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NOW LET'S BURY THATCHER'S LEGACY



TUC call a 24-hour general strike!

Peter Taaffe
Socialist Party general secretary

It is a human response to be sad when somebody dies. But many working class people will be celebrating Margaret Thatcher's death because of the absolutely destructive and long lasting effect she had on the lives of millions of working class and poor people.

She is seen by many as a kind of modern day Genghis Khan. Elected into office in 1979 she unleashed a ferocious assault on the living standards and democratic rights of working class people. Trade unions were attacked in order to clear the way for the destruction of publicly owned in-

dustries and the driving down of wages and conditions.

The Socialist Party's forerunner, the Militant Tendency, was at the forefront of fighting her rotten policies. We led the famous struggle in Liverpool from 1983-87 as part of the Labour council that refused to implement cuts. Liverpool council mobilised a mass campaign of trade unionists and working class people in support of the council's needs budget.

That campaign won £60 million from the government which was spent on building thousands of new council homes and new facilities for working class communities and creating jobs. One commentator lamented that Militant had given Thatcher a "bloody nose".

In the late 80s and early 90s we led the struggle against the hated poll tax. This tax would have seen a duke paying the same as a dustman. We initiated the All Britain Anti-Poll Tax Federation which organised a demo of a quarter of a million people and led to the mass campaign of 18 million non-payers of the tax. As a result the tax was revoked and the 'Iron Lady' reduced to iron filings.

But Thatcher created a number of "mini Thatchers", not just in the Tory party. Tony Blair was her heir just as Cameron and Clegg are now. In fact she claimed New Labour and Blair as her greatest achievement. The Con-Dems are carrying on her work and are in fact going even further than even she dared to go in the savaging of

public sector jobs and services.

Her true legacy is clear to see today in the policies of the Con-Dem government. They are today's standard bearers of her neoliberal ideas. On 8 April 2013, the day Thatcher died, the rich were about to receive a tax cut while working class people face an unprecedented assault on jobs and services.

Lobby the TUC to demand the General Council sets a date for a 24-hour general strike
Called by the National Shop Stewards Network:
Wednesday 24 April, from 8.30am outside TUC Congress House, Great Russell Street, London WC1B 3LS
www.shopstewards.net

Build mass resistance to Con-Dem Thatcherism

- No to all cuts and privatisation
- Prepare for a 24-hour general strike, mobilising the massive potential power of the trade unions, to launch a determined anti-cuts battle
- Build a new mass party to represent workers and all suffering under austerity and to provide a fighting, political alternative to the pro-big business, pro-cuts parties
- For a socialist alternative to cuts and capitalism with a democratic socialist plan of production based on the interests of the overwhelming majority of people - not the 1%



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Halt the Thatcherite onslaught – TUC must call a 24-hour general strike!

When people try to remember where they were when they heard that Maggie Thatcher had died, their reaction will tell us everything about her legacy - Cameron and Clegg's austerity Britain.

The millionaires, including two-thirds of the Cabinet, will think of the 5% tax cut they started to pocket on the first day of the new tax year. But 8 April was also the day the vicious axing of Disability Living Allowance was implemented, alongside April's other brutal changes that will attack the poor, the unemployed, and the disabled.

If anything sums up Thatcher and her modern-day apostles it is the same cruel class warfare she fostered that wrecked mining communities from South Wales to Yorkshire and Scotland, while calling miners "the enemy within".

Thatcher's government opened the way for all the different themes of the Con-Dems' austerity - cutting the NHS, education, public services and the welfare state, along with privatisation and tax cuts for the rich.

She wrote the manual for taking on the trade unions. The anti-trade union laws were the fundamental tool of the ruling class to weaken the working class in preparation for this offensive. Shamefully, the 13 years of Blair and Brown's New Labour were wasted years from the point of view of a working class desperate to reverse this neoliberal juggernaut. This allowed Cameron and Co to go further even than Thatcher herself dared.

No doubt the cynics and pessimists in the labour and trade union movement will also offer a sanitised view of the Thatcher years. They will try and explain away their inaction by pleading that she was too powerful and her anti-union laws too restrictive. But on a number of occasions, her government was rocking under mass working class pressure.

Supporters of the Socialist's predecessor - Militant - led the council struggle in Liverpool



photo Senan

that inflicted a temporary defeat on Thatcher, while the Militant-led mighty anti-poll tax campaign of up to 18 million non-payers actually made her rule untenable in 1990.

But in the incredible and heroic miners' strike of 1984-85, she was able to cling on because the trade union leaders refused to back up the National Union of Mineworkers with a 24-hour general strike. Defeat was not inevitable - a victory for the miners could have transformed the industrial and political situation, and at the very least, temporarily halted the Thatcherite onslaught.

Similarly today, there is nothing inevitable about the Con-Dems being able to force through the full agenda of their cuts package.

A relative lull in industrial action has followed the right-wing sell-out of the public sector pensions' struggle which reached its peak on the 30 November 2011 joint union strike of two million. It was the biggest single day of

strike action since the 1926 general strike.

But the past two years have seen the highest pitch of working class struggle for decades, including the biggest trade union demonstration for a century on 26 March 2011.

It could have and should have been the platform to launch a campaign of continued mass strike action, reaching from the public to the private sector, that could have forced the Con-Dems back and even out of office. Scandalously, it was stalled primarily by the right-wing TUC, Unison and GMB union leaderships. But general strike action is even more necessary now and would be incredibly popular with those on the receiving end of these cuts.

The Socialist Party and the National Shop Stewards Network (NSSN) have championed the demand for a 24-hour general strike to face the effects of the cuts which are ruining the poor and the working class.

The NSSN lobbied the TUC Conference last September with 1,000 union activists. That conference voted overwhelmingly to pass the POA prison officers' motion which called on the TUC to consider "the practicalities of a general strike". Seven long months later, the union leaders will be meeting at the TUC General Council on 24 April to weigh the various union responses.

Thatcher's death is monopolising the front pages now but previous to that the idea of a general strike had even made it to the Independent's front page and reports of the planned debate featured in the Financial Times and other papers.

Mark Serwotka told Sky News: "We are definitely having a discussion about generalised strike action."

"More imminently than that we are having the beginnings of a much more detailed discussion between unions who have real industrial issues in front of them now about co-ordinating their efforts."

The National Shop Stewards Network has

called on trade unionists to lobby the general council meeting, to demand that the TUC name the date for a 24-hour general strike.

As reported in the media, the left unions have made positive submissions on the idea of a general strike and the meeting will be discussing the legalities of such a move, facing Thatcher's anti-union laws, the most undemocratic in Western Europe, as Tony Blair, one of her disciples, bragged about when in office.

But that need not be a barrier to mass co-ordinated strike action as we saw on N30. Whether it is to defend jobs, pay, terms and conditions, pensions, or the fight against privatisation, the issues are present and pressing now to join together.

PCS members have just concluded the second strike of their national action programme, with HMRC workers ending their half-day strike and walking into work when Thatcher's death was announced! They can't be left to fight alone.

Branches and workplace meetings should pass resolutions urging their union leaderships to respond to the letters from the PCS for discussion among the left unions' leaders about how to prepare for coordinated action.

Those union leaders should go to the April General Council with the confidence and knowledge that their members and the rank and file of other unions will not be satisfied with anything less than a strike date. Members attending the lobby should ask to meet their union representatives on the Council beforehand to make the case for setting a date.

They should point out that even before the latest swathe of austerity measures, which includes more increases in pension contributions and the continuation of the pay freeze for public sector workers, real wages have been cut by an average of 16%.

The TUC must name the day for a 24-hour general strike.

Bedroom tax: Can't pay – determined to stay!

The 'Bedroom Tax' has sparked fury over people being forced out of their homes by this hated government. Thousands have protested and campaigns are being organised in communities and workplaces. We must make the bedroom tax unworkable with thousands of appeals and delays.

Everyone affected is sent a letter from the council saying by how much their benefit has been docked. Tenants can ask the council to "look again" at this decision and, if they don't like how they "look again", go to a tribunal.

Every tenant can apply to the "discretionary housing payment" fund, a small pot of money held by councils. Tenants in arrears can potentially make an agreement to pay their arrears in very small amounts, such as £1 a week in cash.

Many campaigns have produced facts and figures, detailed advice and model appeal letters. For example, the legal minimum size of a bedroom can be varied by councils, but according to parliament cannot be smaller than 50 square feet or 6.5 square metres (Housing Acts 1985 and 2004).

A spokesperson for Leeds council explained why they are planning to 're-designate' flats as smaller than they are: "The council will benefit

from this scheme through the savings that could have been associated with the additional resources such as legal costs and additional staff that come with chasing rent."

Leeds expects 10,000 new rent arrears. Shelter, the housing charity, estimates each eviction costs councils close to £6,000.

Stop evictions

Community networks must be organised to stop evictions related to bedroom tax arrears. Eviction notices can only be issued once arrears reach a certain level so there is time to prepare.

Brighton council says it won't evict anyone due to arrears from the bedroom tax. Demands must be made on every council to adopt such a "no evictions" policy and demand housing associations follow suit.

Campaigns should lobby and request speakers at council meetings: massive pressure must be put on councils to refuse to implement the tax and call on central government to reimburse them for losses. Councils could use reserves and prudential borrowing powers to, at least temporarily, waive the tax.

Labour claims to oppose the bedroom tax. But why isn't the Labour leadership pledging that if they win

the next election they will reimburse councils that take a stand? Only six Labour councillors in Labour-led councils have voted against the cuts - and they have faced expulsions and disciplinary action.

Labour leader Ed Miliband has pledged to maintain Tory cuts under a Labour government. Labour MP Helen Goodman announced recently, 'they would keep the bedroom tax'.

We need working class fighters as

councillors, not career politicians who follow the Con-Dems' orders. That means building a new mass workers' party.

The Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) is a step in this direction and is backed by the RMT transport union, other trade unionists, community campaigners and socialists.

TUSC is contesting May's elections - anti-bedroom tax campaigners should stand against councillors

who refuse to defend us.

The bedroom tax is one attack among a blizzard of cuts. The TUC is currently considering submissions from the unions on the question of a 24-hour general strike against austerity.

The TUC must urgently set the date for such a strike. This could most effectively channel the increasing anger into a movement capable of kicking out this hated government.



photo Lash

Con-Dems' latest cruel cut: Disability Living Allowance

Iain Duncan Smith, who claimed he could live on the Jobseeker's Allowance pittance of £53 a week, is the architect of the latest assault on disabled people.

It is called the Personal Independence Payment (PIP) - the Coalition's taste for irony cannot be faulted. PIP replaces Disability Living Allowance (DLA), and replaces the "lower rate" mobility component with a still-more unattainable "standard rate".

The charity Scope estimates 600,000 people will be worse off under PIP. Those with serious mobility problems - unable to walk more than 50 metres - are first in the crosshairs. Any person capable of staggering a mere 20 metres (the length of about four parked cars) has their "higher rate" PIP removed. This includes those walking with mobility aids such as canes and those with carers.

Disability Alliance estimates that one in five DLA recipients are employed. They did a survey which found these same workers would be forced into underemployment or joblessness should they lose the means to pay for transport, carers



photo Paul Mattsson

and vital equipment.

While shamelessly propagating myths about 'workshy' benefit claimants, this government has persistently undermined disabled people's employment prospects.

We have seen the Remploy closures. More than heartless, these were counterproductive. Remploy workers made important medical products, sold at a profit. Remploy factories were set up for veterans of World War Two, enabling these survivors of senseless conflict to contribute to society.

The government's rhetoric, that

axing DLA will "simplify" benefits, is true. There is no doubt things will be simpler for government ministers and the fat-cat bosses. But for those workers with the nerve to be less than fully physically able, the complications are only multiplying.

Socialists call for an end to victimisation of disabled people. We need full public funding of support for disabled people to live independent lives - no to PIP, yes to jobs for all workers of all abilities.

EI Morris, DLA claimant, and James Ivens, Lambeth and Southwark Socialist Party

I could quite happily live with NO income at all because I get £77 lunch allowance every day, free transport, free accommodation, free mobile phone calls, free stationery, free use of a gym and for every £10 I spend in the House of Commons bar you pay £7 of it my lovely tax paying mugs!! LOL! Yours most gratefully
Iain :)

Facebook users made their thoughts on IDS' pledge clear. Nearly half a million people have signed an online petition for Iain Duncan Smith to try living on £53 a week as he said he could.

Thatcher death: readers respond

I went to get my morning newspaper and also needed a sympathy card for a relative. When I asked Shah, my local shopkeeper, where his sympathy cards were his eyes nearly popped out of his head - "I don't believe you are getting a card for Thatcher!" he joked.

After getting back home Swansea Sound, the local radio, interviewed me on the phone and asked me what I thought of Thatcher? I said: "Like millions of working class people I hated Thatcher, hated what she stood for and have continued fighting Thatcherism in the Tory Party and in the Labour Party for the past 30 years. She destroyed working class communities across Wales, especially in the mining areas and her policies were responsible for sending hundreds of ex-miners to an early grave, of condemning their kids to a life of unemployment and drug addiction, which is rife in the Valleys."

"When I heard she had died yesterday afternoon I cheered out loud and last night I raised a glass in her memory - Good riddance!"

After a few more choice comments on the Poll Tax and how Militant turned the Iron Lady into iron filings the interviewer laughed out loud and thanked me for a 'different' interview!

Alec Thraves

A pub in the pit village of Clowne, Derbyshire, in 1984 during the great miners' strike: None of us had money beyond being able to afford a solitary pint, but when her name came up, one miner said that on the day she fell off her broomstick he would break the habit of a lifetime and buy champagne. A silence followed for a few moments, then somebody else said, "let's make a pledge tonight that we'll all do the same on that day."

So tonight - and I don't even drink - I'll lift a glass of Tesco's cheapest fizz to the memory of the courageous striking miners whose fight was for all workers, to their

inspiring wives and girlfriends, to the camaraderie I was fortunate enough to be part of in villages like Clowne, and to all those whose futures were blighted by Thatcher.

Robin Clapp

I have spent 35 years hating Thatcher, alive and now dead, for so many reasons. But today my thoughts are with the 96 innocent football fans (demonised by her) I saw die at Hillsborough. May THEY rest in peace.

Emily Kelly

I celebrated Thatcher's death and I make no apology for it. I raised a glass for the miners from Treharris I stood alongside in 1984/85, to David Jones and Joe Green who died on the picket lines. Thatcher didn't cry, she called you the enemy within.

I raised a glass to Darren Holmes (15) and Paul Holmes and Paul Wormersley (both 14) who died picking coal during the dispute. Thatcher regarded you as a price worth paying.

To the most inspiring MP ever, Terry Fields. Thatcher imprisoned him. For Nelson Mandela, she hated us for opposing apartheid and called him a terrorist. For the Shrewsbury pickets. For the Liverpool and Lambeth councillors. For victims of Hillsborough whom she blamed.

So I give her death the same respect she gave all those mentioned.

Kev Dale

To those who tell me I shouldn't speak out against Thatcher because she is dead, I say this - I am no hypocrite, I loathed her while alive, so why would you expect me to now think otherwise?

To those who tell me it's a matter of respect for her family, I say this - where were you with your talk of respect for family when she destroyed the lives of so many? It is these families I think of now, these families that my heart goes out to.



As a born-and-bred Yellowbelly, I'm proud to be from Lincolnshire. I'm proud of the Lincolnshire civil servants who struck last week, and the bridge-keepers who have struck for weeks at Sutton Bridge recently. What I'm not so proud of is that our county produced one of the most vile, brutal people that has ever led this country.

While, like many people, I smiled at the news that Maggie Thatcher is finally dead, I'd rath-

For those of you who tell me she's dead now, it's over, move on, I say this - the people cannot and will not forget the pain and suffering she rejoiced in causing.

The truth is, dead or alive, her legacy lives on, division and inequality. Where is our industry? She was homophobic, she privatised everything she could - subsequent governments have followed because she made it possible. She destroyed trade unions because they gave voice to the people she wanted to destroy, the working class.

And so, I have no objection to some mourning her death, but I am still mourning her life. We must learn from history, to do that we cannot and must not forget.

Serena Cheung

er keep the champagne bottles corked until her ideas are buried with her and we've achieved our real aim - a democratic socialist transformation of society by the mass of working people. That will be true vengeance to her and her ideas.

Nick Parker, secretary, Lincoln & District TUC

On Plumstead Common in the London Borough of Greenwich on Monday night, there was a firework display by a local trade unionist who had personally spent £100 to celebrate the death of Thatcher. A crowd from the local pub came out to watch the display and join in the celebrations!

**Ted Austin
Greenwich Socialist Party**



Join the fightback against Thatcher's legacy!
Join the Socialists!

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

PCS plans more action

Government refuses to talk

PCS members across the civil service followed their budget-day strike on 20 March with half-day strikes on 5 and 8 April. PCS vice-president John McNally spoke to the Socialist about the strikes and the way forward in this battle over pay, pensions and terms and conditions.



At the 20 March rally in London photo Paul Mattsson

The half-day strikes were a new strategy. In the past we've tended to concentrate on one or two-day strikes. But the aim is to build pressure through disruption in order to get the CO to negotiate. The Cabinet Office sought to play down the strikes but they know they were really well supported and had a strong impact.

There were mass walkouts in many places such as the Department for Work and Pensions building in Glasgow. There were meetings outside offices. There was massive disruption caused in all the departments. There was a very serious mood among the members and they are determined to fight back against attacks on their pay, jobs, terms and conditions.

Our members responded magnificently. We were really proud of them. In the run up to the strike we had to face a lot of belligerent activity from management, particu-

larly in the Home Office, where they threatened to dock one day's pay for a half day's strike. The members in the Home Office knew if the management got away with it there they would try it on elsewhere. So we decided to escalate the action.

From 15 April we'll have a section of the Home Office coming out on each day of that week, which will be highly disruptive. There's a 24-hour walkout by Home Office members in the Disclosure and Barring Service [formerly the Criminal Records Bureau and Independent Safeguarding Authority.] This will involve staff at the Darlington and Liverpool offices.

There was a 30-strong picket in Liverpool on 8 April.

In HMRC there was 90% taking action in Cumbernauld, 90% in Liverpool and 80% in Dundee. The Newry office in Northern Ireland was closed. In Leicester 300 people walked in after the morning's

actions.

As well as the action in the Home Office there will be a series of group actions. It is possible there will be action as part of a 'Welfare Week' at the end of April around the question of the now dysfunctional Universal Credit system.

There's been a lot of stuff in the press recently about a general strike. But some of the submissions about this to the TUC from the leaders of other unions reveal an almost permanent no-strike agreement with Labour: 'You can't strike against a Labour government and when it's not in power you can't strike in case you stop them winning the next election.' This is outrageous.

In our submission to the TUC we made the key point that it's TUC policy to build joint coordinated industrial action on the pay freeze and the government's cuts and privatisation agenda. What the TUC should do is implement that policy.

Pickets discuss coordinated strikes

Iain Dalton
Leeds North Socialist Party

At one o'clock on 5 April, members of the civil servants' union PCS took a half day's strike action as part of their campaign against the government's austerity measures. These include a pay freeze, attacks on pensions, office closures, measures attacking the union's ability to organise and more.

Socialist Party members visited a number of picket lines in the city centre. Simon, rep at Park Place Jobcentre Plus, told us how the turnout had been better than on 20 March.

Alan, a rep at Eastgate Jobcentre Plus explained how they'd brought people out floor by floor, with PCS members who don't usually picket being able to see how action is supported by the membership.

