

Autumn budget:

MORE CUTS MORE MISERY

MORE REASONS FOR A 24-HOUR GENERAL STRIKE!

Nancy Taaffe

Do the Tories suspect that they won't be re-elected? Their plan was for the private sector to rise like a phoenix from the ashes of the destroyed public sector to create growth. But this plan has not materialised. It has been more like the Dodo, a flightless bird which became extinct.

But on behalf of their paymasters in the finance houses and drinking clubs of the city, the Con-Dems are pursuing a scorched earth policy. They intend to pummel the working class with cut after cut and attack after attack in the time they have left, confident that a future Labour government will not reverse these decisions.

Shamefully Labour leader Ed Miliband came out in front of 150,000 people in Hyde Park on 20 October at the TUC anti-austerity demo and confirmed that a future Labour government will make cuts. I would suggest that we heed his words and put no faith in the idea of Labour as our salvation. This shows the urgent

need to fight for a new mass party that opposes austerity.

We have to build in the trade unions and workplaces for generalised strike action to defeat cuts and we have to do it now.

On 14 November we witnessed something that has never happened before. The coordination by some of the trade union federations in Europe to strike on the same day. This introduces into the minds of millions of workers another force in the anti-austerity drama.

It is this force, the working class, that has the potential here in Britain to defeat the shock tactics of the Con-Dem government.

That is why the National Shop Stewards Network is organising a lobby of the TUC general council on 11 December, to demand the urgent organisation of a 24-hour general strike against austerity.

**Lobby the TUC
general council**

**11 December. Assemble from
8.30am at Congress House,
Great Russell Street, London
WC1B 3LS**

the **Socialist**

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what we think

Answering the lies of the Con-Dems

On 5 December Tory axe-man Chancellor George Osborne will stand at the dispatch box in parliament and read out a long list of more pain-promising austerity measures. This will be the Con-Dems' third 'autumn statement' and the cuts it contains will hit our jobs, the services we rely on, our weakened welfare state.

This government of millionaires is acting in the interests of the 1%; and being handsomely rewarded in return. For example, donations from private healthcare sources totalling £8.3 million were gifted to the Tories – who are pushing through the privatisation of the NHS.

Meanwhile the working class, above all the poorest and most vulnerable, are being demonised by the government. In September Iain Duncan Smith, Work and Pensions Secretary blamed poverty on "welfare dependence".

The right-wing press repeat these lies. A Kent University report examined 6,000 articles on social security between 1995 and 2011 and found a recent "surge in negative stories compared to the previous ten years", contributing to the depiction of benefit claimants as 'scroungers'.

But the facts tell a different story. The TUC has shown that, on average, there are 5.3 unemployed people for every job vacancy – going up to 17 people in some areas. Jobcentre staff explain that only about one in six of these vacancies is a real job.

A new Joseph Rowntree Foundation (JRF) report shows there are five million working age adults living below the poverty line, out of work and relying on meagre and shrinking benefit payments.

But there are also more than six million adults who are working and living below the poverty line. One-fifth of women and one-seventh of men earn less than £7 an hour.

Tory ministers are fond of blaming the 'rigidity' of the 'regulation-bound' labour market for the slow (or no) growth in the economy. Again the reality is somewhat different. Over eight million workers are part-timers, the highest since 1992, many of whom want full-time work.

Over four million workers are 'self-employed', often through necessity rather than choice, and more than 1.5 million are temporary workers. Overall it's estimated 6.4 million people lack the work they want and need.

The JRF research reveals the precarious reality for workers in the British labour market, the most 'flexible' in Europe according to the OECD. It says that while 1.6 million people are claiming Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA) at any one time, 4.8 million have claimed JSA at least once

in the last two years.

This reveals a 'precariat' who may be drawn into work when needed, but then find themselves 'surplus to requirement', when the economic cycle of capitalism deems it.

But not everyone suffers. According to the Resolution Foundation, while real wages have stagnated for the majority since 2003, those at the very top continue to experience real pay growth.

The Sunday Times Rich List for 2012 showed that the combined wealth of the 1,000 richest people in Britain is well over £400 billion. A one-off 50% levy on this gang, who include bankers, hedge fund and private equity bosses, ie those who caused the financial crash in the first place, would go some way to making the cuts unnecessary.

But facts and figures don't fight the cuts. To do that workers need a strategy and a programme.

It is little wonder that, with shocking figures, including, for example, that the number of homeless families has increased by 50% over the last year, there is a new phenomenon – 'indignation fatigue'.

Socialist alternative

In reality this stems from the absence of a clear idea of how to combat the Con-Dem onslaught on living standards. Where a lead is given and workers fight, confidence grows.

As we go to print strike action has brought the hardnosed employer in mid-Yorkshire Hospital Trust to the negotiating table. Part of the reason for that, no doubt, is the growing confidence and strength shown in the workers' resistance to a mass down-banding, in reality pay-cutting, exercise. Since the strike 52 workers have joined the union, 16 on the day it set the dates for the three-day strike.

But fundamental to maximising confidence in our side is a programme that answers the lies and attacks of the Con-Dems with an alternative vision to end underemployment, joblessness and poverty.

Socialists demand no job cuts and that the work is shared out - without loss of pay. Bring in a 35-hour week. In France the 35-hour week created 400,000 extra jobs when it existed between 2000 and 2006, despite the limited way in which it was implemented. This gives a glimpse of what could be achieved. The French working class must win that right back again in the struggle ahead.

In addition, instead of being told we have to work until we drop, everyone should be given

the right to retire on a decent pension at 60, allowing workers to enjoy their retirement and creating jobs for the new generation.

Combine such measures with huge investment in a programme of socially useful job creation. The government is planning to bail out tax-dodging, profiteering water companies who have failed to invest in infrastructure. Instead we must demand that the privatised utilities be taken back into democratic public ownership, with compensation paid only on the basis of proven need. This would mean that, instead of handing over £3 billion to shareholders, these cash piles could be invested in improving infrastructure and creating decent jobs.

This is only a taste of how a socialist programme could show an alternative to cuts and misery. We need a clear alternative to

the bosses' endless austerity. But as yet there is no mass party that opposes all the cuts. Labour's pathetic 'opposition', slower cuts, is no alternative.

Striving to create such a mass workers' party, alongside strengthening the unions and the shop stewards' movement is a task we must take up. The Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition, with the involvement of the RMT and other militant trade unionists, is a step in that direction.

Fundamentally what we face is a crisis of the capitalist system and to end that we need to politically arm the workers' movement with a socialist programme, based on taking the wealth of society into the democratic control of the 99% and using it to meet our needs – not further fill the pockets of the 1%.

NSSN MODEL MOTION IN SUPPORT OF A 24-HOUR GENERAL STRIKE

This [trade union body] welcomes the overwhelming vote at this year's TUC Congress in support of the POA motion. It called for the unions to take "coordinated action where possible with far-reaching campaigns including the consideration and practicalities of a general strike".

We are alarmed that a relentless barrage of even more austerity cuts is coming down the line, and will continue into the foreseeable future. Millions of workers, young people and sick and disabled people face a lifetime of severe hardship through cuts to pay, conditions, benefits and services – the horrendous situation facing working people in Greece could be our future if we don't stop the Con-Dem attacks.

We believe austerity cuts must be stopped, and that the labour movement has the potential to force a massive U-turn on this coalition government of the rich, if our trade unions were to organise action decisively together.

We believe that the impressive TUC demonstrations on 20 October, which saw over 150,000 trade unionists march in London, Glasgow and Belfast, mark the beginning of a new stage of action.

We welcome the speeches of union general secretaries on 20 October who called for coordinated industrial action, up to and including a 24-hour general strike.

We urge all unions who participated in the demonstrations to follow up with a further coordinated 24-hour national strike of both public and private sector workers, making direct calls to youth and students, the unemployed, and community campaigns to join in.

We note that the PCS has announced a national strike ballot on a number of issues, including pay.

We also note that a number of public sector unions have lodged a pay claim.

We believe that this could provide the foundation for a national public sector strike which other unions in both public and private sectors could coordinate action with.

We, therefore, agree that this branch will organise a local/regional meeting to discuss how to progress these ideas put forward by the PCS, RMT and POA at the TUC.

We also call on the national executive of our union to call on the TUC general council to meet urgently to name the date for a 24-hour general strike in the new year.

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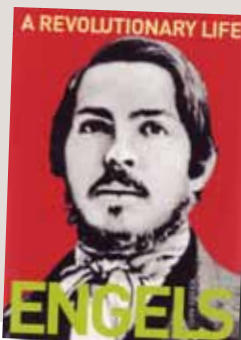
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The Socialist Party's magazine November 2012 issue includes:

● After October 20

More militant action is required to fight back against and defeat the Con-Dem coalition's savage cut-backs argues Peter Taaffe.

