We can stop this austerity

BUILD A
24-HOUR GENERAL STRIKE

Paula Mitchell
London Socialist Party secretary

What a fantastic moment. Chants for a 24-hour general strike rang out along the Brighton seafront, as sun-seeking families lined the route of the National Shop Stewards Network march and applauded. We saw a glimpse of how millions of people can be lifted out of the anger and fear engulfing them and transformed into a force that can change it all.

The trade union movement, organising 6.5 million workers, would be a mighty force if it acted in concert. Imagine the effect if all the schools, all the council workers, all the firefighters, all the government staff and NHS workers, out on strike and taking to the streets, were joined by all the train staff, power plant workers, builders and electricians, and by cleaners, factory and shop workers. That would have enormous power. And just imagine the effect that would have on workers not in unions, on unemployed people, young people and families. There could be a rising up of all those people hit so hard - and to be hit even harder yet - by pay freezes, benefit cuts, tuition fees, the closure of youth centres, the decimation of essential services and so on, and on, and on.

At the moment many see no hope. What can we do when our housing benefit is cut, our tax credits are cut, and the landlord says he’s going to put the rent up? When the queue at the food bank gets longer; when the queue for every low-paid zero-hour contract gets bigger? Save the Children showed that the poorest children bear the brunt of the recession and cuts, losing out on hot meals, new shoes, birthday celebrations, school trips. What will it mean? More riots - the cry of the dispossessed? More people turning to the far right in despair? But now, with the talk of a general strike, all that fear and struggle can be gathered up, organised, and made powerful.

And it can be given a voice. A new poll, reported in the Guardian, shows that by a wide margin people in Britain think we need to "fundamentally change the way our country and economy works". They’re right! It doesn’t take much imagination to work it out. How about, instead of £800 billion ‘owned’ by big corporations sitting in the bank doing nothing, we use it to employ young people and all those public sector workers who have been made redundant? Instead of the government giving money to the banks, for them to sit on, refusing to loan, the money is used to build houses, re-build schools and re-open youth centres? Instead of the rich getting richer at our expense, we could plan, using the enormous wealth lying idle, for the benefit of all of us. Democratic socialist planning is not such a great leap of the imagination.

A 24-hour general strike won’t sort all of that out in one go. But it would be so momentous that it could really dent the cuts programme, it could lead to the toppling of this weak government, and it could transform the ideas and the hopes of millions – if we can do this, what else could we do...?

STOP PRESS: as we go to print the TUC’s 2012 Congress has just voted to support Motion 5, proposed by the POA prison officers’ union which calls for a general strike against austerity. See pages 6&7
After the Paralympics... Stop the Con-Dems’ assualt on disabled

With the Paralympics over, the Con-Dems attacks on the welfare of disabled people continue - such as the planned 20% cut in Disability Living Allowance (DLA), which many Paralympians rely on.

Chancellor George Osborne and home secretary Teresa May should not have been surprised such as the planned 20% cut in Disability Living Allowance (DLA), which many Paralympians rely on.

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Save the Independent Living Fund

Independent Living Fund user

On 13 September, Disabled People Against Cuts organised a 'Paupers' Picnic for Independent Living' in central London to raise awareness of Tory/Liberal coalition plans to close the UK-wide Independent Living Fund (ILF) by April 2015.

The fund was set up in 1988 as an extension of the social security and national insurance system. Following its closure to new applications in May 2010 and cutbacks in its central government grant, the ILF’s 19,000 users now receive funding from a central pot of £330m a year towards their personal assistance or care support.

This is to employ personal assistants, buy help from a domiciliary care agency or fund additional support in Independent Supported Living schemes.

Each ILF user has a complex condition associated with their severe physical impairment and/or learning difficulty or autism. Many would, without the critical support of ILF funds, be living in residential care, relying on live-in volunteers or spending their day bored in the farmlands.

The development of the ILF revo- lutionised social guarantees of a generation, and also meant the most vulnerable layers of people with considerable difficulties could continue to live in the community or with their families.

The central fear of many ILF users was expressed earlier this year in parliament’s Joint Committee on Human Rights when John Evans, a leading activist in the European Disability Forum and European Net-

Work on Independent living, raised his worry that he may be returned to residential care in 2013.

ILF users and their families un-

derstand that, with ongoing cuts to social care, transferring complete responsibility for large care packages to local authorities will lead many to being reassessed and the loss of essential support, particularly with the new development of maximum expenditure policies.

The ILF does not fit with the coa-

tion’s ‘localism’ policy or the re-

source-led personalisation process and personal budgets where a social care funding allocation is identified through a questionnaire rather than a detailed, personalised assessment by a social worker that ILF users are familiar with.

ILF users and workers have a huge amount to lose. They must conduct a vigorous campaign to save the fund, linking with the ILF administra-

tive workers’ union, the PCS.

They must also claim Disability Rights UK withdraws its support for the Con-Dems’ localism and personalisation policy, and actively defends both the ILF and local authority services from any further cuts.

I recently found out I had to reapply for Access to Work, a scheme to aid disabled people in work and help them to achieve work tasks as an able bodied person would do. My situation has not changed at all in the three years I have been working and my support has re-

ained the same. I was interviewed over the phone about my claim with many probing questions. I think if I could travel to work by bus instead of us-

ing a taxi. I have four taxi journeys a week as I work two days, and it gives me door to door. Buses are very in-

frequent. I need to get to work two hours early and not get home till two hours after I finished work - all for a three mile trip!

Could I change my working hours to fit? No, I’m employed for a certain amount of hours - I can’t change it. It seemed they wanted to know every-

last detail.

I came off the phone feeling very shaky and highly intimidated by the interview. It felt like I was being accused of claiming for things I shouldn’t. I don’t earn much at work and only get DLA and work-

ning tax credits to make my income up to something near liveable on. I certainly can’t contribute any more than I already am.

I pay 50p in every mile for my journey to work and can claim back the rest. I don’t think this is too un-

reasonable.

This government wants disabled people to work they need to support the necessary adjustments needed. All the rhetoric about scroungers and benefit cheats makes disabled people feel on the frill of all the time when we’re not.

The vast majority of people, disabled or not, wish to work, earn a living and live comfortably. That means no extra support, the government or the employer should make the funding available to meet our need.

Access to Work scheme user

Save our NHS

Leicester: Marching to keep children's heart unit open

Steve Score

East Midlands Socialist Party

Around 150 people gathered at about 3 o’clock on Saturday 8 Septem-

ber to show their opposition to the proposed closure of the children’s heart unit at Glenfield Hospital in

Leicester.