This is the fourth strike that has taken place in Leeds in just over a week. This and the discussions at the TUC general council on 24 April about examining the possibility of calling a general strike were discussed. All the pickets we spoke to expressed their wish that such strike action should be coordinated if possible, as the National Shop Stewards Network has argued.



An HMRC picket line photo S.Score

Southampton

Andy Cooper, PCS rep at the Maritime Coastguard Agency HQ Southampton, said: "Tens of thousands of our members were out on budget day.

"We need to keep it going. Keeping it in the public consciousness. Keep going until we are listened to. We can't give up because the alternative is to allow public services to disintegrate."

Nick Chaffey

PCS elections: vote Democracy Alliance/Left Unity

PCS members are encouraged to vote to maintain the fighting left leadership of the union in the national and group executive elections starting on 18 April. The candidates for the national executive are below.

Those standing in the group elections can be found on: <http://www.leftunity.org.uk>. Socialist Party members work in the democratic socialist PCS Left Unity which is part of the Democracy Alliance.

President: Janice Godrich
Deputy/Vice-Presidents: Sue Bond, Paula Brown, Kevin McHugh, John

McNally
National Executive Committee: Ian Albert, Kevin Greenway, Lorna Merry, Mark Baker, Sam Hall, Chris Morrison, Clive Bryant, Elenor Haven, Marianne Owens, Ian Crossland, Zita Holbourne, Andy Reid, Alan Dennis, John Jamieson, Dave Richards, Mike Derbyshire, Andy Jennings, Glenn Siddall-Butchers, Mary Ferguson, Adam Khalif, Derek Thomson, Helen Flanagan, Neil License, Karen Watts, Cheryl Gedling, Marion Lloyd, Hector Wesley, Jackie Green, Dominic McFadden, Paul Williams

Unison elections

Elections for Unison's national executive (NEC) start on 22 April and run until 24 May. Members of the Unison United Left are standing in the seats below, including many Socialist Party members.

Glenn Kelly, who is standing for the male seat in the local government service group, says in his election address: "The Con-Dem government is by far the greatest challenge facing workers for decades. Their agenda is to destroy public services and this has to be met with the full might of our trade union, linking up with all other trade unions and wider community groups.

I believe the NEC has a responsibility to organise and plan a coordinated fightback and not to leave branches to fight alone. This must involve the calling of coordinated and generalised strike action in defence of jobs and services.

I believe that the union should immediately call a special conference of all branches to plan our national fight against the cuts.

National action to stop the jobs and services slaughter. No more pay freezes. Not a penny to be given to councillors attacking our members."

The United Left candidates are: (Socialist Party members are asterisked).

- National black members seats: Female: Monique Hirst*, April Ashley*, male: Hugo Pierre*
- National young members seat: Greta Holmes
- Eastern region: Female: Claire Wormald
- East Midlands region: Female: Jean Thorpe*, male: Adrian Picton*
- Greater London region: Female: Helen Davies, Marshajane Thompson, male: Jon Rogers, reserved seat: Gundula Seidel
- North West region: General seat: Tony Wilson, female: Bernadette Gallagher, Karen Reissmann, male: Roger Bannister*
- Scotland region: General seat: Duncan Smith, male: Jim McFarlane*

- South East region: Female: Jacqui Berry*, Diana Leach, male: Paul Couchman*
- South West region: Male: Bernie Parkes
- Cymru/Wales region: Male: Jamie Davis*
- West Midlands region: Male: Dave Auger*
- Yorkshire and Humberside region: Female: Helen Jenner, Lorna Foster, male: Mike Forster*, reserved: Vicki Perrin*
- Health Care service group: Female: Helen Ridett*, Suzy Franklin, male: Dave Ward, general: Gary Freeman*
- Higher Education service group: Female: Tomasa Bullen, general: Max Watson
- Local Government service group: Female: Phoebe Watkins, Sonya Howard, male: Glenn Kelly*, general: Paul Couchman*
- Transport service group, water and environment: John Jones
- Community: Female: Janet Bryan, general: Kieran Grogan*

Fight the attacks on NHS working conditions

Sharon Mitchell
Brighton

The 2012 staff survey results from the Sussex Partnership NHS Foundation Trust are even worse than the previous year's results, which were grim enough.

Beleaguered staff report a rise in work related stress, from 35% to 49% of the workers surveyed. Staff do not feel that the organisation appreciates their difficulties, with 67% of respondents (up from 45%) saying their health and wellbeing is not protected.

Communications with management continue to be strained, with Sussex Partnership achieving just over half the score of the best performing mental health Trust, which again places it in the bottom 20% in the country.

16% of staff have experienced discrimination in 2012, up from 12% in the previous year. At the same time, the number of staff receiving adequate equality and diversity training sank from 48% to 33%.

25% of respondents report being bullied by a colleague and, shockingly, 8% of workers have been physically attacked by a co-worker, up from 2% in 2011.

24% of respondents feel pressure to work when they are sick, up from 19% last year.

The Trust board bleat about creating a culture of support and compassion in line with the Francis report into the Stafford Hospital scandal, yet continue to foster a climate of fear and abuse by dismantling already poor pay and conditions, and failing to protect the health and safety of workers on the front line.

Inadequate staffing levels and 12-hour shifts compromise patient care and destroy workers' health and morale.

There is no need for this wretched situation to be repeated again next year. Fight for a democratic NHS that acknowledges the needs of both service users and staff, one that is fully funded for all people. Fight every threat to this in the form of cuts to jobs and services.

Tories and press use Philpott case to attack 'welfare culture'

The truth about life on benefits

Nobody can but feel horror and sadness at the deaths of six children, killed in a fire set by their father Michael Philpott. However, the Con-Dem government, egged on by the baying of the press, has sunk to a new low in attempting to link this tragedy to a so-called 'culture of benefit'.

It's no coincidence that it was during the same week as a number of the benefit cuts came into effect that Chancellor George Osborne said of the case: "I think there is a question for government and for society about the welfare state, and the taxpayers who pay for the welfare state, subsidising lifestyles like that."

But of course the welfare state has nothing to do with what happened to the Philpott children. When, in 2008, millionaire Christopher Foster killed his wife and daughter and then set fire to his £1.2 million mansion following the collapse of a Cyprus property deal, there were no cries for measures to control the rich or investigations into the machinations of property speculators. Yet the press and the Tories have latched onto this tragedy to have yet another go at demonising the poor and attacking the already shattered benefits system.

An advice worker explains what life on benefits is really like.

I work for an advice agency covering three of the poorest areas of Liverpool and the country. There is crime in the area, which mainly hurts the poorest but is also the crime of poverty - petty theft, drugs and gang violence largely carried out by youth abandoned by government nationally and betrayed by the local council.

Even according to the Daily Mail, there are only 200 families with ten or more children claiming benefits - a drop in the ocean compared to the millions handed out to bankers or uncollected in tax owed by the rich.

Benefit fraud, by the government's own figures, costs under £1 billion - 0.7% of payments. Tax evasion costs over £70 billion. So what are the government doing? Rather than increase the number of tax inspectors and collectors, they are attacking the civil services and cutting benefits.

Tax evasion

On the same day that tax cuts for the rich gave away £1 billion, over 650,000 tenants were threatened with eviction for not being able to pay the 'bedroom tax' - a saving of just £465 million. Thousands on housing

£1bn
cost of benefit fraud
£70bn
cost of tax evasion

benefit will have to pay more towards their Council Tax - saving the government just £480 million.

Overwhelmingly, the problems faced by the people coming to the agency where I work are those of being thrown off Employment Sup-



Many people seek advice after being thrown off Employment Support Allowance and Jobseeker's Allowance

port Allowance and Jobseeker's Allowance through sanctions - such as the disabled man called for an interview in an office accessible only by climbing some stairs, or the job seeker told that applying for 20 jobs in a week was not enough, or the man whose legs had been amputated due to diabetes who was told he should "bum" his way up and down his stairs. Or the people desperate for food vouchers because their benefit has been delayed.

Alternative

In its wisdom the government has now transferred claims from the Social Fund - loans or crisis payments - to the city council, from a free-phone number to a payment line. There, claimants are told that details of any loan or payment they get will be sent to their computer or mobile phone.

Government statistics have shown that those most in need have neither a computer nor mobile - or no credit on the phone if they do. So the poorest and most desperate must find the money to phone a



The Daily Mail headline on the Philpott case

friend to take the details, and wait until a decision is made as to whether they will eat that day or not.

This is a picture of parents going without food to feed their children, of people being forced out of the homes they have lived in for 20 or 30 years, of people losing their benefits and terrified of what the future holds and how they will find the money for food, rent and heating.

Rather than further benefits cuts, we need decent education in properly equipped schools, proper jobs on a living wage, as part of a socialist programme to rebuild the economy. In the short term, that means a new, mass, campaigning workers' party that could give some hope and direction to those on benefits terrified of the future and living a life of uncertainty, poverty and deprivation.

HBOS scandal is just the tip of the iceberg

Matt Gordon
Bristol Socialist Party

HBOS has been called the 'worst bank ever' after colossal losses resulted in a government-brokered merger with Lloyds and a subsequent taxpayer bailout of £20.5 billion. Others have called it 'an Ealing comedy for our times', referring to the bungling, ineptitude of the Bank's management, the 'HBOS three'.

But for the majority of us who are now paying the price through austerity and a stalling economy, this 'comedy of errors' is no laughing

32,000
lost their jobs as a result of the HBOS/Lloyds merger

matter. 32,000 workers lost their jobs as a result of the merger between HBOS and Lloyds, and many of them will still be struggling to get new work as the UK service sector is continuing to contract four years on.

A recent report by the Banking

Standards Commission has savaged the HBOS three for being personally responsible for ruining the bank and "sowing the seeds of destruction".

