



Bin the bedroom tax

CAN'T PAY - WILL STAY!



photo Lash

The Bedroom Tax has rightly sparked a massive and angry response. It sums up the cold cruelty of the Con-Dems. Nationally an estimated 660,000 will be affected, facing reductions in housing benefits of over £1,000 a year in some areas.

The government's utter hypocrisy is disgusting. Posh, pampered ministers claim concern for the housing benefit bill, asking why tax payers should stump up for social tenants to 'enjoy' spare bedrooms. But the reality is the benefits bill, and homelessness, will soar if thousands are forced into private rented accommodation where rents have sky-rocketed and greedy landlords laugh all the way to the bank.

They also maintain the bedroom tax is an 'incentive to work' – hiding the almost one million workers forced to top up poverty pay with housing benefit. A real incentive would be investment in a mass programme of socially useful job creation.

Nancy Taaffe, the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition candidate for Walthamstow, east London, outlines how to fight the bedroom tax.

Far from worrying about the bedroom tax, on average the richest 1% have £15 million per household. And according to new ONS figures they are worth more than the bottom 99% put together.

Camden council is reportedly "encouraging" 761 families to move to Bradford, Leicester and Birmingham to avoid the benefit cap.

Meanwhile the super-rich, on the run from the crimes they have committed against the working class of Europe, are being given safe haven by the Con-Dems and are virtually buying up the whole of central London.

But the authorities are worried by the growing resistance, so worried that the London regional news is hosting an evening completely given over to explaining the changes to benefits coming in April.

Only in times of crisis and exceptional circumstances does this happen. It is clear that the ruling class and their political representatives know that this cut could potentially prove a catalyst for reinvigorating the anti-cuts movement.

Already thousands of people have protested against the tax's introduction. Networks of supporters in the communities and in the workplaces

have to be built now. We must use everything in our armoury to make it unworkable.

In the event of threatened evictions we must mobilise our communities to resist with all our might. We should emulate the tactics employed to stop the bailiffs in the struggle against Thatcher's hated poll tax, or in Spain or the Occupy Homes campaign in Minneapolis.

Labour councillors who join anti-bedroom tax protests must show their commitment by pledging not to evict a single tenant who can't pay.

Those councillors who refuse to stop evictions should be told that the campaign will stand their own candidates under the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition banner to replace them in the next election.

The tiny pigeon step retreat on some aspects of this cut by Tory (lack of) work and (cutting) pensions minister Iain Duncan Smith shows that the Con-Dems are worried that the bedroom tax could be an echo of the poll tax; when a mass movement defeated the tax and brought down Thatcher.

There are differences with the poll tax, but no doubt the bedroom tax could become a focus for workers' anger at different aspects of

austerity. All anti-cuts campaigners, trade unionists and socialists should get behind the anti-bedroom tax movement.

The Socialist Party says:

- Scrap the bedroom tax and reverse all the welfare cuts!
- Council and housing associations must refuse to evict all tenants that fall into rent arrears as a result of the tax!
- Organise a campaign to stop evictions for bedroom tax-related arrears
- Build a new mass workers' party that draws together workers, young people and activists from workplaces and anti-cuts campaigns, to provide a fighting, political alternative to the pro-big business parties
- For a major programme of council house building and refurbishing to provide affordable homes for all and decent jobs
- Trade unions must build for a 24-hour general strike against austerity

the Socialist

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Sussex university occupation: 'they say private - we fight back and organise'

Claire Laker-Mansfield
Socialist Students national
organiser

'Students and workers, unite and fight' was the chant reverberating around Sussex campus on Monday 25 March. Up to 2,000 students and staff descended on the university's Library Square for a protest marking the culmination so far of a bitterly fought campaign against privatisation.

Taking fright at the scale of the movement, the university's management had shut down large parts of the campus, including all its shops and cafes. The main administrative building was in 'lockdown', with most workers told not to come in. Bars were fitted on all the windows. This created a sense that the university had been 'given over' to the protesters for a day.

The yellow square - a symbol of the movement - was a ubiquitous presence throughout the campus, with most buildings adorned with banners or chalkings reading 'stop the sell-off' or 'join the occupation'. The stage was set for battle.

Assembled for the rally, hundreds of Sussex students were joined by those studying at universities all over the country, all arriving for what had been dubbed a 'national demo'.

Speakers emphasised that Sussex University is far from unique in having a management determined to sell off much of its support services to the profiteers. The battle being waged there can give confidence to those facing similar attacks elsewhere, acting as a catalyst for developing the struggle to defend higher education nationally.

When speaking, one of the workers affected by the planned

sell-off described the 'culture of fear' that management were attempting to create. But he spoke inspiringly of how the tide was beginning to turn, and made clear that strike action by workers would be an essential component of any successful campaign.

The protest began a march around campus, touring the main buildings and passing the university's occupied 'conference centre'. Next, it assembled close to Sussex House, the main administration building which holds the vice-chancellor's office and those of all senior managers.

Occupying

Despite the 'lock-down' the protesters were determined to occupy - the crowd now chanting 'they say private - we say organise' and 'you cut our education - we go into occupation'.

One protester managed to get to the flag pole on the roof of the building and raised the red and yellow flag representing the movement; a contrast to the union flag that would normally be seen.

The demonstration surged forwards, attempting to enter the building. At this point van loads of riot police began arriving on the campus, charged with the task of protecting the university's rich bosses.

The protesters began to link arms, shouting 'cops off campus', and the police were forced to retreat backwards as the demonstration eventually stormed into Sussex House.

The protesters were unable, however, to enter the corridor housing the vice-chancellor's executive group. Clearly cowering, the vice-chancellor had pre-emptively invited in five police officers to defend his office against the students.

After around an hour of occupy-



Students gather to protest at Sussex University photo Sarena Cheung

ing this building the protest then regrouped and marched to the occupied conference centre. There, the occupation was expanded, taking in the whole of the top floor of this building. Once inside a meeting began with representatives of different universities speaking on how to build the movement nationally.

Socialist Students members from Manchester University and York University gave examples of the campaigns they are involved in. Both emphasised the importance of students taking united action alongside workers, and the enormous power that workers can exercise through withdrawing their labour and striking.

They also raised the need to escalate student action against cuts and privatisation, raising the poten-

Privatisation - the grim reality for student housing

The student housing giant Opal went into administration recently. Since then there has been a noticeable change to services around the student accommodation site of Little Aspley in Huddersfield.

The bins have not been collected for two weeks; a mountain of rubbish is piling up in the courtyard. The receptionist explained that the contract with the bin collectors has been voided and could not say when the bins will be collected. It won't be long until rats and other vermin begin picking at the grotesque mountain of rubbish.

Forty members of staff are set to lose their jobs.

Jake Lawley, Huddersfield Socialist Students

tial for a student strike, something which would ideally take place alongside action by organised by workers.

In the new term it will be necessary to re-invigorate the movement at Sussex and escalate the action.

And it is also necessary to begin to spread protest and struggle elsewhere. A united national movement, with workers and students fighting together, can turn back the tide and defend education for the 99%.

NUT teachers conference: serious attacks require serious action

Martin Powell-Davis
NUT national executive

The National Union of Teachers (NUT) Conference 2013 meets to debate how best to defend teachers at a time when education as a whole is under fierce attack.

As the best organised teaching union, the NUT has a huge responsibility to use its strength to push back a government determined to drive through an agenda of cuts and privatisation.

If teachers go out and explain how the Con-Dems' attacks on pensions, pay and conditions are part of a broader attack on education, large sections of the public can be won to support our action, just as they were when unions took national action in 2011.

Since then the full horror of the government's attacks is more widely understood. If we organise effectively and mobilise around a clear programme of action, then we can force them to retreat.

Tory minister Michael Gove has talked of declaring 'war' on the teaching unions because he knows our potential strength. When we take action, thousands of schools are closed, working lives and the economy widely disrupted, trade union opposition to cuts clearly displayed in every community.

This government is not confident that it can push through its plans. It knows that, beneath the surface there is massive discontent at the bankers and the super-rich, who the government represents. With its cuts packages threatening a 'triple-dip' recession, the Coalition is struggling to show that it has any solution to the continuing economic crisis.

Yet throughout 2012, the Con-Dems must hardly have been able to believe their luck. The retreat by unions such as Unison and ATL over pensions left other unions isolated and significant joint national action was not repeated again since November 2011. That retreat also left some in the NUT leadership seemingly struggling with a crisis of confidence.

Instead of leading the way, as the NUT had done in June 2011, last year NUT only called a London regional strike which, although confirming that teachers would take action when a lead is given, wasn't then followed by further major action.

For over three months after Gove announced his performance-pay attacks in early December, no strike plans were announced.

Even the publicity for members seemed strangely muted. Leaflets had to be produced by Local Associations, 'Classroom Teacher' and others, from below.

