribunal.

Additionally, in future all tribunal cases will have to be referred first to the arbitration organisation, Acas. Acas' resources are already very stretched and, given the government's deficit-slashing agenda, there is unlikely to be any investment in Acas to deal with this additional workload.

The government claims that they must take action to halt the supposedly "astronomical" rise in tribunal claims. In fact employment tribunal claims have levelled off

recently. This is not likely to be due to increased worker satisfaction or a decline in bullying but more likely frustration with a long-winded and expensive process which usually doesn't get you your job back.

Behind the scenes

And who is driving this agenda? None other than Adrian Beecroft, a £100 million venture capitalist. Beecroft has given £530,000 to Tory funds under David Cameron and in return he was asked to produce a report on cutting employee rights as a way to 'boost growth'.

A few Lib Dems squealed and the report has never been published but the Queen's Speech has Beecroft's finger-marks all over it. Beecroft is chair of Dawn Capital, whose portfolio includes Wonga.com, which offers short-term loans at scandalous rates of interest up to several thousand per cent. These are the people Cameron listens to.

Watch out for the bogeyman

Nial Vivian

Terrorism, serious crime, the bogeyman – all of these would justify the state apparatus leafing through your mail and analysing everything you've read, as part of legislation outlined in the Queen's speech.

Knowledge that you've been in contact with the bogeyman him/herself is all they need to get a warrant. A warrant to read your mail, to poke around in your private life and find out one of a million things that could potentially be used as leverage to have you confess to all manner of discrepancies.

To justify such measures while at the same time professing to protect free speech is an insult. If we are to be watched at all turns, to fear for

who may be watching us at every corner, how can we be expected to freely speak our minds? Where does criticism, a fundamental part of learning, get a look in? The answer may be as sinister as you would imagine.

Whether giving up government secrets, speaking out against the regime or planning action to stop workplace discrimination, they may well be watching you soon. Recently protesters staged an occupation of Menwith Hill, the largest US spy base outside the homeland and central to plans to further the observation of communication in Britain.

This Draft Communications Bill makes the campaign to defend our democratic rights an urgent part of the fight against austerity.

Family friendly measures?

The Families Bill that was proposed in the Queen's speech may look like a good idea to those outside the Special Educational Needs (SEN) community and can be seen as freedom from bureaucratically controlled council departments.

However all it means is a continuation of privatisation and cuts to already massively overstretched social services departments.

As a father, single parent and car-

What is needed is full public funding for education, the NHS, social services and other departments to end the profit motive and with democratic control so that parents, carers, service users and staff can together plan the best provision possible

er of two special needs kids and one adult, I can see the consequences this could entail for me and the other SEN families that I know.

I was told that if I had direct payments, I could have more respite as I could negotiate with the carer and



photo Socialist Party

pay them less giving me more hours. So in effect parents and people in need of care will have to make their own cuts. If the budget provided is not increased either, there will be less and less respite making life intolerable for families with SEN children. They say managing budgets will be optional but with the cuts to council services they will not have the staff to do it.

This system is supposed to be in place in our schools already, but owing to a lack of staff and funding many children slip through the net or those who do need support are not given support as there is no adequate funding available. With the current ongoing cuts in education,

this is likely to be just words.

It is likely that children with less noticeable special needs, such as some cases of autism, will be out of the category altogether therefore not receiving any help at all and ending up being excluded from some mainstream schools, especially academies.

What is needed is full public funding for education, the NHS, social services and other departments to end the profit motive and with democratic control so that parents, carers, service users and staff can together plan the best provision possible.

John Gillman
Reading Socialist Party

Noticeable by its absence: same sex marriage

Greg Randall

US President Barak Obama announced his support for same-sex marriage in a TV interview on 9 May. That same day in Britain marriage equality was conspicuously absent from legislative plans set out in the Queen's Speech, despite David Cameron's avowed support.

Obama previously avoided committing himself on the issue and when he did come out in favour he did so very cautiously. Nevertheless, is this a sign of courage, coming only a day after voters in North Carolina voted to ban same-sex marriage in the state's constitution? Not really.

Most US voters sufficiently opposed to 'gay marriage' for it to be a determining factor when choosing candidates already back Obama's Republican Party opponents due to their generally reactionary stance.

Voters wanting a change in the law would probably back Obama anyway or abstain in disgust at his big business policies. He is trying to shore up his base and campaign funding.

It is claimed that gay men and lesbians among Obama's super-wealthy financial backers influenced him, but they are unlikely to push for measures that would guarantee jobs and improve conditions for millions of workers, including lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) workers.



Socialist Party members on Leeds Pride 2011 photo Leeds Socialist Party

Socialists support marriage equality as an important democratic right. This should go with the right to a job and decent standard of living in your married (or unmarried) life. The capitalist system cannot provide such rights.

Institution

Marriage should not be used to privatise the basic functions of society by getting family members to work as unpaid carers when workers are disabled, fall ill or reach old age. This is the agenda behind Cameron's support for same-sex marriage. He wants to "strengthen the institution of marriage" - that is, for families and partners to fill in for the services he is cutting.

The absence of marriage equal-

ity in the government's programme has been attributed to pressure put on Cameron by his right-wing backbenchers.

Many Tories yearn for the open homophobia of the Thatcher years. They want to sow division in society and scapegoat minorities in the hope of diverting opposition to austerity. Their plan is to pull Cameron even further to the right in the hope of splintering the coalition with the Lib Dems.

No politician representing big business can be relied on by LGBT communities. They may say they support us but they all dance to the tune of the ruling class in the end. We have to fight against prejudice and the system that encourages it if we are to win and guarantee liberation.

More than just good friends

Rebekah Brooks reveals Murdoch's reach into the heart of government

Ben Norman

Many people will have felt a sense of relief when it was announced that Rebekah Brooks, former editor of the News of the World (NoTW) and chief executive of News International, is to face charges of perverting the course of justice. Brooks was arrested in July following one of the three police investigations connected to phone hacking.

But the buck doesn't stop with Brooks. Her testimony at the Leveson Inquiry drags both David Cameron and George Osborne into the political storm as the links between Rupert Murdoch's media empire and the Tory party are found to extend into the heart of government. Brooks was questioned for five hours about her relationship with Cameron and senior Tory and New Labour politicians.

Brooks is known to be a family friend of Cameron, to the extent that when she was fired from her position at News International the Prime Minister sent her text messages of support, bemoaning that he could not show public loyalty towards her. How many workers got this treatment when their jobs were cut?

Political allegiances

Brooks' testimony made it clear that she has been in regular contact with Cameron throughout his time as Tory leader. She also claimed to have been instrumental in the deci-



Cameron is good friends with Brooks and her husband Charlie

sion to switch the political support of The Sun from New Labour to the Tories just before the 2010 general election.

Osborne has also been put under increased pressure after it emerged that both Brooks and Andy Coulson were invited to the chancellor's official residence while News International executives were drawing up proposals for the takeover of BSkyB.

At the time Coulson was serving as Cameron's director of communications following his sacking from the NoTW in 2007 over phone hacking.

Tory culture secretary Jeremy Hunt is already preparing to appear before the Inquiry to face accusa-

tions that he acted as a cheerleader for Murdoch's bid while he was supposed to be impartially presiding over the takeover process.

If Osborne is also forced to appear he can expect to be questioned on Brooks' claim that she was tipped off during her visit to his residence that Hunt would make "extremely helpful" statements during the bid process.

The phone hacking scandal has so fully exposed the corruption within the coalition that it is amazing so few members of it have been forced to resign. If the Labour Party was an opposition worthy of the name, the government could be on its way out.

JP Morgan: banksters at it again

Ross Saunders

The financial sector is back in the news as it emerged that cowboy investors at JP Morgan's London office have lost \$2 billion (£1.2 billion), leading to a run on shares which swept \$19 billion off the bank's market value in just two days.

JP Morgan had attempted to insulate itself from the economic crisis still contaminating the world economy by making "hedge" bets to try and offset losses on other investments, but the strategy backfired spectacularly on the bank.

There is no hiding from crisis-ridden capitalism, which has shown it has learnt nothing from the last five years of debt-fuelled disaster. Bankers who could do no wrong just a few weeks ago are now being asked to fall on their swords.

Ina Drew, the bank's chief investment officer, has resigned, and three other high-profile traders could go, including Bruno Iksil, nicknamed "the whale" because of the huge gambles he made. Even chief executive Jamie Dimon is in the firing line, with investors demanding he step down as chairman.

