



RECOVERYP? MORE TORY LIES!

Strike back against endless cuts

How can you tell when a Tory is lying? Their lips are moving. It's an old joke but it surely rings true. What have we heard over the last week? Incomes are rising. We're in a recovery. In fact the opposite is true – we face billions of pounds more cuts and seemingly endless downward pressure on our wages, working conditions and benefits. Councils of all shades are announcing yet more cuts as they carry through Con-Dem austerity. Getting angry is a rational response but that alone won't stop the onslaught. Here we report on how two groups of workers are organising effective resistance.

Philip Stott

There is a growing confrontation between the Labour administration of Glasgow council – prepared to attack its own workforce and the services it provides – and a fighting trade union branch opposed to all cuts.

Hundreds of Glasgow residential care workers finished a second 48-hour strike on 28 January. Up to 200 of the overwhelmingly female workforce are facing cuts in wages of £1,500 a year. As Unison steward Maggie Smith commented: "We didn't want to strike but we've been left with no choice. We don't deserve these cuts to our wages and increased shifts."

Social Work Services (SWS) bosses are demanding workers go onto 12-hour shifts and have insisted on other changes to terms and conditions. This group of workers, who have not taken action before, were forced to sign the new contracts following threats from management.

Brian Smith, Glasgow City Unison branch secretary, explained: "Sen-

ior SWS management still refuse to move on any aspect of the dispute. They remain unwilling to address the cut in Unison members' living standards. They show little understanding of what a £1,500 cut in pay



means to workers living on around or below average wages."

The residential care strike action comes after a series of strikes last year by Pupil Support Assistants

(PSAs) employed by the council at schools across the city. The PSAs walked out in a row about staff having to take on extra healthcare duties.

Unison members were also involved in unofficial action at homeless units last year. There are another two ballots for action involving groups of workers in the social work department.

Ian Leech, Glasgow Unison social work convener, summed up the determination of the union to fight all the cuts: "Yet again we're back outside the same council offices as we were late last year with the pupil support assistants. This time another group of staff are taking action for the first time. The council think they can pick off our members group by group, cut wages, terms and conditions and increase workloads. Ordinary Unison members have made it clear; this far and no further, enough is enough."

As we go press the workers have voted to escalate the action with a three-day strike in February.

Please send messages of support to: enquiries@glasgowcityunison.co.uk

And the pay award goes to...



IWGB members and supporters photo London SP

Cleaners and other low-paid workers are getting organised in London, fighting for the '3 Cosas': holidays, sick pay and pensions. The workers employed at University College London took three more days of strike action this week, campaigning for their final demand – pensions.

On 28 January they travelled by open top bus to the Royal Opera House where other members of the same trade union (IWGB) are campaigning for the living wage.

Royal Opera House cleaners were planning their first day's strike for Sunday, the opening night of the Bafta film and TV awards.

Over 70 strikers and supporters piled into the foyer of the Opera House with megaphones and banners. Someone from management came out and said that they would pay the London living wage. Everybody started singing and dancing – but workers demand proof of this before they call off the action.

Helen Pattison

the Socialist

The paper of the Socialist Party. Issue 796.

The Socialist, PO Box 24697, London E11 1YD Registered as a newspaper at the Post Office. Published by Socialist Publications, printed by Sharman & co Ltd. ISSN 1366-9621

Brighton Green Party referendum offers no alternative to cuts

Paul Moorhouse

Brighton and Hove Socialist Party

Brighton and Hove's Green Party leader Jason Kitcat wants to follow up last year's attack on the city's bin workers' wages with further cuts in the council's 2014-15 budget. If successful, this would mean that his administration, elected on a mandate to 'resist auster-

ity', has cut £50 million from jobs and services in the city in three years.

There is no question that the primary responsibility for cuts in local government services lies with the Con-Dem government's austerity programme. The proposal by the Greens to increase council tax by 4.75%, however, is no defence in the face of this attack.

This tax increase would raise £2.75 million more than December's draft budget. But that budget proposed £22.56 million in spending cuts threatening the jobs of 100-150 council workers. In other words the Green administration would be asking the voters of Brighton to swallow a rise of almost 5% in their council tax bills as the price for still accepting nine tenths of the cuts in jobs and services demanded by Pickles and the Con-Dem government.

These would come on top of £30 million worth of Tory cuts which the Green Party has passed

on to workers and service users in the city since coming to power in 2011. Not surprisingly the Tory local government minister Brandon Lewis MP fully supports the Greens' move. This shows that it is not the case, as Green Party national leader Natalie Bennett has claimed, that: "Instead of letting Whitehall impose cuts on vulnerable people in Brighton and Hove, this announcement takes the decision to the people."

By playing along with the spending limits imposed by Pickles and the millionaire Eton boot boys in the Con-Dem cabinet, Brighton's Green Party is ensuring that the only possible outcome of the referendum is either:

- Voters reject an increase in council tax bills 2.5 times the rate of inflation (at a time when real wages are under sustained attack and public and private sector rents and other housing costs are shooting through the roof) and so all £22.5 million pounds in cuts demanded by central government go through, or

- Council tax payers in Brighton bear the brunt of subsidising the cuts in central government spending: the penalty system means that much of the extra council tax will not fund threatened services, but will simply be clawed back by central government. At the same time we will still have to swallow 90p in every £1 of Eric Pickles' cuts to services!

In other words, whatever Natalie Bennett and Jason Kitcat claim, either way, the referendum can only lead to "Whitehall imposing cuts on vulnerable people in Brighton and Hove."

The referendum would also be a highly divisive exercise in 'divide and rule': pitting 'council tax payers', against 'council workers' and 'service users' when the reality is that resisting the cuts requires that we stand united (indeed, most often we are the same people, anyway!). If we accept the Greens' 'dented shield' analysis, which says that nine-tenths of the cuts are inevitable, we will end up engaging in a vicious 'race to the bottom'.

This would pit 'education' against 'housing' and children's services against services for older people and the disabled in a struggle to become the lucky 'one in ten' to escape Councillor Kitcat's axe. Instead we should be standing together and resisting ALL CUTS.

Brighton's Labour councillors are proposing a 'vote of no confidence' in the Green administration. Not because they oppose the cuts but because they want to carry out more cuts! Labour want an 'all party administration' to implement the Con-Dem coalition's cuts in full for 2014-15, and for 2015-16. This would inevitably lead to even more losses in jobs and services.

Second question

Socialists should argue for a second question in the referendum asking the electorate in Brighton if they would rather the council defied the government and refused to implement the cuts, instead of choosing between tax increases and slightly smaller cuts or cuts alone.

Imagine if our councillors explained that adequate funding for Brighton's schools, bins and recycling (which are still reeling from the 'settlement' of last year's strike and the botched 'reorganisation' forced through by Kitcat and senior managers), housing and care services should have priority over the governments' pro-super rich austerity agenda. In this way, councillors could build a mass movement of resistance and unite council workers, services users and Brighton's communities to force Pickles to return the money stolen from our city.

Today there is an alternative, which the Socialist Party, the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition, Brighton Trades Council and Brighton Stop the Cuts Coalition have urged on the Green administration since it was first elected. Brighton and Hove Council should set a 'needs budget' and link up with the trade unions to campaign for central government to return the £70 million plus which has been cut from central government allocations to the city since 2010.

This was what the socialist-led council did in Liverpool in the 1980s. Not only did they force the Thatcher government to increase funding for services but they expanded the council's workforce at a time of rising unemployment and built 5,000 new council houses (more than were built by councils in the whole of the rest of England and Wales in the same period).

Why not put that idea to a referendum vote?

Determined strikes can stop London Underground in its tracks

Bill Johnson

With the Olympics a fading memory, London Underground (LU) intends to implement the years of austerity that it had to forgo in order to keep tube workers onside for the games. The consequences for staff and passengers are dire - 953 job cuts and every ticket office on the tube down for closure. Many workers face pay cuts of up to £10,000.