Leadership

The leadership seemed to draw the conclusion that the NUT can't act alone - it has to make sure the NASUWT acts with us too. Of course unions acting together adds strength - that's why the Socialist Party has been to the fore in campaigning for the TUC to discuss and build generalised strike action. However, there's a balance to be struck at each stage

between the benefits of taking joint action and the risks of having to go at the speed of the slowest partner.

The NASUWT remains a difficult partner to negotiate with - certainly at the top. Hopefully, out of joint action, links can be strengthened from below that can also put pressure on the NASUWT tops to maintain action.

The joint NASUWT/NUT 'action short of strike action' has won some gains and helped build union organisation in some schools. However, school-by-school action asks a lot of local union organisation and has inevitably been 'patchy'. Localised battles are no substitute for national strike action to win our demands.

On pensions, we need to reverse the increased pension ages and win a pay rise that gives us back what we have lost to inflation and contribution increases.

On workload we need to win the 35-hour limit on working hours, with a maximum of 20 hours pupil contact time, listed in Motion 55.

Immediately, we have to fight to reverse the severe attacks on pay that will soon be legislated for in the Pay and Conditions Document.

Immediately, we have to build and escalate action on PRP. The NUT/NASUWT programme marks, at last, a return to action, but it needs strengthening.

It should start with a day of national strike action, linking with the PCS civil service union in June. It would be best if this involved the NASUWT but the NUT must be prepared to take this step without other teaching unions if necessary.

If the NUT gives a bold lead then NASUWT members will demand that their leadership joins the action. The plans for the autumn term need to be announced and dates set for further escalating action in 2014. **This article is based on material in the Socialist Party bulletin at NUT conference. See the blogs of Socialist Party NUT executive members: electmartin1.blogspot.co.uk and electglover1.blogspot.co.uk**

The 'workfare bill' and sanctions targets Con-Dems have no solutions to unemployment

Dan Crowter

Coventry Socialist Party

On budget day, the latest unemployment figures were published and showed yet another increase in the number of people out of work. Rather than offering any solution, the three main parties continue to attack the unemployed.

For example, the Con-Dems' 'workfare bill' went through the House of Commons easily, as all but 44 Labour MPs obeyed the leadership and abstained.

The bill was rushed through in response to the High Court's ruling that the way workfare was implemented is illegal. This meant that the government owed compensation to around 150,000 jobseekers who had taken part in the scheme, which forced them to work for free for private companies or risk losing their unemployment benefits.

Labour

Unlike most laws the bill will be applied retrospectively so the government can ignore the ruling and refuse to repay any benefits that were sanctioned.

Labour is facing a growing backlash from inside and outside its ranks as a result of their disgraceful decision to abstain, with many members calling for shadow Work and Pensions minister Liam Byrne to resign. It has once again been shown that New Labour doesn't represent working class people.

Hundreds of people have said online that they won't vote Labour again, and some Labour activists



A Youth Fight for Jobs protest against workfare in 2012 photo Senan

have resigned or threatened to resign – they should get involved in the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) instead.

It has also recently been revealed that jobcentres have been setting

Labour is facing a growing backlash at its disgraceful decision to abstain

targets and "league tables" for how many benefit claimants they've sanctioned, despite repeated statements from the government and the Department for Work and Pensions that there were no targets in place.

Emails sent by a local manager re-

ferred to a "league table", which the Guardian reports "could only have been drawn up through information provided by senior managers in the DWP".

The email also threatened disciplinary action against staff deemed to be "not delivering". This sort of pressure on staff, and the attitude within the DWP of suspicion towards claimants, is unacceptable.

The trade unions must campaign for real jobs – not workfare – and for benefits that are enough to live on without bullying for claimants or staff.

The Socialist Party calls for a mass programme of job creation – house building, infrastructure development and investment in public services – as the only way to solve unemployment.

Sick of Your Boss gets going in London

Ian Pattison

Youth Fight for Jobs

Youth Fight for Jobs has launched its new Sick of Your Boss initiative.

A growing number of people, particularly young people, are underemployed, on top of the millions who can't find work at all. Zero-hour contracts, unpaid breaks, no holiday rights – that's the type of work on offer in Con-Dem Britain.

Sick of Your Boss kicked off in central London on Thursday 21 March with a protest outside Starbucks. Starbucks attempts to promote a friendly-employer image, but we know the reality is very different.

Pay your tax!

When Megabucks Starbucks was revealed to not have paid a penny of tax in the UK over three years, under pressure the company agreed to cough up. But to make up for it the bosses attacked workers' rights – withdrawing holidays and maternity rights.

In the run up to the protest Youth Fight for Jobs activists in London gave out thousands of leaflets, walking straight into shops, food courts and shopping centres, speaking to

workers about the issues important to them.

On Sunday 24 March, Sick of Your Boss's first public meeting brought together young underemployed workers from across London at the Unite the Union Community Centre in Tower Hamlets.

Making plans

We discussed the demands of the campaign, our rights at work, but most importantly, how we can get organised in unorganised workplaces. We talked about the importance of all workers joining and getting active in a trade union such as Unite, and for the unions to take seriously the task of organising precarious workers.

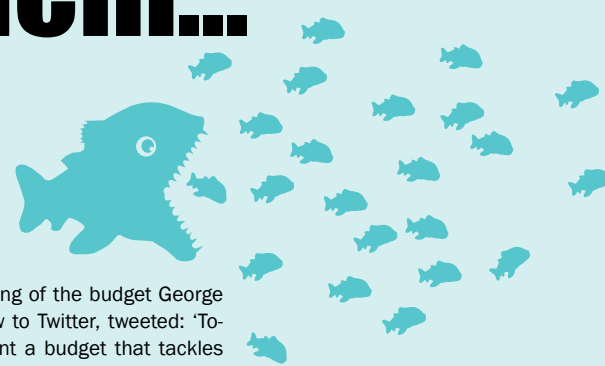
We agreed to hold a series of meetings across London over the next couple of months in areas where many underemployed, often unorganised, people work.

The first meeting will be in Oxford Street where there are many clothes shops and fast food restaurants as well as private language colleges where teaching staff are forced onto zero-hour contracts. We will also organise protests targeting the worst bosses.



photo Youth Fight for Jobs

Them...



Growth?

On the morning of the budget George Osborne, new to Twitter, tweeted: 'Today I'll present a budget that tackles the economy's problems head on helping those who want to work hard and get on'. Sounds strangely familiar to what he was planning to do in each previous budget. But tackling the economy's problems doesn't seem to be going very well for him – he revealed that 'growth' in the economy this year is predicted to be only 0.6% – halved from previous predictions. The chancellor's failure in his main aim explains why voters have such little faith in him – a recent Ipsos Mori poll showed that 15% fewer people support the government's core economic policies when told that Osborne is the author!

Pay

The misery facing public sector workers will be dragged out even further if Osborne gets his way – he announced an extension of the 1% cap on pay rises to include 2015/16. Even official statistics for inflation put it at over 2%, meaning this cap is a real-terms pay cut.

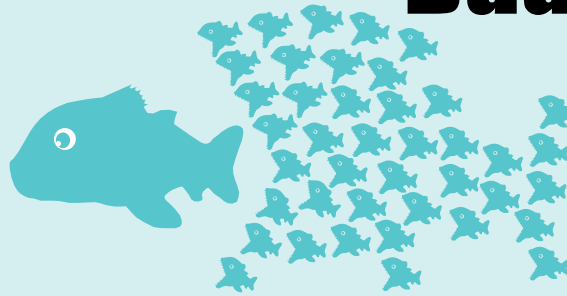
And then we're expected to be grateful for a small cut in the price of beer – 1p a pint. But that means, even drinking ten pints a week, you only save £5.20 in the course of a year.

Tax

The amount you can earn tax-free is being raised to £10,000 a year – finally an actual help for someone other than the super-rich. But while giving this with one hand, Osborne takes much more back with the other through pay cuts, rocketing prices and attacks on benefits.

And besides, it's nothing when compared to the advantages added to the tax system for big business. Corporation tax is being reduced by a further 1%, on top of 7% already cut since the Con-Dems came to power. By 2016/17 this will lose £800 million from the public purse.

...& Us Budget



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

NSSN

Best response to #budget2013? Call a union/workplace meeting to discuss how to build for a #24hrgeneralstrike as a start

Nancy Taaffe

Barclays announces £38.5m bonuses on budget day #budget2013 #cuts #TUSC #NSSN #socialism #fightback

Youth Fight for Jobs

Corporation tax cut in Osborne's #budget2013 for the 1%! Should make rich pay 4 job creation.

Greg Randall

44 rebels against #workfare bill "saved Labour honour" says Len McCluskey. And the other 211 MPs? No honour in this party. #TUSC



Join the fightback! Join the Socialists!