Shed no tears for Dimon, Drew, Iksil and the others, though. They have been well paid for their incompetence: pay at JP Morgan increased by a grotesque 21% last year - in the



\$19 billion was wiped off JP Morgan's market value in two days

middle of a recession! Drew will collect a £32 million payoff - more than two years' salary - as she exits.

JP Morgan is attempting to write off the calamity as the result of the mistakes of a few individuals, but the record shows a different picture.

In 2010 JP Morgan was given a record-breaking £33.3 million fine by the Financial Services Authority for risking clients' money on its own investments. JP Morgan is one of 16 banks under investigation for having engaged in speculative activity that pushed Greece into bankruptcy.

With these crimes in the spotlight, it's not surprising that calls are growing for these banksters to be reined in,

but reforms like the Volcker rule and the Dodd-Frank Act in the US, and the recommendations of the Vickers Report in Britain, won't remove these people from their positions of power and won't solve the fundamental problems in capitalism.

£360 trillion of Europe's wealth is pumped into derivatives - money which doesn't satisfy any real human needs.

The only way to stop irresponsible cowboys from damaging our economy further is to take the running of it out of their hands, nationalise the banks and the financial system and for workers to run them as part of a democratically-planned economy.

Them...



Gas Mk 4.4 million

Centrica, the company that owns formerly nationalised British Gas, has warned that rising bills will continue. Household energy bills could rise by as much as £100 over the next 18 months according to Centrica's chief executive, Sam Laidlaw. He'll be cushioned from this though - it recently emerged that Laidlaw gets a £680 discount from his own Centrica bill - just part of his £4.4 million salary, bonuses and benefits!

But bosses at Centrica shouldn't get too comfy - the company recently became the latest victim of the 'shareholder spring' when 12% of shareholders refused to endorse its pay and bonuses policy.

rise, the value of shares has reduced by an average of 6.6%.

Value for money

One of the reasons that Remploy factories have to be closed, we were told, is that they're just too expensive. £25,000 is far too much to be spending getting a disabled person into work.

And yet the government's flagship scheme the Regional Jobs Fund (RJF) could cost £200,000 per job created! What could the difference be? That the RJF is designed to create only private sector jobs perhaps?

Friends in high places

After the riots last August the government insisted that they were nothing to do with poverty and cuts. No, instead bad parenting and the breakdown of the family was to blame. It seems that this view doesn't only let them and their destruction of public services off the hook but also opens up a whole load of profit to some of their Eton chums.

Octavius Black, contemporary of Cameron at Eton and friend and neighbour of education secretary Michael Gove, has been awarded a contract for his company Parent Gym to provide parenting classes as part of a trial scheme the government is rolling out.

Mr Corrupt

Bristol was the only city to vote yes to having an elected mayor when ten areas held referendums on 3 May. One keen candidate is already making preparations - by legally changing his name to Mr Corrupt Self-serving Lying B'stard. We think he needs something that will stand out more from the candidates of the mainstream parties.

Rich statistics

0.003% of the adult population own £414 billion - more than one third of British GDP

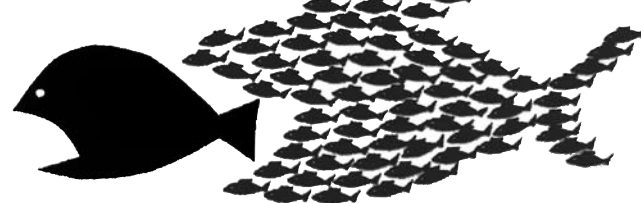
77% of the budget deficit is being reduced by spending cuts, only 23% by tax increases

More than 50% of the tax increases are made up of the VAT rise

The increase in wealth of the richest 1,000 people in Britain has been £315 billion in the last 15 years

And don't forget the £750 billion sitting idle in the banks of big business that could be used to fund a massive scheme of public works and job creation

...& Us



What we heard

The following is a brief summary of my case work this week:

An extremely ill and alcoholic ex-serviceman was found dead at home. The NHS refused to treat his cancer unless he gave up alcohol but couldn't offer him treatment for his post traumatic stress disorder and alcoholism. He killed himself.

A single parent with severe mental health problems was afraid of being found 'fit for work', for the third time - she tried to kill herself by setting fire to her home.

She was admitted to the local psychiatric unit only after they discharged her severely mentally-ill daughter from the same unit.

A 65 year-old man who has worked on the building sites since he was a youth had a massive stroke and is not expected to live - he was terrified of the poverty of retirement.

A mum and dad and their three children are 'living' with her parents in a one-bedroom flat - they were deemed to have made themselves "intentionally homeless" without even being interviewed - the lies of the bigoted landlord were believed.

Tomorrow is another busy day, my head hurts from the injustice of it all. We have to organise to change the world. That's why I am a member of the Socialist Party, please get involved.

Wally Kennedy



Join the fightback! Join the Socialists!

www.socialistparty.org.uk • Phone 020 8988 8777 • Text 07761 818206

Workers demand pensions battle is stepped up

Unison members want to strike



Unison members on 30 November photo Paul Mattsson

A Unison shop steward

Every Unison member at my workplace came out on strike on 30 November. They are all women workers on low pay and most of them had never taken strike action before. They were nervous about their decision but they felt that with the attacks on their pensions they had no choice and wanted to show solidarity with other striking workers.

The disappointment of these workers following 30 November, caused by the Unison leadership's decision to do a deal with the government with no consultation or communication with their members, was painful to watch. It was difficult to know how to deal with it, but we continued to hold meetings to discuss the situation and keep everyone informed.

We were not involved in the strike on 10 May, but we had a meeting on that day. Using facts, figures and general information gathered from

recent editions of the Socialist we discussed why it was important to fight the government's attacks. We compared the lifestyles of the rich and poor in this country. I was also able to pass on an update of the strike activity from Socialist Party members on the picket lines.

Support other workers

We discussed how we could support workers taking action in other unions and send a message to Unison that we are not happy with their leadership. There was general agreement that we should vote to reject the proposals in the May ballot of Unison members because nothing had changed. We were still being asked to work longer, pay more and get less at the end.

We decided to continue to put pressure on Unison's leadership by sending a letter expressing our dissatisfaction with the way we were being represented.

The discussion turned into one

about politics in general and the nature of the three main political parties. The idea was expressed that Labour is no longer any different to the other parties, in which case what is the answer?

We talked about the problems of capitalism and how an alternative socialist society would work and two members took away copies of the Socialist.

We left the meeting feeling more informed and knowing that we could contribute in other ways to the struggle until we were in a position to join workers in taking action. We may not have been on strike on 10 May but we were still involved in the fightback!

Unison's local government Service Group Executive (SGE) is meeting to discuss pensions on 31 May. Unison members should contact their rep on the SGE to tell them what you think.

Pensions, pay and Tescos

A Tesco worker

As public sector workers fight to defend their pensions by inspiring taking strike action, one private sector employer has managed to wave through pension changes without so much as a whimper from the union.

Tesco's recent pension changes mean that more than 170,000 staff will have to work up to two years longer to qualify for their full pension. New staff who are yet to join the pension scheme can justly ask: "Is the pension scheme really worth it?"

Tesco, the UK's biggest private sector employer, also plans to save money by increasing staff pensions in line with the consumer price index (CPI) instead of the retail price index (RPI). This not only affects future service but will leave some workers thousands of pounds worse off during their retirement.

Tesco boasts that it was one of only four FTSE 100 companies that still has a defined benefit arrangement in place. But this argument is as hollow as arguments about pub-

lic sector pensions being better than private schemes. It simply constitutes a race to the bottom.

The supermarket chain is proposing to increase by two years - from 65 to up to 67 - the age at which a full pension is paid. This affects pensions built up after 1 June 2012. Tesco have said this does not mean staff will have to retire up to two years later - the normal retirement age remains 65, and staff can still apply to retire any time after 55. But in reality few Tesco workers, on relatively low-paid wages, will be able to retire 'early'.

Insulting

Most insultingly of all, one of the reasons given for the pension changes, is the rise of the average life expectancy to 80 plus. I doubt that the life expectancy of the poorer communities in which most Tesco workers live is this high.

Most Tesco staff can now only look forward to a few years of retirement with less to provide for themselves.