It has also implicated the Financial Services Authority for refusing to even investigate the bank's dodgy practices. But the HBOS three are likely to survive this recent scandal with their fortunes intact.

The HBOS three

Lord Stevenson, chairman from 2001 to 2008, already had a knighthood and was given a life peerage for his work at the bank - he is likely to remain a board-member of Waterstones bookshops.

Sir James Crosby, CEO from 2001 to 2006, is now sitting on a pension pot worth £25 million. This entitles him to an annual pension income of £700,000 - 100 times greater than the average private sector worker.

Andy Hornby, CEO from 2006 onwards, was still at the bank when the share price crashed but has since made good on his losses as head of gambling giant Gala Coral. Gala Coral, which is owned by a string of hedge funds and private equity investors, has thrived since the onset of recession by making money from misery and desperation.

The report reveals that the bank's

losses were much greater than was known at the time. It estimates that shareholders lost 96% of the company's value due to bad loans and excessive risk-taking. The losses would have grown had the government not stepped in and bought up 43% of the company.

Bank bailouts not only gave the main political parties the excuse they needed to embark on a programme of rapid 'deficit reduction' - cuts to vital public

For the majority of us who are now paying the price through austerity, this is no laughing matter

services, pensions and jobs - but have reinforced the wider economic stagnation in the UK economy for which we are all suffering.

Calls to ban the three from ever working in the City again, and to follow the precedent of Fred 'the Shred' Goodwin and strip Stevenson and Crosby of their titles, do not go far enough. All three should



The HBOS three were criticised for "sowing the seeds of destruction"

be held criminally responsible for the misery they have caused both directly and indirectly to millions of people, including being asked to cover some of the losses from their own considerable fortunes.

Capitalist contamination

The report touches on an important truth that there is no real difference between 'good' retail banking and 'bad' investment banking.

It admits that any of the planned 'structural reforms', such as those from the Vickers Report, to ring-fence 'retail banking' from 'investment banking', would not have prevented the collapse of HBOS. In

reality, they were contaminated, not with investment banking, but with the virus of capitalist greed.

The only real way to regulate the banks and prevent a further crisis is for them to be fully nationalised under democratic control and run for the benefit of ordinary people.

Those struggling to pay their mortgage could be helped and not punished, service workers could have their hours cut but pay and pensions increased, small businesses could get cheap loans and the banks could finance public works such as mass house building. This could be the start of a socialist planned economy on a world scale.

THATCHER: A CLASS WARRIOR FOR CAPITALISM

Alistair Tice
Socialist Party regional secretary,
Yorkshire

Millions have been waiting for this day, 8 April 2013. Margaret Thatcher will never be forgiven for the devastation that her Tory governments' policies wrought on working class communities in the 1980s – and is still being felt today.

"I would suggest as a memorial to Mrs Thatcher that instead of the usual headstone or statue, a dance floor should be erected over her grave". This was proposed by a writer to the Observer paper from Durham, a former mining area, on the 30th anniversary of her coming to power.

Seeking to avoid the anger and opposition that a state funeral for Thatcher would invite the government is nonetheless planning a state funeral 'by any other name'. Having spared no venom to attack millions of low-paid, unemployed and disabled people forced to subsist on benefits, Downing Street discovered it had a delicate side and has declined to say how much the 'ceremonial funeral' will cost the public purse. No doubt it will be in the millions.

Nonetheless many ex-miners and their families, trade unionists and socialists are now dancing – in celebration of her demise. The Guardian reported on the response in Orgrave, a town famed for the major attack on striking miners orchestrated by Thatcher in the 1980s. One veteran "said he was thinking of getting t-shirts printed saying 'Thatcher's in hell – she's only been there a few hours and she's already closed down the furnaces'".

The Guardian described responses to her death: "Propping up the bar, the men compared text messages they'd received throughout the day. A typical example: 'I enjoy a good swim. But if someone asked me what my favourite stroke was I'd say Maggie Thatcher's.' Another proudly brandished a text message he'd received just after 1pm saying simply: 'Parteeeee time.'"

Myths

'By your friends shall ye be known' is a well-worn cliché but in Thatcher's case it is insightful. Many have taken to social media to remind us of who Thatcher counted among her pals – murderous Chilean dictator Auguste Pinochet and former US president Ronald Reagan, her co-architect of brutal neoliberalism.

But at the same time, politicians, press barons and editors are fawning and flattering in the praise they spew out for her as the prime minister who they say made Britain great again. She was nothing of the sort. Tory MPs and right-wing commentators on the BBC and elsewhere also use the opportunity to attack the trade unions.

In analysing her role and legacy, we

must start with de-bunking some popular myths. The film industry tried to sell the Iron Lady as a feminist icon. Thatcher was the first female prime minister but her reactionary policies set back previous advances towards women's equality.

Her commitment to 'Victorian values' and belief that "there is no such thing (as society)" were the ideological justification for cutting public services and pushing the burden onto the family, which in most cases meant women.

She opposed 'subsidising' mothers to go out to work saying it would have discouraged them from staying at home to look after their children. Over half of Britain's working women were denied the right to maternity benefits, paid maternity leave and shorter working hours. Publicly funded childcare fell to the lowest level in western Europe.

While being a grocer's daughter from Grantham rather than an aristocrat or millionaire may have made Thatcher more determined to succeed as a politician in an old-boys club, it was the economic and political conditions in Britain in the 1970s that allowed her right-wing policies to come to power rather than any personal qualities.

Economy

Peter Taaffe, Socialist Party general secretary, has previously remarked that: "Friedrich Engels, alongside Karl Marx, the originators of the ideas of scientific socialism, commented that each era calls for personalities required by objective circumstances. But if they do not exist in a rounded-out form, it 'invents' them. Thatcher, without any of the scruples or hesitation of the aristocratic Tory grandees, was the brutal face of British capitalism required by the situation. She not only polarised society but the Tory party itself."

Twenty years earlier during the post-war economic upswing and mixed economy consensus, she would not have become Tory leader or, if she had, not as a Thatcherite. But the economic stagnation and industrial strife of the 1970s meant that the ruling class abandoned the post-war settlement of mildly re-distributionist and Keynesian policies in favour of attacking the living standards and rights of the working class in order to restore the profitability of an ailing British capitalism.

Thatcher, a convert to the monetarist, free-market ideology of Hayek and Milton Friedman, replaced the defeated prime minister and Tory 'wet' Ted Heath in 1975, and won the general election in 1979.

However, it was the Labour leadership that prepared the way for Thatcherism by starting to implement neoliberal policies in the 1970s. Thatcher won three general elections and stayed in power over eleven years, giving the appearance of being both popular and impregnable. However, she was neither. According to opinion polls, she was, during her time in office,

actually the second most unpopular post-war prime minister.

But the Labour leadership failed to take advantage of this. On the one hand it had failed to tackle the problems of the working class and on the other hand it had directed its energy against challenging the left, particularly Militant. In this it revealed its degeneration from a pro-workers' party at bottom to what it is today, indistinguishable from the other pro-capitalist parties.

After the 1981 inner-city riots her personal approval rating was only 23% and a Times headline read: "The most unpopular prime minister since records began". After defeating the miners' strike in April 1985 the Tories were 5% behind in the polls and in April 1990, when the poll tax was introduced in England and Wales, they were 24% behind Labour!

Popularity?

In other words, at the height of class struggles which polarised society, Thatcher was clearly seen as fighting for her class against the majority of society, the working class. Much of her perceived strength was actually the reflected weakness of the trade union and Labour leaders.

While her 1983 election victory owed most to the so-called Falklands Factor, Thatcher jingoistically wrapping herself in the union flag to defeat the "enemy without" at the cost of hundreds of lives, the right-wing Social Democratic Party (SDP) split-off from the Labour Party and the beginning of the witch-hunt against Militant supporters (the forerunner of Socialist Party) meant that Labour was divided and seen as unelectable.

Had the pit deputies union NACODS acted on their big strike ballot, had the docks and railway solidarity strikes lasted longer, and if the TUC leaders had called a general strike in support of the miners, then the Thatcher government could have been brought down in 1984/5 like the Heath government was in 1974. Even then, Labour leader Neil Kinnock lost his party's poll lead by attacking NUM president Arthur Scargill and the Militant-led Liverpool City Council in the run-up to the 1987 election.

But Thatcher was beaten. Her government was forced to retreat in 1981 when the South Wales miners threatened to strike against pit closures.

Liverpool

Liverpool City Council, by mobilising mass support for its policies of building houses and creating jobs, forced the Tory government to concede an extra £60 million funding in the summer of 1984. This was heralded as "Dane-geld" by the Times - Dane-geld was the tribute in gold demanded from the English rulers in the 13th century by the invading Danes in exchange for not engaging in pillage and plunder. Thatcher then used these retreats, although forced on her, to prepare

more thoroughly to defeat first the miners and then 'left-wing' Labour councils.

Poll Tax

After winning the 1987 general election, Thatcher made the mistake of attacking all the working class at once by introducing the Poll Tax, a punitive and regressive charge on all adults for local services. She declared the 'Community Charge' as her flag-ship policy. Militant warned it would be her Titanic. Starting in Scotland in 1989, where the tax was to be introduced first, Militant helped initiate a campaign of mass non-payment organised by anti-poll tax unions, which spread to the rest of Britain in 1990.

At its height, 18 million people were refusing to pay the poll tax, the biggest campaign of civil disobedience ever. Just after the so-called poll tax riots in Trafalgar Square (caused by the police attacking a 200,000 strong demonstration) the Tories were 24% behind in the opinion polls. Despite courts, bailiffs and jailings, non-payment grew making the tax uncollectable.