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PCS budget day strike - M20

Reports from the picket lines and rallies

These are extracts from the many inspiring reports we received about the strike, longer versions of which are on the Socialist Party's website:
www.socialistparty.org.uk

Central London was dotted everywhere with the yellow and blue of PCS flags and placards. One picket at the Passport Office said: "I normally hate getting up early but this morning I thought 'great!'"

Strikers felt that the PCS plan of three months of a campaign of action and trying to coordinate with other unions is what's necessary.

Everyone I spoke to thinks there should be a one-day general strike and agreed with the National Shop Stewards Network (NSSN) lobby of the TUC general council on 24 April that has been called to urge the TUC to name the date for a general strike.
Paula Mitchell

Catering staff for the House of Lords were in a defiant mood. Catering staff throughout parliament have already suffered £100,000 worth of cuts and are now being told they have to suffer further cuts in overtime rates and terms and conditions.

The staff have to work 14 or 15 hours a day to provide subsidised food for MPs and the Lords. The lowest paid are on only £900 a month, working a 40-hour week.

Meanwhile the members of the House of Lords get an attendance allowance of £300 a week just for turning up, plus a £54 a day meal allowance! No surprise the pickets were determined to take further action - hitting parliament in its stomach - if the government doesn't retreat.
Hannah Sell

Outside the Maple House Homes and Communities Agency office on Tottenham Court Road, housing workers in the Unite union were also striking and picketing, in co-ordination with the national PCS strike. The Unite workers were striking against a divisive and inequitable pay offer.

30-plus Unite and PCS workers were on the picket line. PCS assistant general secretary Chris Baugh, Unite branch secretary Suzanne Muna and Unite regional secretary Pete Kavanagh spoke to the strikers and supporters.

Strikers were keen to sign the NSSN general strike petition to make sure other unions join them in taking action next time.

Paul Kershaw and Sarah Wrack

Solid strike action by PCS members across Swansea and South West Wales meant most offices were fully closed or providing a limited service. Socialist Party members visited picket lines across Wales. As one picket thanked us for our solidarity and support she reminded us that this was the first round of action and expected to see us again on 5 April!
Alec Thraves

- Maidstone Jobcentre had seven pickets, the strike was solid despite years of no pickets. Across Kent more DWP offices had solid pickets than before.

- There were PCS picket lines at all the main civil service workplaces in Bristol. Despite cold weather and an early start, pickets were buoyed by the strength of the strike to defend jobs, pay and conditions and protect services.

While George Osborne was announcing further attacks on ordinary people from the comfort of parliament, 60 people joined a local strike rally.



PCS general secretary Mark Serwotka speaking at the strike rally in London photo Paul Mattsson



On the HCA picket line photo Sarah Wrack

In brief

Cleaners' low pay battle

Cleaners working for Churchill on Arriva Trains Wales were on 24-hour strike on 27 March. They are fighting against poverty pay. The company made a slightly improved offer after they announced a strike for 16 March, which was suspended. Talks are proceeding between the workers' union RMT and the company, which has doubled its profits in the last five years. Meanwhile cleaners working for ISS on the East Coast Mainline will be on strike on 30 March, again against poverty pay. ISS made an offer after the last round of strike action but it did not address many issues, including sick pay and free travel.

Crown PO strike

Thousands of CWU members in Crown post offices will be on strike on Easter Saturday, 30 March. The dispute is over closures, jobs and pay. The Post Office plans to close 76 out of the 373 Crown offices, threatening 800 jobs. Also the workers have not had a pay rise since April 2011, even though one was due in April 2012. But postmasters have received a pay rise.

Blacklisting



At the Blacklist Support Group AGM on 23 March GMB and Unite unions pledged to step up the campaign against blacklisting in the construction industry. This will include exposing the individuals who have been associated with the blacklisting body, the now completely discredited Consulting Association. Unite has found that over half of the people who were contacts for the Consulting Association now work for companies engaged in the huge Crossrail project. The result of this includes the sacking of 27 subcontracted workers, including Frank Morris, who was sacked after being elected as a shop steward. Crossrail is trying to claim that the contract simply came to an end.

Website

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



Lobbying the TUC in 2012 photo Paul Mattsson

National Shop Stewards Network (NSSN) lobby of TUC General Council

Name the date for a 24-hour general strike!
Wednesday 24 April, from 8.30am outside TUC Congress House, Great Russell Street, London WC1B 3LS

The 7th annual conference of the NSSN: 29 June 2013
11am - 5pm in the Camden Centre, Judd Street, London, WC1H 9JE

Speakers include union general secretaries
Mark Serwotka, PCS, Billy Hayes, CWU and Steve Gillan, POA
info@shopstewards.net • PO Box 54498, London, E10 9DE

www.shopstewards.net

Care workers prepare for action

Gary Freeman

The snow might have cancelled many events on 23 March but it did not prevent members and supporters of Thera workers in Unison South Derbyshire Health branch and Notts County Unison holding a protest.

Thera workers provide care and support for people with learning disabilities and they are facing massive attacks on their terms and conditions. These attacks will not only create a low-paid workforce at the beck and call of the employer, but will mean the service to people being supported will suffer. Staff will not stay under the proposed terms and there will be no continuity of

support.

A ballot for strike action closed on 25 March and Unison members wanted to continue their publicity campaign.

The protest took place one day after the workers started receiving letters demanding they sign new contracts. The protest ended with us waving our banner and placards as we made our way to the meeting. Despite the weather there was an upbeat mood.

One elderly woman had given her robust view of what she would do to Cameron, and a group of men standing outside the pub gave their vocal support with another view of what they would do to the prime minister.

Striking against the 'fast track to the sack'

Teachers in two of Knowsley's primary schools have taken strike action against the introduction of a punitive appraisal scheme. This links incremental pay advance to successful appraisal and has been dubbed "the fast track to the sack".

The appraisal scheme has been recommended to schools by Knowsley's right-wing Labour council, and some have announced their intention to implement it. On this basis teaching unions NUT and NASUWT members in Longview school and St Margaret and St Mary's school took strike action on 13, 14, 20 and 21 March.

The strikers at Longview School were joined on the picket line by newly elected NUT national executive member Pete Glover, and Roger Bannister, secretary of the Unison branch in Knowsley, and member of the union's national executive council. Both are Socialist Party members.

Knowsley council has proposed talks with Acas acting as conciliators (as opposed to arbitrators), and the unions are likely to take this up, while maintaining the pressure of further action should these talks not result in a settlement.

What does the budget really mean for the housing crisis?

The government's claim to be tackling the housing crisis dominated budget headlines. But, introduced as offering a leg-up for struggling families, it quickly became clear that the housing policies give a hand-out to Osborne's millionaire friends. Paul Kershaw explains what the budget really means.

Home ownership

The chancellor announced spending of £3.5 billion on a 'help to buy' programme under which the government loans 20% of a deposit and the buyer puts up just 5% for a new build home.

They also announced a scheme to underwrite an eye-watering £130 billion of mortgage lending available for any house. Although ministers kept saying this was 'intended' to help new people into the market it quickly became clear that it would be open to buyers of second homes. So at the same time as a 'spare' bedroom tax hits the poor, the Con-Dems are introducing a second home subsidy.

Housing boom?

The Telegraph reports the planning minister, Nick Boles, as speaking unguardedly at a Mayfair reception for property developers. Referring to new homes he stated that he "couldn't care who owns the bloody things". According to the Telegraph, Boles indicated that the main aim was to create a housing boom.

The Daily Mirror dubbed George Osborne 'snob the builder' but these policies have been welcomed in some quarters. Shares in construction companies rose and the Telegraph reported affluent house hunters contacting estate agents in some of Britain's most expensive postcodes to ask how they can benefit from the new state mortgage assistance scheme.

Osborne said the initiative would help families who "cannot begin to afford" the large deposits currently needed to get a mortgage at a good interest rate, but high earners can also access the multi-billion pound scheme.

The Telegraph quotes an up-market estate agent: "I've had a few calls to discuss this, which is surprising given that the sort of people we deal with aren't usually associated with help getting a mortgage," he said.

"Given the limit at £600,000 and lack of salary cap surely this is going to appeal to those wanting really quite nice property - for example three-bedroom flats and houses in Battersea and Wandsworth. If I was being cynical I'd call those Tory voters."

With an eye to the future, even

some Tories see dangers. Ambitious Tory MP Kwasi Kwartang warned of the risk of asset price inflation. The policy will increase demand by easing credit, but there is no evidence that supply will increase to match.

In the Financial Times, James Mackintosh asked: "Does he [Osborne] really think encouraging higher leverage [borrowing] among homeowners so they can buy houses which are overvalued on almost any long-term measure makes sense?"

Mortgage of the living dead

If hard pressed home buyers are drawn in who are dependent on the current low interest rates they will find themselves with a 'mortgage of the living dead' if rates rise.

This scenario would result in mass defaults in some ways comparable to the sub-prime crisis that hit the US state-linked mortgage lenders Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac during the financial crash. Osborne appears to have learnt nothing from the crash, representing a capitalist class addicted to parasitical finance-dominated capitalism.