As if this wasn't a big enough blow for any new staff in Tesco, a recent

development over wages takes the biscuit. A spate of new stores opened in 2011, particularly in South Wales. New starters at these stores started on a basic £6.65 hourly rate and were told on numerous occasions that this would rise to £7.00 per hour after six months.

When the six month anniversary hit, the wage rise didn't occur. Staff were told they wouldn't get it until a year's service! The pathetic reason given was that no new stores opened between 2007, when the change from six months to a year occurred, and 2011. Thus the new stores weren't aware of the change and told new starters false information.

This bombshell for new starters is being challenged and fought at a local level in conjunction with the union, Usdaw.

This shows the dire need for a more militant Usdaw leadership which is prepared to fight for its members and stop Tesco walking all over us. The fight is there in the workforce with members regularly professing a desire to strike. We just wish we could be out there with the public sector workers, fighting for better pensions too.

Wales TUC Oppose all cuts!

Ronnie Job

This government's programme of unrelenting austerity and cuts is already causing so much misery as the cull of jobs continues, services are destroyed and benefits are stolen. Yet the majority of cuts are still to come. Some commentators think that as little as only 10% of the planned cuts have been carried out.

But on 10 May, 400,000 striking public sector workers in PCS, UCU, Unite, RMT and Nipsa sent a warning to the government. More and more trade unionists are looking to coordinate their actions and to march and strike together.

Therefore this year's Wales TUC conference takes place at a crucial point. This is reflected in the motions that have been submitted.

Regional pay

Maybe thinking they had already won on pensions, the government has now revealed the next phase of their attacks on public sector workers and the services they provide, with their proposals on regional pay.

Wales is a low-wage economy - these proposals threaten to take thousands of pounds out of the pockets of Welsh public sector workers and billions out of the Welsh economy.

Nearly a quarter of the policy motions submitted are on regional pay. On regional pay and

pensions there is the opportunity to re-build a coalition of trade unions on the scale of the one that organised the strike action on 30 November.

Perhaps no other cut demonstrates the cruel nature of the government programme than the planned closure of seven of the nine Remploy factories in Wales, (36 across the UK). Remploy workers deserve and need the support of all trade unionists as the consultation period draws to an end.

Almost every motion on the agenda deals with organising to fight cuts and privatisation of public services. All motions rightly attack the Tory/Liberal Democrat coalition for austerity. But this conference can't afford to let the link between some trade unions and Labour hamper the effectiveness of the Wales TUC in opposing cuts when they are passed on by a Labour Welsh government or Labour councils.

Health boards are facing having to make savings of 5% a year for the next three years, yet there is no criticism of the Assembly for the threat to health services that these cuts pose.

There are now majority Labour councils across Wales - will they pass on the cuts by attacking the terms and conditions of their workforces and cutting services?

Trade unionists in Wales need to send a clear message from this conference that we will oppose all cuts, no matter what party implements them.



On a picket line in Swansea on 10 May photo Socialist Party Wales

Interview

Why prison officers joined the protests

On 10 May, members of the POA prison workers' union took part in protest meetings outside prisons against pension cuts.

The POA's assistant general secretary, Joe Simpson, spoke to the Socialist about the action.

How many prison officers marched out on 10 May and why?

We had 80% of public sector prisons in England and Wales out holding protest meetings by 9am and we had all the prisons in Scotland out by then as well. It was quite a big success for us.

The contributions increase - we're not happy about that, CPI/RPI [the switch to the usually lower Consumer Prices Increase from the Retail Price Index measure of inflation] - we're not happy about that either, but the main issue was SPA/NPA [state pension age/normal pension age] - our members were absolutely incensed and up in arms over it. They don't want to work until they are 68.

This is just the start and we will

not rule anything out in our campaign to resolve the matter of NPA/SPA for our members.

What was management's response to the walkout?

Governors threatened our members with dismissal. Some called the police to arrest some of our members, which the police refused to do. Our members were met with bullying and intimidation by some managers.

Nationally we were told that we had to go back to work, that the rallies were illegal, and that they would seek an injunction. In fact, they sent a letter before the action.

At 1.30pm, with all the press coverage that we'd had, we decided 'let's call it off', ready for another

day. So this is not the end of the action from the POA. This is just the beginning.

Will the POA back down under the threat of legal action?

Absolutely not. We believe that this campaign's right, our members protest on 10 May was just. It's an unjust law. We call upon the trade union movement as a whole to get these anti-trade union laws repealed and the only way to do that is by mass action.

We are joining the call to the TUC for a general strike. Workers are being punished on a daily basis for something that was beyond their control.

Banks go out and do all this, yet they've still got no restrictions on the banking sector. Everybody in the top jobs have been given massive pay rewards and bonuses. Then all of a sudden, we see ordinary workers having pay freezes, taking a drop in their living standards because they're having to pay more for their pensions, having to work longer.

It's now time that workers say 'enough's enough'. We've seen it in Greece, we've seen it in Spain, we've seen it in France. It's sending a shockwave as everybody's now saying 'no' to austerity. We need to do the same in Britain.

Are there other issues that prison officers are angry about that influenced the protests?

The future of prisons as a whole - the mass privatisation that the Tories have come up with. We will



Joe Simpson speaking at Socialism 2011 photo Senan

always be against private money in prisons because prisons shouldn't be run for profit. We've always said that if it's the state's responsibility to imprison its citizens then it's the state's responsibility to rehabilitate them.

Prisons are an expensive commodity now. They want to give it out and sell that part of the justice system to private sector companies. This year we've seen eight prisons up for privatisation. The next round will come and they've been talking anywhere between ten and 25. Then all the big companies will be coming over from America.

So is political representation important in fighting cuts and privatisation?

We saw the ilk of the Labour Party.

When it was in opposition, it said they were going to return all private prisons back to the public sector. When it got into power, it increased the amount of private prisons. It had more private prisons than the Tories ever dreamt of. So the Labour Party is no friend whatsoever to the POA and never will be.

I was proud to stand in the GLA [Greater London Assembly] elections on the list for the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition [TUSC]. We didn't get in, but I think we've got to take TUSC forward nationally with trade unions backing it.

Why do some trade unions keep insisting on giving money to Labour, when they've got an alternative called TUSC. It's in its infancy - get behind it, push it and let's make it into a viable political entity.



Wormwood Scrubs on 10 May photo K Dickinson

10 May sees united strike - but teacher unions shirk their responsibilities

Martin Powell-Davies

NUT executive member

The 10 May public sector strike sent a clear message to ministers that this fight against pension robbery is far from over. National Union of Teachers (NUT) members were not on strike, but some joined a lobby of the Department for Education (DfE) in Westminster after work.

The pay cuts have started - as the Con-Dems phase in higher pension payments - but have yet to be imposed in full. The most hated proposal - to raise pension ages to 68 or more - won't be implemented until 2015. We can still force this divided coalition to retreat - and we must.

The Easter 2012 NUT conference voted against action on 10 May, with some delegates raising concerns about exam preparation, but voted clearly for the aim of a further one-day strike before the end of June.

However, at the 10 May afternoon meeting of the NUT's national executive, I was in a minority of 16 who voted for strike action in June, with 24 against.

The NUT might not now be taking national strike action until October or November at the earliest, a whole year since most teachers took action.

The officers' recommendation did usefully propose that the NUT holds another national ballot for strike

and non-strike action next term on issues wider than pensions, such as local pay and working conditions. That action would hopefully be alongside the other main teaching union NASUWT.

The majority of the NUT national officers argued that it was worth waiting those five or more months in the hope of taking joint action with the NASUWT next term. Of course such joint action would be an important escalation of the campaign. However, we can't let unions who have been holding back from strike action dictate the pace of events.

It was clear from the discussions on the picket lines and rallies that many 10 May strikers had been hoping, and perhaps expecting, that the NUT would be joining them in further action in June. Many will be bitterly disappointed by the NUT executive's decision.

I have also received many angry responses from NUT members, including from teachers attending the lobby outside the DfE. When I spoke there, I stressed that the conference in Liverpool on 16 June now took on even greater importance.

That meeting, alongside the National Shop Stewards Network conference in London on 9 June, will be a vital forum. We will discuss how we maintain momentum in the pensions campaign despite the NUT executive decision, how we build support to win the new ballot



NUT's last national strike action was on 30 November 2011 photo Senan

of NUT members, and how we build a fighting union that is prepared to go out and convince members to take the national action that is vital

if we are to defeat the pensions robbery - and all the other attacks being thrown at us by this millionaires' government.