Cars hooted their support as the loud, chanting protesters marched up and down Belgrave Road.

The march was organised by 14-

year old Ria Pahwa, the second one. She said, “I couldn’t have the pres-

sure on the government to review the decision. If the closure goes ahead, my heart unit would be in Birmingham.

Ria is herself a heart patient and said that she could have died soon after birth if the heart unit hadn’t been at Glenfield. Campaigners and doctors have pointed out that the closure of this unit would un-

doubtedly mean a greater number of deaths.

An online petition - epetitions.

direct.gov.uk/petitions/35788 - has been signed by around 65,000 peo-

ple so far with the aim of getting over 100,000 signatures and the de-

cision reviewed.

The original consultation paid different different heart units against each other. The Socialist Party is opposed to the closure of any of the heart units, and believes it is part of the wider process of cutbacks the gov-

ernment is making.

There is more information online at www.socialistparty.org.uk/ 

issue/728/14946

London NHS protests - Saturday 15 September

South London

1pm, General Gordon Square, Greens End, Woolwich

Central Middlesex

● Re-open our A&E with full 24-

hour service

Assemble 12 noon at Harlesden Jubilee Clock, High Street, Brent

March to Central Middlesex Hospital

Ealing

Marches assemble 10am at Southall Park and 11am at Acton Park

Both will march to Ealing Common for a 1pm rally

Kick out Atos

Atos, which was scandalously allowed to sponsor the Olympics and Paralympics, continues to ‘assess’ (ie cut) disabled welfare claimants in exchange for £100 million a year from the government. Over 1,000 people have died after having their benefits withdrawn due to Atos assessments.

Even parliament’s own work and pensions committee has said that just mentioning Atos triggers ‘fear and loathing’ among claimants. Channel 4 speculated Paralympic athletes and volunteers intentionally hid the Atos logo on their passes for the opening ceremony.

People in the company don’t put much effort into training its employees. As one person tweeted: “When being assessed by Atos my sister, who has Down’s Syndrome, was asked ‘how long have you had the condition?’ Unbelievable but true.”

No wonder that many of Atos’s decisions are overturned on appeal.

Disability assessment needs to be taken out of the hands of big busi-

ness gangs like Atos and be run as a publicly owned, democratically accountable public service.

Bromsgrove meeting opposes A&E closure

On Friday 7 September, 150 people attended a meeting in Bromsgrove, Worcestershire, organised by the ‘Save the Alex’ campaign which is defending the Alexandra hospital in nearby Redditch.

52,000 people have signed the Save the Alex petition, and 1,000 have marched in Redditch.

Speakers included Broms-

grove Tory MP Sajid Javid, who told us spending on the NHS was increasing in real terms, welfare a NHS Worcestershire document says ‘funding avail-

able for healthcare will remain largely static over the next three years’.

Javid said he opposed plans to close the A&E department at

Redditch and stated he was not convinced by the overall propos-

als. Maybe he said this with conviction or more likely because he sees a career change coming in a few years if he didn’t.”

Source: PAMP and PCS union executive member Kevin Greenway pointed out that one way the money needed could be found was from a crackdown on tax avoidance and evasion by the rich.

But Javid thought this would be too temporary as the rich would leave the country. So, just as the banks were too big to fail, it seems the rich are too rich to tax.

Pete McNally

Worcester Socialist Party

Don’t cut our Access to Work

...
Con-Dem housing measures - in ‘the thick of it’?

Faul Kershaw

The government has announced a package to revive house building, including ‘guarantees’ for new homes said to be worth £10 billion. Developers and some of the big ‘social housing’ associations welcomed the package. Even housing charity Shelter approved. But some in the press speculated about a panic to find a good headline for Mark Prisk, the new housing minister, being behind the measures – shades of ‘The thick of it’?

There is plenty of bad news to divert attention away from housing and other measures will do nothing to help the housing crisis.

The proposals ignore planning laws meaning it is easier for developers to build on ‘green belt’ land or to damage public amenities. Requirements on developers to provide affordable homes are also to be relaxed. You can see why developers would welcome this; easy profits!

But developers are already sitting on ‘land banks’ with planning permission to build over 400,000 homes. At the current rate of construction it would take developers three and a quarter years to clear the backlog by building all of the new homes local authorities have signed off on.

In London alone there are 93,000 homes with planning permission which haven’t been started or are stalled by developers. In reality developers are hanging back until the prospects are best to make a killing.

The Con-Dems inherited house building at a historic low from the previous Labour government. However, by slashing spending on social housing, Rather than the private sector rushing in to fill the gap, house building has continued to spiral down with indicators that this will get worse.

Housing crisis

Figures from the House Builders Federation show social housing planning approvals fell 41% between the first and second quarters of 2012. The problem isn’t red tape, it is the refusal of banks to invest, the unwillingness of private developers to build in the inability of would-be homebuyers to meet the mortgage and house prices are spiralling out of control.

The credit boom prior to the banking crash is over and ordinary people are paying the cost. According to Shelter three-quarters of people say they would like to own a home within the next two years but the average deposit is £27,000, more than the average person earns in a year!

On current trends, just a quarter of households will own their home with a mortgage in 2025. The reality is that home ownership is a distant dream for many while private sector rents are soaring and 200,000 families live in overcrowded housing.

New figures from homeless charity Crisis shows homeless applications up 27% in London and rough sleeping is up by a massive 43% in 2011/12 compared to the previous 12 months.

The media talks about these measures as part of the government’s ‘plan B’ to revive the flailing economy. We need plan B! Take over the parasitical banks and major building companies; draw up a socialist plan of production based on people’s needs and engage unemployed building workers to meet housing needs through a massive programme of construction and renovation.

The lowest number of housing starts in the UK since the 1920s

Cabinet reshuffle

Jeremy Hunt and demo rhyming chants

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His other achievements include: a failed business in exporting marmalade to Japan, fiddling £20,000 in MPs’ expenses, having to apologise to Liverpool fans and the families of victims of the Hillsborough stadium disaster after fellow MPs revealed that their boss had played a part in the 96 deaths; Corruption and scandal seem to be the only way Hunt works and avoiding paying £100,000 in tax after doing a nifty number through his company (nothing to do with marmalade!).

In his last post as culture secretary, after making department cuts of up to 50%, he hired his own parliamentary assistant, daughter Ava Gore, on a permanent fixed contract.