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Over 10,000 people demonstrated and marched in London on Saturday 24 November to condemn the Israeli bombardment of Gaza. The turnout was greater than expected, considering that a ceasefire was declared last Wednesday and there was continuous rain all day, but people turned out to make their views and anger heard. Among the chants were: "One, two, three, four, occupation no more"; "End the siege of Gaza, end the siege now"; "Free, Free, Palestine"; and Socialist Party members added the chant: "No to war and occupation, Spend the money on education".

Flooding tragedies Socialist action needed to tackle climate change

While some of the worst storms and flooding in recent memory hit parts of Britain, UK climate change secretary Ed Davey was in Doha for the latest in the series of toothless United Nations Climate Change Conferences. Davey is hypocritically calling for greater cuts in carbon emissions - while nothing is being done by his government in the UK. Flood barriers are being overtopped. And people are suffering.

Our warmer atmosphere holds more moisture, so that while any single flooding event cannot be attributed to global warming, climate change always contributes to the vast scale of the flooding events we see today worldwide, which can only get worse. Pete Mason explains.



You can take your pick from seven disaster scenarios, such as the collapse of the inherently unstable West Antarctic ice sheet, resulting from a host of newly discovered mechanisms. A recent Sunday edition of the New York Times, ruminating on Hurricane Sandy, asked: "Is This the End?" Whether in 50 or 100 or 200 years, "there's a good chance that New York City will sink beneath the sea."

Effects for us

Ordinary people are suffering food scarcity, extreme weather and heat exhaustion. Our inability to predict the results of the feedback effects that have now been triggered, such as the release of methane from frozen deposits, are causing nightmares for scientists.

The New Scientist editorial appeals to US President Obama, newly re-elected and - in theory - with renewed authority to act on climate change. He declared "We want our children to live in an America... that

isn't threatened by the destructive power of a warming planet" in his re-election speech.

It's not only the next generation that we need to worry about, the New Scientist points out - the effects of climate change are real and here now. In reality, Obama is a representative of big business, which criminally continues to fund climate change denial machinery and to profit from polluting the environment.

The tremendous 29% vote won by Socialist Alternative's Kshama Sawant in Seattle shows that the US working class, which, like the British working class, is adversely affected by global warming, least able to flee from storms, flooding and drought, but significantly will not stand idly by while the planet burns.

Only democratic socialist planning, mobilising material and human resources on a world scale through taking the major companies responsible for global warming into public ownership, can tackle climate change.

Emissions increasing

Meanwhile, the New Scientist notes in a major article, nothing has been done to reduce the emissions of greenhouse gases - on the contrary, coal-fired power plants are springing up like mushrooms across the planet and emissions are still increasing.

Housing for the Counihans, housing for all No cuts in Brent, no cuts at all!

Some 50,000 families are currently accepted as homeless, a number which has risen by almost 50% in the past year. If this trend continues, we could expect many hundreds of thousands of families likely to be living in temporary accommodation by 2020.

My family and I were made homeless in April of this year. That was 18 months after declaring £18 a week from a piece of land in Ireland which my mother and father were told could not be sold, as they would be divesting themselves of a 'capital' asset to keep a means-tested benefit, and that they could be done for fraud for selling it.

My mother got a phone call saying that housing benefit had been stopped for our family, and that my mother and father had to pay £70,000. We were also given an eviction date.

We were placed into temporary accommodation in Ealing. We have been here for seven months now.

My mother's hip replacement has been put off as you need to be in suitable accommodation for this operation. My youngest brother, Vinny, has autism - children with autism need routine and the council don't seem to have any consideration with how we are coping mentally and emotionally.

In August my father was told to sell the land in Ireland. If the correct advice was given to my family, the hell we have gone through could have been prevented.

Hypocrisy

Muhammed Butt, Labour leader of Brent council, recently wrote a letter to the Guardian newspaper, about how "moving residents out of the city and away from their communities (and in many cases, families) is absolutely the last thing I want to have to do". Actions would speak

louder than words.

We have started a campaign - The Counihan Campaign. The message of this campaign is 'Housing for the Counihans, Housing for all, No cuts in Brent, No cuts at all!'

We want to make people aware of what is going on with councils and how they may be affected in the near future if they haven't been already. We hold public meetings for people in the area to come and share their stories.

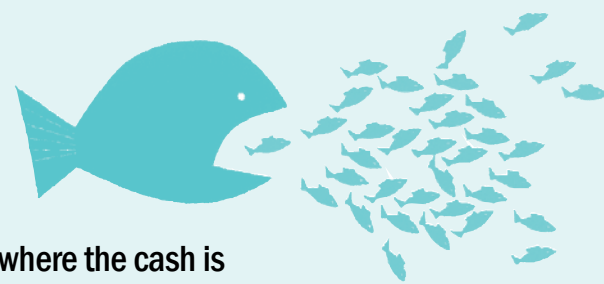
On 26 November, housing benefit was reinstated to my family. We have continued to fight, and have reached one of our goals, so we will keep going!

Many people who we have met while this campaign has been growing have said they will join our march on 1 December from Kilburn station at 1pm, to South Kilburn.

Our campaign has grown, my family has gone from seven members to dozens! It's an amazing feeling to stand up and fight.

Sarah Counihan-Sanchez

Them...



Home is where the cash is

"South Shields comes first," claimed David Miliband, giving a commitment to his constituency after losing to his brother Ed in the 2010 New Labour leadership election. Strange then that he's enjoyed £47,600 worth of trips abroad, including Qatar, Jordan and Zurich. These trips have contributed to the £400,000 he's back-pocketed on top of his MP salary.

Miliband's travels are part of over £1.5 million worth of all-expenses paid trips enjoyed by backbench MPs since the 2010 general election, paid for by other governments, lobbying groups and companies. No prizes for guessing in whose interests the trips were, then. One-fifth of Tory backbenchers have been to Israel/Palestine - mainly paid for by pro-Israeli regime lobbying groups.

In the Independent's investigation, Miliband's travel expenses were the second highest. In first place was Barry Gardiner, Ed Miliband's special envoy for climate change. £52,071 has kept Barry out of the UK for 73 days within two years, his destinations including Cape Town and Rio de Janeiro.

Revolving door

Sean Worth was a special advisor on health to Number 10 until June. Now he works for a lobbying firm with many private health companies as clients. Worth is just one of five known about former advisors to Cameron or Osborne who are now lobbying on behalf of private health vultures.

£20 billion of contracts in the NHS have recently become available through the Con-Dems' privatisation plans.

Before coming to office, Cameron described lobbying as "the next big scandal waiting to happen" and said: "We all know how it works. The lunches, the hospitality, the quiet word in your ear, the ex-ministers and ex-advisors for hire, helping big business find the right way to get its way." Little did we know this was an invitation to his future staff!

3.5% tax

Accenture, a consultancy firm which works for HM Revenue and Customs, reduced its tax bill last year to just 3.5% of profits. This is less than a sev-

enth of the standard rate. In the two previous years, Accenture paid no corporation tax.

So the company is paid from our tax money to provide computer systems in the department responsible for collecting tax but pays hardly any itself. Here's an idea HMRC - why not make it a condition of paying Accenture that they pay a full tax bill?

The PCS civil servants union, which organises HMRC workers, has shown that there is £120 billion uncollected, avoided and evaded tax. The vast majority of it is from big companies like Accenture.

Persecuted Tories

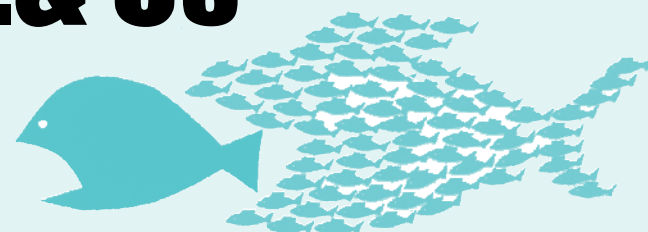
Conservative students at Oxford University tell us they are persecuted. They want special representation on committees granting them the same protection as women, LGBT people and ethnic minorities. Apparently they feel "actively isolated, personally attacked and made to feel unwelcome". They seem to have confused persecution with social exclusion. The 17% gender pay gap or the fact that youth unemployment for black men is more than twice as high as the general population is not quite the same as people not wanting to be your friend because you support vicious attacks on the living conditions of anyone who hasn't enjoyed your own privileged life chances.

Clear out the rats

There has been a real terms cut of 32% to regulatory services like environmental health and trading standards since 2009. Specialists have warned that this is likely to result in more rats on the streets, more deaths caused by dangerous goods and a greater chance of a national health crisis such as foot-and-mouth disease. The false economy of these cuts is clear. In 2009 a report from the Office of Fair Trading said that for every £1 spent on trading standards the consumer saved £6. Staff say preventative work is becoming impossible because of workload - likely to increase the cost to other agencies like the NHS.

Time to clear the rats making these cuts out of government and local councils and protect our public services.

...& Us



Have you got news for the 'fishes'? Email: editors@socialistparty.org.uk

What we heard

Labour MP for Birkenhead, Frank Field, was walking through a lobby of a Wirral Labour conference.

