Paralympics, Atos scandal, Remploy closures...

CON-DEM'S WIN GOLD FOR HYPOCRISY!

Millions are watching the 2012 Paralympics. The Games aim to inspire young disabled people to take up sport, compete at the highest level and illustrate to the world that having a disability doesn’t mean that a full, active and challenging life cannot be lived.

The ethos that despite being disabled, a person should be able to fulfil their own potential, through holding down a job and being a productive member of society, was also the ethos that eventually led to the setting up of the first Remploy factory in 1946.

The forerunner of the Paralympics started in 1948 in Stoke Mandeville Hospital as a way of using sporting competition as a form of healing and therapy for disabled ex-service personnel, many of whom were recovering from injuries suffered in World War Two.

2012 will be a memorable year for disabled people who will be part of the Paralympics, either as spectators or participants. It will also be a memorable year for the disabled workers of Remploy, but the memories will be poles apart.

The disabled athletes, their families and fans, will have joy and excitement. They will look back on 2012 as the year they came to the Games, and left with souvenirs and full photograph albums to record every joyous second.

The disabled Remploy workers and their able-bodied comrades, however, will have bad memories. Their factories, which have provided good quality employment for the best part of 70 years, will shut their gates for the last time. They will head, not for gold but for the dole and a life of poverty and deprivation as they get dumped on the scrapheap.

This will be then vastly exacerbated by the Con-Dems’ cold cruelty: with benefits slashed and denied financial and other support to live independently, disabled people are also being demonised as “scroungers”, and abuse towards them is rocketing.

In the Con-Dems’ arrogance, brought about by the “Born to Rule” attitude that they have all grown up with, they have ignored the big questions that will be on every working class disabled person’s lips, especially if they are ex-Remploy workers or victims of Atos, sickeningly one of the prime sponsors of the Olympics and Paralympics.

Why is it that disabled people are encouraged to compete on the field of sport, partake as competitors in activities from which able bodied athletes are segregated, while being employed in a workplace alongside other disabled people in a supported environment is not acceptable?

The government, some charities and, to their shame, some trade unions seem to find having fun together acceptable, but not working together.

Why should disabled people have to suffer the stress of the “work capability” assessment administered by Atos? The sole aim of this cruel process seems to be to push as many people as possible off sickness benefits, as part of the £18 billion welfare cuts.

• No Remploy closures. The factories should be run for disabled people, by disabled people, where people with all forms of disability can fulfil their employment potential in the short, medium and long term.
• Fight all welfare cuts. Kick Atos out of the system. End the work capability assessment. A living wage and fulfilling work opportunities for all without compulsion.

FIGHT ALL CUTS!

“The TUC march on 20 October will be a massive display of unity. We need to ensure we use this to continue to build the fight against the cuts, and not only march together but strike together as well.”

Mark Serwotka, general secretary of the Public and Commercial Services union

Hear Mark speak at the National Shop Stewards Network lobby of the TUC on 9 September. Demand the TUC uses the 20 October demonstration to build for a 24-hour general strike against the government’s austerity measures. See pages 2, 6 & 7

Les Woodward
National convenor, Remploy trade union consortium

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Lobby by the TUC for a 24-hour general strike

Time to rise up!

Committee member of ‘Shafted by A&E’

Britain’s self-appointed ‘elite’ has declared war on the ordinary people of this country. From self-serving politicians seeking office for their own gain, to greedy bank- ers wrecking homes, jobs and lives in pursuit of the almighty pound, to smug media bosses flexing the law and casting aside everywhere the shred of deency in order to swell their own coffers. We are being lied to, ripped off and viewed with utter contempt by these people who have come to believe that our nation, to be run for their benefit. You and me are mere beasts of burden to be worked to death then cast aside.

I did not always think like this. I was in steady employment with the same company for over 30 years until that company chose to invoke a little-known piece of legislation called a Company Voluntary Ar-
gement order to sack half the workforce without notice, consulta-
ation, appeal or payment. 125 of us, most with decades of loyal service, were cast on the sc-
racaph. We were replaced by re-
turns on short-term contracts, low-
er wages and poorer conditions.

This government condones every attack on working people while it-
self continuing to wantonly hack at every aspect of the lives of ‘ordinary’ people. No one person sits idly by while everything he or she holds dear to them is then cast aside by the enemy. The time has come to rise up.

Lobby the TUC for a 24-hour gen-
eral strike. Support every action against these brutal cuts and show our attackers that we will take no more!

— Ali Hill,

The demo on 26 March showed the possibilities but we need to build for a 24-hour general strike

photo Alison Hill

East Midlands: Save our ambulance service

Charlie Taylor, Derby

East Midlands Ambulance Service (EMAS) is in a period of consultation over plans to close the 13 super stations and ‘standby points’. These will probably be port-
able cabins or shared premises with the police or fire service.

The chief executive says this plan will improve response time perfor-

mance, provide better welfare for staff and allow EMAS to operate within the budget.