Protesting for affordable housing in London photo London YFJ

Private rent sector

In an important move that got few headlines, government money to attract institutional investors to the private rented sector was increased fivefold from £200 million to £1 billion. Not surprisingly the initial £200 million 'Build to Rent' fund was quickly oversubscribed conjuring an image of pigs at a trough.

Of course there is no plan to regulate the private rented sector, offer secure rather than short term tenancies, or control rent.

The government-commissioned Montague report recently raised the idea that private renting could supplant social housing and many observers doubt that the home ownership initiatives will actually expand house building.

LSL property services commented: "It is the private rented sector

that is increasingly picking up the slack and having to support more and more tenants. Demand is astronomical, and tenant numbers look set to increase even further this year. On the same day as the budget, the UK is also digesting a rise in unemployment - plus a fresh fall in gross mortgage lending.

Build houses!

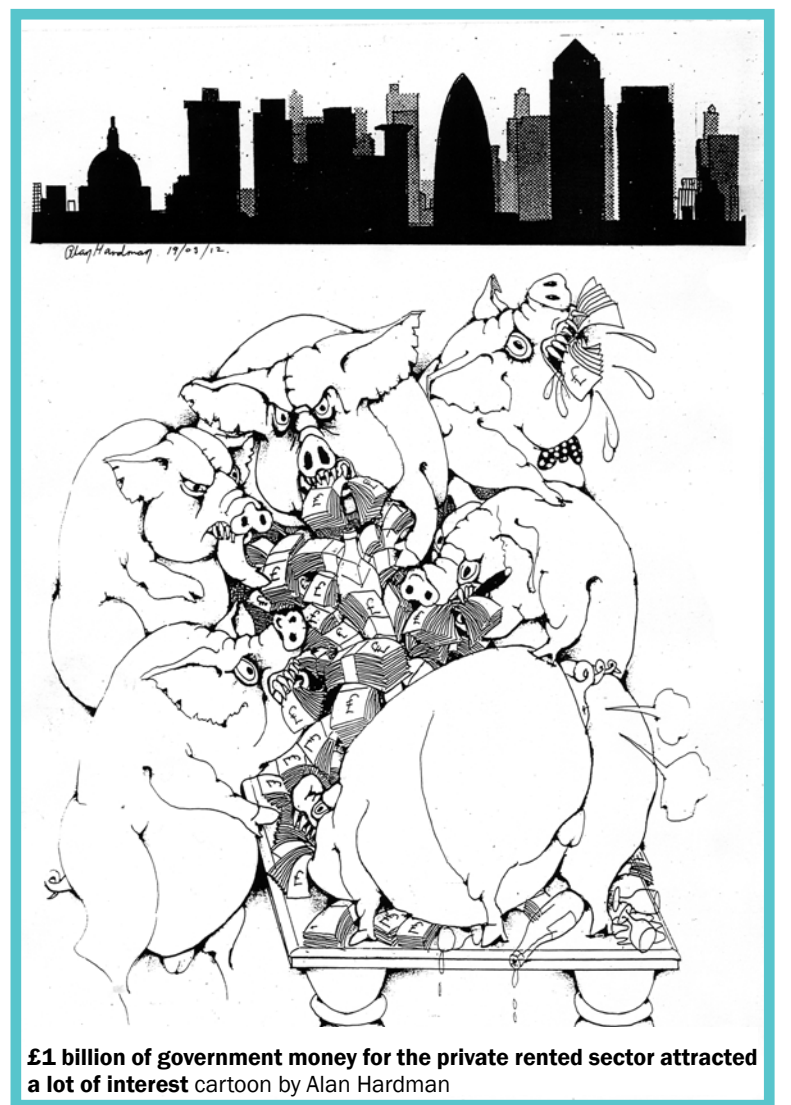
"And if this wasn't enough, property prices are now mounting a fresh rally, while struggling first time buyers face a mounting burden from wider inflation. In this tough economic climate more would-be homebuyers will find themselves forced into the rental sector.

"Until the economy can sustain real wage growth, the sails of the pri-

ivate rented sector will be billowed by record numbers of tenants." That is a more realistic assessment than the government propagandists who promise an expansion of home ownership.

Disgracefully, the TUC Touchstone blog described the 'Build to Rent' money as "Welcome but not enough" (20 March), seeing it as a boost to the construction industry. Labour too has called for incentives for the private rented sector in exchange for a vague call for more rights for tenants.

Why not call for a massive programme of council house building instead? Shouldn't the workers' movement be calling for building secure, cheap social housing rather than an expansion of private landlordism?



Social housing

Osborne announced a further boost to the discount for 'right to buy' sales of social housing. The government claims that the proceeds will be used to replace properties sold with affordable housing.

But they mislead when they describe this as 'like for like' replacement as the new 'affordable rent' homes have far higher rents than the old 'social rent' homes.

The policy is presented as increasing home ownership but almost a third of homes sold under right to buy have ended up in the hands of

private landlords - in conditions of austerity and recession the proportion is likely to get even higher.

The Lib Dems were supposed to have extracted money for social housing in exchange for supporting the increased 'right to buy' discount but they got a pathetic £225 million, a fraction of the £3.5 billion to support mortgages. The government estimates that 240,000 new homes are needed every year, currently around half that are built.

The coalition started with a massive 63% cut in grants for social housing and the promise that the

private sector would fill the gap and 'get Britain building'.

Housing benefit

In fact house building has fallen from the low level inherited from the previous Labour government. Homelessness acceptances are up 10% since 2011. Rough sleeping is up by nearly a third.

Since the 1970s governments have been reducing money spent on building social housing and since the 1980s right to buy has

been reducing the stock. Politicians and the press talk about immigration but this, and the unwillingness of private builders to build despite high prices, is the reason for the housing shortage.

High housing costs mean that nearly one in five households rely on housing benefit and the over £20 billion spent on housing benefit dwarfs the budget housing announcements. This money does not make tenants rich, it goes to landlords.

All the major parties propose combinations of benefit cuts, yet

more 'incentives' for private landlords, and backing for banks and private builders.

We need a political voice that argues for a cap on rents not benefits and a massive programme of social house building which would actually save on the housing benefit bill.

In 2008 the bank bailout package cost the government £500 billion - instead of offering the banks further guarantees they should be nationalised and used to support council house building and other socially useful projects.

Cyprus bailout: RETURN OF THE EUROZONE CRISIS

Tony Saunois
Committee for a Workers' International (CWI)

The eurozone crisis has dramatically intensified. Events in Cyprus have blown away the optimism of the European ruling classes in recent months that they had resolved the crisis. Once again, the continuation of the eurozone, as currently constituted, is seriously threatened. The Cyprus crisis could also dramatically pose the viability of the euro.

This time the threat has not erupted from one of the so-called PIGS (Portugal, Ireland, Italy, Greece and Spain). It is a measure of the parlous state of the eurozone and the European Union (EU) that (Greek) Cyprus, which accounts for 0.2% of the EU's GDP (total output), threatens the continuation of the eurozone.

Cyprus was also, at least initially, the first country to apparently call the bluff of the Troika. This threatens to set a 'trend' for other faltering eurozone countries to do likewise, something which terrifies German Chancellor Angela Merkel and the other EU leaders.

After a week of turmoil an emergency meeting on Sunday night (24 March) of eurozone finance ministers with the International Monetary Fund, European Central Bank and European Commission (the Troika), and the Cypriot government, agreed a draconian bailout package. This will be imposed on Cyprus.

It involves the closure of Cyprus's second largest bank, Laiki, whose assets will be transferred to a re-structured Bank of Cyprus. A cash limit of €100 has been imposed on ATM withdrawals and limited capital controls have been introduced to stop a flight of capital.

Although only larger depositors with over €100,000 will be hit and not the smaller depositors as originally proposed, the measures will plunge

According to Guardian commentator Larry Elliot, Cyprus "has been left in a near impossible position by the terms of its rescue. The €10 billion (£8.5 billion) loan from the European Union, the European Central Bank and the International Monetary Fund means Cyprus will have a debt-to-GDP ratio of 140% and an economy that is on course to shrink by at least 20% in the next two or three years." The Wall Street Journal estimates the contraction could be as high as 25%!

Cyprus into a depression and choke off credit. A 20-25% contraction of the economy in two or three years is expected. It will effectively destroy Cyprus's offshore banking sector - its main economic base, along with tourism.

The bailout deal will have a devastating effect on the Cypriot people. It is very close to the original measures demanded by Christine Lagarde, head of the IMF and rejected by Cypriot president, Nicos Anastasiades.

Arrogantly, like a colonial master, the Troika initially insisted that the Cypriot government confiscate a percentage of the bank deposits held by



both rich and poor, 9.9% for those holding over €100,000 and 6.75% for others, as a condition for a €16 billion bailout. The Troika would provide €10 billion with an additional €5.8 billion raised by the Cypriot government.