Union member: Will you be calling on the council to oppose the cuts?

Frank Field: It's about getting a Labour government elected not opposing cuts

Union member: Will a Labour government reverse these cuts?

Frank Field (with utter disdain): Don't be ridiculous

The battle against pay cuts continues in Mid Yorks hospitals

A strike leader

Admin and clerical Unison and Unite members at Mid Yorkshire Hospitals Trust ended their three-day strike action on 22 November - with a firm resolve to fight on against Trust proposals to impose pay cuts of between £1,700 and £2,800 a year on over 350 medical secretaries, receptionists and other admin staff employed at Dewsbury, Pontefract and Pinderfields Hospital in Wakefield.

Over 40 posts have also been axed through voluntary redundancy and a 'Mutually Agreed Resignation Scheme'.

While admitting that downgrading these posts will save just £650,000 a year, they have paid £3.3 million to external management consultants for advice on how to implement these measures!

Health workers suffering job and pay cuts while big business profiteers continue to rake in vast amounts of public money are growing increasingly angry.

Picket lines were very well attended over the three days of the strike, and there was a defiant and buoyant mood despite the weather.

At a rally at the end of the three days, new Unison steward Karen summed up this mood when she said: "I will stand through wind, rain, sleet, snow, whatever - until we win." And an indicative vote re-



The Mid Yorks workers are determined to fight on photo Iain Dalton

turned a unanimous 'yes' in favour of further strike action.

Other groups of workers know that they will be next in line for similar attacks. Many have been asking "when are you going to ballot us?" Unless there is a ma-

ajor climb down by management, these staff will be balloted and the dispute will be escalated.

The solidarity and support shown by Unison branches across the country, and by the wider workers' movement, has been fantastic. We

know that the dispute is being keenly watched by other Unison health branches expecting to face similar offensives.

We hope we are giving them the confidence to resist.

More on page 12

Fight to save Tata steel jobs



Tata steel in South Wales

Tata has given over 500 workers at its Margam plant in south Wales the most unwanted Christmas message they could ever have received: "You are being sacked with virtually no chance of getting another job". For every sacked steelworker it's estimated another seven jobs will go in the supply and service industries. Port Talbot, already struggling, will be devastated by these redundancies.

Tata blames the downturn in the world economy for the drop in orders. But it wasn't the steelworkers or the thousands of public sector workers in Wales who were responsible for the economic crisis - it was the billionaire bankers, speculators and spivs.

If Tata refuses to withdraw these redundancies the steel trade

unions should demand the re-nationalisation of the steel industry in Britain but this time under democratic workers' control and management.

There should be an immediate convening of a conference for all shop stewards in Tata to plan a united fightback against these redundancies.

Socialists say:

- Save all the steel jobs now!
- Re-nationalise the steel industry!
- Private sector and public sector workers unite to fight the cuts!
- TUC must name the day for a 24-hour general strike!

Workers showed support for this programme with donations of £55 and sales of 45 copies of the Socialist at a Socialist Party campaign stall on Saturday 24 November.

Ten days that shook the Trust

A Unison steward, east midlands

I work as a support worker in health. Many years ago I was transferred over from the NHS to a trust which is a charity. In October 2011 the trust started to attack the workforce. Some of the nurses faced pay cuts of £10-20,000. Hourly rates were to be cut from £14 to £8.

I organised meetings, produced newsletters, petitions, and letters and got an MP involved who raised it in Parliament and I used the press. The nurses even produced their own document to counter the trust's one.

I stressed the need to build for action but many workers hoped for a solution from the union's solicitors. Then the solicitors said there was nothing they could do.



More health workers are having to fight cuts and privatisation

Support workers

The trust have now come back to attack the support workers. Some of those who were TUPed (transferred from the NHS) like myself could lose over £300 a month. The new contract means a 50% cut in sick pay, and longer hours. We are taking a different approach this time. Since news of this broke the union branch has held two meetings and we have recruited 27 new members. And at our last meeting it was decided to go for a consultative ballot.

What has angered people is they have not had a pay rise for four years. And in 2010-2011 we were told everybody was foregoing a pay rise. But in the same year Unison has found that the five executive directors awarded themselves a 25% pay rise. Four of them are on over £100,000 a year!

Also five of the trust companies made a surplus of £2.1 million which they donated as gift aid to the parent company and in the same year they cut workers' wages by £10,000-£20,000.

The feeling at the last Unison meeting is we have to fight. In the region we now have nearly half the workforce in the union.

We are trying to build links with the Unison stewards in other regions. We should have done this earlier.

It is very difficult to organise in a company whose workforce is non union, but it can be done. This means leafleting the workplaces with union material in your time. It means discussing privately with other workers away from the boss.

I am confident we can get a result. If not the fight will still go on. Hopefully it will be Ten days that Shook the Trust.

In brief

Cleaners' campaign



Picketing during a previous strike in Newcastle photo Elaine Brunskill

Rail union RMT has announced strikes by train cleaners around 30 November and 1-2 December. The different disputes are all about fighting low pay and poor working conditions that these workers suffer. The union is coordinating these strikes to launch a national campaign for pay and workplace justice.

The strikes affect ISS workers on London Midland operating out of Bletchley and Northampton and ISS East Coast mainline, ISS London Underground; Carlisle Cleaning on the Transpennine Express and the Docklands Light Railway and Churchill's cleaning contract on the Tyne and Wear Metro.

An eve of strike rally has also been organised in London on 29 November at 7pm in Conway Hall, Red Lion Square.

Ballot for action

The Department for Work and Pensions group executive committee of civil service union PCS met on 28 November to discuss a recommendation from the group's campaign committee to ballot the whole group membership. This follows the announcement of compulsory redundancies of 43 staff. Management claim there is no role for these staff but this is nonsense. In an organisation of 100,000 dealing with employment services and benefits there is more than enough work available. This is a political not a business decision, it is intended to show that management will make 'tough' decisions. It means, if they get away with it, anyone can be made compulsorily redundant. PCS will oppose these redundancies and will ballot quickly in order to organise action in the new year.

Virgin Media

Communications union CWU has exposed the way Virgin Media has stolen trade union recognition from its workforce. As we reported last week, the company called a snap referendum on union recognition on 2 November to run from 7-16 November.

They have now announced a vote of 52% to 48% in favour of the company's position of derecognition.

The company immediately tore up the recognition agreement in spite of the three-month notice period built into it.

Website

For more reports on trade union and workplace issues see the Socialist Party's website: www.socialistparty.org.uk

Stratford Academy, east London

Parents and teachers united against bullying management

After striking for nine days over three weeks, teachers at Stratford Academy, east London, suspended their strike action pending the outcome of negotiations with senior management. It is believed that management made concessions, including agreeing to pay back the 15% docked wages of 12 teachers, which triggered the industrial action by members of the teaching unions NUT and NASUWT.

The head teacher and school governors were rocked by the combined pressure of striking teachers and parents who are in open revolt against the aggressive actions of the school's senior management.

The Socialist spoke to Niall Mulholland, who helped initiate Stratford Academy Concerned Parents.

The head, Andrew Seager, tried to use 'divide and rule' tactics between teachers and parents to defeat the strike. But this was thwarted once parents knew the real reasons for the dispute – an oppressive management that cut teachers' pay for following national union action short-of-a-strike. Teachers are refusing to undertake tasks that distract them from the core role of teaching and which do not require their skills as qualified teachers.

On the first day of strike action, 25 October, I went to the teachers' picket line to offer solidarity and support from the local Socialist Party branch and also as a parent of a Year 8 pupil at Stratford. I soon heard examples of years of heavy-handed, oppressive senior management, backed by supine governors. This only got worse when Stratford was turned into an academy, with minimum 'consultation', in 2011.

Parents tried to meet with the governors. We were ignored. So we called our own parents' meeting

and invited teachers' unions and governors to speak. We advertised the meeting by leafleting neighbouring streets around Stratford Academy, holding street stalls, asking local shops to display posters on their windows, which most did eagerly, and going to the local press.

We held a packed meeting on 16 November. The NUT and NASUWT sent representatives but the governors did not show up. Parents were able to get past the misinformation put out by Seager and find out the truth about the strike. While half a million teachers in 23,000 schools are taking action short-of-a-strike, only senior management at Stratford have decided to take punitive action against teachers, provoking a strike.

Demanding our say

We set up 'Stratford Academy Concerned Parents' and the meeting unanimously agreed a motion demanding senior management stop cutting teachers' pay, let the teach-

ers carry out union activities and end the oppressive management culture.

This rattled Seager who called his own 'meeting for parents' on 21 November. We and the teachers' unions leafleted the 150-200 parents who turned up. After 20 minutes listening to the head justify provoking a strike by his insistence on enforcing "non-negotiables" on teachers, the mood of parents was extremely restless.

I and other parents, like Lois Austin and Caroline McGrath, stood up and demanded that we have our say. We put the blame for the strike firmly on senior management and the governors. This ignited the room. Many parents angrily called for the few governors present to justify their actions. Seager lost control of the meeting. Lois Austin moved a vote, calling for the governors to call an emergency meeting and to rescind the teachers' pay cuts, which got an overwhelming majority in support.