He also played a part in the News Corporation scandal, overseeing the company’s BSkyB bid which he refused to refer to the competition commission. The bid was eventually dropped.

Lovesson inquiry into phone hacking activities revealed Hunt’s impropriety in his contact with News Corp’s James Murdoch, congratulating him on the success of his bid. The bid was eventually dropped.

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More bad news from media mogul Murdoch

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The fact that Uribe is accused of knowing about illegal wiretapping of journalists, judges and political opponents in Colombia when he was president is of little consequence to the media mogul.

In fact, Murdoch senior vener-

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However, according to Human Rights Watch, Uribe’s presiden-
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If these plans go unchallenged it will mean, as BTM transport union general secretary Bob Crow says, “an all-out attack on safety” which will have “devastating consequences for workers and public alike as busi-
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Ten years ago the likelihood of a workplace inspection by the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) watchdog was calculated at once every 34 years in a working life.

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Teachers must unite against Tories

Martin Powell-Davies
Member of the NUT national executive, personal capacity

Teachers have voted overwhelmingly for action against attacks on their pay and conditions. The results for the votes covering teachers in England were: In favour of discontinuous strike action 88.1%, no 10.6%. In favour of industrial action short of strike action 93.1%, no 6.9%. Similar margins were recorded for the ballots in Wales and in sixth form colleges. Action will start on Monday.

This government is going all-out to hound and demoralise teachers. On top of a pay freeze, we face ‘pay-cuts-by-performance’. Schools minister Gove wants appraisal judgements and new ‘teachers standards’ to be used to block pay rises for even those who kick teachers down the pay scale.

Young teachers fighting for more pay
photo Paul Mattsson

As the scandal over GCSE grading has shown, the standards that teachers and schools are judged against are open to political manipulation too. We face a government intent on blocking opportunities for our students, trapping teachers, cutting our pay and pensions, attacking union facilities and widening school privatisation. Now the ballot result gives teachers the chance to stand up for ourselves and for education.

The NUT and NASUWT, making up 85% of teachers in England and Wales, have issued common advice to members. It’s vital that NUT and NASUWT members meet together in schools to discuss union advice and to plan ahead for the action in their school, encouraging every member to take part.

Regular local reps’ meetings, comparing experiences across schools, will also be vital. The immediate battles may well be around appraisal and observation policies. Where schools are imposing unacceptable policies, strike action is the best response. Where local authorities are ignoring union protocols, strike action is the best response.

Workers’ unity against brutal bosses

Mick Whale
Secretary Hull NUT

Striking workers at the Cranswick Foods meat processing factory at Preston near Hull have won a temporary reprieve from brutal new working conditions.

Cranswick management want to speed up the track to further exploit the workforce. A Cranswick worker explained: “At the moment, two of us working together are expected to process 500 carcasses an hour. Management want to have us working alone and have each one of us processing 350 carcasses an hour.

This is nearly a 50% increase in what we are expected to produce for no extra pay. In fact we haven’t had a pay increase for ten years.”

Management have not had to deal with a union and a strike before and they have clearly been shaken by the solidity of the strike and the determination of the strikers organised by the Cranswick joint committee.

The management have agreed to go back round the negotiating table and not implement the speed-ups for a while but further negotiations continue. This is a reprieve rather than a victory but the strength of the union action has forced management back.

A particularly inspiring feature of the strike has been the unity of the overwhelming majority of the workforce who are Polish with the English workers.

This shows again that the labour movement and working class action can bring about unity.

The language difficulties have been at least partially overcome through the support of everyone producing leaflets in Polish.

As one English worker joked: “I can’t understand the Polish saying but we all understand the words ‘strike’ and ‘picket line’.”

As the picket line broke up, many of the Polish workers were chanting “GMB, GMB!”

Workers’ unity against brutal bosses

Allistar Tice

So Mr Jack Scott, cabinet member responsible for trade (mis) management in Sheffield, how much money did you waste this weekend on strike-breaking and ‘blurring the lines’? Sheffield Labour council authorised a private haulage and waste company, MHH Contracting, to open their facility to the public and advertised on the council website to try to break the effectiveness of another two days’ strike action by GMB recycling workers.

Talks broke down on Friday when the GMB refused to suspend the weekend strike and the latest offer was withdrawn. So 38 odd workers still carried on on strike-breaking duty?

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Socialist students: Fighting for education

Extract from the editorial of Megaphone, the magazine of Socialist Students

Fees tripled, EMA scrapped, youth unemploymentskyrocketing. This government will leave behind a brutal legacy.

We are governed by the rich, for the rich. The real interests they serve are maintained big business – the ‘1%' or the capitalist class.

In an attempt to distract people from the true nature of one of the government’s favourite tactics is to attempt to turn people against each other. The young are ‘left' ‘lazy' and have a sense of ‘entitlement' as they should be first to face cuts, is one argument.

But the people with the real ‘sense of entitlement' are the banks and big business. After their casino captives led us to disaster, not only did they expect a bailout for their bad debts, but to be able to keep the power to dictate our lives and enjoy huge bonuses, just as before!

But, in Britain, students were first to demand a national organising mass protests, walkouts and strikes against fee hikes and EMA cuts.

This year the fight for our future will have to continue. The Con-Dems are coming for our education. Exit fees being tripled means the cost of a degree is now equivalent to a small mortgage. A three-year degree will set you back £50,000. Course fees for adults in further education (FE) are also being hiked. But while prices are increased, quality is set to be hit. Thousands of teaching and support jobs are threatened. This will leave students with overworked and undervalued lecturers, increasingly unable to deliver education at its best.

Privatisation

In higher education (HE) a plan for privatisation and marketisation is being formulated. David Willetts, universities minister, has stated openly that he wants HE institutions to stop thinking of themselves as part of the public sector.

Private companies are being brought in to run so-called ‘back room' services. To realise this means education on the cheap. At London Metropolitan University, all services other than teaching and the vice-chancellor's office have just been outsourced to the private sector.

The approval of new private universities, such as the ultra-elite ‘New College of Humanities', represents another strand of the effort to create an American style system of education - a system where the highest paying ‘customers' get the best education.

These tactics must be fought. This autumn two key dates for young people who want to fight back will be the trade union demonstration on 20 October and the National Union of Students (NUS) national demonstration on 21 November. We need to ensure that these demos are as big as possible with tens of thousands of students attending.