This was rejected by the Cypriot parliament, enraging German imperialism and the Troika which then adopted a harder line as an example to other countries of what to expect if they too reject the Troika's demands. As German Finance Minister Wolfgang Schäuble, put it: "I won't allow myself to be blackmailed, by no one or nothing".

According to Edward Scicluna, Malta's Minister of Finance, at Sunday's meeting: "All this was agreed to by the Cypriot government representative who, with a pistol at his head, was naturally unusually cooperative. But it took nearly ten long hours before the Cypriot minister's body and soul became exhausted enough for him to assent to this accord".

According to reports Cypriot MPs will not be allowed to vote on this latest package!

The original package was perceived as a dictate by colonial rulers. Yiannaki Omiras, president of the parliament, argued that, "Europe wants Cyprus to return to be a country of limited sovereignty - neocolonial". The history of colonial rule under the Ottoman Empire and British imperialism is an important part of Cyprus's history, fuelling opposition to measures being imposed by the Troika.

The confiscation of a percentage of the deposits of all savers provoked a massive backlash in Cyprus and other EU countries caught in the centre of the storm, especially Italy, Portugal and Spain. In one stroke, the imposition of this measure fatally undermined the insurance guarantee for

depositors throughout the EU. This can lead to a flight of capital from other weak economies in the EU.

If the Troika could impose this on Cyprus, then why not Italy, Spain or Portugal and other countries when the next bailout is needed? It was a blunder by Merkel and the Troika, driven by the 'hardline' Dutch, Finn and Slovak governments in support of Merkel and German imperialism. The deposit 'tax' threatened to trigger a run on the banks in other countries, as depositors withdrew money from their accounts in fear that they could lose at least a percentage of them.

The consequences of this miscalculation - reflecting the arrogance of the EU leaders and that they are thrashing around for solutions - has only intensified the crisis. Following news of the latest deal stock markets rose sharply, only to fall back when one European finance minister suggested that future bailouts could be based on the Cyprus bank restructuring model.

Humiliated

In Cyprus, the newly-elected president, only in power for over two weeks when the initial deal was proposed, was left humiliated. Bullied into accepting the deal in Brussels, Anastasiades returned to Cyprus to face a revolt of the mass of the population and all the political parties, including his own.

In the end, not a single MP voted for that deal and the governing party, DRP, abstained on the vote! They effectively called the bluff of the Troika, which threatened to cut off emergency ECB funds by Monday 25 March. Such a move would have effectively put Cyprus outside the eurozone and possibly even the EU itself.

Apart from the pressure by the

mass of the population to oppose this measure there were other important factors which also allowed the Cypriot ruling class to initially withstand the demands of the Troika.

But the vote to reject the deal in the Cypriot parliament was not a vote against an austerity package. The cuts package had already been accepted by the previous government, led by Akel (the Cypriot Communist Party), which has significant support among workers, and passed on to its successor.

The Cypriot government attempted to strike a bailout deal with other capitalist powers outside the EU, in particular Russia. Cypriot banking is awash with money from Russia - \$31 billion invested in Cypriot banks by the Russian banking system alone - due to very favourable tax rates.

The vote against the Troika package by the pro-capitalist parties was partly a vote to maintain Cyprus as an offshore tax haven. Its banking system, which is currently eight-times the size of the country's GDP, has been teetering on the verge of collapse after being exposed to heavy losses as a result of the crisis in Greece.

At the same time, Cyprus has gas reserves worth an estimated €475 billion. This, the ruling class had hoped, would give them the opportunity to broker an alternative deal with Russia. Instead, it revealed a clash of national interests among the capitalist and imperialist powers.

The prospect of Russia acquiring a share of the gas reserves, in return for at least a percentage of the bailout, enraged Merkel and German imperialism, in particular. Even US

imperialism was disquieted at such a development.

The extension of Russian influence into an EU country will aggravate tensions with German capitalism and other EU powers. At this stage, President Putin and the Russian oligarchs do not want to come into a sharp collision with Germany and other EU powers, which would threaten trade and other commercial interests.

Italy next?

The fragility of the eurozone has already emerged following the recent dramatic elections in Italy. Despite the lack of a socialist alternative for the Italian workers and masses, a clear majority voted for the anti-austerity parties. The populist Five-Star Movement, led by Beppe Grillo, took 25% of the vote, campaigning against the euro, for a return of the lira and a restructuring of Italy's mountain of €9 trillion public debt.

There is still no government in Italy. Financial meltdown in Italy, the EU's third largest economy, would make the drama of the Greek crisis seem like a minor sideshow in comparison. Moreover, Spain and Portugal are also set to follow an eruption of the euro-crisis in Italy.

The Cypriot government has been compelled to levy a higher tax on wealthy depositors. Russian depositors are set to lose billions in the latest deal which is certain to increase tensions between the EU and Russia. This may allow Cyprus to remain in the euro for a period although this is far from certain.

A new crisis will inevitably emerge, posing again the prospect of Cyprus's ejection from the euro, if Italy, Spain or Portugal have not already gone through the exit door. These events

these same capitalist politicians will attack the rights and living standards of the Cypriot working class. Working people reject austerity to keep the euro.

The current Greek Cypriot government, elected on a promise of securing a 'softer' bailout, is now largely discredited. It is urgent to fight for an alternative government of the workers and others exploited by capitalism.

Such a government would oppose the terms of the bailout and reject the austerity programme demanded by the Troika. The banks should be immediately nationalised, under democratic workers' control and management.

Such a government would face immediate ejection from the EU and the euro. A government of the working people of Cyprus would need to prepare for such a prospect. It would need to immediately introduce capital controls to prevent a flight of capital and introduce a new currency.

An emergency economic programme would be necessary to defend the interests of workers and the poor. This would be possible on the basis of a democratic socialist plan of the economy through the nationalisation of the major companies and financial institutions under workers' control and management.

also show again that every measure taken by the Troika in attempting to 'resolve' the crisis is followed by an eruption elsewhere.

Socialist alternative

The crucial issue facing Cypriot workers and the middle class is the urgency of building a mass movement to reject any austerity programme demanded by the Troika and capitalism, and to oppose any measures making the masses pay for a bailout of the banks.

Unfortunately, the leadership of Akel is not organising a mass mobilisation and presenting an alternative programme to break with capitalism, as a way out of the crisis.

When in government, and holding the presidency until only three weeks ago, Akel accepted the austerity package demanded by the EU and simply passed it on to the new government to implement.

Today it calls for a "powerful response by the people" and "mass resistance". It demands "the popularisation of the vision for the liberation of Cyprus from the suffocating embrace of the monopolies". (Akel statement, 16 March).

Akel is not offering a concrete alternative of what should be done in the face of this crisis and the prospect of Cyprus being ejected from the euro. Akel is currently calling for opposition to the Troika but not the eurozone. Yet membership of the eurozone means acceptance of the austerity demanded by the Troika. Many Cypriots will question what it did when it was in government. In the recent elections, Akel lost up to 25% of its vote compared to 2008.

There can be no trust in the capitalist government. In or out of the euro,

However, this crisis of the EU is also a crisis of the global capitalist system. A socialist government of the workers and poor in Cyprus would immediately face the wrath of European and global capitalism.

Temporary loans and trade arrangements could be negotiated with other states as an interim step. But it would need also to forge links with the working people of Greece, Spain, Italy and Portugal. It would be necessary to appeal to them to follow such an example.

Internationalism

Together, the working people of these countries could form a democratic, voluntary federation of Mediterranean and Iberian states.

This could be a bridge to reach over to the workers of the rest of Europe with the aim of forming a democratic socialist federation of European states as an alternative to the capitalist EU and Troika.

The crisis in Cyprus has opened a new chapter in the crisis in the eurozone and the EU. It has illustrated that the crisis is far from resolved. Deeper and further crises are certain to erupt in the coming weeks and months. On a capitalist basis there is no solution to them. The struggle for a socialist alternative is now more imperative than ever.



The Cypriot section of the CWI has helped initiate workers' protests

Committee for a Workers' International (CWI)

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



The CWI website contains news, reports and analysis from around the world.

www.socialistworld.net



The Lady of Cyprus says no to austerity!



The floundering new right-wing Greek Cypriot president, Nicos Anastasiades

**TUSC
AGAINST
CUTS**

Mary Jackson, Doncaster mayoral candidate

Speakers include:
Bob Crow, RMT transport union
general secretary
Tony Mulhearn, 'Liverpool
47' councillor 1983-87 and
2012 TUSC Liverpool mayoral
candidate
Mary Jackson, Doncaster TUSC
mayoral candidate
Tuesday 2 April, 5.30pm to
7.30pm
Doncaster Trades and Labour
Club, Second Floor, Frenchgate
Centre, DN1



I will be standing on a no-cuts platform and will fight to reverse every cut which has already been implemented, as well as helping to mount the battle against the bedroom tax, not one eviction is necessary!"