The reality is this is a cost cut-

ting exercise. The current stations require repairs estimated to cost £12 million. Also, if EMAS does not achieve its target to reach 73% of life-threatening emergency calls within eight minutes then the Trust faces a potential fine of £2.5 million and it risks not achieving Founda-

tion Trust status.

When EMAS lost the contracts for patient transport services, a third of the ambulance service was privatised. This was done under Labour but it was in the spirit of the Cox-Demens’ vision for as much priv-

atisation as possible and as many cabs as they can get away with.”

The hub and spoke approach will mean hubs in high density areas. For Derbyshire the plan is for one in

Chesterfield and one in Derby. This means some staff will have to travel further to work. Considering

some staff do 12-hour shifts this in-

creases the risk of fatigue.

Crews working in the rural ar-

eas will have to travel much fur-

ther to collect and return their ambu-

lance. For example, New Mills crews will have to travel to

Chesterfield to pick up the ambu-

lance. Staff that live in New Mills will spend up to an hour travel-

ling to pick up their ambulance.

This puts patients at risk.

It is also likely that when the crew pick up their ambulance in

Chesterfield, they will end up respond-

ing to an emergency in that area.

That is because the super stations are in high density areas.

This is how the Trust is probably calculating the 3% improvement in re-

sponse times. They are putting

more crew where there are more calls at the expense of the rural and smaller urban areas.

OK for the people of Chesterfield and Derby and bad for everyone else in Derbys-

hire. The same goes for Nottingham-

shire, Lincolnshire, Northamp-

tonshire and Leicestershire/ Rutland. What EMAS desperately needs is more crews on the road but there is no mention of this in the proposals.

Communities who are not in the close vicinity of a hub will cam-

paign to save their station. This is already happening in areas like

Basestoi, Ripley and Hinckley.

In Ripley, Derbyshire, Socialist Party members had been cam-

paigning against the closure of our local station. Reflecting support for this we sold 23 copies of the So-

cialist in one hour and collected several names of people who were interested in setting up a broad campaign to save the station.

As well as local campaigns there is a need for a region-wide coordi-

nation to say no to all the cuts. We must resist any attempt to pit town against town.

An east midlands demonstration against all attacks on the ambu-

lance service, linking up with other campaigns in defence of the health service must be called by the trade unions.

• Ripley campaign meeting, Wednesday 5 September 7.30pm at the Pear Tree Pub, High Street Ripley (opposite the co-op).
Gove stole our exam grades!
GCSE changes to prepare for more academies

Derek McMillan
Mid Sussex Socialist Party

Newspaper headlines about GCSE results are predictable. If the results show movement in one direction, press and politicians claim the movement is “good” that standards are slipping. It is nothing of the sort. This year’s results give lie to that assertion.

The results are worse this year because Gove has moved the goalposts. Raising the GCSE A – C benchmark from 35% to 40% is a dirty political manoeuvre.

English results have been hit particularly hard by the last-minute sales job to the public on another group of teachers who had reliably been able to predict “C”-grades for their students having to console Year 11s who have instead been awarded a “D”-grade. Pupils who would have passed are now labelled as “failures” on the whim of a Tory minister.

If he raises the benchmark high enough nobody will pass. No doubt he would be delighted because then every school would be a “failure” and could be forced to become an academy.

And who does Gove blame for this manufactured “failure”? The teachers of course. Perversely he claims that this is further evidence for his educational policy of removing the requirement for Qualified Teacher Status from academies so any Tom, Dick or Harry can become a teacher.

The policy is clearly aimed at undermining teaching unions by flooding schools with unqualified teachers. The Department for Education and Skills (DfES) dishonestly claims that this will enable “brilliant” people to come into teaching, while undermining elected local schools and unqualified teachers. The DfES dishonestly claims that this will enable “brilliant” people to come to replace all the teachers. And presumably they would stop being “brilliant” if they trained as teachers and were paid a teacher’s wage.

Apparently that is how things work on planet Gove. The unions need to stand up for our students, to dissuade young people from pursuing further education and, above all, to provide an excuse for turning even more schools into unaccountable academies while dismantling elected local authorities.

Protest
A hastily organised protest outside DfES 50 teachers and parents loudly opposed the GCSE grading. The protest was called by London National Union of Teachers (NUT), NUS and Socialist Party member Martin Powell-Davies on the initiative of Lewisham NUT members.

In the tube station after the protest one worker from the DfES approached Socialist Party members who were holding “Gove stole my grades” placards. Nodding to the placards he said; “We have an even lower opinion of him than you have to see him everyday!”

Martin said: “Many students’ hopes have been dashed. Many schools now also face the threat of forced privatisation as they struggle to meet Gove’s imposed 40% GCSE benchmark. Many teachers will also fear the threat of ‘capability’ procedures and loss of performance-pay awards as a result of this scandal.

Behind this disgraceful gerrymandering of the GCSE results stands Michael Gove. This unfair downgrading of students fits his dangerous agenda perfectly – to blame teachers for ‘failing’ students, to dissuade young people from pursuing further education and, above all, to provide an excuse for turning even more schools into unaccountable academies while dismantling elected local authorities.”