But they can only be the start of the fightback. The 2012 NUS conference voted to call a national student strike. We have to fight to make this a reality. To be most effective, this kind of action should coincide with strike action by workers, who, unlike students, have economic power. This should be the start of building a mass campaign organised around the following demands:

• Reverse the Con-Dem fee hike
• Tax the rich to fund free education
• Bring Back EMA
• No to all cuts – we won't pay for this
• To education run on the cheap, kick out the profiteers – no privatisation
• Slash rents, provide affordable accommodation for all
• No to education run on the cheap, kick out the profiteers – no privatisation
• We need a society for the 99%
• All the banks and big businesses should be owned publicly and controlled democratically by ordinary people.

Socialists demand an immediate 50% levy on the £750 billion held by the major corporations in their bank vaults. This would provide enough money to invest in developing socially-useful industry, but also to massively expand much-needed public services. For example, investing in a huge programme of new building, can provide much-needed homes and jobs.

Youth Fight for Jobs calls for:

• A living minimum wage for all
• A national living wage for all
• No to education run on the cheap, kick out the profiteers – no privatisation
• Reverse the Con-Dem fee hike

Youth Fight for Jobs fortnight of action: September.

March for Jobs

Order now for £6 plus £1 postage (usual price £9.99) at youth-fight-scotland.blogspot.co.uk or ring 020 8988 8777

On the Jarrow march photo Paul Mattsson

Global youth unemployment rises

Liz Gray
2011 Jarrow marcher

Since the end of the Youth Fight for Jobs in 2011 Jarrow March, youth unemployment figures have continued to rise, internationally, currently standing at 13% overall; the highest rate in Europe is Spain at 25%.

The International Labour Organisation (ILO) has predicted that this figure will continue to worsen over the next four years. The longer young people are unemployed, the more difficult it is for them to find work even if the job market improves.

The eurozone crisis has had a knock-on effect on other economies, with youth unemployment rising to 26.5% in the Middle East and to 27.9% in North Africa, a rise of 5% since the Arab Spring uprisings. However, there has been a surge in fighting back by young people globally, from the Spanish Indignados to the Occupy movement beginning in Wall Street.

In the UK, Connexions offices are closing despite young people needing support to find employment. The Con-Dems point the finger of blame at those who can't find work but to be able to keep the power to dictate our lives and enjoy huge bonuses, just as before!

But, in Britain, students were first to demand a national organising mass protests, walkouts and strikes against fee hikes and EMA cuts.

This year the fight for our future will have to continue. The Con-Dems are coming for our education. Exit fees being tripled means the cost of a degree is now equivalent to a small mortgage. A three-year degree will set you back £50,000. Course fees for adults in further education (FE) are also being hiked. But while prices are increased, quality is set to be hit. Thousands of teaching and support jobs are threatened. This will leave students with overworked and undervalued lecturers, increasingly unable to deliver education at its best.

These tactics must be fought. This autumn two key dates for young people who want to fight back will be the trade union demonstration on 20 October and the National Union of Students (NUS) national demonstration on 21 November. We need to ensure that these demos are as big as possible with tens of thousands of students attending.

But they can only be the start of the fightback. The 2012 NUS conference voted to call a national student strike. We have to fight to make this a reality. To be most effective, this kind of action should coincide with strike action by workers, who, unlike students, have economic power. This should be the start of building a mass campaign organised around the following demands:

• Reverse the Con-Dem fee hike
• Tax the rich to fund free education
• Bring Back EMA
• No to all cuts – we won't pay for this
• To education run on the cheap, kick out the profiteers – no privatisation
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• Tax the rich to fund free education
• Bring Back EMA
• No to all cuts – we won't pay for this
• To education run on the cheap, kick out the profiteers – no privatisation
• We need a society for the 99%
• All the banks and big businesses should be owned publicly and controlled democratically by ordinary people.

Leeds: Young Tenants Fightback

Leeds Youth Fight for Jobs will lobby Leeds City Council on Wednesday 12 September over housing issues as part of its ‘Young Tenants Fightback' campaign.

Iain Dalton, Youth Fight for Jobs Yorkshire organiser said: “Finding decent, affordable housing is becoming an ever greater problem for young people. A record high of three million 20-24 year olds live at home, an increase of half a million in the last 15 years. Many who do move out have no choice but to live in homes of multiple occupancy crammed in with other people due to high rent levels in the private sector. With only limited social and council housing being built in the last 20 years it's no wonder that the average waiting time for council housing is seven years.

For more info contact VFI Yorkshire organiser Iain Dalton on 07809839793 or yorkshireyfj@gmail.com

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Bristol: “We're not lazy - we're fighting back”

Outraged by news of the book Britain Unchained, which brands working class people as lazy, activists from Bristol Youth Fight for Jobs picked the surgery of Chris Skidmore, Tory MP for Kingwood and one of the right-wing authors of the book.

However, as we approached the surgery there was a ‘closed due to unforeseen circumstances’ sign on the door. Skidmore had gone on holiday! Maybe he didn't have the confidence to back up his disgraceful book and would rather shut his surgery, causing inconvenience to his constituents, than debate with protesters.

Despite Skidmore going into hiding, with the help of a hoover we kicked off the protest. Chants of ‘the rich, the rich, we've got to get rid of the rich' and ‘Tories out' could be heard as activists gave interviews to BBC Radio Bristol and distributed leaflets to the public. After about an hour we marched on the shopping area, backed by shouts of support and tooting of horns.

Patrick McInally

Youth Fight for Jobs in action!

March for a future! Saturday 6 October, 1.30pm Commemorating Outdoor Relief Strike

Rally at Custom House Square, march through the Shankill and Falls. Belfast - Northern Ireland

In October 1932, thousands of outdoor relief workers in Belfast went on strike to fight for their dignity, mass protests and rallies united Catholic and Protestant workers in the face of violence from loyalists and the state.

After two weeks of struggle, they won significant concessions. Youth Fight for Jobs has called this march from Custom House Square, where the rally that announced the strike was held, through the Shankill and Falls, the heartlands of the struggle, and ending with a rally at City Hall.

We want to commemorate the heroic struggle of 1932 and to send a message to the politicians and bosses that we will fight back too!

The march date has changed so not to clash with parades on 29 September.

Youth Fight for Jobs for fortnight of action

13-20 October

Contact youthfight@youthjobs.org.uk for activities in your area

Scotland

March for Jobs and Public Services

Stirling to Glasgow STUC demo 17-20 October

Organised by Youth Fight for Jobs Scotland and the PCS Young Members.