Not over yet

This gave confidence to the striking teachers. Up to then, only a handful of teachers were on picket duty, largely due to fear of management reprisals. But the day after Seager's meeting blew up in his face, 40 teachers joined the picket line. The fear of management tyranny fell away.

Another Stratford Academy Concerned Parents meeting was held on Thursday 22 November, with an even bigger turnout of parents and many young teachers. The next day, Seager suddenly invited us to meet with him and other senior staff. We brought to



photo the Socialist

the meeting another motion, passed unanimously, which found 'no confidence' in the head.

Seager and senior staff were on the back foot. We got them to agree that all pupils who did not attend the few 'classes' that took place on strike days would not be marked as having taken 'unauthorised absences'.

The balance of forces is on the side of teachers and parents. But the strike is suspended, not yet over. Outstanding issues remain unresolved. Beyond a restoration of pay cuts, teachers demand that all future threats of cutting their pay for taking part in the national NUT/NASUWT action must be withdrawn, and management bullying must end.

The parents have also found their voices. They demand real represen-

tation and accountability and will fight to have genuine parent-governors on the board of governors.

Stratford Academy Concerned Parents will continue to campaign, along with teachers, for all these aims.

At Connaught School for Girls in Waltham Forest, which is threatened with becoming an academy, students have been campaigning against the plans. A petition has been passed around and now has hundreds of signatures. Despite intimidation from the head teacher, some students are discussing what more they can do to support their teachers.

Student demo - potential for mass movement

Anger at NUS failings

Chaz Lockett

Sheffield Socialist Students secretary

Sheffield student union was the first in Britain to organise a campus-wide anti-cuts campaign in response to the call for a national demonstration in November: the newly elected student union officers saw it as a chance to mobilise students and to build a permanent anti-cuts group on campus after the demonstration.

Socialist Students welcomed this move with open arms, participating effectively in mass meetings of up to 150 students, as well as playing a leading role in organising and building the campaign.

On the march

Reflecting the political shift on campuses since the last student demo in 2010, the general student body was much more receptive to the ideas being discussed in mass meetings than might be expected, considering that the NUS nationally has done little if anything to publicise the demonstration or the demands we are fighting for.

Sheffield University took five coaches, as well as a coach

from Hallam University – around 250 students in total. The mood on the coaches was certainly upbeat and spirits were not diminished by the fact that the turnout was significantly less than in 2010. The odds were stacked against us, with the bad weather, a deathly silent NUS national bureaucracy, and threats of police intimidation bound to reduce numbers.

The march itself was noisy and vibrant, with many loudhailers, chants and samba bands accompanying us. But the wind and rain (which gave rise to many inventive chants such as "It's raining, it's pouring, the Tories are appalling") began to take its toll on morale, especially as the NUS march took us directly away from Parliament.

Many students attempted to block the way across Westminster Bridge, in an attempt to keep the march in central London. Most Sheffield students followed the NUS route out to Kennington Park, where the mood slowly soured.

Simmering resentment at the inaction of the NUS made itself more and more evident, with spontaneous chants of 'general strike!' and 'NUS, shame on you, where the f**k have you brought us to?' Eventually, a number of students pushed past security and President Liam Burns



Socialist Students bloc on the march photo Paul Mattsson

was pelted with eggs and forced to make a shamefaced retreat.

Pressure from below

The Guardian characterised the march as a shambles of "eggs, fruit and anger", lacking coherence or political purpose. Nothing could be further from the truth. The NUS is an organisation in a state of transition, subject to enormous pressure from below to use its legitimacy to lead the struggle against attacks on our education. The 'storming' of the stage was not political infighting,

but an expression of frustration from an increasingly radical but constrained student movement.

The real division in the student movement is between the NUS leadership, who want to sell students down the river in order to keep their cushy careers intact, and the student movement proper, who are determined to defeat this government.

Students are beginning to assert their right to a democratic union, and our task is now to intervene in, and to lead, the anti-cuts campaigns which are beginning to come to life.

School students hungry for answers

Newstead Woods school 'Question Time' finished with six students applying to join the Socialist Party. The event, which had been put together by students in the school's politics society, was a chance for students to ask their questions to representatives of the three main political parties, an editor of the Times and myself.

The presence of a Socialist Party member on the panel changed the dynamic of an event which would otherwise have had only panellists who agree on the fundamentals.

Instead, I was able to answer questions on topics ranging from scandal at the BBC to sexism in society and MPs on I'm a Celebrity, from the perspective of a party which stands for the interests of the 99%.

Talking to students after the event it emerged that many of the questions students had wanted to ask had failed to be 'approved'. One student had hoped to ask 'is socialist revolution possible?' – It's not hard to imagine why that one might have raised a few eyebrows!

Claire Laker-Mansfield
Socialist Students national organiser

Media, Murdoch and Leveson

MPs’ expenses, bankers’ bonuses, corporate tax dodgers; this deep, long-term crisis of capitalism has brought with it a thorough-going crisis of legitimacy in capitalist institutions. The murky Murdochgate scandal implicated media bosses, political leaders and police tops and led to the setting up of the Leveson Inquiry into press standards. The report from the first part of the Inquiry is due to be released on Thursday 29 November. Judy Beishon, from the Socialist Party executive committee looks at the background to the Leveson Inquiry.

The ‘Murdochgate’ phone hacking scandal brought out into the public arena the huge power that the press barons wield – intruding into the lives of any of us; threatening politicians with unfavourable coverage if they dare to defy their interests; using the propaganda they want; and so the list goes on.

Public officials, including police and prison officers, have been bribed by newspaper journalists and a number of top Tories had columns in Murdoch’s papers and journals, or book deals with his companies. Prime Minister David Cameron was very close to two of the News of the World editors, Tony Blair secretly became godfather of one of Murdoch’s children; there was a vast web of links involving mutual favours among the rich, along with corruption and some criminality.

When the phone hacking revelations were escalating and his own links became clear, Cameron felt compelled to shunt the scandal of the News of the World’s abuses into an inquiry led by a senior judge, Brian Leveson. The inquiry was subsequently widened to encompass other issues, including other newspapers, and links between the media and the police and politicians.

In the run-up to the inquiry’s report, there has been debate and panic in the media and among politicians over what Leveson might recommend. The right-wing Daily Mail, owned by Viscount Rothermere (who has wealth of £760 million according to the Sunday Times Rich List), devoted ten of its pages on 16 November to point out that there were ‘assessors’ working with Leveson during his inquiry who support independent or statutory regulation of the press.

The Tory party is divided on the is-

sue of regulation, with Cameron among those wanting no statutory regulation, while others are pushing for it.

Many of the politicians of all three main parties who are paying for blood in the form of curbs on the press are sanctimoniously arguing that it would be in the ‘public interest’. Some of their critics, though, have accused them of being motivated by rage at having been exposed by the press for over-claiming expenses and other corruption or suspect behaviour. No doubt they also want to reduce adverse media coverage of their parties before elections.

The Tories who oppose regulation in the interests of a ‘free press’ do so in the knowledge that most of the media is owned by their big business friends, so it’s better for them to leave it unhampered and exert influence over the media barons during dinners at elite clubs and other networking occasions than to risk unpredictable interference from a new body.

The present self-regulation of the press, the Press Complaints Commission (PCC), where newspaper editors make recommendations to each other – is clearly unable to stop unacceptable stories and methods. But does this mean that socialists should support ‘independent’ or statutory regulation?

Big business barons

Firstly we have to point out that the fundamental problem is not one of poor regulation, but is that the media is almost entirely owned by big business individuals and conglomerates who act in the interests of the capitalist class.

An apt adage is that the mainstream media tells part of the truth some of the

Public officials, including police and prison officers have been bribed by newspaper journalists and a number of top Tories had columns in Murdoch’s papers and journals, or book deals with his companies



Police guard the News International offices in 2011. photo Paul Mattsson

time, but only so it can use lies and propaganda the rest of the time.

The BBC is publicly owned, but its trustees are appointed by the government and its senior managers are not far different from those in privately owned media firms in echoing the ideology and needs of the capitalist class.

Therefore its coverage and political line reflects the views of the government and establishment – not those of ordinary people. All the media’s class bias, excesses, corruption, profiteering, lies, inaccuracy, poor quality, repetition and monopolisation will only be consigned to irrelevancy and small audiences when substantial media resources are made available for genuine public use, under public ownership, control and accountability.

Then we would start to have a media that can provide accurate information, quality investigative journalism, quality entertainment, and that can be accessed by minority points of view.

Trade unionists and socialists face a virtual blackout in today’s media – prevented from putting forward a programme against cuts in services and other austerity measures.

This means there is no informed debate where all sides can be heard on these vital issues and others of crucial importance to working class people.