Many councils are preparing to invest in charity-run food banks because of escalating demand for crisis services as a result of devastating welfare cuts. The Socialist has previously reported on the rapidly rising number of food banks in Britain – feeding people struggling to get by with rocketing food and energy prices along with pay freezes, job losses and benefit cuts.

128,697 families were given emergency food supplies by charity organisations last year. It is an indictment of local councils that there are not more of these services to simply direct more and more of these residents to the limited services they do provide.

But why don’t Labour councils declare now that they will spend what is needed on emergency crisis loans – and maintain existing levels of council tax benefit support for that matter – and present the bill for meeting the funding gap back to the government? That’s what Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) councillors would do.

Labour in Westminster could help by pledging that an incoming government would reimburse councils if, for example, they were to use their reserves, or their prudential borrowing powers, to avoid these devastating cuts.

These are choices – and Labour is making the wrong one in not resisting the Con-Dems’ rolling back of the welfare state.

Cllr Richard Bennett, Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition national nominating officer

Crisis services handed over to charity food banks

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Berec Heagney’s article in issue 729 of the Socialist accurately described the current situation regarding the changes to council tax benefit. Different councils seem to be taking different approaches, but the key thing they are all focusing on is the cuts in one way or another.

Our local newspaper, the Coventry Telegraph, ran an article with headline ‘Neddy Coventry families escape council tax benefit cut’. However you did not have to read much further to see that what it actually means is that the Labour-controlled council will be cutting other services, with potentially dozens of jobs under threat. This is not forking the cuts, this is robbing Peter to pay Paul so they are ‘protecting’ the vulnerable, by attacking slightly less vulnerable people!

Once again they have no concern about taking a cut in the council tax benefit for the poorest of the poor, yet it is the rich, overpaid, benefiting from the dislocation, tightness, a lot of arbitrage opportunities (taking advantage of differences in prices in different markets). We will be able to provide the world with solutions... and that should also be good for Gove.”

As Iain said in his article “While the food industry is controlled by private companies for profit and speculators control prices, millions will continue to starve or suffer malnutrition.”

One person’s tragedy...

In issue 730 of the Socialist, Iain Dal- ton reported on the world food crisis. But evidently, crops failing and the resulting unaffordable food prices and poverty show there isn’t a tragedy for everyone. The director of agriculture at commodity trading company Glencore, Clara Mahones, said: “The environment is a good one. High prices, lots of volatility, a lot of dislocation, tightness, a lot of arbitrage opportunities (taking advantage of differences in prices in different markets). We will be able to provide the world with solutions... and that should also be good for Gove.”

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Top up
£60,738 a year just isn’t enough for some MPs – dozens are subsidising their parliamentary salary with money from consultancy, legal work, public speaking or company directorships. For some this means they end up with 13 times their official pay packet! MPs get more than £100,000 a year from outside earnings. The top earners in the last year were Gordon Brown (£900,286 from speeches, academia and speaking), and David Miliband (£440,371 from consultancy and public speaking) and they seem so disconnected from the 99% and the problems we’re facing!

Snail’s pace
The Labour Party attacked the Tories recently for being too slow to act on matters of social concern, declaring ‘we will spend what is needed on emergency crisis loans – and maintain existing levels of council tax benefit support for that matter – and present the bill for meeting the funding gap back to the government?’ That’s what Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) councillors would do.

Labour in Westminster could help by pledging that an incoming government would reimburse councils if, for example, they were to use their reserves, or their prudential borrowing powers, to avoid these devastating cuts.

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Dirty money
You can tell a lot about a person by the friends they have. And this is true of parties. The Tories received £440,000 from business interests of crook Aki Nadir between 1985 and 1990. Nadir then left Britain in 1993 to avoid being charged with theft but has now been jailed for ten years for stealing nearly £29 million from his company Pondy Peks. Even Lord McKinnon, former Tory treasurer, recognised that the money should be returned. In fact he correctly said it should have been given back in 1993!

As yet nobody seems to have acted on his suggestions...
Unison and Unite NHS workers
Poole Dorset

Poole Hospital NHS Trust is one of the 20 trusts in the South West that have signed up to the South West Pay, Terms and Conditions Consortium, the real purpose of which is to reduce the wage bill.

The Trust management aims to do this through reviewing pay bands, introducing performance-related pay (except for themselves no doubt!), increasing hours worked with no extra pay, reducing sick pay and cutting holiday pay. Newly qualified staff will also not be allowed to progress up their pay bands through the removal of section 1.8 of the Agenda for Change, pay and grading scheme.

This is based on the need to reduce costs, which is driven by government demands to slash the NHS budget by a further £20 billion. The aim of the consortium is to reduce costs over the next three to four years and probably beyond! As stated in management's discussion document and its implementation will mean the breaking up of the Agenda for Change national pay bargaining scheme.

A Coventry council worker

Local government pension scheme
How did we end up worse off?