Local Associations for National Action Conference

Saturday 16 June, 11am - 3.30pm

The Quaker Meeting House, 22 School Lane, Liverpool L1 3BT

This event is our chance to plan how we are going to make sure teacher unions maintain the momentum of the pensions campaign - and escalate and extend our action to cover other issues too.

Conference delegates need to be elected by their Local Association - but visitors will be welcome too.

Contact: classroom.teacher@yahoo.co.uk



nationalshop stewardsnetwork

Sixth Annual Conference
Saturday 9 June
11am-4pm
Friends Meeting House
London NW1 2BJ

- All strike together to defend public sector pensions - like we did on N30!
- Defend national pay!
- Stop the Con-Dem cuts!
- Defend the NHS!
- Support the Remploy workers!
- Find out how the Sparks beat the Besna!
- Workers fight back in the private sector - Unilever... Stagecoach.... oil tanker drivers... MMP...

Book your place now!

www.shopstewards.net
info@shopstewards.net

The battle to defend pensions continues

What we think

No matter how much Con-Dem ministers tried to play down the public sector pension strike on 10 May (M10), they know that this dispute is not over - and neither are the crises faced by their increasingly unstable government. The battering they took at the ballot box on 3 May has been reinforced on the picket lines.

Up to 400,000 public sector workers in PCS, Unite, UCU, ISU border control union and Nipsa from Northern Ireland took official strike action against the government's attacks on public sector pensions. Already workers have had the first increased contribution taken out of their pay packets. On top of this they face working to 68, 70 for new starters, and then getting a reduced pension.

Weeks after the momentous N30 strike of over two million the right-wing union leaders attempted to derail the struggle by signing the government's Heads of Agreement. But M10 represents a crucial re-igniting of this protracted struggle.

The M10 strike was boosted by the fantastic unofficial walkout of the prison officers from the POA union for over seven hours. This involved all their Scottish members and 80% in England & Wales defying the anti-union laws and the ban on their union's right to strike.

There was also a massive Police Federation demonstration of over 35,000 police officers against police cuts. This, combined with doctors in the British Medical Association currently balloting their members on strike action against attacks to their pensions, is a big warning to the Con-Dems that they are increasingly isolated from the majority in society.

Right-wing leaders

Predictably this is lost on the right-wing union leaders and unfortunately on some left leaders as well. Scandalously, Unison's national officer for health, Christine McAnea informed the employers that no further industrial action would be taken by health workers in Unison because of the slim majority for rejection of the government's pension 'deal' on a 14% turnout.

McAnea has form on this, justifying signing the heads of agreement in December by saying: "We always knew this (N30) would be a damage limitation exercise". This is the cynical view of union bureaucrats weighed down by two decades of defeats and out of touch with the raging anger of their members - who are also in the middle of a four-year pay freeze.

Similarly, NUT members will be furious that their 'left' leadership has unfortunately seemingly lost its nerve by not



PCS members picketing in Leeds photo Iain Dalton

only being absent on 10 May but at its executive (NEC) meeting, which incredibly took place on the strike day, voting to rule out taking action in June.

NUT general secretary Christine Blower was heckled in the London M10 rally when PCS, UCU and Unite members justifiably asked: "Why aren't you on strike today?" As the government's austerity programme continues to bite, even left leaders who have played an important role in the dispute on J30 and N30, will not be able to rest on their laurels. The NUT Local Associations rank and file conference on 16 June is a vital step in pushing the union back on course (see page 5).

But the head of steam from M10 has to be maintained to ensure momentum isn't lost again. The upcoming PCS conference will discuss emergency motions calling for further coordinated strikes in June. We call for an immediate meeting of at least all the unions who took part in N30 to discuss a strike on that scale. This is entirely justified given the Unison vote and also GMB's likely rejection in health.

Considering the scale of the austerity agenda - 90% of the cuts are still to come and national pay could be scrapped in favour of regional or even local pay rates - it was no wonder that Bob Crow's call for a

A national TUC demonstration on a Saturday in London before the summer break to supplement the ongoing strike action would broaden the movement against the cuts and build support for a 24-hour general strike against austerity



Unite health workers outside St Thomas' hospital in London photo Paul Mattsson

Angry workers walk out across the country

In London, Westminster was a sea of pickets. 400 Unite health strikers and supporters marched across Westminster Bridge from St Thomas's hospital to attend a lunchtime rally. 700 strikers heard Mark Serwotka (PCS) and Len McCluskey (Unite). RMT leader Bob Crow was applauded when he said: "We need the entire trade union movement to link up with the community and all hit by austerity" he urged. He finished with another much applauded call for the TUC general council to call general strike action.

Outside central London, at the Hackney Benefit Centre Amore explained: "I'm retiring on 1 June with that fantastic, 'gold-plated' civil service pension which does not add up to that much. But it's good to be going now. Carrying on until you're 68 is just too long."

At Settles Street NINO (national insurance number processing office) in Tower Hamlets, one manager who has been upgraded and given a £7 per week pay rise, decided to cross the picket line. "Now we know his price, it's pretty cheap", said one of the pickets.

Prison walkouts

At Belmarsh prison, 80 officers walked out. When the prison governor threatened disciplinary action, the 40 still working decided to walk out too.

Around 70 walked out at Brixton Prison. UCU and PCS members went to support them.

At Wormwood Scrubs prison, 97% of POA members due on duty didn't go in. All the prison vans were turned away so no prisoners were sent to the Crown and Magistrates courts.

In Swansea Socialist Party members visited picket lines at Singleton Hospital, the Pensions Centre, Land Registry, DVLA, Gower College and others.

There was pride at being part of a movement that has refused to buckle but also anger at the leadership of those unions that have held their members back, particularly Unison.

60,000 public sector workers in the North West region were on strike. 400 workers packed into a rally in Liverpool. Printers' spokesperson Terry O'Connor represented 160 workers who have been sacked by international printing conglomerate MMP. He said the workers were still determined to defend their conditions after 16 weeks of industrial action.

Liverpool TUSC mayoral candidate Tony Mulhearn thanked all PCS members and members of other unions who had given him magnificent support during his campaign.

Thousands of PCS union members on Wirral, working in Land Registry, Job Centre Plus, Child Support Agency, County and Magistrate courts and the Lady Lever Art Gallery, took strike action. PCS Land Registry Birkenhead branch had 22 pickets and supporters on the picket line.

Solidarity

There were around 100 on a Unite Health demo at Manchester Royal Infirmary, with the Unite members on strike at Central Manchester Foundation Trust joined by Unite members from other local hospitals and NHS Trusts. Unison members on their way into work, and patients at the hospital, joined the demonstration to show their support.

In Sheffield over 200 strikers came together for a rally outside the town hall. About 20 PCS members joined a dozen striking Aslef members protesting outside Sheffield railway station. They were on their fourth strike day against East Midland Trains' attack on their pensions.

Youth Fight for Jobs had a noisy contingent on the Leeds demonstration and at Leeds Trinity University College Socialist Students members joined the picket line.

Richard Chamberlain, POA branch chair at HMP Leeds said: "We're protesting against the retirement age of prison officers which is now being confirmed and verified at 68. We don't feel that's safe, practical or realistic."

300 attended a Leeds strike rally where Socialist Party member and PCS vice-president John McNally finished a storming speech with a call for more coordinated, national industrial action.

He said: "The elections in France and Greece show austerity is being rejected throughout Europe. The local government elections represented a vote against austerity, not a vote for the Labour Party formulation that supports the same cuts as the government but 'not so fast, not so deep'."

"There is no justification for any cuts whatsoever... The tide is turning, and it's turning in our favour. Now is the time to re-double our efforts by building in the workplaces and in our com-

The elections in France and Greece show austerity is being rejected throughout Europe. The local government elections represented a vote against austerity, not a vote for the Labour Party formulation that supports the same cuts as the government but 'not so fast, not so deep'

munities too... let's have confidence in our collective power."

There was a good mood on the picket lines in Exeter. PCS and UCU members leafleted the town, getting great support. A rally heard representatives of the striking unions, including a Socialist Party member.

Winchester University UCU picketed the King Alfred campus. PCS pickets were out in Southampton at HMRC and the Maritime and Coastguard Agency (MCA).

PCS rep Andy at MCA said: "Frances Maude says strikes are futile. Anything but. We can't afford to back down."