But LU's plans go much further than cost-cutting. Our boss is ultimately Mayor Boris Johnson and he is trying to position himself to lead a post-Cameron Tory Party. Johnson hopes to defeat the National Union of Rail, Maritime & Transport Workers (RMT) in the same way that Thatcher defeated the miners, making his credentials irresistible to the Tories.

Cameron's government is also keen to see a defeat for the union that is widely seen as one of the most militant in Britain. Chancellor Osborne told journalists that he cannot believe his luck that there has not been a more determined trade union response to job cuts and pay restraint but he knows it is coming. A defeat for the RMT would, the Tories hope, discipline the whole working class.

Conversely many workers, whether unionised or not, will want to see RMT defeat Johnson and the Tories' austerity policies. A public cam-

paign, 'Hands off London Transport', has been launched and many passengers are expressing support to tube workers in stations. It is important that this campaign focuses on winning support for the union's strike action. Only determined strikes can stop LU in its tracks. It is important to build public support for the union, which will increase the pressure on Johnson but public opinion will not win this battle.

LU aims to implement cuts over a seven year period. This opens up the possibility of a protracted war with the RMT and the other tube unions, TSSA, Aslef and Unite. TSSA voted to join RMT in dispute over the first of the cuts to be announced, on stations.

United fightback

It is essential that LU is not allowed to take on each section of its workforce in isolation. Given £4.2 billion of cuts are planned and the current proposals add up to £270 million, every grade of worker in every area of LU is under threat. Only a united fightback can defeat Johnson and LU. A victory now for the unions could kill off LU's hopes of making the remaining cuts.

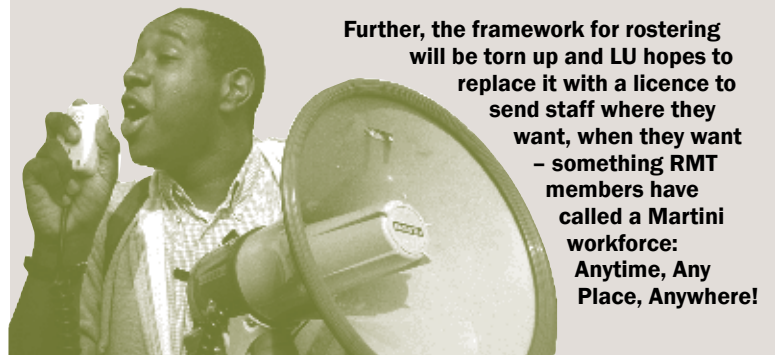
This dispute will be on a different scale to other recent disputes on the tube. The stakes are far higher and preparation for more prolonged and determined action is needed.

The proposed cuts are relatively small in terms of government spending. They amount to around £50 million a year.

Just capping senior pay in TfL to £100,000 would save at least £15 million, nearly a third of the cuts needed.

These cuts will have a massive impact on tube station staff. Many supervisors will lose their grade and up to £10,000pa.

With only three years protection of earnings on offer, almost every ticket seller and control room assistant is likely to lose £5-6,000.



Further, the framework for rostering will be torn up and LU hopes to replace it with a licence to send staff where they want, when they want - something RMT members have called a Martini workforce: Anytime, Any Place, Anywhere!

Members understand this, which is reflected in a bitter mood, but also some trepidation. RMT is conducting local meetings and reps are visiting workplaces across the network. This needs to be stepped up even further in the run up to strike action on 4 February. In particular national officers need to take a lead and help give confidence to members.

Developments in the past week have increased the chances of a

strong show of support for the strike action by train drivers and other grades. Information about a meeting where trainside managers were told about impending changes to drivers' contracts has leaked out leaving the drivers' union Aslef furious. RMT represents many drivers but Aslef retains a small majority. Aslef members should be lobbying their union to join RMT and TSSA's dispute.

The involvement of all drivers

would significantly swing the balance of forces towards the unions while Aslef would have a better chance of preventing the roll-out of attacks on their members by joining with the other unions now.

Engineers have also been threatened with 500 job cuts while both engineering members and those working directly for Transport for London (TfL) have been told that their pensions are under threat. Pensions have the potential to become a major battleground in this war over tube funding.

Cuts avoidance

Talks are now at Acas but LU continues to pretend that it has not identified where 94% of its proposed £4.2 billion cuts will be found. With the announcement of TSSA's yes vote for action more pressure than ever is on LU to start meaningful negotiations.

RMT has put a counter proposal to avoid job cuts and office closures. We have called on LU to campaign for a restoration of the government grant, to reverse outsourcing and to cap senior pay. These measures could save more than LU's plans without cutting jobs or services.

Until the current cuts proposals are taken off the table and LU commits to negotiate seriously, then not only will the strikes on 4 and 11 February go ahead, each for 48 hours, but further action will be called.

Davos summit: World capitalism means increased inequality

Danny Byrne

Behind the headlines and speeches trumpeting 'economic recovery', inequality is so blatant that even the capitalist leaders cannot ignore it. In fact, the recent World Economic Forum (WEF) at Davos showed they are terrified that inequality will lead to mass revolt.

The 'Global Risks 2014' document maps out what the world's political leaders and the planet's biggest business sharks see as the major threats to their system. It includes: "fiscal crises in key economies, structurally high unemployment/underemployment, water crises, severe income disparity, global governance failure, food crises, failure of a major financial mechanism/institution, profound political and social instability".

Bankrupt

The horrendous situation facing young people lays bare the utter bankruptcy of the capitalist system. The WEF document says: "The generation coming of age in the 2010s faces high unemployment and precarious job situations, hampering their efforts to build a future and raising the risk of social unrest... In developing countries, an estimated two-thirds of the youth are not fulfilling their economic potential."

But instead of addressing this perspective, providing jobs and education, recent studies have re-affirmed the investment strike of the super-rich, sucking lifeblood from the economy.

Global accountants Deloitte recently uncovered a shocking \$2.8 trillion cash pile in the vaults of the world's biggest non-financial companies, with five companies alone hoarding the equivalent of the United Arab Emirates' GDP!

So what do these great leaders offer up as a solution to these problems? Their perspective is for continued anti-worker policies and austerity 'sacrifices', this time in or-



Workers' struggles are vital to reverse austerity photo Socialist Alternative

der to make sure that our 'sacrifices' so far did the job!

Beyond Davos and the continued crisis-ridden state of the world economy, the idea of a budding 'recovery' is central to world capitalism's political agenda for the coming year. The ruling classes hope against hope that telling us the worst is over will help to calm the stormy waters of radicalisation and resistance to their attacks.

Even in the austerity-choked countries of southern Europe, workers and youth are being told that 2014 will be the year when their 'sacrifices' (read suffering) at the altar of capitalist markets finally begins to pay off.

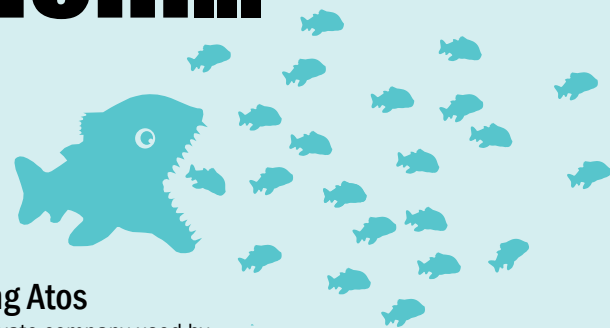
In Greece, workers are asked to rejoice at the "primary surplus" the government and 'Troika' hope to register this year but are told nothing of what good this surplus (mostly based on savage cuts which have sown mass poverty and hunger) will do them.

In Ireland, the government talks of a "victorious" exit from the Troika bailout out of one side of its mouth, while announcing new brutal impoverishing measures, such as water charges, out of the other.