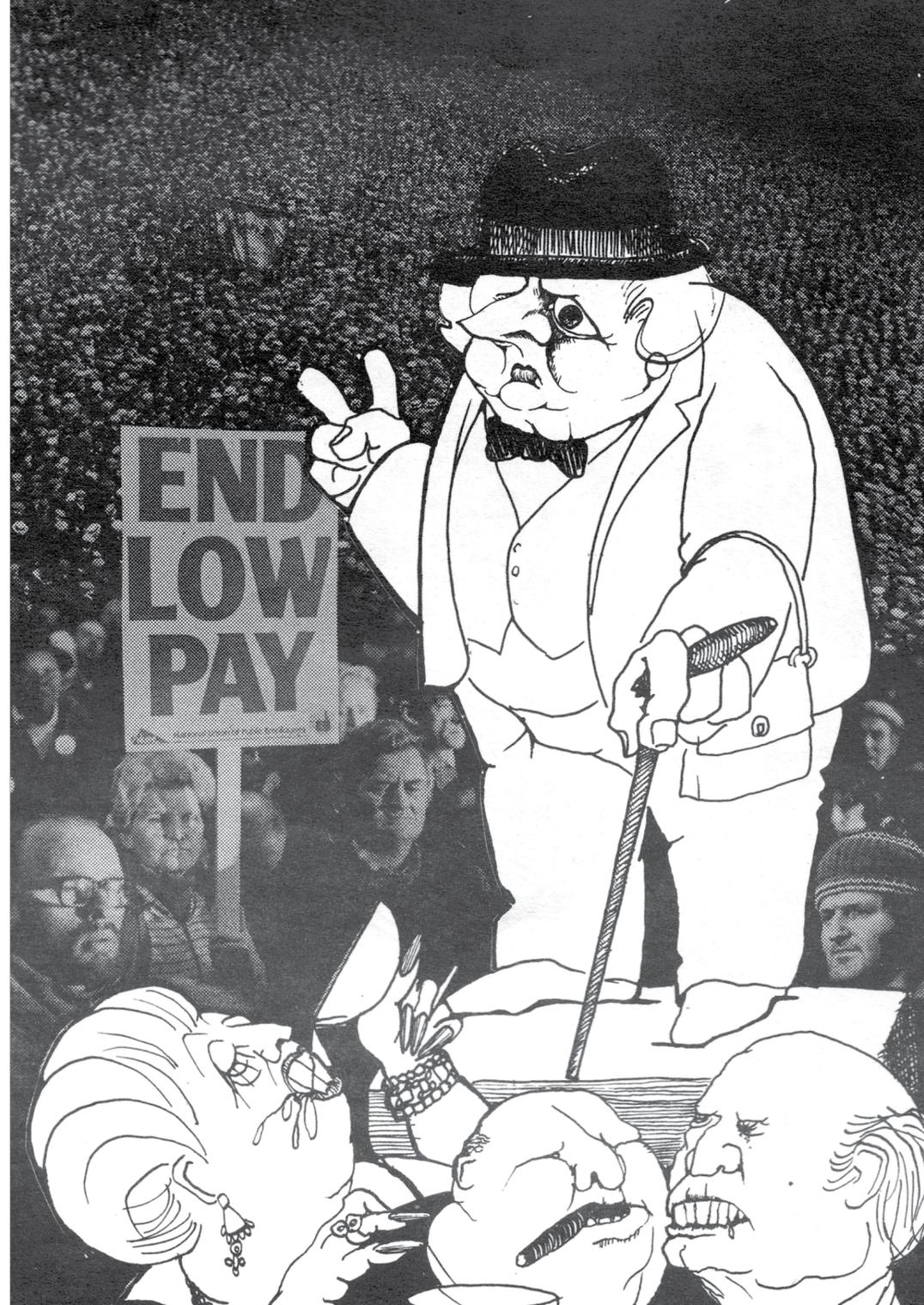
It was this mass opposition and unpopularity that persuaded the Tory Party to sacrifice their heroine, and with her the poll tax which was immediately scrapped by her replacement John Major. Thatcher herself was later to lament in her memoirs: "The eventual abandonment of the charge represented one of the greatest victories for these people [the organisers of the anti-poll tax demonstrations on 31 March 1990] ever conceded by a Conservative government." [Margaret Thatcher, 'The Downing Street Years', p661.]

What this showed is that all Thatcher's perceived strengths, as a resolute, determined, single-minded strong leader, epitomised in her famous "You turn if you want to. The lady's not for turning" speech, turned into their opposite when her divisive policies completely undermined social support for the Tory government. Decisive was the leadership offered by Militant in the campaign of mass non-payment. Then she was seen as arrogant, stubborn, pig-headed, and unwilling to listen to her cabinet, leading to Tory splits and her removal.

In sinking the retreating Argentinian battleship Belgrano and in her year-long "civil war" against the miners, the "enemy within", Thatcher displayed the brutal cold-heartedness of British capitalism. But she herself became the victim of the ruthlessness of her own ruling class.

We'll shed no tears for her demise. She will be remembered forever for destroying manufacturing industry and causing permanent mass unemployment. Her monetarist policies of high interest rates and slashing public spending turned the recession in 1979-81 into a depression. Manufacturing output fell by 30% by 1983. Industries like steel, coal and engineering were decimated and whole communities with them. The former 'workshop of the world' became a net importer for the first

Never have so many,
been robbed of so much,
for the benefit of so few,



cartoon Alan Hardman

time since the industrial revolution. Unemployment rose by over a million in just one year, peaking at 3.3 million in 1986 with a 'lost generation' of young people thrown on the scrap-heap.

Thatcher, representing finance capital, believed that de-regulation, especially of the City, would lead business to prosper and wealth would "trickle-down." Combined with the proceeds of the selling off of council housing and mass privatisations of public utilities, there was the appearance of growing prosperity reflected in the 'yuppie' and 'loadsomoney' culture but this was superficial and only ever benefited a small minority. Her much-vaunted "share-owning democracy" never materialised, as workers quickly sold their shares and the financial institutions became the 'masters of the universe'.

Legacy

By the end of the 1980s, 12.2 million people, over a fifth of the population, were living in poverty, and the gulf between the richest 20% and poorest 20% had widened by 60%. This increase in inequality was to widen further under Blair's New Labour government as it continued Thatcherite policies of curbing the trade unions, privatising state resources and deregulating the City of London. In 2001 Labour's Peter Mandelson tellingly said: "we are all Thatcherites now", before enthusing that he was "intensely relaxed about people becoming filthy rich".

Thatcher herself claimed that New Labour (Labour's conversion to capitalist neoliberal policies) was her greatest legacy and Labour leader Ed Miliband has praised some of Thatcher's key policies, stating: "Some of what happened in the 1980s was right. It was right to let people buy their council houses. It was right to cut tax rates of 60, 70, 80%. And it was right to change the rules on the closed shop, on ballots before strikes. These changes were right, and we were wrong to oppose it at the time." This complete capitulation to the market has now led Labour to accept the Con-Dem coalition cuts and pay freeze, making the need for a new mass workers' party even more urgent.

It is fitting that Thatcher should die at the very time when free market capitalism, in the middle of its worst economic crisis for 80 years, has so spectacularly failed. She sought to "roll back the frontiers of socialism" but it is now those very ideas of socialism that will make a comeback as increasing numbers of workers and youth look for an alternative to the austerity, war and environmental destruction that is global capitalism today.

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Thatcher's death: readers respond

I was a committed socialist before I left school in 1970. For me Thatcher, like many before her, was a representative of the capitalist class and therefore the enemy of my class. But I would like to thank Thatcher for just one thing. Before the miners' strike of 1984 I was a revolutionary isolated without a party.

But as a result of my active support for the miners' strike I was introduced to and joined the Militant - the Socialist Party's predecessor. Despite the defeat of the miner's heroic struggle, I take tremendous pride in knowing that as a member of Militant I played a small part in beating the 'Iron Lady' and her hated government twice - through Liverpool's socialist council victory in the 1980s and the campaign of mass non-payment of the poll tax.

Thatcher is now dead but Thatcherism will live on until a third and crucial victory is won - over the rest of her class who aim to drive us back to the 1930s.

Andy Bentley, Stoke

I sold the Socialist at the Manchester United/City derby, shouting "celebrate the end of Thatcher, buy this week's Socialist". There were one or two rude remarks, and an ex-squaddie told me I was a moron, but loads of grins, laughs, punching the air, singing "the wicked witch is dead!" Comments included: "I went through the 80s miners' support groups and all that. This is a great day." "My dad said 'Thatcher's dead', he was bouncing!"

"You should have put 'Thatcher's dead' on the front!"

"We'll be having a party on Friday."

I sold 13 copies. Unlucky for some, eh?

Paul Gerrard

Where there was harmony she created disharmony, everything she did caused division. She pitted class against class, worker against worker and Britain against Ireland.

She changed the British economy from manufacturing based to service based,



The real tragedy is that while she may be dead herself her ideas are still alive and well in the form of the Con-Dem coalition and New Labour.

She was a determined fighter for her class, the 1% of very wealthy people at the top of society.

The Socialist Party wants to build a movement that does the same for the 99%, working class people.

We want to build a mass movement that will take the wealth from the super-rich and that dismantles the project she embarked upon.

Dave Nellist, Labour Coventry South East MP 1983-92 and Socialist Party councillor 1998-2012, quoted in the Coventry Observer

not because it was a sensible thing to do, but out of sheer prejudice. She transformed Britain from a nation which she claimed could be ransomed by the trade union leaders into a nation that could be ransomed by the bankers.

Andy Hamilton

In 1984 mines that were profitable were being closed. Thatcher was out to destroy the NUM; it was a political attack. She described striking miners who were trying to save jobs as the "enemy within".

We striking miners were subjected to police violence and arbitrary arrests. It was like being in a police state in Nottinghamshire.

A former Nottinghamshire NUM member

Four weeks ago I had a joke with a friend about the death of Thatcher and said that I would buy her a pair of maracas to use at the party I would hold for the celebration that was to be had. I ordered them the day before Thatcher died.