Stories like this fuel my motivation to stand up for ordinary people across Welwyn-Hatfield on an anti-cuts platform in May's county council elections. I'll offer a genuine alternative to the three main establishment parties of Labour, Liberal Democrats and Conservatives, as well as the Greens, who have proven in other areas of the country they are not willing to stand up to austerity."

Craig Johnston, RMT Northern Region relief organiser

**For further information contact
RMT executive member Daren
Ireland at d.ireland@rmt.org.uk**

Luke Pilling
Exeter Socialist Party

You need to send your greeting message by 10 April to make sure it is included in the May Day issue of the Socialist. For more details and to give your greeting, go to www.socialistparty.org.uk/mayday, email bobsevern@socialistparty.org.uk or phone 020 8988 8796.

The Socialist Party HQ's new computer server has now been installed. Thanks again to all readers who supported the party's financial appeal to make this essential upgrade possible, which raised £11,794. Donations to support the Socialist Party's work can be made at www.socialistparty.org.uk/donate or by phoning 020 8988 8777.

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Fight the destruction of our NHS across England and Wales

From 1 April, the Con-Dems Health and Social Care Act comes into force in England – ending the government's duty to provide comprehensive free healthcare and freeing the NHS from parliamentary control.

Primary care trusts will be replaced by 211 clinical commissioning groups (CCGs) that will decide who to treat, who provides the treatment and what is free at point of delivery. Private companies will bid for CCG contracts. With further NHS finance cuts ahead, we are likely to see the restriction of free care.

Already, under Tory, New Labour and Con-Dem governments, we have seen the privatisation of most non-medical and some medical services in the NHS, with horrifying results for both patients and health workers. The trade union movement needs to organise a massive national campaign to fight these changes and all cuts and privatisation in the NHS.

The Socialist Party demands:

- Axe the Health and Social Care Act
- Kick big business vultures out of the NHS
- Stop all cuts, closures and privatisation
- All hospitals to be fully funded by the NHS
- Adequate staffing levels to provide good quality care for all patients. Decent pay and conditions for all staff
- A mass national trade union-led weekend demonstration to save the NHS
- Health unions should organise industrial action to defend every part of the health service
- A 24-hour general strike against all cuts



Protesters outside Whittington Hospital, north London, which is lined up for massive cuts photo Paul Mattsson

Wales NHS: Different government - worse cuts!

Claire Job
Socialist Party Wales

If you listened only to Labour politicians and many trade union leaders, you would think that cuts to the NHS are an English problem only.

These views have been repeated by the authors of *The Plot Against The NHS*, who herald the organisation of health services in Wales, under a Labour government, as a 'model of health delivery'.

It is true that there has been far less privatisation or use of PFI in healthcare in Wales. The NHS in Wales is more centralised and structured, organised into seven Health Boards instead of a multitude of trusts. But NHS campaigners in England waiting for a Labour government to save them would do well to take a closer look at the NHS in Wales.

NHS cuts are deeper in Wales. The NHS budget has been ring-fenced in England, with small annual increases, even though these represent a cut in real terms. The NHS in Wales has been given no such protection. Welsh Labour has actually chosen the NHS to bear the brunt of the cuts in Wales.

By 2014-15 spending on healthcare in Wales per head of population will be lower than in any other area of the UK. £1 billion has already been cut from the NHS Wales budget since 2005. Health boards are expected to make savings of nearly £300 million - roughly 5% of their annual budgets - each year.

Just like the Con-Dems in England, the Welsh Labour government attempts to disguise cuts as a reorganisation in the best interests of patients.

Labour commissioned a report from supposedly independent expert Marcus Longley, a Cardiff-

Kick out the PFI leeches

In 2010 George Osborne described Private Finance Initiative (PFI) deals as "discredited". Now his discredited government has signed off its first PFI hospital.

Alder Hay children's hospital in Liverpool will be rebuilt under a 30-year PFI deal. The consortium includes John Laing, which is also part of the PFI deal that pushed South London Healthcare NHS Trust into administration.

PFI deals are like taking out a high-interest mortgage, but then the lender owns the house at the end of the loan. In South London, and across the NHS, cuts have been made in order to pay for 'non-negotiable' PFI repayments.

All NHS PFI deals and debt should be scrapped, with compensation paid only on the basis of proven need.

based health economist. From the start there were suspicions that Longley and the Welsh Government were colluding to 'sex-up' the report to point to conclusions that they had already arrived at and justify cuts.

'Centralisation'

Longley's report and the Welsh Government report argue for centralisation of services. What this means for Accident and Emergency services, for instance, is that services will be downgraded in all but a small number of specialist centres. Just four or five centres are proposed for two million people across South Wales.

In the context of shrinking budgets, centralisation is not modernisation, as Labour claims, but a cover for massive cuts.

What these proposals mean is massively reduced access to healthcare for large sections of society, including anybody without their own transport, the elderly, disabled people and some of the poorest communities in the regions who will often have the furthest to travel to access services.

Public transport in Wales, even in the biggest towns, is appalling, made worse by Welsh Government and council cuts - infrequent, unreliable and expensive. In some areas, even just outside bigger towns, it is almost non-existent at weekends and evenings.

Meanwhile the Welsh Ambulance service is failing to meet response targets because of staff shortages and cuts.

In autumn 2012 there was the shocking story that a baby died after waiting hours for an ambulance to be transferred to another hospital. This sort of story may become increasingly common if these cuts go through.

In polls, three-quarters of Welsh people have indicated that they do not support Welsh Labour's plans. Already this year there have been demonstrations to defend health services in Wrexham, Llandudno, Tenby, Blaenau Ffestiniog, Caerphilly and Bridgend.

These are the people with the faith in the NHS to fight for its survival as a service for all. We need to join together to fight all Welsh Labour's cuts.

Whipps Cross domestics show how fighting back can win

A Whipps Cross Hospital worker

Thirty three Whipps Cross Hospital domestics in east London have successfully resisted attempts by private contractor Initial to cut their hours and pay. Three full-time workers remain at risk.

The overwhelmingly female, part-time workers have fought a determined struggle following the fighting campaign strategy of the local Unison union branch leadership.

On 21 January, the company announced to these mainly migrant workers a 30-day consultation with plans to cut working hours by 30 minutes per shift. This represented a reduction in earnings of one-sixth for these low-paid workers who undertake mainly three-hour shifts.

The proposals represent 'phase one' and the 'Initial steps' of the company's plans across the whole 320-strong hospital workforce, including porters, as part of parent company Rentokil Initial's national 'LEAN' initiative.

The Unison branch secretary Len Hockey and Initial shop stewards agreed a programme of meetings, firstly with the 36 affected staff and then with the entire Initial union membership. The strategy involved a recruitment drive that targeted zero-hour contract workers.

A broad all-encompassing campaign was initiated with the agreement of the 36. No stone was left unturned in getting the message out to the wider hospital workforce and trade unions.

Since 1 February, five Initial Unison meetings have been held with a total of 220 members attending. A press release, which forced the company to publicly

defend its plans, and petitions were issued.

A very lively weekday evening rally at the hospital main gate attracted 70 domestics and porters. Workers and trade unionists from within and outside the hospital addressed the rally, including Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) campaigners.

There has been an increase of over 10% in union membership among the Initial workforce. A survey of the entire Initial Unison membership has returned a 99% vote in favour of being balloted for strike action to stop the plans. Only one management consultation meeting with the staff has happened since 21 January due to pressure of the union's campaign.

Initial claims the decision to not cut the 33's hours is due to local Trust management-initiated changes affecting their timings. The cuts threat remains for the three full-time staff and the consultation can be restarted any time.

The union is demanding to know how many cuts 'phases' there are and continues to press for the complete withdrawal of management's crazy plans. Our strike ballot request is lodged with Unison Greater London Region.



the Socialist postbag

Do you have something to say?

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

Hacked - and robbed?

Bedroom tax - big demos everywhere. Leveson - press furore, huge public anger at treatment of the McCanns, etc. Are they connected? What riles people so much about the bedroom tax isn't just that it's yet another cut, it's the intrusion. People don't expect to be told by the government who sleeps where and when in their own homes, especially when they know the millionaires have lost count of the number of bedrooms, bathrooms, etc, they have. Someone said that people are having to talk in TV interviews about aspects of their domestic arrangements that no one should have to discuss in public. So there is a connection - the bedroom tax is like being hacked. Except they take your money - and/or your home away - as well as your dignity.