The world economy remains in the deep end, overwhelmed by the contradictions of the profit system. This log-jam can only be lastingly broken by ending the dictatorship of these companies and instead democratically planning the vast wealth they control, thus reorganising the world economy on a socialist basis.

Internationally, ordinary people and the workers' movement can have no faith in an imminent recovery bringing a better life or undoing the damage of the last years. The only 'recovery' capitalism is interested in will be based on axing our rights and living standards. Only a 'revolt' that is organised to fight for socialist change can lay the basis for the economic growth that we so desperately need.

Them...



Not giving Atos

Atos, the private company used by the government to conduct its work capability assessments of disabled welfare claimants, is notorious for accusations of harassing claimants. The latest victim of the government's ruthless 'back-to-work' campaign is Sheila Holt from Rochdale - a long-term sufferer of bi-polar disorder. She was sectioned under the Mental Health Act in December after suffering a breakdown when her income support was withdrawn. Subsequently, Sheila had a heart attack and is in a coma. But this did not stop Atos from sending her another letter reportedly asking why she hasn't found employment!

last year, over 500,000 people have been forced to use food banks in order to properly feed themselves.

Paying the piper

A secretive, elite dining group of Tory donors enjoys direct access to the prime minister and government ministers. Members of the 'Leader's Group' must donate a minimum of £50,000 a year to Tory party coffers. In return they get regular dinners, lunches and drinks receptions with David Cameron and other leading Tory cohorts. Membership of the group is dominated by hedge fund managers and bankers. Between them these puppet masters have donated an estimated £43 million to the nasty party since 2001. This political lobbying culture of the mega-rich will escape the narrow restrictions of the government's mis-named Lobbying Bill, which does, however, further impede the democratic rights of trade unions.

Star ratings

The Chinese 'Communist' party regime's anti-corruption campaign is primarily a political tool to enable president Xi Jinping to win some popularity as the country's wealth gap grows ever wider and to impose greater control over China's vast and unwieldy state apparatus. However, far fewer officials were prosecuted this year compared to the average for the past five years. Amusingly, more than 50 Chinese hotels have asked to be downgraded from five-star to four-star ratings in order to regain business from chastened party officials who are expected to rein-in their conspicuous consumption.

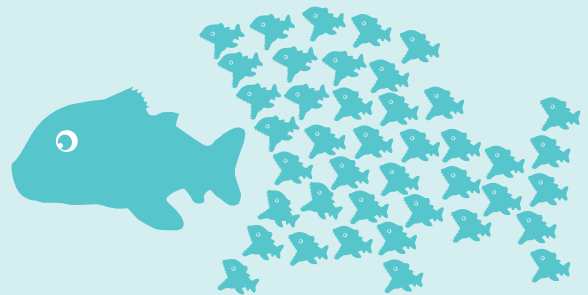
Below minimum

Chancellor George Osborne, having switched to 'election mode', is trumpeting the call for a limited rise in the minimum wage (currently £6.31 an hour) this October. It's part of the government's nonsense propaganda of 'having all endured austerity together, we should now all enjoy the 'recovery' together'. However, the architect of this government's austerity programme is silent on the fact that inspections into employers not paying the minimum wage have slumped from 1,492 before the 2010 general election to a mere 431 last year.

Recovery bull

Osborne continues to hog the media headlines with his economic 'recovery' mantra. He should try selling that bull to GP surgeries overwhelmed with queues of desperate patients booking appointments to claim food bank vouchers. In the

...& Us



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



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Landlords, the real beneficiaries of benefits street

Paul Kershaw

Channel Four's infamous Benefits Street 'documentary' has featured a squalid four-bedroom rented home that is so riddled with damp that water runs down the walls. It has no heating because the boiler has long been broken, and the tenant's children are so frozen at night they sleep with their clothes on.

Government minister Iain Duncan Smith said the programme showed the need to end the 'benefits culture'. But the tenant of this nightmare home, Symphorien Mbuyamba, works full time in a local factory. He pays £215 a week to share this place with his wife, their four children and two teenage nieces.

The Sunday Mirror quotes him: "I have been complaining two years but nothing ever happens. No one has ever been round to carry out repairs since we have lived here. I doubt a penny has been spent on it for ten years or more."

The house is owned by Paul Ni-

schal - an active Tory and friend of former Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher. His property firm, appropriately called Goldfinger, owns three houses in the road featured on television. He reportedly pockets nearly £3,000 a month from struggling residents in the street - most of it in taxpayer-funded benefits. This gives an idea of who paid for Nischal's gated mansion in a smart suburb well away from his tenants.

The Birmingham Mail has reported that another landlord in the street is a Labour councillor and deputy police commissioner, Yvonne Mosquito. It reports that she is paid £65,000 a year by the police and £16,267 by the council and supplements this with her 'property portfolio'.

None of the big parties are shouting about the scandal of welfare dependency in which landlords benefit from the housing shortage by pocketing high rents subsidised by benefits - or low paying employers whose workers are forced to claim benefit. Channel

Four does not air programmes on the moral decline of bankers' families subsidised by tax payer bailouts and tax breaks!

A government acting in the interests of the majority in society would immediately control rents. Rent controls would not even need new primary legislation as the old pre-Thatcher rent act is still on the statute books. They should also introduce a minimum wage people can live off.

They should scrap the £1 billion 'build to rent' fund that further subsidises private landlords and launch a massive programme of council house building.

The mood of anger at politicians expressed in the support that celebrity Russell Brand got for calling for "revolution" is no surprise when no party takes up this sort of programme.

Working class people standing in elections under the banner of TUSC (see pages 6&7) can begin to give voice to this anger in the upcoming local elections.

What we saw



The real benefits street

On Youtube

A video response to Channel 4's Benefits Street from Socialist Party supporters of the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition

Shortcut link bit.ly/1cj3lla

More university strikes against pay cuts - but stoppages must be escalated

Sam Morecroft
Sheffield UCU Education Officer

On 23 January, University and College Union (UCU) members in the Higher Education (HE) sector walked out for a third time over pay since October – but this time it was for just two hours, rather than the previous 24-hour strikes. A further two hour strike went ahead on 28 January. This will be followed by a one-day strike of all three campus unions involved in the dispute (UCU, Unison and Unite) on 6 February.

Reports suggest that hundreds of members walked out of universities. At the University of Sheffield,

around 70 UCU members gathered to protest and picket. It was clear staff were striking because of their anger at the University and College Employers Association's intransigence in insisting on yet another real terms pay cut; offering staff 1% at a time when the HE sector has massive surpluses.

That was magnified at Sheffield by the announcement that Vice-Chancellor Sir Keith Burnett had been awarded a 26.3% pay rise – increasing his already inflated salary to £374,000 a year. Imagine how low-paid and part-time staff feel – we're told there's no money to raise our pay in line with inflation, and yet Sir Keith gets an even bigger slice of the cake!

To illustrate the point, union

members delivered a cake with a '26% slice' cut out to congratulate him, while picketers made do with peanuts – literally.

But members aren't just angry at our greedy university executives – we're angry at our union leadership too. When this dispute started, we were promised a plan of escalating strike action that would see us taking two and three day strikes in January and February. But the UCU leadership has abandoned this plan, citing the need to maintain unity with Unison and Unite.

Now of course our members want to strike alongside other campus unions – this pay dispute affects all of us – but if the leadership of the other unions are not prepared to

support escalating strike action then we must take the lead and appeal to them to join us. Members are ready for this fight, but nobody wants to lose pay over tokenistic action.

One departmental rep told me: "I've never crossed a picket line in 20 years in the union, but I've already lost £400 in this dispute – why should I lose two hours pay for nothing? We need serious action, not empty gestures."

That's why Sheffield UCU has passed a motion demanding an emergency HE conference and a return to the original plan of escalating strikes. Members are ready to fight – but to win we need serious, sustained and escalating industrial action.