In Brighton there were 20 on a picket at the Royal Sussex hospital. There were pickets at Brighton City college, three at the university, the Job Centre (with the benefits claimants group joining the picket), the courts, and HMRC. In Lewes there were 25 picketing the Sussex Coast college.

PCS at the DWP and Courts in Canterbury were out and the UCU at Canterbury College. In Folkestone, PCS were out at the Customs for the Eurostar, and Dover Port reported the same.

Pension theft

There were lively picket lines around the Nottingham HMRC buildings. Pickets were dressed as robbers to represent the Tories' pension theft.

Following the mass walkout from HMP Nottingham, about 100 prison officers were on a picket line with PCS members.

There were over 300 at a rally in Nottingham city centre, joined by striking Aslef members from East Midlands trains.

In Birmingham there was a rally at the main hospital and a demo through the university campus. Unison sent a message of support and a large round of applause greeted someone from the audience asking why Unison weren't on strike.

In Belfast, Northern Ireland Public Service Alliance (Nipsa) and PCS members took coordinated strike action. There were 300 at an indoor rally. Socialist Party member Billy Lynn, chairperson of the civil service executive committee for Nipsa explained a strategy of escalating united action to defeat the Tories' austerity agenda.

Police demo shows that opposition to cuts is growing

Kevin Parslow

On the same day as the public sector workers' pensions strike, the Police Federation called a demonstration in London to protest at attacks to the police service.

They are facing 20% cuts to the police service, which is leading to redundancies. They are opposed to the Winsor Report on the police service, which includes cuts to pay levels and conditions. This is on top of a two-year pay freeze and increased pension contributions, and privatisation of core police functions.

Socialists who went to leaflet the police demo were wondering what the response would be. The answer surprised us.

An estimated 35,000 off-duty officers marched, fuming with the government. So much so that they snatched all the leaflets from the handful of Socialist Party members there - we underestimated the response we would get! - and over 50 copies of the Socialist were sold.

Many officers politely declined to take leaflets or buy our paper. Some said they were non-political and were surprised to learn how many of their colleagues had bought a copy.

There were very few hostile responses. And we made it clear to those who wanted to talk that we have strong criticisms of the policing of demos, picket lines and communities.

But we welcomed any action that brought the Police Federation and ordinary police officers closer to the trade union movement if they are going into conflict with their employers, the government and police authorities.

We supported their right to strike, which they may ballot for soon and will have to fight for if they win the ballot.

But this is truly the sign of a government and capitalist society on the rocks when sections of its state feel the need to demonstrate against it! The police are used by the government to frighten people off from demonstrating, as brutally experienced by students in 2010, but developments like this could help to weaken their use against strikers and demonstrators in the future.



Part of the Police Federation demo in London photo Paul Mattsson



Why I joined the Socialist Party

‘Socialism: the thinking person’s economics!’

Ravi Patel
West London Socialist Party

My seven-year-old saw me reading the pamphlet 1917 - The Year that Changed the World, by Peter Taaffe and Hannah Sell.

“What’s that?” he demanded.

“What’s it about?”

I resorted to that phrase well known to fathers everywhere.

“Umm... Errr... Hmm... Errmm...”

“What is it about?”

So what the hell, I figured. I’ve explained why Doctor Who’s Tardis is smaller on the outside and big on the inside, and what the acronym T-A-R-D-I-S stands for (Time and Relative Dimension in Space). I can try and explain the Russian Revolution and Karl Marx. “It’s about somebody named Karl Marx,” I said. “It’s about why he was right.”

“Right about what?”

“About not liking capitalism. He didn’t like capitalism.”

Blank stare.

“Do you know what capitalism is?” I asked.

“No.”

“Okay, you know how everybody buys and sells everything?”

“Yeah?”

“That’s capitalism. And Marx didn’t like it.”

He had an expression halfway between incredulity and boredom.

“Why didn’t he like it?”

“Well, with the system where everybody buys and sells and tries to make as much money as they can, you end up with some people who have a lot of money who own the factories, and then some people have only a little money and work in the factories. And Marx thought that was unfair. He said that the people who work in the factories should own the factories.”

“Oh.” Pause for thought. “That makes sense.”

“Yes,” I said. “But some people really don’t like that idea.”

Then his eyes lit up. “The factory owners don’t like it, I bet!”

So there you have it. Socialist

ideas are intuitive enough that even a seven-year old can understand them.

But in 2001 I was an approved candidate for the Conservative Party to stand in the local elections. For most of my life I had been a Tory supporter. I thought that if the leftists got into government, democ-

I felt totally disgusted with bailouts for the rich and cuts for the poor

racy and freedom would be rejected in favour of a Stalinist totalitarian regime with bread queues extending for miles.

I believed the capitalist propaganda, after all with the fall of the Berlin Wall, which led to the eventual collapse of the Soviet Union, things were not looking awfully good for socialism in general.

In November 2005 I went to Dubai and started consultant work in the booming real estate sector. I turned a blind eye to the slave labour conditions that existed to build these magnificent palaces on artificial islands in the sea, and tried to justify to myself that it was part of life which I had no control over.

In August 2007 my mother fell over while disembarking from a bus en route to Southall, west London. She suffered severe head injuries, and as a consequence her Parkinson’s disease was made worse. Being the only son, I left my job in Dubai and became a full time carer looking after my mother 24 hours a day.

Ealing council, hampered by budget cuts, failed to provide my mother with an adequate service in terms of regular respite care and all the necessary apparatus.

At this point in time I started to question my belief in capitalism, I felt ashamed that during my good times I was happy being a capitalist, and now during the bad times, I was



1917 - The Year that Changed the World is available from Socialist Books. Phone 020 8988 8789 or go to www.socialistbooks.co.uk photo Senan

The direct route to building the Socialist Party

Socialist Party members in Leyton and Leytonstone, east London, have been leaving no stone unturned in an effort to build the Socialist Party. We have gone back through lists of names of people interested in joining or finding out more over the last 18 months but for one reason or another did not join our ranks.

We decided to cut out emails

and phone calls and visit people at home. We got an excellent response. One young woman bought a paper, came to our local meeting the next day and joined the party that night. A PCS union activist gave us a cheque for an annual subscription to the Socialist and Socialism Today and agreed to join. A student at the local university has agreed to start attending meetings

and a recent nursing graduate has agreed to attend next week.

People have busy lives, and taking the step of changing your weekly routine to include political meetings and campaigning can be a big step. The lesson of our visits is that when people say they are interested in joining the Socialist Party, they mean it.

Sean Figg

dancing to a different tune.

The financial crisis kicked off in late 2008, the banks were failing, and national governments were bailing out the entire banking system with bailout after bailout with no end in sight. I felt totally disgusted with crony capitalism, bailouts for the rich and cuts for the poor.

The UK government spent £117

billion buying shares in banks and lending directly to financial institutions, the National Audit Office calculated. That represented a liability of £5,530 for every one of the 21.1 million families in Britain. So it’s socialism for the rich and austerity for the working class, how can this be fair?

So it hit me: socialism is the think-

ing man’s economics.

The choice should be rather obvious to you. You can believe that New Labour and the Con-Dems have the working class person’s best interests at heart. Or, if not, if you have to hesitate and think about that for even a couple of seconds, then maybe you’re just a ‘closet socialist’ and too scared to admit it!

National Committee

On 12 and 13 May the Socialist Party’s national committee (NC) met for the first time since being elected at the party’s 2012 congress in March.

Discussions included Britain and Europe after the elections, and building the Socialist Party.

The executive committee, the body that oversees the day-to-day work of the party, was elected.

Price of the Socialist

The meeting agreed that due to increased costs, especially in postage,

the standard Direct Debit subscription rate for the Socialist would increase to £4 a month from July. The cover price will be £1 from the next issue.

With a growing rejection of austerity and new opportunities opening up for selling the Socialist, the needed price increase will be combined with stepping up campaigning to increase the paper’s readership.

Socialist Party branches should ask for a report from a local NC member.

A more detailed email has been circulated to branch secretaries.