Leveson inquiry

It should be working class people who lead a democratically organised inquiry into phone hacking and other unacceptable practices by the press, not one appointed individual selected by the Tory prime minister – in this case Leveson. Representatives of media workers, media users and the trade unions should be fully

involved in the inquiry, as well as the government.

Why should an unelected individual decide what is in the ‘public interest’? Let us, the public, decide what’s in our interest! A survey by the Carnegie Trust last month found that 63% of people think that they should have an input into setting future guidelines for the press.

Most people are disgusted by the crimes and privacy invasions of the press that were revealed during the phone hacking scandal and generally don’t oppose the idea of denting the powers of the super-rich press barons to do what they like. Polls indicate that a majority of people support the idea of regulation of the press ‘independent of the media and politicians’.

However, a recent poll by the Free Speech Network revealed that less than 1% of people think that regulation of the press is a priority – instead MPs should focus on issues such as improving the economy and health care they say. No doubt this stems from the fact that three out of every four people (according to a PBS UK survey) think that “media outlets sometimes, or frequently, lie to their audiences”, and have probably understandably concluded that tinkering with ‘regulation’ is a lost cause!

Maybe some of Leveson’s recommendations could – if agreed by the government, which is far from certain – curtail some of the invasions of privacy and other excesses of the press and give people a better route than the PCC to challenge some of the lies that are printed and broadcast.

But socialists need to warn that if regulatory powers are placed in the hands of an appointed committee, it certainly won’t be the views of the majority in society that will be the benchmark, but those

of the handful on the committee – with their vested career interests and drawn mainly from the ranks of big business or capitalism’s academia.

Why should they inflict their view of morals on the rest of us, and what’s to stop them from protecting the interests of the rich and powerful by reducing the right of papers like the Socialist to expose corruption and exploitation?

Regulation by law

Any introduction of statutory underpinning of regulation carries even more dangers. This could involve state licensing of newspapers, charging them a fee for doing so, and punishing papers that break a set of rules. This could potentially be extended to websites, blogs and other online activity. Nowadays many ordinary people become ‘reporters’ when they are involved in events, or just during their normal routine.

The full force of the law is already brought down on some tweeters and bloggers who are deemed to have broken certain laws when expressing an opinion or joking; more heavy handed treatment could rain down if statutory media regulation is brought in.

In Hungary there were demonstrations in January 2011 against media legislation that imposed restrictions on all broadcast, print and internet media. The new law created heavy penalties for content deemed not in the ‘public interest’ or in keeping with ‘common morality’, ‘public order’ or ‘balanced reporting’. An Amnesty International spokeswoman commented: “Facing the possibility of stringent fines or even closure, many journalists and editors are likely to choose the ‘safe’ option of modifying their content”.

There have been many repressive laws and attacks on democratic rights and privacy already brought in by our Tory-Lib Dem government and Labour before it. At present the Communications Data Bill is being discussed in parliament that will allow the state to store the content of the website visits, emails, text messages and phone calls of all of us if it becomes law.

The 2011 Global Press Freedom Index placed the UK only in 26th place, showing that our ‘free press’ is not so free when compared to 25 countries that were judged to have greater press freedom. Plenty of laws already exist that make practises like phone hacking and invading people’s medical records illegal, so there is a danger of a new regulatory body being introduced that further counters a ‘free press’ while being useless against future criminality. It’s also the case that increased regulation couldn’t cover online sources from abroad that everyone can access.

Socialists can’t support any new ‘privacy’ or other laws that would allow the greed and unscrupulous methods of big business and capitalist politicians to go unreported and make it harder to expose their attacks on trade unionists, socialists, anti-cuts campaigners, benefit claimants and immigrants; and to put forward an alternative.

We need to campaign for a genuinely free media that is neither under big business control nor state control. In a socialist society it should be a means of communication for everyone, with its parameters discussed and decided democratically involving the widest possible number of people. Then it can help with planning what people need and want, and lay the basis for a massive flowering of communication, art and culture.

Three out of every four people think that “media outlets sometimes, or frequently, lie to their audiences”

The Murdoch scandal

● **Murdoch.** Rupert Murdoch’s News Corporation has 200 newspapers globally, over 50,000 workers and reaches a billion people daily. It also has TV shows, films, books and magazines with sales of \$33 billion a year. In spite of the phone hacking charges at its now closed News of the World paper (NoW), shares of News Corp went up by more than a third in the year to August 2012, boosting Murdoch’s fortune by \$2 billion. Murdoch controls 70% of the newspaper market in Australia; In the USA he owns the New York Post, Wall Street Journal and Fox News TV channel; In Britain, News International owns the Times, Sunday Times and Sun.

● **Phone hacking.** A 2006 police inquiry into phone hacking by NoW journalists was led by Andy Hayman, who by 2010 was himself writing for the Murdoch papers. That inquiry ignored a mountain of evidence that the deceit and illegal web of activity was massive. It confined the blame to just two ‘rogue’ people – journalist Clive Goodman and private detective Glenn Mulcaire, who were jailed in January 2007 for four months and six months respectively.

The latest figure for possible phone hacking victims is over 4,700

● When the scandal later resurged, the government eventually announced, on 13 July 2011, the setting up of an inquiry led by Lord Justice Leveson. Despite its limitations, this inquiry further exposed the web of lies and crimes and it showed the close links between the owners of the media, top politicians, judiciary and police. The police estimate that over 700 people are likely to have been victims of phone hacking, and the latest figure of possible victims is over 4,700.

● The crimes involved phone hacking, bribes, data intrusion, computer hacking and improper access to medical, banking and other personal records.

● NoW’s methods went as low as hacking the phone of murdered teenager Milly Dowler. Murdoch considered himself beyond the law – able to do anything he wanted.

● **Cameron.** Tory Prime Minister David Cameron has had very close links with editors of NoW and other press barons. He even employed former NoW editor Andy Coulson as his communications director when Coulson was still receiving money from NoW and had £40,000 of News Corp shares. Coulson had resigned from NoW because he accepted overall ‘responsibility’ for the first-revealed phone hacking cases.

● In January 2011 Coulson resigned from Cameron’s team under pressure of the phone hacking revelations. Cameron said he was “very sorry” that Coulson felt “compelled” to resign. In May 2012 Coulson was charged with perjury – for allegedly lying to the high court in Glasgow when he gave evidence at the perjury trial of socialist Tommy Sheridan in December 2010.

● Coulson was NoW editor when Tommy Sheridan won his defamation case against Murdoch’s News of the World Scotland. The Socialist Party and others are demanding that Tommy’s perjury conviction be overturned.

● Another former NoW editor, Rebekah Brooks, was a long-term close friend of Cameron – staunchly supporting him politically and having regular social interaction with him. She’s recently been charged with conspiracy to access voice-mails, illegally paying public officials and other charges, along with six other former NoW staff and investigators, including Coulson. Also, six others, including Brooks’ husband and her chauffeur, have been charged with conspiring to pervert the course of justice. She received a £7 million pay-off after resigning from News International over the allegations against her.

● **BSkyB.** The NoW scandal exposed connivance between top ministers and Murdoch over Murdoch’s bid to take over-all control of TV company BskyB, including endorsement of Murdoch’s plan by Tory former Culture minister Jeremy Hunt; and an alleged deal under the Labour government that Murdoch would give more political support to Labour if funding was cut to the BBC and Ofcom. Murdoch had to suspend this drive when the phone hacking revelations escalated.

● **Bribery.** The police and other public officials were bribed by NoW employees. The Commissioner and Deputy Commissioner of the London Met police resigned over these revelations. Met chief Paul Stephenson and his wife had accepted a 20 day free stay at an expensive health spa via a Murdoch intermediary. Also, the Commissioner had hired Neil Wallis as his PR adviser, who was later arrested for suspected phone hacking at NoW.

● One prison officer received payments totalling nearly £35,000 between April 2010 and June 2011 from News International, Trinity Mirror and Express Newspapers. Another prison officer at a different prison is reported as receiving over £14,000 from Trinity Mirror between February 2006 and January 2012.

● In July 2011 the 168-year old NoW was sacrificed by Murdoch. He needed to try to stop contamination to his other papers.

● On 21 July 2012 Rupert Murdoch announced his resignation from the boards of a string of News International companies behind the Sun, Times and Sunday Times, plus some in the US. But he remained at the helm of News Corp. His son James had already resigned in February as chairman of News International and relocated to New York to spearhead other parts of the Murdoch empire; he remains on the board of BskyB. News Corporation intends to separate its news-paper and publishing arm from its film and TV operations. There is speculation that Murdoch could decide to sell his UK newspapers.

[illegible]

Egypt: Mursi power grab provokes mass protests

Build a united front of workers and poor for 'second revolution'

The declaration of sweeping new political powers by Egypt's president Mursi has provoked a violent backlash, leaving two dead and hundreds injured, and further polarised society along pro- and anti-Mursi lines. To many Egyptians who struggled to overthrow the dictator Hosni Mubarak in 2011, the need for a 'second revolution' is growing as David Johnson reports.