PCS leadership elections



Striking against austerity photo Paul Mattsson

The elections for the leadership of the Public and Commercial Services union (PCS) will start soon, with nominations closing on 6 March.

Socialist Party members in PCS are part of Left Unity, which is standing candidates with the PCS Democrats – as the Democracy Alliance.

Socialist Party members who are standing include Chris Baugh for Assistant General Secretary, Jan-

ice Godrich for President and John McNally for Vice-President.

The union's Democracy Alliance-led leadership has a proven track record of opposing the Con-Dems' austerity attacks by fighting for jobs, services and working conditions.

PCS branches are being asked to nominate Democracy Alliance candidates – a full list is available on leftunity.org.uk

More in next week's Socialist.

Land Registry threatened with sell-off

Elenor Haven
PCS national executive committee, personal capacity

The Land Registry has been a part of the UK civil service since 1862. However, a consultation currently underway threatens to remove the vast majority of it from the public sector. All but a small regulatory body would be separated out, leaving it ripe for sell off. It opens the door for a weakening of staff protection and threats to pay, jobs and terms and conditions.

Any privatisation of the Land Registry threatens to undermine confidence in the integrity of the Land Register, which underpins the housing market in England and Wales. The potential for fraud is increased when the profit motive is involved.

PCS general secretary Mark Serwotka has said: "There is absolutely no evidence that this would improve services at what is a well-respected and trusted 150-year-old institution, and senior managers have so far failed to make a coherent case."

"Any perceived benefits in taking what is inevitably the first step towards privatising the Land Registry

are overwhelmingly outweighed by the huge risks involved."

PCS Land Registry vice-president, Dave Lunn, said: "Any move away from the Land Registry's public service status could make it easier to cut terms and conditions, close offices and cut jobs... we are also concerned about the security of the data we hold about property ownership, with fraud more likely."

"This is all a part of this government's ideological attack on public services, punishing public sector workers and the ordinary people that we serve, while preparing a vital national asset for sell off to their mates in the City. We would urge the public to respond to the public consultation demanding that the Land Registry retains its public service status to best safeguard the information we hold on your property and your mortgage."

PCS Land Registry Group is lodging our own response to the consultation and are now considering our campaigning response.

The Land Registry is a public service and should be retained in the public sector with jobs, pensions and terms and conditions protected. No to privatisation of the Land Registry.



NUT activists meet to push for action

The Local Associations National Action Campaign (LANAC) is meeting on 1 February in Leicester. LANAC was set up in 2012 to organise and argue for a fighting programme for the National Union Of Teachers on pay, workload, pensions and working conditions.

Motions for discussion at the conference – and open to amendment – have been publicised on the LANAC website: www.nutlan.org.uk

It will be a vital conference to discuss the plans to build a clear strategy to defeat Gove's attacks on pay, pensions and conditions.

LANAC convenor Martin Powell-Davies points out on his blog

that the meeting will be "right after the next NUT national executive meeting."

"Let's hope that, after that NEC, we will then have a firm date for the next strike action that we can build for."

"However, LANAC has consistently argued that the decisions shouldn't just be about the next action date but should also map out a calendar of action that can show both Michael Gove and our members that we have a serious strategy to defeat these attacks."

For more see Martin's blog on : electmartin1.blogspot.co.uk

NSSN launched in south of England

Trade unionists and anti-cuts campaigners from all over the South of England gathered in Bracknell on 18 January to launch the National Shop Stewards Network (NSSN) in the region. Delegates from Southampton, Portsmouth, Reading, Aylesbury, Windsor, Bracknell and elsewhere gathered in an enthusiastic first conference.

Trade unions members attending included members from Unite, Unison, Ucat, RMT, NUT and CWU.

Bracknell Unite hosted the conference and branch chair Terry Pearce introduced the main speaker, Rob Williams, national chair of the NSSN.

Rob emphasised the importance of building support for the looming campaign by London Underground staff to save ticket offices from closure.

He explained that central to our fight against austerity was the call for the TUC to call a 24-hour general strike.

RMT speakers from the floor explained the importance of the ticket office campaign in London and the fight to protect underground workers' jobs and wage levels.

Other speakers talked about the continuing fight to protect local authority jobs and services.

A Unite member and local anti-cuts campaigner outlined the successful fight to save Bracknell's hospital while a Unison speaker from Hampshire spoke of the need to increase union membership if

fighters to save local services were to be successful.

Val Pearce from Unite, when making a financial appeal, spoke about the history of the trade union movement including the miners' strike and the lack of support from the TUC and Labour leaders.

The financial appeal raised more than £65, which will be used to build the NSSN.

This is just the first step in building the influence of the NSSN in the South of England.

In brief

Ford ballot

Over 5,000 Ford workers are being balloted for strike action in a dispute over job security and pensions. The Unite members are mainly on the production lines in Bridgend, Daventry, Halewood, Duntun (Basildon) and Dagenham. In 2012 Ford cut 1,500 jobs and the union is calling on the company to give some commitments on job security. The workers are also fighting for improvements to their pension scheme, which is currently calculated on the Consumer Price Index, rather than the Retail Price Index.

Government spying

One of the revelations from the publication of government archives is that civil servants participation in industrial action was monitored – this allowed it to hinder their career prospects and block their promotion. This was blurted out in letters from then chancellor Nigel Lawson in 1984, when he conspired with Margaret Thatcher to break the law in this way. Discrimination against strikers contravenes the European Convention on Human Rights and UK legislation.

Shrewsbury pickets



SP member Rob Williams speaking on a Shrewsbury pickets demo photo Harry Smith

The campaign to clear the name of the building workers jailed and punished for participating in a strike is now pushing for the archives concerning this to be published as well. A 100,000 strong petition was presented to Downing Street in December by one of those jailed, Ricky Tomlinson.

Pensioners

At their recent well attended meeting members of Bracknell Forest National Pensioners Convention expressed their support for RMT and TSSA members in their campaign to keep London Underground ticket offices open. After being addressed by Ron Douglas, NPC National President and RMT member, those present unanimously showed their opposition to Boris Johnson's plans. Pensioners are appreciative of the help underground staff provide in helping to understand the zonal system and the wide variety of tickets.

Val Pearce
Chair, Bracknell Forest NPC

Website

For more trade union and industrial news see www.socialistparty.org.uk

Derbyshire 'Old Labour' cuts hurt just as much

Dave Gorton
Chesterfield Socialist Party

Derbyshire county council's recently elected Labour administration has announced £157 million of cuts over the next three years, attacking the most vulnerable in society.

Consultation over the cuts under the innocuous title of the "Derbyshire Challenge" has been launched with the council leader declaring 'we've got no choice'.

Councils do have a choice – fight or capitulate. Derbyshire is following the route of every other Labour council – abject capitulation.

The irony of many of these Labour councillors last year celebrating the 40th anniversary of the Clay Cross council struggle – when councillors held firm against a Tory government – is not lost.

Yet, the majority of Derbyshire's Labour councillors aren't high flying local businesspeople who came to the fore during the Blair years.

Many would class themselves as 'old Labour', mining stock politicians whose parliamentary heroes are the likes of Nye Bevan and Denis Skinner.

But they have no clue how to fight. That is why Unite union leader Len McCluskey's attempts to 'save' Labour are way too late and forlorn – the supposed left wing in the party is not only forbidden under its structures from mounting an effective opposition, it no longer knows how.

'Finishing the job'

With Ed Balls' announcement that a Labour government will 'finish the job' of big public spending cuts, any Labour council that solely puts the blame on a Tory government is being disingenuous. They will be fac-



Standing up for care workers in Derbyshire photo East Midlands SP

ing the same pressures from their own party in government.