See youthfight.scotland.blinkspot.com for activities in your area

Get organised against Con-Dem attacks photo Paul Mattsson

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YOUTH

www.socialistparty.org.uk

13-19 September 2012

the Socialist

07809839793 or yorkshireyfj@
NSSN lobby demands a 24-hour general strike

‘TUC - name the date’

This trade union body is assuming a trend that is a range of ever more austerity cuts, in coming years, and a new opposition movement is needed. We believe that there is a mass movement against the Con-Dem government and the need for one to be stopped by the trade union movement leading powerful general strike action involving the public and private sectors.

We, therefore, agree that this TUC Congress should call a general meeting to discuss how in a joint statement with the NSSN and other trade union unions to stop the RMT and NSSN campaign to ballot for a 24-hour general strike.

STOP PRESS TUC Congress passes motion 5

Following what was described by one speaker as “an historic day”, the TUC delegates have faced a battle to stop the NSSN’s motion 5, which calls for a 24-hour general strike in the autumn, was made clear by the speakers in favour of motion 5. Although the wording of the motion qualified the general strike call, the sentiments and motivation behind it was made clear by the speakers in favour of motion 5.

However, after the vocal battle among trade unionists on the floor of the Congress, with the TUC leaders bailing out the banks, the NSSN and the Con-Dem government and the need for one to be stopped by the trade union movement leading powerful general strike action involving the public and private sectors.

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How we stopped the racist EDL

A personal account

On 1 September the far-right, racist and hooligan English Defence League (EDL) attempted to march through the streets of Waltham Forest, north east London, was blocked by a counter-demonstration of over 3,000 people.

I was one of the demonstrators. As a member of Brent TUSC and a member of the Socialist Party and Youth Fight for Jobs, I had spent months leafletting, petitioning and door-knocking, all with the aim of raising the maximum numbers against the EDL.

It has always been clear that getting a big counter-protest would be vital. But the Socialist Party also raised the need to have a strategy on how we use the numbers to maximum effect.

Rather than simply ‘celebrating our diversity’ we argued the anti-racist demonstration would need to revitalise the labour movement tradition of saying ‘no pasaran’ – preventing the EDL from marching in our community.

On the day, the counter-protest began with a rally in central Walthamstow, before marching down Hoe Street, to intersect with the EDL’s planned route towards the Town Hall.

A decision was made for the march to stay where it blocked the EDL’s route, but police ‘kettle’d’ the counter-protesters. This was a clear attempt to ensure we would not ‘meet’ the EDL at any point.

The blockade definitely had a big effect. The EDL were humiliatingly stopped, unable to have their planned march.

But after around 30 minutes blockading, Socialist Party and Youth Fight for Jobs members received word that the EDL were re-routing through back streets to their rally at the Town Hall.

At this point 1 and other party members began discussions with the people around us on the need to move the march to the Town Hall in order to prevent their rally going ahead as planned.

The people surrounding us, mainly local Asian young people, were all clear in their determination to stop the EDL. They were keen for us to move people towards the Town Hall.

We discussed with Daymer, a Turkish-Kurdish youth organiser, and members were able to move the crowd towards the Town Hall.

At first we moved the crowd forward in a line, which led most directly to the Town Hall. The police had blocked this exit with vans, so we began chains of ‘we demand – let us through’ the police refused to allow us to pass, determined that they would protect the EDL. It soon became clear that the only possible way to get to the Town Hall would be via side roads.

Gap in the line

A surge forward meant the thin police line that had been guarding this exit was dispersed and hundreds of protesters began following us up the street.

Marching through the back streets, the Socialist Party and Youth Fight for Jobs attempted to keep the march together to avoid individuals or small groups becoming vulnerable to attack by the police or EDL.

We linked arms and led protesters downhill to the Town Hall.

On arrival we were greeted by a line of riot police protecting the EDL’s leadership – around five things without any ‘back up’ EDL leader Tommy Robinson was clearly shaken by his situation. The rest of their members were unable to join them because of their vulnerability, protected only by the police, was evident.

We won this humiliating defeat for the EDL as they sent them into a crisis with splits and arguments developing in the wake of it.

In a crazed attempt to ‘save face’, Robinson has now put out a call to ‘unite the right’ and come back to Walthamstow in October.

It’s essential that on this date the EDL are defeated even more decisively than they were on 1 September, proving once and for all that growing protests in our community.

Supporters of the family have described the actions of Brent Labour council as social cleansing, with Glenda Jackson MP’s outrageous comment being to ‘go to Wales’!

Brent TUSC supports the Brent campaign and calls on Brent council to immediately house the family in Kilburn, and to serve all debts they owe to the council.

However, this is just one example of working class people being on the receiving end of the austerity agenda. The Socialist and campaign supporters insist on seeing this as part of the wider austerity agenda by the government.

Sign the online petition at www.petitiononline.co.uk/petition/ house-the-counihan-sanchez-family-in-brent/4660

Protestors opposite the Town Hall

photo Waltham Forest SP

Brent Labour: Making families homeless

Anthony Counihan and Isabel Counihan’s family moved with their five children from Kilburn, London, to Ireland in 2007, to look after Anthony’s dad who was sick. They signed away a council tenancy on the orders of Central Middlesex Hospital’s A&E department closure. But will it be on the ball not to get caught up in the cuts – see page 11.

Unable to afford the rent on Anthony’s £400 a week wage, evicted from their flat – Brent council found them temporary housing in Ealing, despite all the children attending school in Ealing, despite Isabel’s mum being seriously ill with cancer in Kilburn and despite the fact they couldn’t afford this flat either!

Brent Labour Party says it supports rented council and private housing for young people, but will not use its NHS Trust scrutiny powers to stop the closure?

Unlikely... the council is cutting £41.7 million on the orders of the Con-Dem.

Brent Socialist Party supports the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition, which stands against all cuts – see page 11.

They were threatened with eviction mid-August, which was only just overturned by the courts. The council has ruled that the family had made themselves intentionally homeless and are waiting on the outcome of the family’s housing benefit tribunal before undertaking their duty to house them, despite their obvious need for growing protests in our community.

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Peter Vasey, called Pete by his friends, died on 17 July at the relatively young age of 54. Born in Batley, West Yorkshire in 1957 to a poor family, he instinctively fought any authority figures who tried to rule his life.

He had a very keen and lively sense of humour and was generous to a fault. Much progress was made when he was around and you had to be on the ball not to get caught up in one of his jokes.