Paul Gerrard

"Debating" homeless cuts

On 21 March, Leicester's Labour-run council held a debate, triggered by a 1,590-strong petition from people who want to stop the council slashing £2.2 million from its £6.6 million budget for tackling homelessness. The council plans to reduce its budget by £11 million by 2014/15. Labour councillor Ross Willmott seemed keen to pass on most cuts but proposed a motion (agreed by the scrutiny commission) to put £1 million back into the homelessness budget: ie 'only' cut from £6.6 million to £5.4 million. Surely the scrutiny commission should be arguing for an increased budget for homelessness services (to meet increased demand)! However the packed public gallery at Leicester Town Hall jeered city mayor Sir Peter Soulsby when he said he

for 2013/14 - "for the fifth year in a row". But, it says, it has 'no option' but to pass on the government's cuts and reduce council tax benefit. So a part-time worker on the minimum wage, currently receiving full council tax benefit, will now have to stump up £150 extra a year, whereas a millionaire living in the same borough will pay nothing extra. Moreover, the Labour council has other 'options' available. For example, the neighbouring Tower Hamlets council



photo Hull SP

is applying 'temporary transitional arrangements' protecting low-paid workers from any reduction in benefit. Elsewhere, even some Tory councils refuse to pass on government funding cuts to the poorest workers. Let's hope that Labour in Newham will get its comeuppance from working class voters in the 2014 elections.

Simon Carter

Fighting the cuts

A Jobcentre worker on a picket line in Nottingham explained why the PCS civil servants union was on strike on budget day. "We've had pay restraint for eight years now, which is a 25% cut in real terms in our living standards. We've lost 20,000 staff in three years. The job is getting harder and harder. "The strike isn't just about us, it's also about how we deliver a service to the public. The quality of service is in danger; staff are under pressure to punish people for being out of work or sick, and that's all wrong. Everyone will suffer if these cuts carry on."

Pete Watson

Disabled but ditched

The people of the Falkland Islands have just voted to stay part of the UK. In 1982 I was 17 and in the Territorial Army so I never understood the opposition to the Falklands war. However if I was the age I am now in 1982, I would have opposed the war when Thatcher saved her failing government at the cost of British lives. Disturbingly if you were wounded and disabled in that war you will now be on ESA and DLA. The same Tory Party that jingoistically sent youngsters to the Falklands now wants to take away the severe disablement component from injured ex-soldiers' benefits and was preparing to throw them out of their flats if they had an extra bedroom. The government now only has crumbs to offer those ex-soldiers who are from the poorest backgrounds and who paid a high price.

Rob Menzies, Bristol



photo Leicester SP

could not support councillor Willmott's motion. Homelessness campaigners Streetlife Action Group, who secured most signatures for the council "debate" will keep up their campaign to make the council back down on their cuts. They also want local people to join a three-day long sleep-out on the Town Hall steps on 17 April to show what Leicester will look like if the vicious assault on the homelessness budget is carried out.

Michael Barker

Council tax benefits slashed

From this April, low-paid workers will suffer from new government cuts to council tax benefit. In Newham, east London, the Labour council has sent letters to council tax benefit claimants boasting that it has frozen council tax

Disability hate crimes - accomplices and victims



The biggest disability hate crime has been perpetrated by DWP bosses photo Paul Mattsson

Derek McMillan

Over 1,700 disability hate crimes were recorded by police in England and Wales in 2011-12. The new Joint Inspectorate report said that disability hate crime was in fact under-reported and blamed police officers' reluctance to ask callers whether they were disabled or not. The largest disability hate crime has been by the Department for Work and Pensions bosses who contracted the Atos company to reduce the number of claimants for Disability Living Allowance. There are examples of Atos insisting that a man in a coma, or another claimant who was blind and deaf and unable to walk, were "fit for work" and clearly just scroungers. And this crime's accomplices are the gutter press which wage an un-

ceasing campaign against 'scroungers' and fuel the hatred which allows disability hate crime to take place. Fiona Pilkington killed herself and her disabled daughter Francesca Hardwick in 2007 after repeated complaints to police about harassment by youths. However the police were quick enough to act when Beth Tichbourne took part in a peaceful protest and yelled at Cameron "you have blood on your hands". On 30 November 2012 David Cameron was booed coming on stage to turn on the Christmas lights in Witney, Oxfordshire. On YouTube you can watch a video of him trying to drown out any criticism by awkwardly getting the crowd to cheer for everyone from themselves to the queen. Beth Tichbourne told the Black Triangle Campaign: "While this was going on I was being beaten up by

the police on the other side of the stage. I have never been so scared: my face was being pushed into the ground, I could feel blood coming from my nose, there was someone putting their whole weight on my back while someone else was stamping on my knees, along with various people grabbing and twisting my limbs. And then the officer on my back moved a knee up onto the back of my neck." Beth was fined £747. Small change for a millionaire like Cameron but more than a month's income for her. The police can act hard enough when the issue is important enough to them but when it comes to dealing with disability hate crime, it seems they're too embarrassed. A website 'calumlist.org' lists 30 deaths attributable to 'Welfare Reform'. Cameron actually does have blood on his hands. Quite a lot of it!

DANGER!

New secret courts in Britain

Dylan Murphy Huddersfield

Over 700 leading lawyers - including 40 QCs - have signed human rights group Liberty's petition condemning the Justice and Security Bill and government plans to introduce secret courts into ordinary civil law. A group of human rights organisations worldwide including Liberty, the American Civil Liberties Union and civil liberties organisations from Hungary, Egypt, Canada, Ireland, South Africa and Argentina also issued a joint statement saying: "Every decent justice system is built upon openness, fairness and equality under the law. These are the principles which are missing from those states founded on dictatorship rather than democracy, fear

rather than freedom. "The past decade has seen terrors perpetrated against innocent citizens in freedom's name; shameful treatment of individuals by powerful governments and their agents...

The bill seeks to limit public scrutiny of Britain's government, security services and public bodies

"The proposal for secret courts in the British government's Justice and Security Bill has huge ramifications for this pursuit of accountability and transparency... If the UK Parliament passes this proposal into law it will be a huge setback for those of

us fighting to secure truth and fairness from our own governments and within our own justice systems across the world." The Justice and Security Bill was announced after high-profile and embarrassing litigation and media investigations showing the government's shameful involvement in extraordinary rendition, torture and indefinite detention without trial. The bill seeks to limit public scrutiny of Britain's government, security services and public bodies. It aims to avoid further embarrassment by bringing in a 'justice' system that is deeply flawed and unfair. Designed to keep the press and public in the dark, these proposals will have serious implications for media freedom and the rights of potential victims and their families seeking answers and justice.

Cameron whips up immigration fears to divide movement against austerity

Hannah Sell

Socialist Party deputy general secretary

The Con-Dem government grows more unpopular by the day. Endless austerity is combined with falling living standards, rising unemployment, and no prospect of a return to economic growth. If anger at austerity was harnessed into a mass, united movement the Con-Dems could be forced to call a general election within months.

Tory Prime Minister David Cameron knows this. Desperate to creep up a few points in the opinion polls, under pressure from the Eastleigh byelection result of right-wing nationalist Ukip, Cameron is attempting to tap into many workers' concerns about the potential consequences of increased immigration. This is an attempt to divide the movement against austerity.

The trade union movement needs to respond by launching a serious united struggle – starting with a 24-hour general strike – against those who are really responsible for the misery we face; this government of millionaires and the capitalist system it defends. Trade unions must warn that the Con-Dems will attempt to use limiting access to public services for immigrants as the thin end of the wedge to attack universal access to essential services and benefits.

However, the trade union movement also has a duty to answer the fears of some workers about increased immigration. Over the last decade there has been a rapid increase in the number of people, mainly from other parts of the EU, who have come to Britain to live and work. This is a major factor in the increase of around two million in Britain's population in the last five years.

A small minority of new arrivals in Britain move to wealthy areas like Kensington and Chelsea – but they are almost all foreign fat cats and Cameron is more than happy to hobnob with them.

The vast majority of new arrivals, however, join the ranks of the poorest sections of the working class. Increased population density has overwhelmingly taken place in working class communities with already over-stretched public services and over-crowded housing. Against this background it is inevitable that tensions exist about who does, and does not, get the limited public services that are available.

Housing

It is on the question of housing that these tensions are particularly acute. By declaring that EU immigrants are to be kept off housing waiting lists for at least two years, Cameron is encouraging the idea that people from other countries are taking a disproportionately large share of social housing, and that this is causing the current acute housing crisis, where over five million people are on the waiting lists.

Is this true? Increased population has increased demand for social housing, but it is the complete absence of any other option for millions of people born in Britain that is the central reason for the increase in numbers wanting a council house or flat.

Cameron is attempting to shift the blame for the housing crisis away from its primary cause; the profit-

driven housing policies of current and previous governments. House prices have gone up 40 times since 1971 whereas prices in general have gone up tenfold while wages have mostly stagnated. This means home ownership is now out of reach for the majority. At the same time rents in the extortionate private rented sector have increased by 86%.

But social housing is in incredibly short supply. Twenty years ago there were more than five million council homes, now there is barely half that number. If the Con-Dems get their way even these will have their rents raised to extortionate 'market' levels.