£12 million is being cut from the adult care budget. This will include closing day care services, introducing a £5 per occasion charge for using transport to and from daycentres and increasing the level at which adults qualify for council care to 'substantial' need.

The amount people will pay for council care will increase from 50% of their Attendance Allowance/Dis-

ability Living Allowance to 60%, 75% or 90%.

Funding of housing-related support services which help vulnerable people to set up and maintain a home will be reduced.

Funding for personal budgets will be cut. Funding for voluntary sector care providers is being slashed as well. And, of course, there'll be job losses.

£6 million will be cut from the children and younger adults and £7

million from the economy, environment and transport budgets.

These include withdrawing free public transport and other cutbacks for school students with special educational needs, closing seven children's centres and turning off street lights.

At almost every turn, these cuts punish the underprivileged and ordinary working people the most. At the same time the council is raising council tax by 1.99% (to raise

Bristol public meeting: Councillors can fight the cuts!

Monday 17 February

7.30pm

**Council House/City Hall,
College Green**

Speaker: Keith Morrell

Keith is an anti-cuts councillor in Southampton. He was kicked out of the Labour group for sticking to his promises and refusing to vote for the closure of a swimming pool. His campaign was successful and the pool has been saved. He will explain how councillors don't have to implement cuts and can save services.

Organised by Bristol Trade Unionists and Socialists Against Cuts

Contact Tom on 07986 951 527 or tomobaldwin@gmail.com

www.tusc.org.uk

Carmarthenshire council rats

Alec Thraves

A glimpse of the response to the massive cuts to council services in Wales was highlighted this week by the direct action of one Carmarthenshire resident.

After being told that Carmarthenshire county council no longer had a pest control department she caught one of the live rats infesting her property. She took it to the county hall and asked the receptionist to please pass it on to the chief executive!

An unusual and humorous protest but revealing a serious situation when residents in Carmarthenshire cannot rely on council services to prevent the spread of vermin.

However, Carmarthenshire's pest department will not be the only part of council services that will be cut if councillors vote through a package of £30 million of cuts in February! Huge job cuts and attacks on services will be devastating.

Carmarthenshire Unison branch has submitted a 'no cuts budget' to the council and is leading the way in

Wales in preparing to link up local government unions and community campaigners to oppose all cuts to jobs and services.

At the planned council lobbies and protests of next month, residents and workers will be keeping a keen eye on those councillors who are prepared to 'rat' on their constituents and will remember them at the next election.

Unison lobby of Carmarthenshire council executive, Monday 3 February, 8.30am, Carmarthen Town Hall

Leeds Labour breaks bedroom tax promise

Kevin Pattison
Leeds Socialist Party

On 15 January, Leeds city council (LCC) sent bailiffs to a tenant who could not pay his bedroom tax.

This was despite assurances given to two Leeds Labour MPs, Hilary Benn and Fabian Hamilton, and to Labour councillors, by LCC's Labour leadership, that there would be no bedroom tax evictions.

The tenant now has a solicitor and has gained temporary access to his flat to retrieve belongings including

medication and papers, but he has not been allowed to move back in.

He will be appealing against the eviction next week at Leeds county court. Hands Off Our Homes will demonstrate outside to support him and other tenants under threat of eviction.

Discretionary payments

Housing officials did not inform him he could claim Discretionary Housing Payments. We think he has a strong case for DHP. A Labour councillor is now taking up his case.

A freedom of information request shows the council has sent 919 letters to tenants affected by the bedroom tax threatening possession orders. 531 letters were to tenants whose arrears have accumulated only since the bedroom tax was introduced.

It costs over £100 to seek a possession order, which is added to the amount the tenant owes.

The Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) will be standing candidates in the May council election, calling for a "no evictions" policy.

Spelthorne: 'Save our fire stations'

Paul Couchman
Secretary, Save Our Services in Surrey

There was standing room only as 50 people packed a public meeting on Wednesday 22 January to say unanimously: "We want to keep our two fire stations in Spelthorne".

The meeting felt betrayed by absent Tory councillors that have now voted for the cuts despite declaring their opposition only weeks earlier.

There was a lot of discussion about the new 'option five' - one station with one full-time and one on-call appliance.

For the on-call proposal to work, the fire service would have to be able to recruit at least 18 people who live or work within five minutes of the station.

There was unanimous feeling that this proposal was just a way of getting the council's original plans through the back door. Two stations are closed, a new station is built with two appliances but as they can't recruit enough on-call firefighters the second one is withdrawn.

Save Our Services in Surrey has

called for a lobby of the cabinet meeting which will make the final decision on 4 February. We are supported by the Fire Brigades Union and all the major local trade un-

The council's own survey showed 92% opposition to the cuts

ions, two Surrey county councillors, a number of Spelthorne borough councillors and eleven residents' associations.

The council's own consultation, with 1,200 responses (including two petitions,) showed 92% of residents and businesses opposed the cuts. The Save Our Services in Surrey petition, with over 1,200 signatures, will be presented to the cabinet meeting.

**Lobby the County Council Cabinet meeting
12pm - 2pm, Tuesday 4 February
Outside County Hall, Penrhyn Road, Kingston KT1 2DN**

WE NEED COUNCILLORS WHO STAND UP FOR US

TUSC AGAINST CUTS

TUSC local elections conference 2014

11am-4pm 1 February

Indian YMCA, 41 Fitzroy Square, London, W1T 6AQ

See tusc.org.uk

Campaign for the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition in May

Paula Mitchell
London Socialist Party

On Thursday 22 May a little bit of history will be made. Hundreds of working class people – some of them already organised socialists, but many of them ordinary workers, trade unionists, young people, members of their local communities – will stand before the electorate and ask for votes.

It's no easy job to make a stand against the three arrogant capitalist parties. But in May over 4,000 council seats are up for election, and a record number of people are deciding that enough is enough.

The facts recently released by Ox-fam underline how utterly unjust society is. While we are told there is no

has argued for academies. Shadow minister for work and pensions, Rachel Reeves, has pledged that Labour will be tougher on benefits than the Tories and even plans to cut benefits if job seekers don't pass English and Maths tests. When Chancellor George Osborne announced a further £25 billion in cuts, shadow chancellor Ed Balls immediately pledged to stick to the plans if they win the general election.

The May elections will take place after the latest round of budget-setting meetings, when once again councils will be pushing through vast cuts. They are also happening as benefit cuts bite, and people are dragged through the courts or evicted for council tax and bedroom tax arrears.

Importantly they also follow Labour's special conference on the relationship with the unions. This will hear the proposals of the Collins Review into the relationship between Labour and the unions, instigated after Miliband called the police on Unite in Falkirk. Miliband is allowing an incredible two hours for this historic event! TUSC's conference on 1 February will spend more time debating the issue. Whatever the exact outcome of this conference, it will mark the end of the collective voice of the trade unions in Labour.

There will be ferment in the unions as workers discuss what to do. The chance of large numbers joining Labour as individual members is unlikely. It will be harder for union tops to block donations to candidates other than Labour. Pressure inside unions to make the break and take steps towards founding a new party will further increase.

native working class voice. But a wide stand helps our case.

Two successive RMT conferences in 2012 and 2013 have endorsed RMT support for TUSC candidates and the RMT formally appoints representatives to the TUSC steering committee. The steering committee also comprises leading figures from other trade unions.

There have been over 500 candidates, including many trade unionists, since TUSC's launch in 2010. TUSC stood in 37 local council byelections in 2013 TUSC candidates received an average of 5.2% of the vote. (This compares to an average of 6.5% for Green candidates in the same seats.)

These are modest votes at this stage but are a warning shot to Labour and a pointer to the future.

New mass workers' party

More likely after the next general election than before, at some point the massive pressure inside the Labour-affiliated unions will lead to a break.

Whether it's under the blows of a Labour (or Labour-Lib Dem) government implementing austerity, or whether Labour's opposition is so feeble that the Tories scrape back, the floodgates could open and moves to form a new party could escalate.