Dates for your diary

- Socialist Party new members’ school**
Saturday 26 May, London
- Socialist Party LGBT meeting**
Saturday 26 - Sunday 27 May, London
- Marxism and the state
 - The ‘new’ morality, religion and politics: do they mix?
 - Building the Socialist Party’s LGBT work
- Youth Fight for Jobs open steering committee**
Sunday 10 June, 10am-4pm
University of London Union, Euston
Phone 020 8558 7947 for more details

- Socialist Party Summer Camp**
Friday 24 - Monday 27 August, bank holiday weekend
Epping Forest, Essex
Political discussions in a relaxed atmosphere, fun for children and adults: Walks in the woods • Deer park • Crèche • Cycling (bikes for hire or bring your own) • Games • Barbecues • Camp fires • Tents for hire • Meals at a reasonable cost
- Phone 020 8988 8777 for more details and to book your place at any of these events**
www.socialistparty.org.uk/whatson



At last year’s summer camp photo H Sell

Get involved

Donate

Subscribe

I'd like to join the Socialist Party

I'd like to donate £

12 issues £9

6 months £18

1 year £36

I'd like more information about the Socialist Party

to the Socialist Party

please make cheques payable to Socialist Party

please make cheques payable to Socialist Publications Ltd

Western Europe: 12 issues £16, half year £32, year £50

Rest of world: 12 issues £25, half year £50, year £90

Return slip or pay at www.socialistparty.org.uk/subscribe

Name

Address and postcode

tel/email

Return to: Socialist Party, PO Box 24697, London E11 1YD or phone 020 8988 8777 to pay by card, to arrange a direct debit, or to join.

Credit card No:

Name:

Start Date:

Expiry Date:

Security Code:

Issue No:

SOCIALIST PARTY FIGHTING FUND

	£ target	£ received	April-June 2012				Deadline 29 June			
South West	1,400	1,182								
North West	1,200	743								
Yorkshire	2,900	1,584								
Southern	1,200	545								
East Midlands	1,550	701								
South East	750	314								
Northern	600	233								
Wales	2,300	810								
Eastern	1,200	382								
West Midlands	2,100	585								
London	6,100	789								
England & Wales	3,700	1,818								
TOTAL	25,000	9,691								

Greek workers reject austerity

Syriza must prepare working class for a battle with the Troika

(continued from page 1)

The neo-fascist Golden Dawn scored big successes in last week's elections and entered parliament for the first time. But many of those who voted for Golden Dawn to "punish the politicians", now see the real far-right, anti-working class character of the party. Golden Dawn has subsequently dropped in polls, to just above 3% in some cases, which would see the party fail to win any MPs in new elections.

Nevertheless, the working class cannot be complacent about the threat of the far right and reaction. Since winning parliamentary seats, Golden Dawn supporters have viciously attacked immigrants.

Xekhinima calls for the creation of local anti-fascist committees to include democratically-organised defence, extending to communities, schools, universities and workplaces. If the left fails to offer a viable socialist alternative, the far right can make new gains and the Greek ruling class, which previously resorted to military rule, will also seek to deploy more authoritarian measures against the workers' movement.

Eurozone exit?

The bosses' parties threaten that Greece will be forced to leave the eurozone if new elections are called and Syriza comes to power with its anti-austerity policies. Syriza leaders say they want to take measures to end cuts and to improve living standards and that Greece should stay in the eurozone.

While the vast majority of Greeks vociferously oppose the austerity programme they also want to remain in the eurozone. They understandably fear the aftermath of exiting it.

There are endless warnings from the media and cuts-making politicians about what leaving would entail: a dramatic fall in living standards, financial bankruptcy and hyperinflation. Not surprisingly, one recent opinion poll recorded that 78% of respondents said they wanted a new government to do whatever it took to keep the euro. At the same time, however, to stay in the euro straitjacket promises only endless austerity for Greeks and an increasing number of them are demanding to leave.

Notwithstanding the aim of Syriza leaders to stay in the eurozone, even if they follow their current policies in a new government, limited as they are to a 'radical' renegotiation of the bailout terms they will face stiff opposition from the EU and

Greek capitalists, most likely leading to Greece's exit from the euro.

The Troika has indicated that it is prepared to reconsider aspects of the bailout terms but not the 'core' issues, which means new assaults on the living conditions of Greek people.

Yet Syriza is not preparing its own supporters and the working class generally for the consequences of confrontation with the Troika, the markets and the Greek ruling class or taking account of a likely ferocious media and bosses' parties scare campaign that will be unleashed against Syriza during a new election campaign.

Some Syriza leaders argue that when they form a new government, the Troika's bluff will be called and they will be forced to back down and make big concessions.

They point out that the EU leaders are terrified of a Greek default and exit from the euro, which would cause a new financial crisis and deep recession throughout the EU, with countries such as Spain, Portugal and Ireland also possibly forced out of the euro.

While this is true, events have their own momentum. Some EU leaders and markets fear Greece is on an irresistible slide towards exit from the euro. Financial markets are making preparations for a Greek exit from the euro.

Angela Merkel and EU president Jose Manuel Barroso openly stated that if Athens cannot abide by the bailout rules, Greece will have to

leave. This may partly be a threat to force Greece to form a coalition government to continue with cuts, as well as an attempt to show what will happen to any eurozone country that dares to stand up to the Troika.

Left government

In this situation, what should the Greek Left do? Xekhinima welcomes Syriza's public call for left unity. Syriza should open up and develop its structures as a broad left alliance, so that fresh layers of workers and youth can join and decide party policy democratically. Xekhinima supports united action of the left parties ahead of the next elections and for working people to vote for Syriza.

This should be done concretely, with the convening of mass assemblies at local, workplace, regional and national levels to discuss and agree programme, demands and electoral tactics, to campaign for a left government and to strive to ensure that such a government pursues anti-austerity and pro-working class policies.

The communist party (KKE) and Antarsya (the Anti-capitalist Left Cooperation) both took a sectarian attitude before the last elections and rejected Syriza's 'left unity' proposal, with the result that their votes remain stagnant. To the amazement of many millions of workers, the KKE leadership still continues to refuse to form a block with Syriza.

But under growing pressure from their rank and file, and the working

class in general, a section of Antarsya has indicated that it is prepared to have joint collaboration with Syriza.

Many KKE members also speak of the need to "make unity with Syriza". Xekhinima urges Syriza to make a bold call to the rank and file of the KKE and other left forces to join in an electoral bloc on an anti-austerity platform and to fight for a left government with a socialist programme.

Xekhinima will campaign for a government of the Left and call for it to carry out anti-austerity, pro-working class policies and to adopt a socialist programme to transform society.

A programme for united action by Syriza and the KKE around opposition to all austerity measures, for cancellation of the debt, public ownership of the main banks and industries and for socialist change, would win widespread support from the working class, youth and middle class.

Syriza should make a call for a resurgence of mass action in the workplaces, colleges and communities and for combative, democratic trade union organisation.

Socialism

Pro-working class policies would predictably cause screams of outrage from the bosses in Greece and the EU. They would probably quickly kick Greece out of the eurozone.

Ejected from the euro, a workers' government would need to carry out an emergency programme, including state control over imports and exports and capital controls to stop the "flight of capital" by profit-hungry property-holders and multinationals.

Democratic committees should oversee the supply of foodstuffs, medicine, oil and other vital goods to working people.

A workers' government in Greece would link up with the workers' movement in other crisis ridden eurozone countries, like Spain, Portugal, Ireland and Italy, to break the diktat of the Troika, the bosses' EU and capitalism.

These countries could form a confederation on a socialist basis and begin the international democratic planning and coordination of the economy, as part of a fight for a full socialist confederation of Europe, on a free and equal basis. This would win massive support quickly across the working class of Europe.

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

Russia: Moscow's streets a 'battleground'

Anti-Putin protesters respond to police attacks by setting up 'Occupy Abai'.

CWI reporters, Russia

image not available

Tunisia: General strikes, power struggles and economic stalemate

Republic's president Marzouki afraid of 'new revolution'.

CWI reporters, Tunisia



USA: Socialist candidate challenges corporate politics in Washington state

Kshama Sawant stands as independent left-wing, pro-worker candidate

Socialist Alternative (CWI USA)

image not available

the Socialist postbag

Do you have something to say?

Send your news, views and criticism in not more than 150 words to Socialist Postbag, PO Box 24697, London E11 1YD, or phone 020 8988 8771, email: editors@socialistparty.org.uk. We reserve the right to shorten letters. Don't forget to give your name, address and phone number. Confidentiality will be respected if requested.

Will Virgin care?