Now I am ordering bongo drums for Iain Duncan Smith and a second hand violin for Cameron. Ideas for purchases to bring about the demise of Hunt, Osborne et al would be very well received.

Sally Griffiths

I grew up in Clydebanks. My earliest political memory is a quote from my great

aunt and uncle (I was only seven when Thatcher came to power in 1979).

Faced with the destruction of the local shipbuilding industry and the Singer sewing machine factory, of mass unemployment and "business parks" which only employed a handful of the people who used to work in the once-bustling docks and factories. They said that Thatcher would soon be out because the unions would call a general strike. If only they were right!

I will be celebrating today, but more than ever we still need to fight all those, from the Tories or from New Labour, who have

carried on her legacy of cuts and unemployment, of attacking public services and the welfare state.

Andrew Walton, Leicester Socialist Party

I work for a Citizens Advice Bureau. Every day, we have to deal with the fallout from the Thatcher years - whether from Thatcher herself, the neo-Thatcherite Tony Blair or the present government.

All I can say is that everyone here is rejoicing. We are planning the equivalent of a minute's silence - five minutes of cheering. Clients are coming in overjoyed at the news.

We have already had two elderly clients saying they can now die happy - they were only hanging on for her to go! One question is whether Mark Thatcher will be liable for bedroom tax now there is a spare room in his house.

Merseyside CAB employee

I will have a quiet drink tonight and celebrate some of the best news I have had for nearly 30 years. This day will always be known and celebrated as Thatcher's Day, when the person who put Britain up for sale and destroyed our manufacturing base... did the decent thing and died.

Ex-miner, Rotherham

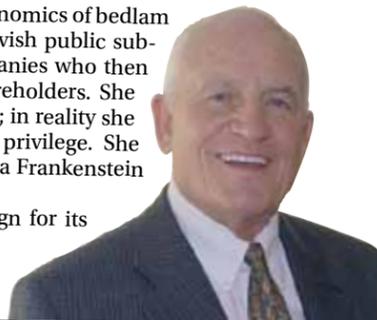
The eulogising of Thatcher by the mainstream media is taking mendacious sycophancy to a whole new level.

She unleashed the crazed policy of transferring wealth from the working class and the neediest in society to her already obscenely rich friends, fattening her own bank balance in the process. Her policy of privatising energy, rail, water, etc, has proved catastrophic for the vast majority of consumers.

We are lumbered with the economics of bedlam where the tax payer provides lavish public subsidy to the privatised rail companies who then pass any profit on to their shareholders. She claimed to act for the individual; in reality she was the champion of power and privilege. She may have left the stage but, like a Frankenstein monster, her legacy lives on.

We must continue to campaign for its defeat.

Tony Mulhearn, Liverpool 47 Labour councillor 1983-87



For many older workers and especially trade unionists, the death of Margaret Thatcher brings to an end a period of bitterness.

She is remembered for her assault on the trade unions and in particular the mineworkers.

This led to a huge setback for the trade union movement that we have barely recovered from.

Whole mining communities were laid waste. Many mineworkers never worked again and the misery continues today. Who can forget those marches where the slogan 'Margaret Thatcher milk snatcher', rang out. Thatcher will never be forgotten or forgiven.

We face today a similar situation where a vicious Tory government is again launching a massive attack on the weakest and most vulnerable in society. The Labour Party offers no resistance. We can only erase the memory of Thatcher by erasing the rottenness of capitalism - that means starting by building for a 24-hour general strike.

Terry Pearce Chair, Bracknell Branch Unite (personal capacity)

So Thatcher's dead... let us now bury her ideas of selfishness and greed and her acolytes in the dustbin of history.

The political and capitalist class will weep including Blair, Brown and Miliband... let us build a new mass workers' party for the workers, of the workers and by the workers.

Let us organise to undo all the carnage she and her followers have wrought... build a society for the needs of the billions and not the greed of the billionaires.

Wally Kennedy

Iron Rations

Rust finally stopped your mouth.

But your pieces are buried in our streets, offices and playgrounds, coiling like barbed wire, cutting like knives, and their poison has a half-life of forever.

Joel Lane

Cheltenham marches against A&E cuts

Gregory Mouat
Gloucestershire Socialist Party

Saturday 6 April saw around 300 people march through the centre of Cheltenham, Gloucestershire, against plans to reduce night time staffing at the town's A&E.

Following the march, rally speakers included Unite Community South-West regional organiser Brett Sparks, Trevor Hall from Unite Gloucestershire, Robin Clapp from Bristol and District Anti-Cuts Alliance, Sue Powell from Gloucestershire Against Cuts, and local resident Carmella Walker-Bishop.

A statement from Shaun Clarke of the local ambulance service explained that the proposed reductions would mean patients being taken to the already stretched Gloucester A&E, or even further afield to Bristol or Worcester.

Carmella said that a recent Uni-



photo Chris Moore

versity of Sheffield study found that each extra 10km travelled would increase the risk of patient fatality by 20%. There were calls for a national

demonstration to defend the NHS. An overwhelming majority raised their hands when Trevor asked who supported a 24-hour general strike.

Stop extermination of our NHS

Hugh Caffrey
Secretary, Greater Manchester Keep Our NHS Public

Campaigners from across Greater Manchester gathered at Media:City in Salford on Tuesday 2 May, the first day that the government's privatisation measures against our National Health Service took effect. Banners and placards demonstrated our opposition to the handover of public healthcare to private profiteers.

Street theatre performed by our more theatrical supporters demonstrated how the measures will rip the heart out of our NHS.

We secured press coverage on the BBC midday and evening regional news, as well as write-ups in the local newspapers.

Greater Manchester Keep Our NHS Public is supporting and drawing together campaign groups

across the area, with supporters in every borough. As cuts under the 'Healthier Together' review will take aim at our Accident & Emergency units, alongside existing threats to the very future of viable hospitals in Bolton and Trafford, we will step up the fight.

For more information visit keepournhspublicgmcr.com or email konpmcr@hotmail.com



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CELEBRATE MAY DAY

Missed the 10 April May Day greeting deadline?

Contact us by 18 April and we'll see what we can do. Go to www.socialistparty.org.uk/mayday, email bobsevern@socialistparty.org.uk or phone 020 8988 8781. The payment deadline for all greetings is 17 May.

Fears of a nuclear conflict on the Korean peninsula increase

Military and diplomatic tensions have escalated on the Korean peninsula in recent weeks. In February, North Korea conducted a nuclear test. This was followed by a US-South Korean military exercise and then by the North Korean regime declaring a "state of war" on the South. Hotlines between Pyongyang and Seoul have been cut and work at the joint Kaesong Industrial Complex has been suspended. Clare Doyle reports on this growing instability and the possibility of a regional conflict.



North Korea's leader Kim Jong-un at a military command post

The escalation of fear and tension on the Korean peninsula, and far beyond, is not without justification. North Korea is a quasi-Stalinist regime of a peculiar kind and inherently unstable. The new 'great leader' in North Korea - Kim Jong-un - appears to be even more unpredictable than his father Kim Jong-il (who 'inherited' the 'communist party' leadership from his father, Kim Il-sung) when it comes to threats of launching nuclear weapons.

Does he really see the South of the divided peninsula as a major threat to his dictatorial rule - especially its higher living standards and certain basic elements of democracy? Is he trying to demonstrate to others within his own ruling clique that he is boss? Is he using the threat of nuclear attack to force a renewal of negotiations in the international "six-party talks"? Is his aim to get international sanctions lifted and more food aid for North Korea's starving population?

It is probably a mixture of all these. The situation is indeed one in which at any time a nuclear exchange could be set off - deliberately or by accident. It cannot be excluded. It would lead to a human nightmare of death and destruction, the collapse of the regime in the North and a major crisis for South Korea and the whole region.

The initial response of the US to North Korea's threats has, thankfully, been "ratcheted down", as an analyst at Yonsei University, Seoul, put it. After flying B2 nuclear bombers over the peninsula, the US administration has postponed a planned

inter-continental missile test and appears to be looking for 'dialogue' rather than 'active deterrence'.

The new Chinese 'Communist' party leadership in Beijing appears to be less willing than in the past to give automatic backing to the North Korean regime and its periodic sabre-rattling against imperialism and the South Korean regime. On the other hand, in the South, the 'trustpolitik' of its new right-wing regime means accepting that 'denuclearisation' is not the only first step towards the removal of the almost permanent threat from the North.

Hypocrisy

It is totally hypocritical of the US and China to demand total disarmament of North Korea when they are themselves armed to the teeth with nuclear weapons which they have no intention of de-commissioning. Nuclear armaments are monstrous and fiendish weapons of mass destruction. No sane regime would use them because of the prospect of Mutually Assured Destruction (MAD). They say they are simply deterrents.

But this does not answer the argument that such weapons could be set off by accident or by a deranged head of state. In the case of Korea, a new instability has arisen in the aftermath of the previous 'reign' of Kim Jong-il, during which a majority of the population lived in abso-

lute poverty and starvation.

The existence of the superior living standards in the south and the 'infection' of certain hard-won democratic rights, even access to the internet, threaten to undermine the regime in the North. Hence the hyping up by Kim Jong-un of the external threat and the necessity of being ready to use nuclear weapons in self-defence.

The regime in North Korea appears to be a law unto itself. It is in a position, with 600,000 troops just across the 'ceasefire' line to obliterate the South's capital, Seoul, that lies only 37 miles to the South. It has made a number of attacks, for example on South Korean vessels, in the recent past and soon may launch a missile with a range that would take it as far as the US base of Guam.

Support waning?

In its struggle for dominance in the region and internally, the ruling 'Communist' party in China is not averse to engaging in its own military stand-offs in the region - with Japan, Vietnam and even the US. But on its road to the restoration of capitalism, it will not now automatically come to the aid of its neighbour.