The TUSC model of organising – on a federal basis, meaning that all participating organisations have a vote but also have the right not to be bounced into anything they don't support – is an important factor in giving serious trade union forces the confidence to take those vital steps.

The Socialist Party argues for unions to disaffiliate from the Labour Party. We are in favour of a conference called by the trade unions to discuss concrete plans to launch a new party based on the organised working class.

TUSC is already an important pointer towards what is possible, and in the 2014 May elections, by mounting the biggest left-wing stand in many years, the Socialist Party believes it can help to speed up the road to a new mass workers' party.

What can councils do?

Refuse to implement the cuts!
Councils can use their reserves and prudential borrowing powers to avoid making cuts this year, while organising a mass campaign to demand that the government makes up the funding shortfall.

What can councils do?

Support free school meals for every primary school pupil (as has been done by the Welsh government and some English councils).

What can councils do?

Build council homes now. Use councils' borrowing powers for capital spending to build council homes, while campaigning for the government to divert its subsidy for private developers to finance a mass programme of public housing.

Campaigning to get fighting socialists re-elected

Southampton

In 2011 council workers and their supporters fought a prolonged battle against the Southampton Tory council's vicious cuts to pay, jobs and services. Over one million bin bags covered the city's streets but the city stood with the council workers. Throughout that strike, councillors Keith Morrell and Don Thomas attended picket lines, demonstrations and mass meetings to support the strikers and take their fight to the Labour group on the council who refused to back the workers.

In May 2012 the Tories were kicked off the council. Under the pressure from the strikers Labour promised they would be different, "Your friend in tough times!" sang their candidates. Yet within two months they put forward their first budget to cut jobs and services, including the local swimming pool in Keith and Don's ward. Business as usual, capitalist politicians breaking their promises.

Keith and Don refused to betray their supporters for their political careers and refused to vote for cuts. With the support of their community, the trade unions, anti-cuts campaigners and the Socialist Party, Keith and Don fought a battle to save jobs and services, to oppose the closure of their local swimming pool and won.

They did this because it's what they always do, it is why they stood to be councillors. Keith and Don have a long record of standing by their community. When the Tory council tried to close a local old people's home, Erskine Court, in 2010, Keith and Don stood with the residents and told the council they had a fight on their hands. They mobilised hundreds of people in a ring of steel around the home and forced the council to retreat.

Just a few weeks ago when the local bus company cut a service to an area of the ward with high numbers of elderly residents who relied on the bus, Keith and Don helped to collect 600 signatures to restore the route. They fought and won again.

In 2013 they proposed a budget to protect all jobs and services by using the council's legal powers to access prudential borrowing, paid for through reserves to balance the budget. In November they moved a motion calling for the council to organise a city-wide anti-cuts conference of the community and the trade unions to mobilise support to fight the government for the return of money stolen from the city since 2010.

While anger at pro-capitalist, pro-cuts

politicians is at a record high, Keith and Don have won support and respect for the simple fact of doing what they promised. They have principles they won't break and for that they have shown you can win even in the toughest of times.

Our communities urgently need more socialist fighters like Keith and Don, which is why we will be standing TUSC candidates again across the city in May as well as campaigning to ensure Keith is re-elected to the council.

Nick Chaffey
Southampton Socialist Party

Coventry

Coventry Socialist Party is organising for TUSC to stand in all 18 of the Coventry council seats up for election this May – including Dave Nellist in St Michael's ward, fighting to retake the seat.

We are basing our campaign across the city around key demands of: no austerity, a £10 an hour minimum wage, a mass programme of house building and job creation, scrap the bedroom tax and cap rents. These demands are part of our wider programme, 'A Socialist Coventry City Council' explaining what we would fight for and implement, which we are launching in February.

Our campaign is attempting to draw as much involvement as possible from our wide base of supporters and more than 3,000 voters across the city, built up over many years. We have started our 'campaign for 100' to sign up over 100 volunteers to our 'Socialist Campaign Team' who will help leaflet, canvass, collect nominations, raise money and a host of other stuff, to build the socialist fight this May.

Despite our absence from the official council chamber since Dave lost his seat in 2012, the Socialist Party in Coventry has only increased its presence and maintained support across the City. We never stopped organising opposition to the devastating austerity measures being implemented by the Labour council in Coventry and by the Con-Dems nationally, while constantly raising socialist ideas.

Our candidates are some of the best class fighters in the city with workers and youth from the RMT transport workers union, the Communication Workers Union, Unite the Union and the public sector union Unison, as well as students from Coventry and Warwick universities.

Lenny Shail
Coventry Socialist Party

What can councils do?

Restore full council tax benefits and discounts, to be funded from council reserves not council tax rises, and campaign for government to reimburse councils that do so.

What can councils do?

Refuse to implement the Bedroom Tax. Write off all Bedroom Tax-related arrears, withdraw all court proceedings and eviction orders where the Bedroom Tax has been a factor and call on housing associations to do the same.

What can councils do?

Use councils' powers to exclude firms that have participated in blacklisting from tendering for public contracts (as has been done by the Welsh government and several UK local authorities).



Southampton councillors Keith Morrell and Don Thomas protesting against the closure of their local swimming pool
photo Southampton Socialist Party

Rent control now!

Waltham Forest has been ravaged by cuts from the Labour-led council and the Con-Dem government. 700 council jobs have been axed since 2010. Services like libraries and children's centres have been butchered. Eviction proceedings are in progress against people who haven't been able to pay the bedroom tax.

Waltham Forest TUSC is aiming to stand for every council position this May, contesting 60 seats. We have teachers, firefighters, tube workers and community activists on our list. We're saying no to all cuts and privatisation.

We're also, with our campaign 'Rent Control in Waltham Forest', highlighting some ways that things could be dif-

ferent if we had councillors willing to fight.

The private renting sector in the borough, like across London, has ballooned – from 18% of households in 2001 to 32% now. Rents are sky-rocketing but for young people, recent immigrants and many others, there's no other option. 25% of council housing stock has been sold off since 2000, 20,000 households are on the waiting list and last year house prices rose more than anywhere else in the country.

This year the council is planning to introduce compulsory licensing for private landlords. If used properly, this could allow the council and the community to have real control over the rip-off private rental sector. Why should landlords who let overcrowded, substandard accommodation at outrageously high prices be given licenses?

Waltham Forest TUSC candidates are standing on a promise that if elected they

would build a mass campaign to win:

- Rent control to bring private sector rents in line with social housing rents
- Rent councils to democratically decide what's really affordable
- A programme of council house building and renovation to meet growing need
- Bring all housing association stock and housing services back in-house
- Axe the bedroom tax and halt all associated court proceedings

Whether elected or not we're planning a big campaign to win these demands and think local people will be enthused to get involved. The election in May will be the perfect platform to raise the demands and show what support there is for the idea of public representatives who understand and fight for what local people want and need.

Sarah Wrack
Waltham Forest Socialist Party
See www.walthamforesttusc.com

Phone 020 8988 8777 to pay by card, to arrange a direct debit, or to join

New mineworkers' strikes in South Africa

Workers and Socialist Party calls for democratic control of the action

The ongoing struggle of mineworkers in South Africa for a R12,500 (£900) a month minimum wage has exploded into strikes in the platinum mines once more - called by the Association of Mineworkers and Construction Union (Amcu). It was while striking for this same demand in 2012 that 34 miners were killed by police at Marikana. Out of the anger and political discussions that followed emerged the Workers and Socialist Party (WASP), also involving the Democratic Socialist Movement (sister organisation of the Socialist Party). This is an edited version of WASP's statement on the latest strikes.

WASP supports the platinum wage strike. However, we are supporting the call of the rank-and-file Rustenburg leadership for the immediate resurrection of the independent strike committees to lead the strike and place it firmly under the control of ordinary mineworkers.