There are renewed demonstrations and clashes with security forces on the streets of Cairo and other cities. This time the spark has been the constitutional announcement by President Mohamed Mursi on Thursday 23 November.

Hours after mediating the Gaza ceasefire between Hamas and the Israeli government, glowing with praise from world leaders, he declared he was "authorised to take any measures he sees fit in order to preserve the revolution, to preserve national unity or to safeguard national security."

No presidential decision taken since 30 June (when he took office) could be overturned by the courts. Neither the constituent assembly drawing up a new constitution nor parliament's upper house (the Shura Council) could face legal challenge.

Both bodies are dominated by right-wing political Islamists, from Mursi's Freedom and Justice Party (the Muslim Brotherhood) and the even more conservative Nour Party (the Salafists). In previous weeks liberal and Christian members of the constituent assembly had walked out, claiming the majority's constitutional proposals were undemocratic.

Mursi sugared the pill by announcing retrials for Mubarak and those of his henchmen recently acquitted of organising killings of protesters during the 25 January 2011 uprising. The Attorney General, also a remnant of the previous regime, was dismissed.

Within hours of Mursi's announcement thousands demonstrated in Tahrir Square, including many football fans, chanting "Down with Mohamed Mursi Mubarak" and, "The people want to topple the regime." Tear gas, birdshot and rocks were used by security forces and field hospitals set up by demonstrators, in scenes reminiscent of 2011's street battles. On the stock exchange, shares fell 10% on Sunday 25th.

On 24 November hundreds of judges protested with the same chants. Some courts have gone on strike and more may follow. The head of the lawyers' association told the judges: "The country's fate is in your hands now. If you decided to strike, we will strike. If you decided to stage a sit-in, we will join you."

During Mubarak's last years, many judges criticised his rigging of elections. Many reflect the views of liberal middle class opponents to the Muslim Brotherhood, although others hope to see a return of the former regime under which they prospered. Another group of judges support Mursi. Splits in the judiciary are a sign of wider divisions in Egypt.



Tahrir Square in Cairo was once again occupied; this time by protesters against president Mursi's decree

The Muslim Brotherhood is not immune to these divisions. The chairman of the Shura Council criticised Mursi's announcement, despite being a leading Brotherhood member himself, while the Justice Minister said he had reservations about the announcement.

It seems that the strength of opposition could make Mursi partially back down rather than risk growing confrontation on the streets. A Muslim Brotherhood statement on Friday 23 November called for marches on Sunday 25th and a "million-man march" on Tuesday 27th in support of Mursi.

But on Sunday, the Freedom and Justice Party issued a more conciliatory statement that made no mention of the marches and said "it is looking forward to a dialogue with all political parties and forces and social groups and movements with regard to the current situation or the draft constitution... an opportunity to achieve the desired consensus, so as to fulfil the hopes and aspirations of all the Egyptian people." And on Monday they called off the "million-man march."

Crackdowns on the media are also growing. Earlier this month privately-owned Dream TV was ordered off air (apart from its sports and entertainment shows). It has a long record of criticising the previous and current regimes. A court has now temporarily overturned the original ban. Another TV channel supporting the previous regime has also been closed down. A newspaper editor is awaiting trial, charged with insulting the new president.

Opposition

Mursi's attempt to strengthen his powers shows anxiety over bigger challenges to come. His 'honeymoon' is running out, although many still support him, probably temporarily boosted by his mediating role in Gaza.

Three million workers are now organised in 800 independent trade unions (compared to four independent unions before the 2011 uprising). 2,000 Ain al-Sokhna dockworkers employed by DP World (owned by the Dubai government) struck in October, with 800 occupying the port in shifts, bringing it to a standstill. They were protesting against the sacking of eight trade union activists and successfully forced the company to back down. Cadbury, Suzuki Motors, Pirelli Tyres and other multinational cor-

porations have all sacked trade union activists.

On 14 November Cairo metro workers went on strike, returning four hours later after the company chair agreed to resign and pay talks were agreed. The leaders were summoned by security forces and charged with hindering work, but they warned the workers would be back on strike if they were harmed.

After many strikes and protests in recent months, Mursi has threatened: "In the new law there is no room for blockading roads or [obstructing] production." The government is making organisation of independent unions harder. It wants to strengthen the state-backed Egyptian Trade Union Federation, replacing its Mubarak-era leaders with Muslim Brotherhood members.

Economic crisis

The International Monetary Fund has just approved a \$4.8 billion loan to help Egypt's growing budget deficit. Fearing further revolutionary movements, "there is a strong international desire to help stabilise the rule of Mohamed Mursi and avert economic shocks which could provoke unrest in the Arab world's most populous nation" (Financial Times 24/11/12).

The price of the loan is a 22-month 'reform' programme, aimed particularly at cutting energy subsidies that account for 20% of the budget. Millions depend on subsidised fuel for cooking, heating and transport.

An IMF spokesperson said: "Given the magnitude [of the subsidies], it will take several years to wind them down. To get buy in [from the population] and protect those in need, savings cannot be used exclusively to reduce the deficit but must also shore up necessary social spending."

Food costs continue to rise, causing great hardship. All the problems under Mubarak remain - including jobs and housing shortages, inadequate healthcare, sexual harassment of women, electricity and water cuts, overcrowded and poorly maintained roads and public transport.

Over 50 young children going to school were killed when their bus was struck by a train on 17 November - the latest of many tragedies in Egypt where terrible safety claimed innocent lives. Egypt's infrastructure continues to crumble, unchanged

by revolutionary upheavals over the past two years. The prime minister was chased away from Assiut Hospital by angry family members of the deceased children when he visited.

Workers need to continue building their own independent trade unions. A mass workers' party is also needed to draw together workers, youth and community activists involved in struggle.

While it is correct to march together with liberal forces in opposition to Mursi's undemocratic measures, workers' organisations need an independent identity and programme.

Less than six months ago the Revolutionary Socialists (allied to the SWP in their International Socialist Tendency) called for support for Mursi in the second round of the presidential election to defeat the old regime candidate, Ahmed Shafiq.

They wrote of "the error in failure to discriminate between the reformism of the Muslim Brotherhood and the 'fascism' of Shafiq" (28 May statement). What sort of 'reformism' is Mursi showing now, as he negotiates with the IMF and tries to put himself above legal challenge?

The Revolutionary Socialists now say the Muslim Brotherhood regime and the remnants of the old regime "are two sides of the same coin... We say to Mursi: you and your organisation are the real threat to the revolution, as you embrace Mubarak's businessmen, run panting after loans from the IMF, trade in religion, threaten national unity and sell the revolution" (23 November 2012).

Such twists and turns, without analysing their earlier mistaken positions, confuse instead of clarify. Who do the RS include in their "national unity"? Is it the same "national unity" Mursi spoke of in his announcement?

What is needed is unity between workers, poor people and youth around a programme of democratic socialist change - a second revolution to win real, lasting democratic rights and to take into public ownership under genuine democratic control all the major companies and banks.

Egypt's wealth could then be planned for the benefit of all, ending disasters such as the 17 November rail crash. A socialist Egypt would inspire a new wave of democratic socialist revolutions across the region.

The Committee for a Workers' International

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

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

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

www.socialistworld.net

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



Jordan: New and bigger wave of protests sweeps country

Cuts in fuel subsidies provoke mass eruption from below.

CWI reporter in Amman



India: International day of action for legal abortion in Ireland

Activists gathered in Bangalore to protest death of Savitha Halappanavar.

Jagadish G Chandra (New Socialist Alternative, CWI India)



Chile: Massive abstentions in municipal elections

No parties can claim electoral mandate.

Celso Calfullan, Socialismo Revolucionario (CWI Chile)

the Socialist postbag

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PIP fears

I'm autistic but it's not so much a disability, it's a different way of processing information – the way the brain is wired up is different to most other people. It's the way society is run that makes it difficult for us. A video at vimeo.com/52193530 shows how people with autism can suffer sensory overloads from everyday life.

I used to apply for Disability Living Allowance (DLA) benefit every two years. I get the lower rate for mobility but I use that to, say, take a taxi from somewhere late at night. On the bus it can get very noisy which can badly affect me. There is also stress. Everyone gets stressed, but it's many times worse for people on the autism spectrum.

I very much doubt that I'll get Personal Independence Payments (PIP which the government will replace DLA with) as, for example, it assumes that if you're a wheelchair user you have no problem getting about. So conditions where the problem is not instantly noticeable – like autism – will not be taken into account. PIP fills me with dread.

Lucy Stokes, Leicester

Why USUC occupied

On 21 November the council chamber at Salford Civic Centre was occupied by mental health service users' group USUC activists. Protesters draped their



banner 'Mental Health Cuts Will Kill' from the top table. Later they issued a leaflet to all councillors explaining why their frustration had driven them to this point. Some services have been withdrawn 'temporarily'. Already hospitalisations

and suicide attempts have increased, an indication of what will happen if the cuts go through permanently.