The regime in North Korea is by no means 'communist' anyway, even in name. Its ruling ideology, Juche, is an invention of its first 'leader' - Kim Il-sung originally a communist and resistance fighter against Japanese rule over Korea.

The statelet, with its population of nearly 25 million, resulted from the devastating peninsula war of 1950-53 between the forces of imperialism and those of post-war China under Mao Tse Tung. It ended in a stalemate with an ossified northern state modelled on Stalin's Soviet Union and a capitalist south under pro-US military rule.

Today the steady stream of tourists who stare across the De-militarised Zone that divides the peninsula are told by official guides that the "communist wolves" of the North have threatened the democratic South for 60 years.

Firstly, although the main bastions of the economy in the North are state-owned, there are no elements of democracy for the massively impoverished and hungry population but there is great wealth and privilege for a few at the top of the governing clique and the army.

North Korea has been used as a bogeyman against the ideas of communism and socialism but it is a gross distortion of such ideas and bears no resemblance to a democratic socialist workers' state.

Secondly, in the South, US imperialism poured huge resources into backing ruthless military dictatorships there for more than 30 years, including that of Park Cheung-he, the father of the newly elected president.

The US has a large arsenal of weapons and tens of thousands of troops based in South Korea. Since Pyongyang's threat to 'nuke' Hollywood, the US has threatened to increase its 'hardware' on the peninsula - another reason for China to try and de-escalate the crisis. (In 1994, Bill Clinton's administration seriously considered invading the North but it was constrained by the estimated \$100 billion cost and one million casualties.)

Chaebol capitalism

The South Korean economy is dominated by a handful of family-run conglomerates or Chaebol. Trade union militants are constantly harassed and imprisoned for exercising the democratic rights to organise and to strike (see article on socialistworld.net - 26 February 2013).

The struggle to create an independent political voice for the South Korean working class gathers urgency.

Because of the monstrous regime in the North, which many have been persuaded to falsely associate with 'socialism', the task of building a genuinely socialist force to fight against big business and the banks in the South remains difficult.

Today's huge discrepancy in living standards between the North and the South means that most in the South see the huge cost of reunification as being at their expense.

Any struggle to re-unite the peninsula in the interests of working people needs to link the struggle against dictatorship and nuclear madness in the North with the struggle against the Chaebol in the South.

The struggle for socialist democratic planning of publicly owned industries, banks and the land would lay the basis for the longed for reuniting of the peoples of Korea.

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:



Pakistan: Life under constant threat

Three Socialist Movement Pakistan members killed in sectarian violence in Quetta.

Eyewitness report from Quetta, Baluchistan, by leading SMP member



Sri Lanka: New stage for Sinhala chauvinism

development of Bodu Bala Sena must be stopped.

Senan, CWI, first published on tamilsolidarity.org



Romania: Crushing victory for the USL in elections

Austerity rejected, but a new pro-capitalist government formed.

Victor Cosmin, Romania



US-South Korea war games adding to the tensions

TV review Hillsborough - never forgotten

Tony Mulhearn

Liverpool Labour Party president (1980-85) and one of the 47 surcharged Liverpool councillors

This BBC4 programme Hillsborough - Never Forgotten on 3 April was a powerful reminder of events leading up to the recent Independent Panel's findings on the 1989 Hillsborough catastrophe that claimed 96 lives.

It revealed the now widely-recognised cover-up by the forces of the state. Archive footage of senior police officers and Paul Middup, of South Yorkshire Police Federation, lying about drunken fans and the smugness of coroner Stefan Popper who ruled on the now notorious cut-off point for the victims' deaths; all merged into a poisonous brew of mendacity.

The film revealed how, after decades of obstacles erected to frustrate the bereaved families' quest for justice, one event triggered dramatic change. At a memorial meeting for the 96 at Anfield stadium in April 2010, Andy Burnham addressed 34,000 people. He was a member of a Labour government whose prime minister ruled out a fresh inquiry into Hillsborough.

As he spoke, a lone voice rang out: 'justice for the 96'. That cry swirled around the stadium until 34,000 supporters of the 96 chanted the demand in unison.

A shaken Burnham reported: "Next day, we had a Cabinet meeting and I said to Gordon [Brown]

'I'm going to raise Hillsborough'. It wasn't on the agenda and it wasn't on the government's radar. I said 'I'm not saying this just because I had a bad time yesterday.' 23 years of fobbing off had not diminished the intense feeling in Liverpool - for the government to retain any credibility an independent panel would have to be set up to satisfy the demand for justice.

After that senior police officers and politicians, seeing the game was up, all outbid each other in giving the deepest apology for the behaviour of those complicit in this criminal activity. But we have yet to learn of a single prosecution from these revelations.

The film had a heart-rending interview with special constable Debra Martin who had tended to the injured and dying. She was pressured into falsifying her evidence when two West Midlands police officers visited her.

However, in depicting the events leading up to Hillsborough, economic decline, joblessness, the 1981 riots, etc, the producer couldn't resist including "the 'Militant' control of the council". It's as though the 47 councillors were part of the problem and not a force which tried to put right, with great success, the appalling decline in Liverpool's fortunes.

Hopefully the event to mark the 30th anniversary of the 47's election on 27 April will help dispel the pernicious myths that the same establishment which demonised the victims of Hillsborough still belch out when given the opportunity.



Liverpool: discussion and exhibition marking 30 years since the election of Liverpool's socialist council

**Saturday 27 April, 10:30am
Adelphi Hotel,
Lime Street, Liverpool**

Speakers include **Len McCluskey** general secretary of Unite, **Janice Godrich**, president PCS union, **Peter Taaffe**, Socialist Party general secretary and **Tony Mulhearn**

Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC)

In local council elections on 2 May 5% of the seats will have a fighting anti-austerity alternative on the ballot paper. The Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) is standing 121 candidates, in 20 of the 35 councils with elections this year.

Contrast this with when these seats were previously contested in the four-yearly local elections cycle. In 2009 a year after the financial crisis broke and when Labour polled just 24% of the vote, there were literally just a handful of candidates presenting a working class alternative to the pro-austerity consensus.

It is mainly county councils up for election in May, overwhelmingly Tory-controlled - though Cumbria has been run by a Labour-Conservative coalition! But these councils administer a range of services - from education, adult social care and youth provision, to libraries, highways and emergency services -

covering a population of 24 million, control combined budgets of £43 billion, and employ 750,000 workers (including school staff).

TUSC's platform for these elections (see below) offers a distinct alternative in elections where Labour candidates may try to present themselves as 'anti-cuts'.

TUSC candidates

TUSC candidates include national executive committee members of the RMT transport workers' union and the PCS civil servants' union and regional and branch officers from both. There is a Unison health sector group executive member, a Communication Workers Union regional organiser, POA branch officers, and numerous Unite, Unison and National Union of Teachers local union reps. College students are standing, and an 89-year old

**TUSC
AGAINST
CUTS**

National Pensioners Convention activist.

In 2011 TUSC stood in 2% of the seats being contested, in 2012 in 4% of metropolitan council elections. May's election challenge, in more seats in a different terrain, is another step in TUSC fulfilling its function of being a means for trade unionists, community campaigners and socialists to present a common banner against the establishment parties.

See www.tusc.org.uk for the full list of candidates

Briefly...

Third place for TUSC in Knowsley

TUSC candidate Steve Whatham won third place in a Knowsley council byelection on 4 April. Labour held Prescott West seat with 44% of the vote. The Lib Dems kept their second place position from last May's contest. Steve got 8.5% of the poll, ahead of both Tories and Greens. In the Merseyside borough of Knowsley all 63 councillors are Labour, but the byelection showed again that the TUSC banner can be picked up by anti-cuts campaigners to mount a credible working class challenge to the pro-austerity consensus. Labour 441; Lib Dems 403; TUSC 86 (8.5%); Conservative 62; Green 14

'I'd rather stand as a TUSC candidate...'

"I was a Labour councillor on Wyre borough council from 1995-1999. I left Labour in 2002 because of its break with socialism and the trade unions.

Basically since then I have supported union campaigns against cuts as a union activist, a member of the GMB. I was going to stand as an independent socialist against the cuts, as I have been attacking the cuts in the local paper...

As a trade unionist I fully endorse the platform your candidates are standing on, which is why I would much rather stand as a Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition candidate. With that in mind I submit this application and ask for you to consider me."

Ray Smith

Ray is now TUSC candidate for the Lancashire county council seat of Fleetwood East, with RMT executive member Kevin Morrison standing in nearby Thornton Cleveleys.



RMT general secretary Bob Crow speaking at a TUSC rally in Hockney earlier this year photo the Socialist

TUSC union forum

The TUSC trade union forum met for the first time on 6 April. National or sectional executive level trade unionists were present from the RMT, PCS, NUT, Unison, Unite and the UCU. RMT executive members Daren Ireland and Sean Hoyle are preparing a report of the meeting. May's TUSC steering committee will discuss the proposals raised, including plans for a campaign on union rights in the run up to the general election.

TUSC demands:

All TUSC councillors will:

- Oppose all cuts to council jobs, services, pay and conditions - we reject the claim that 'some cuts' are necessary to our services.
- Support all workers' struggles against cuts, privatisation and the government's policy of making ordinary people pay for the crisis caused by the bankers and the bosses.
- Reject increases in council tax, rent and service charges to compensate for government cuts.
- Defend the national collective bargaining arrangements for council workers.
- Vote against privatisation of council

jobs and services, or transfer of council services to 'social enterprises' or 'arms-length' management organisations, which are first steps to privatisation.

- Oppose racism and fascism and stand up for equality for all.
- Use all the powers available to councils - to block cuts to local NHS services, initiate referenda and organise public commissions and consultations - to oppose both cuts and government policies that centrally impose transfer of public services to private bodies.
- Campaign for the introduction of a Living Wage above the minimum wage for all council employees and those working

for council contractors.