WASP has consistently argued that winning R12,500 will require drawing in every section of the mineworkers through a programme of rolling mass action. In the first instance this means pursuing a strategy to win over the remaining National Union of Mineworkers (NUM) membership.

It will also require mobilising the mining communities and youth in support of the strike. The mining communities' demands around service delivery have to be linked to the mineworkers' wage demands. The mineworkers will need to call for the formation of support groups across the country and for national demonstrations, solidarity strikes and ultimately a general strike to force the mine bosses to concede.

Linking up with the National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa

(Numsa) will be crucial in the aftermath of Numsa's special conference which took the decision to cut ties with the governing party, the African National Congress (ANC).

To our knowledge the Amcu leadership has done none of this. But the mineworkers can rapidly make up the ground that the Amcu leadership has abandoned and adopt a strategy that will maximise the chances of victory.

Unfortunately, the Amcu leadership has taken a sectarian approach to sections of the mineworkers not under their banner. This includes the condemnation of the NUM-led strike in the gold mines in September and the call by the Amcu leadership for Amcu members not to support this strike.

In contrast WASP called on Amcu to throw its weight behind the strike to expose and undermine the treacherous NUM leadership and win mineworkers away from them. This would also have maximised the pressure on the gold mining bosses for the best possible wage deal for all mineworkers, regardless of union affiliation.

Numsa president Andrew Chirwa was invited to address an Amcu mass meeting before the strike by a local Amcu branch, with the expressed consent of the national Amcu leadership. But the same Amcu leadership then intervened to prevent him speaking.

On 20 January, WASP hosted a press conference to give a platform to rank-and-file Amcu leaders from Rustenburg voicing the concerns of key organisers and members at the Impala, Amplats and Lonmin mines. We gave these workers' leaders a platform to respond to the accusations levelled against them by Amcu president Joseph Mathunjwa at a mass meeting of mineworkers in the Rustenburg platinum belt. Mathunjwa named eight rank-and-file Amcu leaders he accuses of seeking to "destroy" the union, "having tea with [South African president] Zuma", taking money from government, demanding and taking bribes, starting a new union and bearing responsibility for the defeat of the Amplats strike against retrenchments early last year. One of the workers named was immediately assaulted by a group of workers.

Need for structures

There is no credibility to these accusations. The real reason for the witch-hunt is that these workers have been at the forefront of calling for the democratisation of Amcu and the accountability of its leadership, including Mathunjwa.

Among the complaints is the Amcu leadership's failure to organise even basic democratic structures in Rustenburg that would give workers a genuine voice within their own union. WASP has been drawing attention to these problems for several months. The democratic struc-



A meeting of striking miners in 2013 photo Sean Figg

tures that do exist - shop stewards committees and branches - are frequently side-lined on the issues that are most fundamental to the labour movement: the calling and control of industrial action.

On the surface, the mass meetings called by the Amcu leadership, at which votes are taken, can seem democratic. But these meetings amount to a 'rule by referendum' passed down from the top for approval rather than a genuine democratic discussion and debate where elected and accountable workers' representatives pass mandates up to the leadership.

After Marikana

The eight named by Mathunjwa are among those who led the independent strike committees that coordinated the strikes in the wake of the Marikana massacre. In fact Amcu owes its entire position in the platinum belt to these comrades and others like them. The majority of the mineworkers in the platinum belt had sustained betrayals at the hands of the NUM, not least in Marikana itself. These leaders took workers into Amcu, expecting and demanding an entirely different regime to the one they abandoned in the NUM.

Such is Mathunjwa's ingratitude for their role and suspicion of the workers' desire to control their own destinies, that he is prepared to incite workers to attack those who have always heroically defended the interests of the mineworkers and the working class in general. Any responsibility for new divisions among the mineworkers lies squarely with the Amcu leadership.

There are rumours that a new union has been founded in the mining industry out of the differences in Amcu described above. If this is the case, then it is a confirmation of the erosion of support for the Amcu leadership in the short space of time they have 'led' in the platinum belt.

Those workers' leaders at the WASP-hosted press conference remain Amcu members and are not part of this initiative. But they did not lift Amcu out of obscurity only to capitulate to Mathunjwa's clique. Out of the strike they and WASP will demand the democratisation of Amcu and its reorganisation as a democratic and worker-led trade union.

Preparation

The R12,500 demand was first raised by the independent strike committees in the course of the 2012 struggle. It is entirely justified and entirely possible, despite the mine bosses' protests of its unaffordability. It is winnable only on the basis of careful preparation by the mineworkers and the working class as a whole.

The platinum bosses have prepared for a long strike, stockpiling platinum for the world market. The share prices of the three main platinum producers actually increased on news of the strike! This is a vote of confidence by the vulture capitalists in the platinum bosses.

WASP has consistently and determinedly argued for the unity of the mineworkers and rejected the use of violence, the sectarianism of the Amcu leadership and the treachery of the NUM leadership. This championing of all mineworkers, rather than just the section organised under Amcu's banner, has led Amcu leaders to slander WASP. For example they regularly assert that some of our members wear red t-shirts, the same colour as the NUM wears, because WASP (and DSM) are enemies of the mineworkers and want them to return to NUM!

The R12,500 will be a central demand in WASP's 2014 election campaign and WASP invites the independent workers' committees to nominate candidates to stand for election under the WASP umbrella.

Viva the mineworkers, viva!

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:



Israel: Historic movement of asylum seekers and refugees

Anti-democratic legislation criminalising asylum seekers provokes strikes and mass protests

Nof Azran, *Socialist Struggle Movement (CWI Israel/Palestine)*



Spain: New Abortion Law a crime against the freedom, health and life of women

A question of gender and class

By Marisa Cabal, based on a longer article by Victoria Lara of *Socialismo Revolucionario (CWI in Spain)*



New website for Socialist Alternative

The co-thinkers of the CWI in the US have launched a new website following the victory of their member, Kshama Sawant, in the Seattle City Council election in November

socialistalternative.org

Donate to the Workers and Socialist Party

WASP is appealing for international labour movement support. Messages of support and the publicising of the campaign will be vital. But what is most crucial is the funding necessary to wage an effective election campaign. The money for the election deposits alone is R605,000 (£38,000). In total we need to raise R2 million (£125,000).

Please write cheques to "South African Miners Fund" and post to South African Miners' Solidarity, PO Box 66682, London E11 9ER or transfer funds to the account details below.

Name of account: Wasp
Bank: Absa
Branch: Gandhi Square
Bank address: 180 Commissioner Street, Johannesburg, 2001
Branch code: 632005
Account number: 4081935745
Swift code: ABSAZAJJ
If asked for a Clearing Code please use: 632005
If asked for Recipient's Address please use: 33 Yster Crescent, Eldorado Park, Johannesburg, 1812
For the reference please put: your country + the name of your organisation. Please send an email to appeal@workerssocialistparty.co.za to notify us to expect the donation and so we can send confirmation of receipt and a message of thanks.

the Socialist postbag

Do you have something to say?