A member of the Labour Party Young Socialists and a Militant (forerunner of the Socialist Party) supporter in Batley in the 1980s, he used his artistic talent to good effect. He made a plywood effigy of Tony Prime Minister Maggie Thatcher, with a ‘Job Destroyer’ notice around her neck, which had a good impact in the local campaign against unemployment. He will also be remembered for his adventurous approach. For example, he made a seven foot kite of Lenin to raise fighting fund, then tested it out on Bridlington beach in gusty conditions – terrifying those nearby!

After the defeat of the momentous 1984-85 miners’ strike, however, he lapsed into inactivity but always professed Marxist ideas, especially those of his beloved Engels.

The demoralisation of unemployment blighted his life at this time too and he developed a drink problem. But after years on the dreaded dole he finally got a job and was determined never to return to the sub-late conditions of unemployment.

Proud of the working class he belonged to and never corrupted by the greed of the capitalist system, he was an inspiration, especially to his brother.

Peter Vasey, 1957-2012

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.

Thanks to: Bernard Roome £30; Ben Golightly £20; Ivan Bonsell £100; J Vasey £20; Ian Dalton and Tanis Bethman-Way £50; D Campion £50; Dave Richards £1,000; Paul Lenihan £30; Eleanor Donne £50; Dave Murray £50

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

Ken Douglas
Quebec Solidaire’s electoral gains show potential for left party of Quebec, ran on its record of imposing austerity and refusing to give an inch in its struggle with the students over tuition fee hikes, pre-judging itself as the defender of “social peace” and against “the power of the street”. PQ, the main party of the Quebec sovereignty movement, made sympathetic overtures towards the student movement but was clear in its support for austerity and nation building. The tacit support it got from the main trade union federations, as well as from the two most modulated student associations, has, however, enabled it to boost its supposed ‘leftist’ credentials in the eyes of some working class and student voters. CAQ, which is openly hostile to the left within an important layer of the movement, lost its support for austerity and tuition hikes, but only won 19 seats. This was a disappointment to the CAQ voters who hoped to capitalise on its anti-corruption credentials. Its leader, François Legault, exposed PLQ ministers awarding contracts to mafia-controlled business. But, the PQ was always likely to win because of the strength of the student movement, lost his seat.

The small left party, Quebec Solidaire (QS), was the only party that took the elections which took up the demands of the student movement, issuing specific demands, not just reversing tuition fee hikes, but for free higher education. Despite having an additional member of the Quebec parliament going up, one deputy to two, and doubled its share of total votes from 3.3% in 2008 to 6% this year.

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Student movement

The student movement was marked by smaller, political formations making significant electoral breakthroughs. South Korea: Hyundai workers fought for a living wage

USA: One year since Occupy shook the world

How the movement radicalised workers and young people

Greg Beiter, Socialist Alternative (CAW supporters in the USA)

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The shame of sexism in sport

Suzanne Belcher

The 2012 Olympic Games and Paralympics showed women’s sport at its best. For Britain, there were stunning performances from Jess Ennis, Elea- nor Summers and many others. A re- cord 70,000 watched Team GB women’s football team. For the first time female athletes from every nation present competed in the Olympics. The US’s women medalists account- ed for 63% of their total medal haul. Women’s relay team smashed the 27 year old world record and Gabby Douglas (“I just made history and people focus on my hair…’’). You might as well just stop talking about it” became a gymnastics double gold winner.

There was 16 year old Ye Shew- en’s record-breaking double jump- ing gold win and the inclusion of women’s boxing (after fighting off attempts to make them wear skirts) made history and people focus on performances from Jess Ennis, Eleonor Summers and many others. A record 70,000 watched Team GB women’s football team. For the first time female athletes from every nation present competed in the Olympics. The US’s women medalists accounted for 63% of their total medal haul. Women’s relay team smashed the 27-year-old world record and Gabby Douglas (“I just made history and people focus on my hair…!’’). You might as well just stop talking about it” became a gymnastics double gold winner.

BBC radio review: Poll Tax

The Reunion rewrites history

Naomi Byron

BBC Radio 4’s ‘The Reunion recently had a programme on the anti-poll tax movement of the late-1980s and early-1990s, Britain’s biggest mass movement of civil disobedience for centuries.

Bravely, the programme’s mak- ers did not even invite anyone from Militant (now the Socialist Party), the organisation whose tactics and strategy defeated the poll tax and Thatcher. Tory poll tax exponent Lord Baker was there but not us – it was like discussing public service broadcasting with representatives from the Murdoch media empire and a few journalists from privately owned newspapers.

Virtually every mention of Mili- tant attacked our role with no right to reply. Danny Byrne from Binsaid was active in the All-Britain Anti-Poll Tax Federation but was not invited. He said that Militant played a good role in the movement but our role was limited to helping in the只想 such a campaign that we couldn’t.

The programme makers could only rewrite history so outrageously because we were excluded. In fact it was the strategy and tactics de- veloped by Militant of mass non- payment (involving 14 million non- payers), clogging up the courts, as we campaigned for mass turnouts of people summoned for non-pay- ment, and legal challenges at every stage. This made the poll tax un- workable and forced Thatcher out of power.

This strategy could only be develop- ed because of the close connec- tions Militant had developed over decades with the labour movement and working class communities. Our approach was designed to mobilise the largest number of people to defeat the poll-tax, while explain- ing, in an accessible way, the need for socialist change.

There were many heroic class fighters who agreed with Militant over the main tactics needed to de- feat the tax, though they disagreed with us on socialism. But without Militant’s clear lead on strategy, and our branches up and down the country which could turn as one to prepare for the next stage of the battle, the poll tax campaign would have been much smaller, weaker and more divided. It certainly would not have won the rapid, clear victo- ries it did.

Many more people could have been jailed; thousands could have had their goods seized by the bailiffs or poind (seized) by the sheriff officers (the equivalent of bailiffs in Scotland) and Thatcher would have stayed in power longer. Rather than wanting to control the campaign, Militant led the drive to involve fully as many non-payers as possible in the struggle.

If you want to know how the anti- poll tax battle was won, and lessons for today’s anti-cuts battle, come to our meetings and discussions, such as Socialist 2013. Sadly the BBC seems less than keen to shed any real light on the matter.