A Coventry council worker

All three local authority trade unions have now accepted the new-look pension scheme - LGPS 2014, with ballots in GMB, Unite and Unison all returning large majorities in favour of accepting. Council workers will have a worse pension - paying more, working longer and getting less.

Many members and activists will ask how we went from a huge day of industrial action on 30 November 2011 (NS30) to where we have now accepted a deal that will see members worse off.

The union leaderships signed up to the Heads of Agreement after NS30 which accepted many of the very issues that we had fought against. Months and months then dragged on with the creators of the deal being bought and sold on the promise of a better future.

Little wonder that members started to question whether the union leaderships were up for the fight. In Unison, branches and activists who wanted to campaign for a no vote were effectively stopped from putting their case to the members.

It was not just Unison who recommended acceptance. GMB campaigned for the deal, as did Unite. The Unite recommendation was especially disappointing given that GMB and Unison signed up for the Heads of Agreement, Unite initially refused to do so.

The fight to reclaim our unions for the members has to be stepped up. This could be a drawn-out process. But we must take heart from what took place in the civil service union, PCS. PCS and its forerunner unions were controlled by the right wing for many years, but the Left waged a long battle for democracy and for a fighting programme and now the PCS is one of the most active and prominent unions in the fight against austerity.

We need to defend union democracy against uneducated officials who see their role as ‘policing’ the membership. We need a genuine lay democracy. Imagine what a powerful weapon Unison and other unions could be if they had a combative approach. These are our unions, and we want them back!

Branches who think on the same lines need to coordinate. Elected positions in the union need to be fought for and won. Our industrial strategy can’t be limited to a big march and then a big day of strike action, with months or years in between.

We need to link up with all public and private sector unions for coordinated action. A 24-hour general strike would be a huge step forward to building the necessary unity - and would send a serious warning shot across the Con-Dems’ bows. Let us also remember that there are unions across the public sector that are still in the pensions battle - some of whom took action on 25 May and could look to further action in the autumn.

This needs to be a discussion among Unison, Unite and GMB members about the link with the Labour Party and the way forward in terms of political representation. Around 80% of the cuts are still to be implemented so we also need a political strategy, one which goes beyond the Labour-inspired ‘cut, but a bit less severe than the Tories’. The unions need to discuss the policies of nationalisation, public ownership and a socialist alternative.

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Prison work

‘£3 a day is exploitation for profit’

Dozens of inmates at Prescoed prison in Monmouthshire are being bussed out to a call centre to work for just £3 a day – 6% of the minimum wage. The Socialist spoke to PJ McParlin, national chair of the POA, about the prison officer union’s attitude to this and Tony justice secretary Ken Clarke’s aim of having 20,000 prisoners working within ten years.

A company is bussing out inmates to work in a call centre. What is the POA’s response? ‘I don’t have much sympathy for prisoners but they’re not all mass murderers or people who have committed horrendous crimes – they’re mostly people who’ve made a mistake. A lot of them have had appalling upbringings and now the state is exploiting them.’

It would be bad enough if it was £3 an hour but £3 a day can be nothing else but exploitation to make profit. At £3 a day, you’re going to be impinged on outside work. For that reason the POA, NAPo, the lecturers’ union and the TUC have rejected the government’s protocol because we don’t believe that it gives the safeguards that are necessary.

What does the POA think about Ken Clarke’s aim to double the number of prison workers within ten years? We think right idea, wrong rationale. They should be concentrating on education and addiction therapy. If you can’t read the safety notice there’s an immediate problem. If you’re addicted to drugs, alcohol, or whatever, there’s a problem in being safe in work.

They’ve paid a lot of lip-service to diverting people with mental health issues, because prison’s not the place for them. Last year they trumped that they’d spent £880,000 on training prison officers in mental health issues. That might be a lot of money to you and me, but in the reality of the system it’s absolutely nothing. They need to be diverting people away from prison who shouldn’t be in prison.

Within these prison factories, they’re talking about replicating outside work. A lot of prisoners have medical issues so they need to see the doctor or a nurse on a daily basis. That has to be moved to the evening. You’ve got to have recreation for any worker – that has to be moved to the evening. The evening is when the number of prison staff – prison officers, probation officers, nurses and so on – is at its mini-mum. Turning all that round has a cost and I don’t think they’ve got the money to do it.

Do you think there’s a case for some training and other rehabilitation to limit reoffending? To a great extent that work happens now. But the problem that prevents proper rehabilitation in prisons is the cost. They’re closing prisons – it’s a government policy. Ken Clarke uses the word ‘superfluous’ which we wouldn’t recognise. Of the 135 prisons in England and Wales, at the end of April 85 of them were overcrowded. If they really believe in rehabilitation, Clarke would end overcrowding, which would allow staff to interact and work with offenders.

Last year they closed HMP Latchmere House in London. They closed it because the land value in Richmond was, I imagine, very high. That was the best performing prison in the United Kingdom in terms of rehabilitation.