Labour

New Labour in government also continued the previous Tory governments' policies, selling off even more council houses than Thatcher. A puny 2,019 council houses were built during New Labour's entire period in government, an average of 400 houses a year!

Contrast this to 5,000 council houses – all with front and back gardens – that just one Labour council – in Liverpool from 1983-87 – was able to build when it stood on a socialist programme.

Labour leader Ed Miliband has stated that Labour 'got it wrong' on immigration, but why doesn't he admit that Labour 'got it wrong' on housing? Labour would be elected on a landslide if Miliband was to pledge that the next Labour government would carry out a mass council house-building programme, to create high-quality, genuinely affordable, secure housing for the majority and to provide work for unemployed construction workers on union rates of pay. This is not unprecedented – from 1948 to 1954 the Labour and Tory governments built an average of 240,000 council houses a year.

However, Labour today, wedded to big business, will never implement such a demand. The Socialist Party calls for the organised workers' movement, in the form of the trade unions, to launch a mass campaign to defend and expand council housing. This could unite existing tenants and the five million people on waiting lists by demanding decent housing for all, regardless of their ethnic or religious background.

At the same time we recognise that, particularly given the current lack of supply, the lack of an open, democratic and accountable system of allocations, which would be accepted by most workers, increases anger and suspicion that housing is being allocated unfairly. Cameron is whipping up this feeling in relation to migrants from other EU countries, who are in fact already only allowed to apply for social housing if they are currently in work, or have been in continuous work for at least the previous 12 months.

And that is only for the right to apply – the current acute shortage means that the vast majority of applicants for social housing languish indefinitely on a waiting list. Statistics indicate that only 0.9% of social housing allocations have gone to workers from Eastern Europe.

This is largely because, to actually get social housing, particularly in London and other areas with a severe housing shortage, it is usually necessary to not only be homeless, but also in priority need – that is pregnant, with dependent children, or vulnerable because of old age or illness. The mainly young economic migrants from EU countries rarely qualify.



Cameron, feeling the pressure from right-wing nationalist Ukip - and his own backbenchers

Nonetheless, there are of course cases where homeless families who are new to an area, sometimes refugees fleeing war, famine and persecution, are housed above families living in severely over-crowded conditions that have been on the waiting list for many years.

While it is the extreme lack of council housing which is the root cause, leading to a choice between housing the homeless and the 'merely' desperate, this inevitably creates resentment among those who do not get council housing against those who do.

The Socialist Party believes that the right of families to be housed in the same community is an important one. The policies of this government and Labour councils are annihilating this right; forcing desperate families to move hundreds of miles from family and friends for social housing.

House building

The struggle to achieve it has to be linked to both the fight for a mass council house-building programme and for the democratic control of the allocation system. Decisions should be taken on the basis of need, including the right to be housed near relatives and friends, not by council officials, however, but by elected representatives of local community organisations, including tenants associations, trade unions, elected councillors and other community campaigns.

The workers' movement needs to take the same kind of class approach to other aspects of the government's attempts to increase divisions between immigrant and non-immigrant workers which are, unfortunately, being echoed by Labour. The Tories hypocritically claim that immigration is undermining 'the British way of life' but it is the government's driving down of workers' living standards that will ruin our way of life unless we fight back.

Miliband has been forced to recognise belatedly that over the last decade big business in Britain used super-exploited migrant workers to lower wages for all workers. His proposals to prosecute more employ-

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ers who pay less than the minimum wage are welcome. There have only been seven prosecutions since it was introduced 14 years ago, and for the first ten years of New Labour government not a single successful prosecution took place!

Miliband should also pledge immediately to increase the minimum wage – to at least £8 an hour – a living wage rather than starvation rations. This would lift millions out of the benefit trap.

United struggle needed

But if Miliband was serious about stopping the race to the bottom he would be calling for all workers – both non-migrants and migrants – to join a trade union and organise together to win decent pay and conditions. This is the only way to effectively combat the employers' relentless attempts to drive down the wages of all workers.

Instead Miliband, like Blair and Brown before him, has opposed workers striking to defend their living conditions and has made no pledge to repeal Britain's vicious anti-trade

union laws.

Unfortunately there is no possibility of Labour adopting even these minimal policies. Under Miliband, as under Blair and Brown, Labour remains a party wedded to capitalism. Miliband is not willing to even vote against slave labour Workfare schemes. Promising to reverse the Tory-Lib Dem cuts is too much for him to stomach.

That is why the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) is beginning to lay the foundations for the creation of a powerful electoral voice for working class people. TUSC brings together trade unionists, including the transport workers' union, the RMT, and socialists, including the Socialist Party.

TUSC stands in elections in opposition to all cuts in public services, and to fight for the kind of policies outlined in this article.

Socialists stand for workers' unity, explaining that the only way to effectively prevent big business's attempts to drive down wages is by uniting workers – non-migrant and migrant – to fight for everyone to get decent pay and conditions.

South Africa: WORKERS AND SOCIALIST PARTY LAUNCHED

CWI reporters, South Africa

On 21 March - coinciding with the 1960 Sharpeville massacre memorial day - over 500 Tshwane workers, mineworkers' delegates, trade union and community activists packed Lucas Van Den Bergh Community Hall in Pretoria, South Africa, for the launch of the Workers and Socialist Party (WASP).

The hall could not accommodate the turnout and attendees overspilled onto the neighbouring field.

The launch surpassed all expectations. It is without a doubt that WASP is striking a chord with working class people.

This new political workers' formation has been born out of the titanic strike struggles of workers in 2012, especially in the platinum and gold mines following the Mari-kana massacre when 34 miners were gunned down by police on one day last August.

Struggles against the rich capitalists and their political allies in Jacob Zuma's African National Congress (ANC) government have also developed among farmworkers, service delivery users and the wider working class.

The Socialist Party's sister organisation in South Africa - the Democratic Socialist Movement (DSM)

- has also played a pivotal role in both the workers' struggles and in taking the initiative to launch WASP.

The launch will have worried many in the establishment - the ANC and their partners in government, the Cosatu trade union leadership and big business. A new power is rising. The working class is getting organised and preparing a mighty challenge to the status quo. The ideas of socialism are being re-embraced.

Delegates

The meeting was chaired by Weizmann Hamilton, the general secretary of the DSM. Headline speakers included Mametlwe Sebei (WASP spokesman and DSM executive member), Elias Juba (chairman of the national mineworkers committee), Ephraim Mphahlela (president of the National Transport Movement NATAWU), Elmond Magedi (Socialist Youth Movement), Liv Shange (DSM) and Joe Higgins (Socialist Party MP in Ireland).

Speakers from supporting organisations included workers' delegates from Klerksdorp Uranium, Kumba Iron Ore in Northern Cape, Bokoni Platinum, Gold Fields KDC, Harmony Gold, Mpumalanga coal mines, Anglo

Gold Ashanti among others.

WASP will now prepare for its next phase of development. It will shortly announce a date for a conference to establish democratic structures and a leadership and to flesh out its manifesto.

There are many other fronts WASP plans to open up: a campaign to recall corrupt councillors, taking up the issue of labour broking, the collection of one million signatures in support of WASP, and preparing the ground for a general strike should the mine bosses and government dare to enact mass re-trenchments (sackings) in the mining industry.

The launch of this new political formation, to give workers a political voice in the fight against capitalism, is an example that should be embraced internationally.

●WASP needs the political support and financial assistance of socialists and trade unionists internationally in order to become properly established.

**●Send messages of support to: workersandsocialistparty@gmail.com.
Send donations (trade union donations especially welcome) to: South African Miners Fund, c/o PO Box 66682, London E11 9ER**



WASP outlined the following manifesto points:

- Kick out the fat cats. Nationalise the mines, the farms, the banks and big business. Nationalised industries to be under the democratic control of workers and working class communities. Democratic planning of production for social need, not profit.
- End unemployment. Create socially useful jobs for all those seeking work. Fight for a living wage of R12,500 (£900) a month.
- Stop cut-offs and evictions - for massive investment in housing, electricity, water, sanitation, roads, public transport and social services.
- For publicly funded, free education from nursery to university.
- For publicly funded free healthcare accessible to all.

WASP's principles:

- We reject outright the corruption of pro-capitalist politicians and political parties.
- All WASP candidates for publicly elected positions - whether councillors, MPLs or MPs - are elected subject to the right of immediate recall.
- For workers' representatives on workers' wages. All officials elected on the basis of the WASP manifesto will only take the average wage of a skilled worker. The remainder will be donated back to WASP.

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 un-recycled waste.
- Public ownership of the energy generating industries. No to nuclear power. No to Trident.
- A democratically planned, low fare, publicly owned transport system, as part of an overall plan against environmental pollution.

RIGHTS

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

NEW WORKERS' PARTY

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

SOCIALISM AND INTERNATIONALISM

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