The full council meeting was delayed while Salford's Mayor negotiated with the group. Importantly they won a meeting with him the following day, and an agreement that they would send a representative to address the full council at their next meeting.

It's not the withdrawal of the proposed cuts, but it's an important step in the campaign, and one which brought useful press publicity. (See also the Socialist issue 734 'Uniting to save mental health services')

Paul Gerrard, Salford against Cuts

Cattle trains

I recently had to travel from Gillingham to Stratford using the relatively new High Speed Rail network. I pay extra to use this service but privatisation means I am not getting value for money! There are constantly people forced to stand up for large parts of the journey. A ticket inspector informed me that some days the train is so full he cannot physically get down the aisle to do his job! The private companies would rather not put on extra carriages (at extra cost) when they can ram us into trains like cattle in a pen. Nationalise the railways and run them for people's needs – a seat is not too much to ask for!

Angry commuter

Sacked without consultation

A high tech company based outside Norwich that achieved the Queens Award for industry is to move to China. The move, announced by Syfer Technology's company director on 6 November, is causing a loss of 120 jobs.

The move is purely to achieve greater profits despite the fact the company in these difficult times has made 20% profit, equating to £5 million, a sum that many companies would be pleased to make.

At no time was the union Unite consulted about a proposed move to see if the decision could be averted. Some production will remain with limited staff, but for how long?

A Unite member

Housing nightmare

The lack of houses being built in south-west England and the area's low wages makes it almost impossible for workers to find houses here. Workers face prices 13 times higher than incomes in rural areas and 11 times in urban areas. Landlords will be rubbing their hands in anticipation.

Many holiday homes – 10,000 in Cornwall alone – lie underused for most of the year. Part of the solution, says the South West GMB union regional secretary, would be compulsory purchase of these to be let out to locals.

A Western Morning News (WMN) editorial screamed about "some Bolshevik buy-back scheme designed to punish



the rich for, quite probably, working hard and saving hard to afford a second home... This thwarted aspiration and stifled wealth creation [In the old Soviet bloc] – and would do exactly the same now".

This so-called 'wealth creation' by the rich leaves many working people without homes. The WMN still attacks the GMB for their "continuing adherence to socialist policies that many thought had disappeared from mainstream politics".

The South West needs a massive increase in housing construction and decent wages to end the uncertainty of homelessness and greed of landlords.

Sean Brogan, Exeter Socialist Party

AAA

It seems the government is determined to maintain their triple A rating. I think this means they are still Amateur Arrogant Arseholes, doesn't it?

Pete, Worcester Socialist Party

Don't fall for Labour's fairy tale

In the Observer on 25 November, columnist Nick Cohen wrote an article praising Labour councillors for, he says, 'dealing with austerity', ie Con-Dem cuts, while attacking as "ultra-leftism" any strategy to fight the cuts.

Tony Mulhearn, one of the 47 fighting Liverpool councillors from 1983-87 and Liverpool Labour Party president, 1980-85, sent this reply to the Observer.

Nick Cohen's praise for a 'tough' new Labour party suggests he has swallowed hook, line and sinker the fairy tale that cuts are necessary as there is no money to fund public provision at the same level as before the banker-induced crisis. The cash levels lying in the banks, off-shore accounts and uncollected tax from the rich reveal resources aplenty.

Naturally he quotes the Liverpool, Clay Cross and Poplar councillors, as people whose courageous stand in refusing to penalise the poor, should not be emulated at any cost.

He overlooks Liverpool's record: 5,000 houses built, thousands of jobs created, nursery school opened and services not cut but expanded when the government of the day was advancing the same cuts policy as the present bunch.

In Cohen's world, heaven curse those who actively oppose the destructive policies of the Con-Dems. He praises Islington Council's policy of sharing the cuts via 'fairness commissions'. This is terminology plucked straight from Orwell's 1984.

Because of Labour's policy of 'managing' the cuts Cohen detects 'a faint flicker of a pulse on the prone body of the British left'. In reality he detects the death rattle of Labour as a party of radical socialist change.

Gove's 'overspend' - on academies!



Bad fairy Gove is not listening photo Paul Mattsson

Derek McMillan

Are you a teacher whose school is short of cash? Have you been warned of 'hard times ahead' and possible redundancies?

Of course you have. We all have to 'tighten our belts' in these times of austerity. We have to 'harden our hearts' because the cupboard is bare. As it's panto season I'm tempted to say "Oh no it isn't."

Enter the bad fairy Michael Gove. His contribution to this situation? A profligate overspend on his pet academy programme of £1 billion. If your school has had to cut down on paper and pencils, not to mention teachers, just think about that.

The BBC reports that the National Audit Office says the overspend was because Gove's Department for Education was apparently "not prepared" for the increase in the number of academies. Not prepared

for his own policy?

Gove may keep his cabinet colleagues in the dark about his plans but I didn't know he hid them from himself as well.

With barefaced mockery Gove "makes no apology" for spending money on a scheme which has been "proven to drive up standards." With academies going into special measures, I repeat "Oh no it isn't!"

No wonder teachers are tired of this crew. Gove apologised (in the Radio Times) to his French teacher 30 years too late for his disgusting behaviour as a stropky teenager. No doubt he will apologise to all teachers and parents and pupils 30 years down the line. It isn't good enough, is it?

In an unprecedented move, the NASUWT and NUT teaching unions are acting together in "action short of strike action" but Gove turns a deaf ear. It is time to escalate the action.

Sorry to Bother You by the Coup

Ian Slattery reviews the Coup's sixth album, Sorry to Bother You.

Two decades since their first LP, the Coup return from a six year break with this album which was held back a year so lead member Boots Riley could concentrate on being a key organiser of Occupy Oakland.

They lay their musical cards clearly on the table, taking cues from the agitational 80s/90s hip-hop sound of groups like Public Enemy while infusing a thick layer of funk.

Lyrically, Sorry to Bother You again puts the Coup's anti-capitalist

message through dark humour, poetry and a Marxist understanding of the economy. One track, Strange Arithmetic, calls on teachers to reveal the true nature of capitalist exploitation and corruption:

"Economics is the symphony of hunger and theft/

Mortar shells often echo out the cashing of checks/

In geography class, it's borders, mountains and rivers/

But they will never show the line between the takers and givers"

Boots has pulled his rhymes up to a higher level than the Coup's last two albums which were more inconsistent than their first three.

With We've Got A Lot To Teach You, Cassius Green, Boots has written a poetic, narrative masterpiece.

Musically, since the Coup's last album Boots has formed Street Sweeper Social Club with Tom Morello from Rage Against the Machine and toured with rock veterans.

With heavy guitar riffs and a punk track in You Are Not A Riot, the album has as much in common musically with the Clash's later albums as with hip-hop.

This might throw off die-hard Coup fans but the result is a more accessible, driven album with their constant message of rebellion just as strong.

Che Guevara

Symbol of fashion or symbol of struggle?

Tom Baldwin
South West Socialist Party

Ernesto 'Che' Guevara is perhaps the most recognisable revolutionary icon, his image having graced countless posters and t-shirts.

For some it is just a fashion statement, but many are drawn to him as a symbol of the struggle against capitalism and the fight for a better world. Films such as the Motorcycle Diaries and the two-part biopic 'Che' reflect his enduring popularity and give a glimpse of how his political ideas developed.

Revolutionaries do not fall ready-made from the sky, but are formed by conditions and events. In 1950 the asthmatic Guevara began his series of travels around Latin America as a 22 year old middle class medical student, seeking only youthful adventure. But these experiences were to shape the rest of his life. On these journeys he witnessed the enormous class divide that existed between the "luxurious façade" and the real "soul" of the continent, the poor and downtrodden.

Seeing the struggles of workers and the poor everywhere he went, Guevara's attitude evolved from sympathy, through support, to active participation. It was also on these travels that he was given the nickname Che, due to his Argentinian accent.

26 July Movement

It was in Mexico in 1955 that Che first met Fidel Castro and joined his 26 July movement. At the time Cuba was under the dictatorship of Fulgencio Batista, who had come to power through a military coup. Its economy was completely dominated by US big business and wealthy Americans frequented the many Havana brothels and casinos.

Castro wanted a modern capitalist state in Cuba with some reforms for the poor. He envisaged a guerrilla struggle to overthrow only the dictatorship, not capitalism. Even after returning to Cuba he told a journalist: "we have no animosity towards the United States... we are fighting for a democratic Cuba and an end to dictatorship".

Che himself was, by this point, an avowed socialist but joined the movement as a way to get active in the struggle. He had previously criticised the Stalinist 'popular front' policy, promoted by the Cuban Communist Party. This was the idea

that in Latin American countries the working class was not ready to take power and establish a socialist society and instead had to make alliances with the 'progressive' sections of the national capitalist class in order to defeat imperialism. He had seen first-hand how these so-called progressive capitalists were prepared to use bloody repression against the workers to defend their own interests.