Cable attacks health and safety

Derek McMillan

Con-Dem economic wizard Vince Cable has outlined his plans to ‘deregulate’ the Health and Safety Executive. He expects to do away with health and safety regulations. However, we expect to buy food that won’t make us ill, and to work in a safe environ- ment. It is the “red tape” the govern- ment wants to destroy that ensures our health and safety.

“Deregulating” the banks turned into a disaster for the Con-Dem government. “Quality” turned into a “word of the year” for the opposition. So what do we do with quality health and safety?

Unsurprisingly Alex Eichmann, head of regulatory policy at the Institute of Directors, welcomes government efforts on deregula- tion “Excessive regulation costs time and money, both of which businesses would rather spend on developing new products, hiring staff and improving British busi- ness both here and abroad.”

He failed to mention what a good idea “deregulating” the banks turned out to be. It’s ABC to any union health and safety expert that if a company can maximise its profits at the expense of its employees’ health and safety it will do so.

The only guarantee that employ- ers will cut corners is that employees in strong union organi- sations. Union health and safety of- ficers will have to take on the role which the Health and Safety Execu- tive shamefully abandoned.

BBC radio review: Poll Tax

The Reunion rewrites history

Naomi Byron

BBC Radio 4’s ‘The Reunion recently had a programme on the anti-poll tax movement of the late-1980s and early-1990s, Britain’s biggest mass movement of civil disobedience for centuries.

Bravely, the programme’s mak- ers did not even invite anyone from Militant (now the Socialist Party), the organisation whose tactics and strategy defeated the poll tax and Thatcher. Tory poll tax exponent Lord Baker was there but not us – it was like discussing public service broadcasting with representatives from the Murdoch media empire and a few journalists from privately owned newspapers.

Virtually every mention of Mili- tant attacked our role with no right to reply. Danny Byrne from Binsaid was active in the All-Britain Anti-Poll Tax Federation but was not invited. He said that Militant played a good role in the movement but our role was limited to helping in the只想 such a campaign that we couldn’t.

The programme makers could only rewrite history so outrageously because we were excluded. In fact it was the strategy and tactics de- veloped by Militant of mass non- payment (involving 14 million non- payers), clogging up the courts, as we campaigned for mass turnouts of people summoned for non-pay- ment, and legal challenges at every stage. This made the poll tax un- workable and forced Thatcher out of power.

This strategy could only be develop- ed because of the close connec- tions Militant had developed over decades with the labour movement and working class communities. Our approach was designed to mobilise the largest number of people to defeat the poll-tax, while explain- ing, in an accessible way, the need for socialist change.

There were many heroic class fighters who agreed with Militant over the main tactics needed to de- feat the tax, though they disagreed with us on socialism. But without Militant’s clear lead on strategy, and our branches up and down the country which could turn as one to prepare for the next stage of the battle, the poll tax campaign would have been much smaller, weaker and more divided. It certainly would not have won the rapid, clear victo- ries it did.

Many more people could have been jailed; thousands could have had their goods seized by the bailiffs or poind (seized) by the sheriff officers (the equivalent of bailiffs in Scotland) and Thatcher would have stayed in power longer. Rather than wanting to control the campaign, Militant led the drive to involve fully as many non-payers as possible in the struggle.

If you want to know how the anti- poll tax battle was won, and lessons for today’s anti-cuts battle, come to our meetings and discussions, such as Socialist 2013. Sadly the BBC seems less than keen to shed any real light on the matter.

Cable attacks health and safety

Derek McMillan

Con-Dem economic wizard Vince Cable has outlined his plans to ‘deregulate’ the Health and Safety Executive. He expects to do away with health and safety regulations. However, we expect to buy food that won’t make us ill, and to work in a safe environ- ment. It is the “red tape” the govern- ment wants to destroy that ensures our health and safety.

“Deregulating” the banks turned into a disaster for the Con-Dem government. “Quality” turned into a “word of the year” for the opposition. So what do we do with quality health and safety?

Unsurprisingly Alex Eichmann, head of regulatory policy at the Institute of Directors, welcomes government efforts on deregula- tion “Excessive regulation costs time and money, both of which businesses would rather spend on developing new products, hiring staff and improving British busi- ness both here and abroad.”

He failed to mention what a good idea “deregulating” the banks turned out to be. It’s ABC to any union health and safety expert that if a company can maximise its profits at the expense of its employees’ health and safety it will do so.

The only guarantee that employ- ers will cut corners is that employees in strong union organi- sations. Union health and safety of- ficers will have to take on the role which the Health and Safety Execu- tive shamefully abandoned.

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We need a political voice to fight austerity

A conference of Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) supporters meets in London on 22 September. In a significant development, the transport union RMT national executive last week elected an official delegation to represent the 80,000-strong union at the event. Clive Heemskerk, TUSC’s national election agent, gives a preview of some of the issues that will be discussed.

Next steps in filling the vacuum

Developing strategies to “overcome the blind loyalty to Labour of some trade unions” is one of the mandates given to the RMT’s delegation to September’s TUSC conference. ‘There certainly has been no short- age of trade unionists’ ‘austerity-lite’ policies from leaders of the Labour-affiliated unions. Responding back in January to Ed Milliband and Ed Balls’ endorsement of cuts to 2015, Len McCluskey, the general secretary of the biggest affiliate, Unite, denounced the ‘national government-like consensus where, as in 1931, the leaders of the three big parties agree on a common agenda of austerity to get capital- ism – be it ‘good’ or ‘bad’ – back on its feet’ (The Guardian, 17 January).

But as the RMT rightly ask, what has actually been achieved to change Labour’s policy? When this year’s Labour Party conference – the third now under the Con-Dems - assembles later this month there is no possibility that the ‘two Eds’ will be overturned. The idea that an election can be reclaimed as a party that would stand up for working class people will once again be re-enchanted.

Another case is the fate of Unite executive member and Lambeth Labour councillor Kingsley Abrams, who is still suspended from his council’s Labour group for oppos- ing cuts. If Unite cannot get one of their own executive members reinstated with the right to vote for union poli- cy – against sacking Unite members, for example – what can the affiliated unions achieve?

Len McCluskey also made the point that Labour’s embrace of aus- terity ‘leaves half the country dis- enfranchised’, including the half a million demonstrators on the TUSC’s ‘march for an alternative’ in 2011. That was 18 months ago and an- other TUC demonstration will take place on 20 October. Would march- ers respond more positively now than they did (not) then to the idea that the only way they could be ‘re-enchanted’ is to ‘join Labour to cu- t cuts’.