- Faced with government cuts to council funding, councils should refuse to implement the cuts.

We will support councils which in the first instance use their reserves and borrowing powers to avoid passing them on - while arguing that the best way to mobilise the mass campaign necessary to defeat the cuts is to set a budget that meets the local community's needs. We demand that the government makes up the shortfall.

- Support action against climate change and for a future where sustainability comes before profit.

Suspended for fighting the cuts

Warrington Labour rebel councillor speaks to the Socialist

Warrington's 'rebel' Labour councillor Kevin Bennett has been indefinitely suspended by the Labour group after he voted against cuts proposed by the ruling Labour council. A 70-strong lobby of the suspension meeting showed the support generated for Kevin by his stand and for the newly-formed Warrington Against the Cuts campaign in which Kevin is playing a leading part. Clearly elements in the Labour group didn't enjoy being lobbied, peacefully if vocally, as they called the police twice during the 90-minute lobby. Kevin was interviewed the following day by Hugh Caffrey for the Socialist.

HC: What happened last night?

KB: A delegation from Unite came down to lobby in support of me, together with others. We spoke to the group, and following that Terry Burns [Unite regional political officer] and I went up to the meeting.

We went into what we felt was an aggressive atmosphere in the Labour group room, the leader of the Labour group was very agitated and not happy with the supporters outside shouting their support.

At one point, some of the supporters actually managed to get into the building. The leader of the Labour group asked Terry Burns to go and try and sort it out and Terry had come back and asked me, because the supporters said: 'Unless Kevin says, we're not going anywhere!' Because the meeting wouldn't start until they left the building, then the supporters went outside and continued demonstrating their support.

Obviously the meeting was staged, they read out the allegations and on this occasion they actually allowed me to finish what I was saying. Then the Labour group asked me a number of questions, some of them quite aggressively, and I kept referring to my statement.

My statement made clear my loyal track record in the Labour Party and my trade union Unite, my attempts to constructively raise my concerns about the budget within the due process of Labour Party rules, and how those attempts were, to my dismay, frustrated and blocked.

My statement also made clear

the years of unpleasant treatment, disdain and intimidation which I have received from elements of the Labour group. No action was taken by the whips against those who attacked me verbally and in writing.

After that, the chair then said, we'll move to the actions. The first vote was: Does action need to be taken against me, or should it be a

Cuts are hitting my ward badly, I'm getting calls and emails from people asking me to help. But the Labour administration won't listen to any of the alternatives

warning? And one of the councillors did put her hand up and say, 'I think he should only be warned because it's his first offence,' and that did get seconded. But it fell, we were overwhelmingly defeated on that. Then there was the whips' recommendation, which was for me to be suspended indefinitely, which was overwhelmingly passed.

Once they told me I was indefinitely suspended, and I could apply after six months to rejoin the Labour



Kevin Bennett speaks to the lobby photo Warrington Against the Cuts

group, we went outside to the supporters who were still there. Despite the freezing cold, they'd stayed there and cheered when I came out, shouting 'it's a disgrace!' that I'd been suspended.

As various councillors were leaving, supporters were shouting 'Shame on you,' some of the councillors were smiling but some looked a bit more sheepish.

I would like to thank all who supported me, and especially thanks to Unite the Union.

HC: So what are the underlying reasons why this has happened?

KB: The real reason for this is since

2010 there's been incidents of bullying and intimidation, leading up to my frustration with not having a voice on the Labour group.

The cuts are hitting my ward badly, I'm getting calls and emails from people asking me to help them but I feel my hands are tied. I can't influence the Labour administration to even listen to any of the alternatives I've put forward to help support the most vulnerable at this devastating time thanks to an ideologically-driven Tory government.

Warrington borough council was putting forward £13.9 million of budget cuts and raising council tax, but topping its reserves by millions.

What you can do

Pass a resolution of support in your union branch, especially if you're in Unite, and send a copy to Kevin

Send Kevin a message of support on kevinbennett396@btinternet.com

If you're in Warrington - come to the launch of Warrington Against the Cuts! Supported by Kevin Bennett and Warrington Trades Union Council. Wednesday 10 April, 7pm

Warrington Railway Club by Warrington Central station.

Join the campaign on Facebook: www.facebook.com/WarringtonAgainstTheCuts

My alternative would have been to use part of the reserves rather than increase the council tax, and borrow money to safeguard jobs and services, to give us time to fight back against the government at this time.

HC: What are you going to do now?

KB: I will be appealing against the decision because I feel we need to fight it all the way and to hopefully influence other Labour councillors to resist these cuts.

We launched Warrington Against the Cuts with a protest against the bedroom tax which was well received by the people of Warrington who enthusiastically signed our petition. People going past beeped their car horns in support.

I want to take forward the Warrington Against the Cuts group, and I'm looking to reinforce this with Unite Community branches to help focus people in my ward to come together and unite against the cuts. It's interesting that the Labour leadership have come out and asked councillors of all parties to vote against the bedroom tax. This is just the start I hope.

'Forced out of work, forced out of Spain'

Sarah Wrack

"No nos vamos, nos echan" - we're not leaving, we're being thrown out. This was the message of hundreds of young Spanish people on a protest in central London on 7 April.

They came with suitcases and backpacks and formed a queue holding signs, including 'we will return stronger' and 'forced out of work, forced out of the country'.

This followed the Spanish immigration minister claiming that the 1,000 emigrating from Spain each week do so because of their 'adventurous spirit', rather than the 55% youth unemployment making a future in Spain seem impossible.

But they were also angry at finding that things in Britain are not wholly different. Socialist Party members took part in the protest and met young people, including one who was a journalist in Spain and another who is a qualified architect, now working in minimum wage jobs with poor working conditions, mainly in restaurants and bars.

Many were keen to get involved in Youth Fight for Jobs' Sick Of Your Boss initiative.



photo Sarah Wrack

The youth that feel forced out of Spain are determined to fight for an alternative to austerity and were keen to discuss the Committee for a Workers' International's call for a European-wide general strike.

We sold 22 copies of La Brecha, the paper of Socialismo Revolucionario, sister section of the Socialist Party in Spain, and seven people gave their details to get involved in their local Socialist Party branch.

Doncaster: 60 at Mary4Mayor rally



Bob Crow (speaking), Mary Jackson and Tony Mulhearn photo A Tice

Mary Jackson's Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) election campaign for Doncaster mayor held a successful launch meeting on 2 April.

Sixty people attended, including many RMT rail union activists and the Lindholme prison POA branch secretary.

Great speeches were made by Joe Robinson - the 21-year-old newly elected TUSC councillor in Maltby, Mary Jackson, Tony Mulhearn - one of the Liverpool 47 councillors who fought Thatcher in the 1980s, and

Bob Crow - RMT general secretary. Over £250 was raised to help fund the campaign, and lots of offers to help were made.

See issue 759 of the Socialist or www.socialistparty.org.uk for more on Mary's election campaign.

A pre-election rally will be held on Monday 29 April, 7.30pm at Doncaster Trades and Labour Club, Frenchgate Centre, DN1 1LL. Speakers will include Mary Jackson and former MP Dave Nellist, who only took a worker's wage as an MP.

Alistair Tice

BEAT THE ROTTEN BEDROOM TAX

Before it destroys lives

Sarah Sachs-Eldridge

Millionaire, mansion-owning Con-Dem ministers have deemed an estimated 660,000 council and Housing Association households that claim housing benefit to be 'under-occupying' their homes.

Since 1 April those working age households can be docked 14% of their eligible rent for one room and 25% for two rooms deemed to be 'spare'. In some areas this will mean well over £1,000 a year stolen from their housing benefit.

Yet again the government is hitting the most vulnerable. 63% of affected households have one or more disabled person living in them. Pensioners are not eligible now but will be from October 2013. 40% of affected households include children.

These households face catastrophic reductions in their living standards - many already report they are eating fewer meals, can't heat their homes adequately and that the huge stress is aggravating existing disabilities and illnesses.

A report in the Sunday People gave a taste of what this will mean: "An estimated 17,000 registered blind [people] face a forced move."

One blind woman explains how she will

Come to a local meeting where we can discuss how to stop the bedroom tax: www.socialistparty.org.uk/whatson 020 8988 8777



40% of affected households include children. 63% include disabled people photo Lash

be affected: "If I had to move I'd face weeks in isolation, unable to step outside the front door because it's too dangerous. It's a long process to learn a new area. I'd have to wait for a trained guide to teach me the roads."

Funding cuts mean there is a long waiting list for trainers who can help by plotting routes from blind people's homes to shops and bus routes.

This woman is contemplating absorbing the extra rent into her meagre income - adding another candidate to the queues in Foodbank Britain.

But the bedroom tax can be beaten. The death of Thatcher has reminded us of the battle against the hated poll tax that saw the tax defeated by a mass movement and eventually removed Thatcher from power.

The Socialist Party says:

- **Scrap the bedroom tax!**
- **No evictions!** Call on council and housing associations to refuse to evict all tenants that fall into rent arrears as a result of austerity cuts. Organise local campaigns to defend our homes
- **Stand against councillors who try to evict us.** 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-cuts parties
- **Cap rents and build homes.** Invest in a major programme of council house building and refurbishment to provide affordable homes for all and decent jobs
- **End low pay!** If workers are paid a genuinely living wage they would not need to claim housing benefit
- **Fight all the cuts.** Trade unions must build for a 24-hour general strike as the next major step in the campaign against all the cuts

While there are differences with Thatcher's poll tax, her descendants' bedroom tax is rapidly becoming a focus for workers' anger over wider austerity: council tax benefit cuts, housing benefit changes, and all the myriad forms of misery we face. All anti-cuts campaigners, trade unionists and socialists should get behind the anti-bedroom tax movement as part of the campaign to defeat austerity.

See page 2 for more on the strategy

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!