How is the POA working with other trade unions? We took action on 10 May alongside other trade unions who are still opposing the pension proposals. That was a brave step - my members haven’t got the right to take industri-al action. But if the issue is right we have to take action. The retirement age of 68 is wrong for a schoolteacher; it’s wrong for somebody digging a road and it’s certainly wrong for prison officers in the charged atmos-phere of the prisons.

We were pleased last year to take to the TUC a motion about the 40-hour work in prisons initiative of the government. We’ve worked closely with other unions in the criminal justice system, and also support the National Shop Stewards Network.

Women’s prisons

Con-Dems’ reforms threaten cuts and privatisation

The Prison Reform Trust has said that prisons in England and Wales are overcrowded, with 7,300 inmates. This overcrowding, says the trust, is limiting prison staff’s efforts to reduce reoffending.

A women’s prison health worker comments: ‘For your own good’ But women are still being sent to prison for petty crimes, judges are sending women to prison for ‘their own good’ feeling that they would not be given the right amount of care if they remained in the community.

And instead of worthwhile retraining, prisons. Chatterton, who was at Styal for three years, said that 50% of the women he saw should not have been sent to prison. Chatterton’s examples included one woman jailed for 12 days for stealing £30 in a country store. One wom-an, convicted of shoplifting, lived in forest where she scavenged food to survive. Another took a £12 bottle of champagne and spent her ten-day sentence ill in hospital guarded by two prison officers.

WORMWOOD SCRUBBS ON 10 MAY 2012 photo Kate Dickson

Chatterton, who was at Styal for three years, said that 50% of the women he saw should not have been sent to prison.

Women’s prisons

The increased prison population is largely a result of harsher senten-cing, not increased offending. In 1995, 129 people were in prison for four or more years; in 2005, it was 1,400. In 2001, 3,000 people were sent to prison for petty theft as a first time offender.

33% of women prisoners are there because of theft. Women prisoners are likely to have no qualifications and be employed at the point of their arrest.

A lack of safe bail hostels for women increased their time spent in prison. Women are also more likely to receive a custodial sentence for less serious offences.

Two-thirds of women in prison are mothers. Only 5% of children whose mother is in prison will remain in the family home. Women who are pregnant while in prison are more likely to be physically attacked by other prisoners.

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Women’s prisons

Con-Dems’ reforms threaten cuts and privatisation

The Prison Reform Trust has said that prisons in England and Wales are overcrowded, with 7,300 inmates. This overcrowding, says the trust, is limiting prison staff’s efforts to reduce reoffending.

A women’s prison health worker comments: ‘For your own good’ But women are still being sent to prison for petty crimes, judges are sending women to prison for their ‘own good’ feeling that they would not be given the right amount of care if they remained in the community.

And instead of worthwhile retraining, prisons. Chatterton, who was at Styal for three years, said that 50% of the women he saw should not have been sent to prison. Chatterton’s examples included one woman jailed for 12 days for stealing £30 in a country store. One woman, convicted of shoplifting, lived in forest where she scavenged food to survive. Another took a £12 bottle of champagne and spent her ten-day sentence ill in hospital guarded by two prison officers.

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A cross the country millions of people are starting to suffer the consequences of austerity, which is designed to balance the books at the cost of both the country and the people. The government is determined to do this at all costs, even if it means destroying the economy and causing untold suffering. In this context, it is clear that the battle against austerity will continue until the end of the decade. It is urgent that the government and the unions take action to defend the living standards of workers.

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Walsall council has begun a public consultation on ‘spending priorities for 2013-14’, speaking of further cuts of around £267 million over the next four years. The consultation questionnaire asks people to say which council services ‘were most important to them’ and which were ‘less important’. Unsurprisingly, it did not include the option of saying no to all the cuts.

What follows is an extract from Walsall councillor Pete Smith’s reply to Walsall Voluntary Action’s campaign engaging hundreds, even thousands, of local citizens might bring a change of mind.

Councillor Pete Smith


Why I joined the Socialist Party

I am 22 years old and a new member of the Socialist Party. I’m sure there are many others who could join with us in our struggle for a fairer world. This is why I joined the Socialist Party. Socialism offers something different, and is a change from the capitalist system that fails us all the time and again.

Organised opposition is what we need, and we know it has potential...

Capitalism quite frankly just doesn’t work, we need an alternative which caters for everybody; young, old, disadvantaged; not the privileged few! In the future the destruction a capitalist society brings will only get worse, which is why we need the youth of today to rise up now before it is too late.

Abandonment of our generation; it happened in the 80s and it is happening now. Why should we settle for exploitation and a life of no aspirations and poverty?

Labour do not represent the ordinary working class, we need a proper position to the neoliberal bloodsuckers at the top!

If we don’t protect our rights and values now, how can we complain when they are stripped from us?

Showing solidarity will never change things, politics is fundamental in how we live our lives, down to the very last detail. Do we want to live in a fair and free society or not? Then we need to organise!

The excitement of the carnival weekend, the Socialist Party’s summer camp to place near the beautiful Lpping Forest. Campers were treated to a variety of political discussions on Marxist economics, philosophy and historical materialism, as well as a discussion on the food industry.