It isn’t time for the Labour-affili- ated union leaders, or at least those who oppose the cuts, to join the call for a new vehicle for working class political representation?

The key function of TUSC is still to act as a catalyst in the unions for this idea, and how to drive it home in the events ahead will be the main theme of the conference’s opening session. One platform speaker will be PCS civil service union vice- president John McInally on the re- cent members’ ballot decision to open up this non-affiliated union’s political fund to back candidates in national elections, an- other sign of the mood developing in the unions.

Reviewing TUSC’s structures

The final conference session will discuss how TUSC’s structures need to develop.

Earlier this year the TUSC na- tional steering committee estab- lished a working group ‘commis- sion’ as part of a review of TUSC’s structures. An initial report will be presented at the conference, with plans for the discussion to continue.

TUSC was established in Janu- ary 2010 and has seen a greater level of trade union leadership and involvement than any other ‘comparator’ organisation. But the RMT is the only trade un- ion formally represented on the TUSC steering committee, pres- ently the final representative body of the coalition at a national level. There are unions where there is clear support for TUSC but which have political funds that currently can not be constitutionally used to finance parties – or where the union is affiliated to Labour – where formal participation in TUSC by official union bodies is just not possible at this point.

Steering committee

The present structure of TUSC tries to overcome this problem by enshrining the participation of named leading trade unionists on the TUSC’s national steering committee in a personal capacity, with provisions to replicate this in local steering committees or branches.

Decisions are taken only on a consensus basis. This federal ap- proach has worked well to date, with no organisation or trade un- ionist involved feeling that they have been ‘bounced’ into lend- ing their name to an action taking place under the banner of TUSC.

However it is not an ideal ar- rangement as TUSC develops in the future. One dilemma is how to involve individual support- ers of TUSC who are not leading trade unionists or members of the Socialist Party or the Social- ist Workers Party (who both have representation on the steering committee), while not diluting the role of the trade unions as cur- rently envisaged.

The TUSC Independent Social- ists Network was established to give representation on the steer- ing committee for individual sup- porters of TUSC but further devel- opment is necessary, for example, establishing a representative ba- sis for a decision-making national conference.

But it is worth saying, as some submissions to the Reviewing TUSC’s Structures discussion im- ply, that TUSC is ‘narrow’ – out of 384 applications to be a TUSC candidate since 2010 only two have been turned down - or ‘undemo- cratic’. What is involved here are different methods of organisation. It is worth recalling that ex-La- bour deputy leader John Prescott saw the ‘one member, one vote’ constitutional changes which neutralised the unions’ role in the Labour Party as more significant as changing Labour than the abo- lition of its socialist ‘Clause Four’. These issues need to be patiently discussed, and the TUSC steering committee is committed to doing that.

In fact, the federal character of TUSC and its consensus method guarantees unity with equal rights to both the organisations and the serious trade union fig- ures involved, not the domina- tion of one group over others. And the steering committee has sought to win the socialist or- ganisations participating, where they represent some forces, ap- proaching both the Communist Party of Britain, the main force behind the Morning Star newspa- per, and Respect.

But these discussions should not distract from what hopefully will still be the focus of the confer- ence. That is, as the RMT ar- gues, to work out how to secure ‘widespread trade union support for TUSC’, which can ‘provide a nucleus’ for ‘the hard, long- term task of rebuilding political representation for working class people and communities’ in the hardest period for workers since the depression-tracked 1930s.

For councillors who stand up to the Con-Dems

One way to hasten the process of developing working class politi- cal representation is to ensure the widest possible TUSC challenge in electoral contests, including those outside the general election cycle. This mainly means contesting local council elections, including byelec- tions, which also brings into relief the clear no cuts position of TUSC.

The platform points to the dual character of the Con-Dems’ attacks on local government services, and the workers who provide them. Councils have experienced one of the biggest ‘departmental cuts’ in government spending which will see, by 2014-15, a 27% fall in funding compared to 2009-10. But also, under what the TUSC platform describes as “the Con- Dems’ hypocritical banner of local- ism”, from April 2013 councils will have new responsibilities, for health and well being boards, social fund ‘crisis payments’, and council tax benefit levels – all with reduced funding.

It is not true however that councils respond more positively now than they did (not) then to the idea of the council government and won lasting gains for the city with such a strategy.
FOR SALE

STOP THE CLOSURES,
STOP THE CUTS

NHS under attack

Steve Wootton and Robin Clapp

Two Bristol health trusts are pursuing a money-saving merger, it has been revealed. One of the most startling proposals would be the closure of the central A&E unit in the Bristol Royal Infirmary (BRI), leaving a city of over 500,000 people with just one emergency facility at Southmead.

Minor injuries units would be expected to cope with any overflows. This would be madness unleashed, catastrophic in its consequences for patients and staff alike.

This comes as 20 of the South West health trusts have formed a consortium to drive down NHS workers' pay and conditions. And in one of the Bristol trusts, the local press has announced that 1,000 workers are now on 'zero-hour' contracts.

None of these crude cuts were in the Bristol Health Services Plan that went out for consultation a few years ago. It trumpeted the launch of two Private Finance Initiative (PFI) projects, the building of Henleaze Community hospital and the redevelopment of Southmead hospital, and the concurrent effective closing of Bristol's third hospital at Frenchay.

PFI schemes, expanded under the Con-Dems and Labour before them, went out for consultation a few years ago. It is estimated that the construction and maintenance group also expects to earn a further £170 million for facilities management and lifecycle maintenance services.

Time to act

Going bust?

It is clear that the Southmead PFI deal is unwieldy and this lies behind the attempt to seek a merger with the BRI. So could the Southmead project go bust?

Already the South London health care trust has effectively gone bankrupt due to PFI which costs the trust £4 million a week.

The coalition government, faced with the potential financial time bomb that is PFI has decided to embark on a review of its use. But existing PPFIs will not be included or re-negotiated. The lawyers' fees alone would be exorbitant.

New health minister Jeremy Hunt might be smiling now, having so far ridden out Murdochgate. But he's about to learn what was meant by a former Tory chancellor who said, 'the NHS is the closest thing the British have to a religion.'

The trade unions and entire communities must rally to the defence of our imperilled hospitals which are being dismantled daily. The battle is on and the task is to link all these local struggles together around coordinated national industrial action and the urgent calling of a 24-hour general strike.

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, standing 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 Committee for 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). Re-nationalise 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 computation.

● 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 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 gigantic business parties.

● Trade unions to disaffiliate from the Labour Party now and end 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!