Virgin provides an awful internet service in Leeds: I've lost connection twice since I turned on my computer to write this, customer service is near impossible to get hold of at times and not great when you reach them. But Virgin has set up Assura Care in Leeds, a 'partnership' between Virgin Care and 27 GP surgeries across the

back to show these companies and the government that the NHS is not for sale. Virgin can't run a media company properly: who on earth wants them trying their hand at the NHS?

Michael Johnson

Merchants of death

The government obsession with playing soldiers has earned the merchants of death a pretty penny. The government wanted to buy the F38C joint strike fighter plane but is now buying the F38B. Apart from one letter the difference is variously estimated as £40 million or £100 million down the toilet. The government calls this "fiscal responsibility." No squandering money on health, welfare and pensions. The F38C's cost actually doubled to £2 billion. Defence Secretary Philip Hammond claimed that the decision to buy the F38C "was right at the time" but the decision to buy the F38B was right now. Well, for the time being anyway. It sounded on the news like they needed to fit 'cat-flaps' on the aircraft carriers but in fact they needed to fit "catapults" and "traps". These public school boys know how to have fun don't they? With billions of pounds of our money! The RAF air-to-air refuelling planes are also allegedly costing the taxpayer £100 million over the odds. The question nobody asked was why on earth the country can afford this profligate expenditure when everything else needs to be cut. New Labour were silent on this because they suggested the F38B in the first place. A real political opposition won't come from the hopelessly compromised Labour leadership.

Derek McMillan, Mid Sussex Socialist Party



about profits!

city. It says it provides "streamlined care" by "combining the clinical skills and expertise of local GPs with the business and service expertise of Virgin Care". My GP surgery is in the "partnership." I recently had food poisoning, it took several hours to speak to someone, but they couldn't arrange for anyone to see me and gave me incorrect advice on dealing with food poisoning. So, I guess they offer streamlined care by sending everyone to A&E instead! Virgin exists to make a profit and is privatising the NHS to do so. Assura Care claims all NHS services will be free at delivery but watch out for things like parking fees to bolster their profits. The government's healthcare bill left the NHS wide open for companies like Virgin to take charge. We need a fight-

A short walk down Whitehall...

image not available

On the day of the Queen's speech, I was on my way to a London demo of Remploy workers. But in Whitehall there was a phalanx of police officers armed with Heckler-Koch assault weapons. As they wore expressions that discouraged a care-free promenade down the public highway I tried to cut through St James's Park.

A chain of crash barriers snaked from Trafalgar Square right down the Mall. At a dead end outside the Horse Guards parading ground, a voice behind me said: "Excuse me sir, can I look in your bag?"

Two police officers were looking at the cloth bag across my back that carries the National Shop Stewards Network (NSSN) banner and poles. They joked that it was to make sure I wasn't carrying a bazooka.

When I told them I was going to a trade union protest they asked if I'd be on the 10 May demonstration - they planned to go to the same day's

demo against police cuts. "Maybe we'll see each other tomorrow carrying placards, hope we don't get kettled!" one of them said, laughing.

They sent me on my way, saying there would be no problem going down Whitehall. But Whitehall was lined with armed officers every ten paces. The Horse Guards were also marching about but it is difficult to feel threatened by men in giant woolly hats, even if they carry automatic weapons.

At the Defence Ministry I'd hit another dead end and two police officers quickly approached me. The last pair had been cordial, these two were not.

Saying I was being searched on suspicion of concealing a deadly weapon they asked: What was the NSSN? Who set it up? What was its purpose? What union was I a member of? What branch was I in? Who organised the protest?

The officers couldn't understand

why I went down Whitehall just as the Queen was heading for Parliament. "You do realise you've had snipers on the roof looking at you?" I looked up. Sure enough a figure perched on the Cabinet Office roof was looking down at me. Suppressing the feeling that a goose had just walked over my grave I explained to them again about the protest and being given the all-clear after my previous search.

The officers wanted to know why I wasn't protesting tomorrow. When I asked if they would be protesting on the police march I got a flat no. Clearly there are different police attitudes to the Police Federation demo.

I was strongly "advised" that it would not be a good idea to head for Parliament and presented with a receipt declaring the investigation into the search for a deadly weapon had proven negative.

Neil Cafferky

TV review The boss exploiting China (and Britain)

Alec Price

Tony Caldeira is a businessman in the textiles industry, manufacturing cushions in China and the UK. A two-part BBC documentary The Town Taking on China, follows Caldeira's plan to move jobs back from China to Kirkby, Merseyside. The documentary's style shows Caldeira to be on a one-man mission, a 'crusade' even, to create jobs in Britain by 'stealing' them from China.

Although Caldeira started his business in Liverpool he decided to move to China. The reason for this was that labour costs in China were so low that even when you add on the transport costs etc, you could still make a bigger profit having a factory in China than you could in the UK.

Caldeira's decisions have been good ones for business and he has received numerous awards and sales in excess of £20 million.

It's been a different story for his workers who until recently slaved for 20p an hour and slept in the factory. However, a young 'cockier'

generation in China are now 'holding a gun' to Caldiera's head for better wages. This has seen wages rise to a whopping £1 an hour!

Most people would see this as a small but progressive step forward but it created a problem for Caldeira as a businessman. Distressed at this situation he wants to see if he is able to move back to Britain where if people ask for wages rises "they'd

be on the next bus back to Kirkby because... there's 200, 300 people waiting to take their place."


The workers in Caldeira's UK factory are on minimum wage and expected to make 50 cushions an hour in an attempt to earn a bonus. To keep afloat some of them take a second job, which makes one of the workers view the week as 'one long day that ends on Friday'.

The programme shows in quite a clear way how capitalism operates. The business owners search for the cheapest labour costs to maximise profits. How the labour force have to live is irrelevant as profits come first.

The second part, shown on 15 May (available on BBC iPlayer) finishes with a decision from Caldeira as to whether he will concentrate in China or the UK.

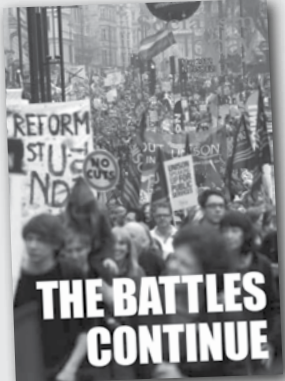
Despite Caldeira's 'success' in the business world he has had less success in politics. Standing as the Tory candidate for mayor of Liverpool he was visibly gutted to have finished behind the socialist policies advocated by Tony Mulhearn and the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC).

image not available



New Book!
Planning for the Planet
How socialism could save the environment
By Pete Dickenson
£9.95
★ **Special limited offer for readers of the Socialist:**
£7 including postage.
cheques payable to Socialist Publications Ltd
Order from: Socialist Books, PO Box 24697, London E11 1YD 020 8988 8789 to order by card or see www.socialistbooks.co.uk

SocialismToday The Socialist Party's magazine
May 2012 issue includes:



- **Pensions:**
The battle continues
- **The royal show:**
The role of the royals
- **Corporate cash hoarding:**
Profits are being hoarded rather than invested

£2.50 including postage from:
Socialism Today PO Box 24697,
London E11 1YD. socialismtoday@socialistparty.org.uk
www.socialismtoday.org 020 8988 8773

Victory for Greenwich Unite library campaign

Lessons in the fight against privatisation of public services

Paul Callanan

Two days of strike action, with the promise of more to come was enough to persuade Greenwich Leisure Limited (GLL) to begin serious negotiations with the Unite union and to offer the necessary assurances on pay and conditions that staff had been looking for.

This was the culmination of a campaign that began a year ago, initially in opposition to the transfer of the library service from Greenwich council to GLL.

Once the transfer took place on 30 April, the battle turned to winning assurances on pay and conditions. A very real threat existed, because following the transfer all staff would be placed on the same contracts. GLL staff are on worse pay and conditions contracts than council staff.

The council even set out a timetable, offering a two-year protection deal, after which staff could expect pay cuts.

But GLL were not looking forward to an industrial dispute and agreed to meet with Unite. The union now has an assurance that 'downward harmonisation' will not take place. This is a marvellous achievement, especially in the current economic climate.

As the government's austerity measures bite, local authorities will increasingly ignore the views of local communities. Unite made a persistent call for full public consultation on the transfer and called for the question to be put to residents and library users.

Initially, the council arranged a series of public consultation meetings and agreed to do an online survey. But as the opposition grew, it withdrew the online survey and cancelled five public meetings!