Two evening rallies were held. A packed marquee on Saturday, including comrades from Belgium and black workers, other carnival-goers, Iain Dalton

Save our computer server!

£542.26 was raised for the server appeal at the Saturday night rally at the annual Socialist Party summer camp, including £110 from Rob Simmons, £100 from Helen and Mark Kerr; £40 from Linda Taaffe, £25 from Ken Douglass, £25 from Paula Mitchell and £20 from Jon Davis.

Thanks also to Natura Hunter for £10; Seth Cruse; Lyle; Peter Watkinson; £40; Alan Coote; £30; Ronnie and Claire Job £100 and £7.50 from a reader of the Socialist.

Please consider donating to the appeal to fund a replacement computer server. Every donation, no matter how big or how small, is very welcome, and will take us nearer to our goal.

You can pay via the Socialist Party website www.socialistparty.org.uk/donate and mark your donation ‘server appeal’ or telephone 020 8988 8777.

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SPEAKERS AT CUSC

Tony Mulhearn ‘Liverpool 47’ councillor and ex-president of Liverpool District Labour Party expelled by Neil Kinnock

Trade Unionist

and Socialists Coalition 2012 conference Saturday 22 September, 11am-5pm See www.tusc.org.uk

Notting Hill carnival-goers support Lonmin miners

Socialist Party members joined thousands of Londoners at the Notting Hill carnival on Bank Holiday Monday, campaigning for solidarity with the South African Lonmin miners.

The excitement of the carnival didn’t prevent a steady flow of people, particularly from Caribbean and Southern African countries, from approaching the stall.

Clearly the memory of the anti-apartheid struggle and the role the miners played in that period still resonates with people who became politically aware in the 70s and 80s. Many people we spoke to on the stall were quick to point out the similarities between the behaviour of the old regime towards workers’ struggle and the massacre at the Lonmin mine where at least 34 miners were shot by police.

Two South African workers de-
Kazakhstan: Human rights campaigner Vadim Kuramshin freed

The well-known Kazakhstan human rights activist, Vadim Kuramshin, was released from custody on 28 August. The judge announced this surprise result after the morning hearing in which Vadim had hoped to be released. Instead of the threatened 14 years imprisonment under a specially harsh regime, he was freed with just one year of conditional bail.

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“First of all, I want to thank all my friends and comrades, of my friends and comrades, the constant support and the wide media coverage they were able to get, have also played a very big role in the outcome of this case, for which there was clearly no basis in the law.”

“Indeed, there has never been a result like this on previous occasions when I have been convicted for clearly political reasons.

“The court judgment says that Breivik is not “psychotic”. The massacre did not happen because of mental illness, but because of his right-wing extremism and Islamophobia.

He was sentenced to Norway’s toughest punishment - 21 years plus. This means that theoretically he could be imprisoned for life if still considered dangerous. Neither party will appeal, which is a great relief for the families involved. The trial has been a huge burden on them.

A few days before sentencing, the 22 July Commission presented its report about the actions of the state authorities one year ago. It criticised the police for how they handled 22 July, but also for not stopping Breivik earlier.

Security Service Police (POT) had received a list of those who had bought suspected chemicals online, but it was put aside, not taken seriously. There was also very poor communication and management on 22 July, with many errors committed. Among other criticisms, the police overhanded their own little inflatable boat instead of using one of the boats that were offered by locals. The report says that police took too long to reach the island. Many could have been saved when every minute counted.

The report forced the resignation of the national commissioner for police, Oystein Aarø. He is a close friend of prime minister Jens Stoltenberg and was hand-picked for the job. Many high-ranking people serving in the police force are career bureaucrats with no police training.

The former head of POT, Janne Kristiansen, said, among other things, that not even the Stasi (former East German secret police) could have stopped Breivik because he had an “Aryan” appearance.

POT has long been criticised for being “blind in its right eye” and traditionally has only monitored the left. POT was reorganised in 2000 after it was disclosed that it had illegally monitored socialists and communists, and collaborated with the Labour Party on this. About 400 people got financial compensation, with many more cases pending. After 22 July, POT was criticised for not taking right-wing extremism seriously, but only focusing on Islamic groups.

Although the Breivik trial has ended, the fight against right-wing extremism, racism and Islamophobia must continue. This summer, Roma people from Romania have been exposed to strong attacks in the media, opinion articles and on line in Norway. They have been subjected to harassment on the streets and in their camp, and by the police.

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The Julian Assange case

Editorial comment from Offensiv, weekly paper of Rättvisespartiet Socialisterna (CW Sweden)

Julian Assange speaking at an anti-war demo in London photo Paul Mattsson

Sweden

When Assange left Sweden on 27 September 2010, however, he was suspected of rape. First he was arrested in absentia on 20 August though the charges were subsequently lifted.

However, on 1 September the investigation resumed. In November, he was arrested in his absence and Interpol sought a woman who claimed he raped her. One case of rape, two counts of sexual molestation and one case of duress. Weeks later, he reported to the police in London.