However, while correctly criticising this approach, Che did not propose an alternative. He had not absorbed the lessons of the Russian Revolution nor the writings of its leaders, Vladimir Lenin and Leon Trotsky, particularly on the role of the revolutionary party and Trotsky's theory of the permanent revolution.

Trotsky's theory

Trotsky explained that the capitalist class in countries with developing capitalist economies such as Cuba was dominated by imperialism and unable to play the independent role that it had in the capitalist revolutions such as in Britain. It was therefore incapable of carrying out its historical role and the tasks of land reform, establishing capitalist democracy and creating an independent nation state.

Trotsky argued that these steps could only be achieved through socialist revolution: nationalising industry, taking its ownership and control out of the hands of the capitalists and establishing a planned economy under democratic workers' control.

Trotsky said that the working class, even when in a minority, must lead the struggle against capitalism. The decisive role of the working class arises from its role in production and the collective consciousness which develops in the workplace and lays the basis for the collective democratic control and management of society. Because of isolation in rural areas and an individualistic outlook, the peasantry cannot lead such a transformation, but can still play an important role in the struggle.

This theory was borne out in the course of the 1917 Russian Revolution when the working class, in the period immediately after 1917, established the most democratic state in history.

But Che was not an active member of any organisation that understood the lessons of 1917. He instead saw the peasantry as the



Che Guevara

most revolutionary class and the methods of guerrilla struggle as the most effective. He was influenced by many factors, including his own class background, the abandonment of an independent working class approach by communist parties and the victory of Mao's peasant army in the Chinese revolution.

Cuban revolution

It was December 1956 when a small band of fighters, Che and Castro among them, landed in Cuba. The landing was plagued with errors and accidents and two days later, when the scattered guerrillas managed to regroup, they were reduced in number from 82 to just 20. But just over two years later they had forced Batista to flee the island.

Che thought the guerrilla struggle would ignite a revolutionary movement, especially among the peasantry. But while the guerrillas drew support, the mass of the population - especially the urban working class - were not active participants in the struggle.

Che gained a reputation as a courageous fighter and leader. He also organised political discussions among those under him and argued for socialist ideas within the 26 July Movement. The guerrilla forces grew as they were seen as the only force consistently opposing the Batista dictatorship.

In marked contrast to the brutal treatment they received at the hands of the regime, the guerrillas did not execute the soldiers they captured. Instead they discussed politics with them and let them go, winning an increasing number of defectors from the army.

On 1 January 1959, with his regime crumbling and the guerrillas approaching the cities, Batista fled the country. The only successful general strike since Che's arrival on the island was called for the following day, which greeted the guerrillas as they marched into the major cities.

Despite Che arguing for it, Castro's intention had never been the overthrow of capitalism. It was over a year later when he first described the revolution in Cuba as 'socialist'. He was pushed to take measures of nationalisation by the pressure of



With Castro

the masses combined with the reaction of American imperialism. As the US recoiled, Cuba developed greater trade and political links with the Soviet Union. The 26 July movement merged with the Communist Party and became the organ of one party rule.

Capitalism overthrown

The Cuban revolution broadly bears out the theory of the permanent revolution. Castro's vision of an independent, democratic, capitalist Cuba was impossible; the Cuban revolution overthrew capitalism. But workers did not play an active role in the revolution, so their role in the subsequent running of society was also passive. From the outset the planned economy in Cuba was controlled not by workers' democracy, but by a bureaucratic elite, reflecting Stalinism in the USSR.

Despite this, the revolution still brought huge improvements to the lives of ordinary Cubans. Illiteracy was eradicated in just two years and by the late 1970s life expectancy was 74, comparable to Britain and much higher than other Latin American countries, Bolivia's was just 45.

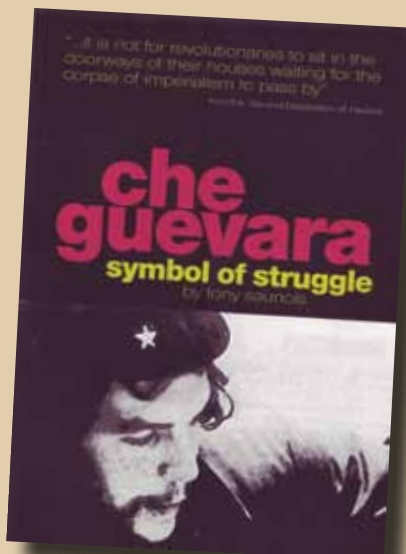
Showing the same spirit of self-sacrifice that had marked him out as a fighter, Che rejected completely the privileges of the bureaucracy. For this he must be saluted and it

is one of the reasons he's still so admired today. Despite his growing disillusionment and revulsion at the bureaucracy, unlike Leon Trotsky he did not propose nor fight consistently for an alternative. Instead he left Cuba in order to try and spread revolution abroad. This devotion to internationalism was another of Che's best characteristics.

The methods of guerrilla struggle, which succeeded in the specific conditions of Cuba, did not have the same effect elsewhere. In 1965, Che left for the Congo but his efforts were unsuccessful and he had to make a clandestine return to Cuba. In 1967 he appeared with a band of guerrillas in Bolivia. Sadly the failure to ignite revolution and resulting defeat of that struggle were to prove fatal to Che.

Che was captured and executed by the Bolivian army, backed by the CIA, at the age of just 39. Throughout his life, the injustices that Che saw motivated him to continue struggling for a better world. At the same time, the development of his political ideas never stopped. Works by Trotsky were found on him when he was captured.


Che Guevara's position as an icon of struggle is completely justified. But we would not be doing his life justice if we did not examine it 'warts and all'. His life is an inspiration for all those seeking to fight oppression and change society.



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BUILD ACTION TO SAVE OUR NHS!

On Saturday 24 November, defying cold driving rain, up to 10,000 residents and staff marched to defend their local hospital. A south London nurse reports.

The atmosphere was electric as the demonstration brought Lewisham High Street to a standstill. Drivers tooted their horns enthusiastically. The Unison, NUT, and Unite union banners headed up the march. Also prominent was the National Shop Stewards Network banner. Unison's London region swung behind the demonstration, giving health staff confidence to march en masse.

Feelings are strong over this planned closure. 250,000 Lewisham residents know that this situation is critical. People may die if they are conveyed longer distances to either Woolwich or Kings College A&E for emergency treatment. Maternity and other services are also at risk. The administrator, Matthew Kershaw and the new Woolwich and Lewisham chief executives must be held to account for this devastation.

Staff and patients chanted "Save Lewisham A&E. Save the NHS". They

see shutting their local casualty as just one in a string of planned assaults by this government. It's all one NHS. NHS managers, ministers and MPs use divide and rule tactics, talking about different areas of the NHS as if they were separate worlds. All NHS cuts must be vehemently opposed.

This casualty department meets all its performance targets and has one of the lowest rates of hospital acquired infection in the NHS. Yet this state of the art department, that had just seen £12 million worth of investment, is closing. And while our NHS is being disassembled bit by bit, the wealthy controllers of Private Finance Initiative schemes (which are wrecking hospitals) are getting richer than ever!

Platform speakers highlighted the unfairness of the planned closure. At an open staff meeting at Lewisham hospital following the

march, health workers and supporters spoke on where to take this epic struggle.

NUT national executive member Martin Powell-Davies assured Lewisham NHS staff that they would get great support if strike action followed this great show of community involvement. Health trade unionists should call for emergency branch meetings and put forward motions for NHS staff to be balloted for strike action.

If we strike we can win. If we do not, we could lose a key casualty department forever! Many health workers may think they cannot strike but they can, with the unions planning for emergency cover in the event of a strike.

If industrial action is coordinated across health union branches the fight to keep Lewisham A&E open will be victorious and strike a blow against all public sector cuts.



On the 20 October TUC demo photo Paul Mattsson

Mid Yorks health workers strike against pay cuts - and argue for re-nationalisation

Admin and clerical workers at the Mid Yorkshire Hospitals Trust have been fighting attempts to cut their pay and conditions through well-supported strike action (details on page 4). Trust bosses claim that these attacks on low-paid workers are necessary in order to make savings of £24 million by the new financial year and achieve Foundation Trust status in 2014. Payments to the consortium which built the £311 mil-

lion PFI hospitals in Wakefield and Pontefract are costing the Trust over £40 million annually.

But our Unison branch has long argued that the only real solution to the Trust's financial crisis is to re-nationalise its PFI hospitals, cancel all debts to the consortium which built them and open Trust accounts to full public scrutiny.

We will oppose all cuts and privatisation demanded by the

Health and Social Care Act. We are lending our full support to the 'Save Our Local Hospital Services' community-led campaign which aims to maintain full services at our three hospitals, and bring all privatised services back under full public ownership. Such local campaigns should be backed by all health unions and linked into a national campaign to save the NHS.

A strike leader

What we stand for

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

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

Our demands include:
PUBLIC SERVICES

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

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

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

WORK AND INCOME

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

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

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

ENVIRONMENT

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

RIGHTS

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

NEW WORKERS' PARTY

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

SOCIALISM AND INTERNATIONALISM

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