Eventually when the public meetings did take place, GLL did not turn up but instead paid a consultant to face the public. At every meeting there was huge, angry opposition to the transfer proposal.

Rather than rely on online sur-

veys, Unite took to the streets. Each Saturday saw stalls set up on high streets and outside libraries where library stewards and Socialist Party members spoke with the public.

Eventually 1,800 Unite postcards were completed and returned, every single one opposing the proposals. These were presented to the council at one of the many lobbies that took place, only for the council to refuse to accept them.

The council and GLL have tried to claim that this is not privatisation because GLL is a 'non-profit making social enterprise', a cooperative. They even claim to be worker-led. Yet this worker-led company pays its director £155,000 while it refuses to pay staff the London living wage of £8.30 an hour! Of its 5,000 workers, only 1,400 are on permanent contracts.

Councils across the country have been handing libraries to these so-called charities and social enterprises. In Bexley, south London, one "charity" now charges for access to its full range of books. Recently, in nearby Lewisham, the power supply was cut off at Sydenham library after the organisation that now runs it refused to pay the bill.

Fightback

Along with hundreds of other libraries around the country, these transfers are destroying the library service. A national, union-led campaign is desperately needed to save our libraries.

There was obvious disappointment that the local campaign was not able to stop the service being transferred and there are lessons to be learnt.

The most important point is that, in the absence of a national fight, library workers were not really confident about strike action until all other options had been exhausted and the council made the announcement.

Nonetheless, the Unite branch won concessions by combining a mass public campaign that won local support, along with an industrial



Greenwich Unite members make their voice heard photo Paul Mattsson

campaign. But if privatisation of our public services is to be stopped, the many local campaigns need to be linked up to a national campaign against privatisation.

The victory won by the workers in Greenwich takes them beyond the

Along with hundreds of other libraries around the country, these transfers are destroying the library service

normal TUPE (Transfer of Undertakings - Protection of Employment regulations).

TUPE legislation gives workers protection at the point of transfer.

While wording in the legislation exists stating that pay and conditions cannot be cut after the transfer if the reason for the cut is linked to the transfer, the reality is that employers simply find another reason under 'ETO' (economic, technical, organisational) reasons.

So as long as they can show that the cut is not linked to the transfer, they get away with it.

New Labour supporting Unison officials have tried to play down the victory by saying that the concessions won by the strike were always there. This is nonsense.

Messages of support poured in for the campaign, with one notable exception. Greenwich Unison.

The library workers were previously Unison members but left in disgust following the witch-hunt carried out by the union against Socialist Party member Onay Kasab

who had previously led the branch. Had these workers stayed in Greenwich Unison, there would have been no campaign.

In Unite, they were given the opportunity to fight and won a victory. Greenwich Unison is still run by unelected full time officials who prioritise stamping out any opportunity to fight back. Nonetheless, Unite did invite the branch to join the campaign but without success.

Employers have a habit of breaking agreements. But in this case, a loud message has been sent. Attack our pay and conditions and we will strike.

Now, the task will be to begin organising non-library staff at GLL and building the union so that all GLL workers can fight back. If GLL want the library service, they will get the union organisation that comes with it.

Mullivaikal 2012: Workers' unity against Rajapaksa regime

Manny Thain

secretary, Tamil Solidarity

Thousands of Tamils will mark the third anniversary of Mullivaikal, the end of the war in Sri Lanka, with a commemorative rally in Trafalgar Square on Saturday 19 May. It will be an emotional occasion but it will also draw people together to renew the struggle for the rights of Tamil-speaking people.

At long last, the sheer brutality of the Sri Lankan armed forces as they overran the north and east is being recognised more widely.

After the shock at the scale of the defeat, the movement for Tamil rights is on the rise again. There are many issues to be taken up. As members of Britain's political establishment queue up to speak at the Trafalgar Square event - the sizeable Tamil community holds significant voting power - one of the key questions is: who are the natural allies of the Tamil-speaking people? Not the British establishment which has invited Sri Lanka's despotic president Rajapaksa to the Queen's jubilee celebrations!

As a grassroots campaign, Tamil Solidarity identifies the Tamil people's allies as the organised working class in Britain, and workers and oppressed people internationally.

Tamil Solidarity raises the demands to



photo Senan

withdraw the troops from the north and east, to stop the settlement programme and shut down the prison camps. We also call for an end to the deportation of Tamils from Britain to Sri

Lanka - returning Tamil-speaking people face immediate persecution.

Tamil Solidarity calls for a full, independent inquiry into all war crimes allegations. Such an inquiry should be made up of representatives from working class communities, on which international trade union and human rights groups could play an advisory role. This would be an antidote to the sham inquiry set up by Sri Lanka's president Rajapaksa to get him and his military command off the hook.

Predictably, the promise of his regime that the end of the war would usher in a period of peace and prosperity has been exposed as a bare-faced lie. Military expenditure has actually increased to pay for the occupation of Tamil areas. The price of basic commodities has soared. The prevention of terrorism act continues to be used to try to silence journalists and to round up trade union and left-wing activists.

Rajapaksa and his cronies rest on the support of the Sinhala majority. Yet, their policies attack the living standards of the vast majority of Sri Lanka's people, regardless of their ethnic/religious identity. Taking up all the class issues can help to break the divide-and-rule policies of the Rajapaksa regime, and take forward the call for the right of Tamil-speaking people to determine their future for themselves.

See also www.tamilsolidarity.org

Solidarity against far-right thugs

Over 50 trade unionists and anti-racists rallied in Lewisham High Street on 12 May to show solidarity with the member of the National Union of Teachers (NUT) who had been assaulted and hospitalised by far-right thugs - suspected supporters of the racist and hooligan EDL - a fortnight earlier on a campaign stall against government cutbacks.

The local NUT branch decided to set up stalls on 12 May to take a clear message to the local community - No to racism, No to cuts! Hundreds of copies of the Lewisham NUT leaflet calling for unity against the cuts and for jobs, pensions and public services, NOT racism, were given out.

NUT members also handed out leaflets from the joint union '68 is too late' campaign to oppose the government's pensions robbery. Shoppers came up to the NUT stall to sign a letter to David Cameron calling for 'Fair pensions for all'.

People were horrified by the attack and supported trade unionists and socialists who were fighting for workers' unity against vicious attacks on services and jobs. 25 copies of the Socialist were sold.

IT'S OUR NHS

Let's fight for it!

Jacqui Berry

Austerity is hitting the NHS. 26,000 nursing posts have already been reduced, with a further 34,000 to be sacrificed - balancing budgets at the expense of patient care.

Members of the Royal College of Nursing (RCN) report being so overstretched that patients are being nursed in hospital corridors. This occurs on a daily basis. The crisis of beds has reached epidemic levels.

Patient safety is put at risk by nurses having to care for up to 18 patients at once. District and Community Services are being put under a growing strain. This is the state of affairs after just one of four years of planned cuts.

Our pensions have come under attack and we are being forced to work in physically, mentally and emotionally demanding roles until we are 68 years old. The government is hell-bent on cutting the pay of nurses and other public sector workers serving communities outside of the M25- although they won't extend this measure to MPs as called for by someone at the RCN congress.

Andrew Lansley was jeered by RCN members when he said the Health and Social Care Bill does not pave the way for privatisation. Clearly it does, as private companies will be invited to take on the planning and commissioning of services in England, running them for profit, not to provide patient care.

Their track record speaks for itself. Under

Labour, private companies were welcomed to come and leach off our health service. The result? Massive structural debts and knock on cuts in services.

Like a broken record, Lansley repeated his mantra, that cuts had to be made and that the private sector can do it better. The NHS is not alone. Across Europe, politicians and big business are coming together in unleashing austerity onto ordinary working people, in an attempt to find a way out of their crisis. Big business is looking to take over public services like the NHS as they search desperately to find a way out of the capitalist crisis.

But there is a fightback developing. Unite health workers were on strike to defend pensions on 10 May. Health workers in the public sector union Unison recently voted to reject the latest pensions deal offered by the government. Doctors in the British Medical Association are balloting for strike action over pensions too.

We need publicly funded, high quality, health care. If capitalism cannot afford that, then we cannot afford capitalism.

All health workers who want to fight cuts, privatisation and all attacks on the NHS should put the National Shop Stewards Network conference in their diaries now:

9 June, 11am-4pm
Friends Meeting House, Euston Road, London
See page 5 for details



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!