Then, a long process of extradition to Sweden began. The Swedish prosecutor Mats Lofving then requested his extradition. Assange fought this, feeling his rape was a “sex game,” and he should not be extradited to the US. In June 2012, Assange went into the Ecuadorian Embassy in London and asked for asylum, which he was granted.

Julian Assange has every reason to fear US retaliation. Since May 2010, the US has detained Breanna Manning (formerly known as Bradley) Manning, a 24 year old who worked in the military intelligence in Iraq and was pointed out as one of the main sources of WikiLeaks. Manning could face life imprisonment, accused of “support for terrorism.” Several leading right-wing US politicians said that Manning should be treated in the same way.

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Julian Assange speaking at an anti-war demo in London photo Paul Mattsson

United States

Assange also turned directly to the United States in his ten-minute speech from the Ecuadorian Embassy balcony on 19 August. To audience applause, he requested that the FBI investigation and the witch-hunt against WikiLeaks cease.

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There are two women in Sweden. “However, some of the activists associated with Occupy who have turned up outside the embassy have stressed their presence is about showing solidarity with WikiLeaks rather than necessarily endorsing Assange,” the Guardian reported.

That the allegations made against Assange - intercourse with a sleepwalking woman and deliberately destroying a condom during intercourse - are classed as rape is used in debates to argue that Swedish legislation is “feminist” or exaggerated. But Sweden does not distinguish itself by its harshness against rapists.

This tougher law is a result of women’s struggles, which in turn were supported by the labour movement and the rest of society. This means that “no means no.” Forced sex is a crime, which even those who believe that Assange is innocent should realise is progress.

Despite the torture laws, very few accused men are convicted or even investigated. About 200 men are convicted of rape annually in Sweden compared to over 6,000 filings. Even in cases which are prosecuted, a third are acquitted. In this context, to speak of “state feminism,” as some Assange supporters do, is absurd.

The Swedish prosecution acted very clumsily and slowly in 2010. When the charges were assumed, they had three weeks to interview Assange before he left the country, which they allowed him to do. Since then, prosecutors refused to interrogate Assange in London, which would be a natural step for those who want to pursue the investigation.

Promises

Similarly, the Swedish government refused to promise that Assange would not be extradited to the United States. Such a promise would, according to Kristinn Hrafnsson from WikiLeaks in a comment after Assange’s speech, be “a way to break the deadlock.”

Socialists stand for the rape allegations being investigated without the threat of deportation to the United States or other repres- sive measures against WikiLeaks. WikiLeaks’ revelations about Iraq and Afghanistan played an important positive role in the struggle against war and imperialism.

In Sweden, it confirmed Foreign Minister Carl Bildt’s warmongering role, as well as the government’s pressure on Iraq to stop refugees coming to Sweden.

Socialists stand for Breanna Manning’s release and defend the democratic rights of WikiLeaks and its sources. A democratic socialist mass movement must stand up for free speech, against violence against women, against war and imperialism.

Eleanor Donne

George Galloway, Respect Party MP for Bradford West, revealed disturbing ignorance and misogyny in his recent podcast about the rape allegations against Julian Assange, founder of the WikiLeaks website and scourge of the political and military establishment.

Galloway says that: “even if the allegations made by these two women...were 100% true...they don’t constitute rape.” He describes the allegations as no more than “bad sexual etiquette.” If you “go to bed” with someone then you are in “the sex game” with them and he says that you should not need “to be asked prior to each insertion.”

Does he want to turn the clock back to the days when marriage gave men conjugal rights and husbands could therefore rape their wives with impunity?

The US has so far done a huge disservice, not only to the women he is supposed to represent in parliament, but also to society in general, by confusing and guilt which many women feel when they are assaulted by their partner or someone they know and to the trivialising of so-called “date rape.”

It is entirely consistent to applaud Assange’s role in exposing the hypocrisy and corruption of governments and the ruling class through WikiLeaks. The recognition that he could also be capable of rape of sexual assault. Clearly it is also possible, as Assange’s lawyer maintains, that the allegations against him are contrived for political purposes.

Women Against Rape (WAR), a pressure group supporting rape victims, commenting on the Assange case, recognises this, pointing to a long tradition of using rape and sexual assault allegations for political agendas.

Speed of arrest

WAR further commented on Interpol’s unusual speed and determina- tion in getting Assange arrested, when in their experience even hardened sex traffickers are able to evade the authorities time after time. But quite rightly they also do not condone the condemnation of the women who reported Assange. However, this level of understand- ing has been difficult for some supporters of his who believe Galloway weighed in disgracefully in a personal attack against the women, dismissing and belittling their claims. Writer and journalist Naomi Wolf, who describes herself as a feminist, indulged in speculation that the women making the allegations were not rape victims but jealous, spurned women taking their revenge on Assange because he had sex with both of them.

She refers to Interpol as the “dating police,” trivialising the rape and sexual assault allegations. Michael Moore initially dismissed the women’s claims as “hooey” although later accepted there should be a full investigation. Even Tony Benn entered the debate, reportedly stating in the context of a speech about Assange, that a non-consensual relationship is not the same as rape.

Salma Yaqoob, leader of Respect, condemned Galloway’s remarks as “deeply disappointing and wrong.”

Julian Assange speaking at an anti-war demo in London photo Paul Mattsson

Galloway should be held to account. It is not acceptable for a member of his party - he should not air personal prejudices in his public role. He should be asked to retract his dis- captioning comments which cannot be said to promote the “Peace, Justice and Equality” which are the watch- words of the Respect party.
Book review

Leon Trotsky: A revolutionary’s life

The 72nd anniversary of the assassination of the great Russian revolutionary Leon Trotsky was commemorated even within Britain’s capitalist press. An interview with Trotsky’s grandson Esteban Volokh, in the Guardian recalls his last months and the assassination attempt that ended his life (August 1940). Trotsky’s life and ideas still provokes interest and controversy. The Socialist Party and the Committee for a Workers’ International (the world socialist organisation to which we are affiliated) recommends the books of Trotsky as well as those of Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels, Vladimir Lenin and fellow leaders of the Russian Revolution. Here Niall Mutholland reviews a new biography ‘Leon Trotsky: A Revolutionary’s Life’, by Joshua Rubenstein, published by Yale University Press.

I n this compact biography, Joshua Rubenstein makes it clear in his afterword that he is not an ‘admirer or follower’ of the historic socialist revolutionary and that the author ‘seek[s] to savage’ Trotsky for his ‘personaliveness’ and his anti-Semitism was ‘exploited by the ruling class in Russia as a way of fostering divide and rule policies among the Russian working class and peasantry, which were increasingly attracted to socialist ideas’. It is no accident that so many socialist revolutionaries, like Trotsky, came from the oppressed Jews in Tsarist Russia. Rubenstein makes the ridiculous assertion that as Trotsky “spurned one messianic religion, he adopted an alternative utopian faith – one that was neither ashamed of its Jewish origin nor ashamed to deny them”. In fact, in his autobiography ‘My Life’, Trotsky writes openly about his ethnic and religious background. Anti-Semitism was mastered by the Bolsheviks, overthrowing Czarism and landowners in 1917 would have been bloody counter-revolution and the likely imposition of a brutal military regime.

The failure of socialist revolutions in advanced capitalist countries left the Russian working class isolated. It was these conditions that primarily led to a bureaucratic, nationalist reaction in Russia not, as Rubenstein asserts, Trotsky being “out of his depth” in his struggle with Stalin, “spurned one messianic religion, he adopted an alternative utopian faith – one that was neither ashamed of its Jewish origin nor ashamed to deny them”. In fact, in his autobiography ‘My Life’, Trotsky writes openly about his ethnic and religious background. Anti-Semitism was mastered by the Bolsheviks, overthrowing Czarism and landowners in 1917 would have been bloody counter-revolution and the likely imposition of a brutal military regime.

Contradictions
Rubenstein asserts that it was the ‘Bolsheviks’ insistence on a monopacy of power that provoked the civil war in Russia. Yet he again contradicts himself, admitting later that the ‘civil war, after all, was initiated by right-wing and pro-monarchist groups’. Trotsky’s role as leader of the Red Army, contesting 21 invading capitalist armies, is condemned by Rubenstein for its “severe discipline”. But all civil wars are violent, bloody affairs. The American Civil War’s extreme measures were used on both sides. Yet historians and biographers usually applaud Abraham Lincoln for his role and they certainly do not heap anything like the same moral opprobrium on him as they do on Trotsky. Why? We can only conclude this is due to their political hostility towards Bolshevism. Between 1918 and 1921, Trotsky and the Red Army successfully defended the Soviet regime against the forces of capitalist counter-revolution. This was primarily on the basis of inspiring workers and peasants to fight for a new socialist society and for a democratic workers’ management of the economy. Eventually the increasingly bureaucratized Soviet economy stagnated and finally collapsed in the early 1990s, ushering in capitalist restoration – a catastrophe for the living standards of millions. The Trotsky had predicted decades previously.

A Revolutionary’s Life concludes with Trotsky’s hounding by the forces of Stalinism and his murder at the hands of a Stalinist agent, in Mexico in 1940. Crucial debates during the 1930s took place among Trotsky’s followers in the International Left Opposition and later the Fourth International. These debates, including the class characterization of the Soviet Union and Trotsky’s call for a political revolution to restore real workers’ democracy, the position of revolutionaries on the impending world war – as well as Trotsky’s rich analysis of fascism, the Spanish Revolution and other vital issues in the 1930s – are treated soberly, and unfortunately often too lightly, by Rubenstein.

Trotsky’s writings are, of course, the best place to go for an in-depth examination of these important debates, which have great relevance today. And Trotsky’s autobiography, as well as Isaac Deutscher’s magisterial, three-volume Trotsky biography, despite its political flaws, remain essential reading to understand the great revolutionary’s politics and times.
FIGHT THEIR SYSTEM, DEMAND OUR FUTURE!

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-by-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 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 un-recycled 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!