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

We shall overcome

Pete Seeger is best remembered for popularising "We shall overcome" and for his role in anti-fascist and anti-capitalist action. He performed with Woody Guthrie in the 1950s and marched with Occupy Wall Street protesters in his 90s, leaning on two canes. He wrote or co-wrote If I Had a Hammer, Turn, Turn, Turn, Where Have All the Flowers Gone and Kisses Sweeter Than Wine. He renounced Stalinism in 1951 but that did not stop the McCarthy witch-hunters from attacking him. They knew perfectly well that the Communist Party was not the main enemy. The working class and all those who fight for them were. The establishment have sought to make Seeger 'safe' by heaping him with praise now that he is safely dead. They hated him like poison when he was fighting against them. Take to time to relisten to some of his work. He is an inspiration to young and old. Anyone who wants a role model for a resilient lifelong fighter need look no further. We shall overcome.
Derek McMillan

Municipal vandalism

The bankers and financial spivs who bankroll the Tory Party can't believe their luck at the acquiescence of Liverpool's councillors in implementing the latest round of cuts. Labour councillor Barry Kushner gives a devastating condemnation of Con-Dem policy where the city will lose £329 million a year and 45% of its children are brought up in poverty. The level of municipal vandalism is breath-taking. It is an appalling dereliction of duty that not one councillor has voted against the cuts. Edward Heath's Housing Finance Act was defeated by Labour councillors voting against it and campaigning with tenants. Labour councillors voted against and assisted in organising the mass movement which defeated Thatcher's Poll Tax. Liverpool's socialist council in the 1980s implacably refused to implement cuts. People are entitled to demand that this Liverpool Labour council should refuse to implement any further cuts. Reserves



should be used to set a needs budget. A mass campaign of demonstrations and industrial action, could link up with like-minded councillors and trade unions in other cities to compel the Con-Dems to retreat. The fightback must start now.
Tony Mulhearn, Liverpool

Who's standing idly by?

I am for some reason on the mailing lists of diverse groups and MPs. A recent mail from Labour came from Gloria de Piero, Shadow Minister for Women and Equalities, asking for a 'yes' or 'no' vote on

whether I'd "noticed daily costs (eg bills, transport, childcare) rising in the last year?" There is only the yes/no option. Anyone voting "no" is either so rich that money means nothing, or an accountant deals with their bills. Labour says the "government continues to stand idly by while working people struggle". The government is not "idle," It is hell-bent on making our lives harder to try to drive up profits and cut tax bills for the rich. Labour is standing idly by. It offers only continued austerity then says 'vote Labour in 2015'. On the basis of their record in government and what they say in opposition, a religious person might think praying for change is a safer bet. I think fighting for a working class, socialist alternative is the only answer. I am looking forward to Gloria's next enquiry, perhaps about the impact of cuts implemented by Labour councils?
Sue Powell

Planet divided

Just 1% of the world's population controls nearly half of the planet's wealth, says a new study by Oxfam. This tiny slice of humanity controls \$110 trillion, or 65 times the total wealth of the poorest 3.5 billion people. The world's 85 richest people own as much as the poorest 50% of humanity. The tabloid press led on a story about Coronation Street when this news was released.



70% of the world's people live in a country where income inequality increased in the past three decades. Governments have been making "hard choices." But they were not all that hard for the millionaires. In the USA the gap between rich and poor has grown at a faster rate than in any other developed country. Oxfam is remembered as a safe charitable concern collecting money for the poor while the rich get richer. But the political elite has completely failed to address this issue. The Labour Party used to have Equality at the heart of its professed philosophy. Now it is indistinguishable from the Conservative Party. Labour's leadership and their apologists say "socialists cannot win elections." That is why socialists world-wide have hailed the victory of Kshama Sawant in Seattle. A socialist campaign can win in the heart of the United States. Fighting for the working class, fighting against poverty is more effective than writing to your MP!
Michael McDillon

Rubbish politics

A recent leaflet from my local Tory Party asked people to take part in a survey on whether wheelie bins should be introduced in Birmingham, one of the last British cities to introduce them. So similar are Tory policies to those of the ruling Labour that wheelie bins are about the



only political difference. They declined to seek people's views on bin bags being ripped to shreds by the local animal population and rubbish being deposited on the street as a result, which is what happens when you don't have wheelie bins. The fact that wheelie bins are the biggest issue between the major parties shows that all the major parties' policies are rubbish. It also shows why a new mass workers' party is needed.
Clive Walder

Inequality fears

A chronic gap between rich and poor is growing wider, the World Economic Forum (WEF) warns. Even as many countries start to recover, the WEF's annual assessment of global dangers concludes that income disparity and attendant social unrest are the issue most likely to have a big impact on the world economy in the next decade. The WEF warned that there was a lost generation of youth in the 2010s who lack jobs and in some cases adequate skills for work, fuelling pent-up frustration.
Nigel Buckley, Plymouth

Curb City gamblers

Huge City bonuses are still being paid out (the Socialist, 794). The financial sector caused the recession. The banks caused wages for everyone else to fall or stagnate as a result of City gambling. Any sane government would stop the pay-outs and tax the bonuses. Linda McQuaig and Neil Brooks highlighted in their book, 'The Trouble with Billionaires', the need for a much more progressive tax system that demands more of the wealthy. They defend the welfare state too in an age where the media and Tories demonise those who need support, often as a result of the recession. We need facts to fight this Con-Dem madness.
Graeme Kemp, Wellington, Shropshire

Labour link

At my Usdaw (shopworkers' union) branch, the 'Labour link' proposition, calling for a special conference to discuss our union's affiliation to Labour has been ruled out of order! I have been through the rule book and my understanding is that, even though they criticise the wording of the proposition it still would have been rejected as it seems to be against the rules to even discuss ending affiliation to Labour! So the rules have to be changed, which can only be done in a rule change year, the next one after this year being 2016 but of course we can't discuss the link the same year as a rule change. So we wouldn't be able to propose the same proposition until 2017! It's unbelievable, so blatant and undemocratic.
An Usdaw member

A waste of a Friday evening



Not long ago Welsh First Minister Carwyn Jones was saying there was no downgrading of the NHS in Wales. Now he says there will be no "massive cuts" to the NHS in Wales photo Becky Davis

Ronnie Job

Much against my better judgement I was persuaded to attend Radio 4's Any Questions on Friday night (24 January) along with other comrades from the Socialist Party. From the start it was obvious the discussion would not reflect the issues and struggles of local people. I couldn't imagine any representative audience of such a working class town as Neath giving a Tory a prolonged round of applause! Our panel had Liberal Democrat Lord Steel, obviously selected to comment on the Lord Rennard case, though he had little to say on that. His stock answer to everything else was: "I'm not qualified to comment on that." Also we had Tory Boris Johnson clone, Michael Fabricant. Meanwhile, providing Welsh accents (if not fundamentally different politics) there were Jill Evans, Plaid Cymru MEP and Labour First Minister, Carwyn Jones. Only a handful of questions were chosen for debate and none of the ones we submitted. Not one question selected even touched on the destruction of council services and the cull of council jobs currently taking place in Wales. But these cuts will have a more devastating effect on the Welsh economy, Welsh workers and working class communities than even the 'Tories' pit closure programme. These cuts, like those now taking place in the NHS in Wales, began with decisions of a Tory/Liberal Democrat alliance in Westminster which were then passed on by a Labour Welsh Government. The Welsh budget that parceled out the cuts was agreed with Plaid Cymru and the Liberal Democrats, who had themselves entered into an agreement to speak and negotiate on the budget with one voice. All four parties represented on the panel had a hand in cuts to council ser-

vices and half the councils in Wales implementing them are Labour-led. Discussion on why education in Wales is by some measures, poorer than that in England, was limited to the pros and cons of teaching through the medium of Welsh. No one mentioned what must be the two most significant factors for educational under-achievement, higher levels of poverty and lack of resources put into education. No party seemed to want to defend their own records on the NHS. Instead the debate degenerated into an argument over whether health cuts are more devastating in England or Wales. Not long ago Welsh First Minister Carwyn Jones was saying there was no downgrading of the NHS in Wales. Now he says there will be no "massive cuts" to the NHS in Wales.

Massive cuts

What Carwyn means by "massive" isn't obvious but the effects of his government's NHS cuts are becoming clearer and clearer for communities across Wales, like the 1,000 people who protested at the loss of special baby-care services at Withybush hospital in Haverfordwest on 26 January. Friday's programme confirmed that workers, trade unionists and working class communities need a party of our own. None of these politicians represent our interests. They argue about which services to cut and which workers should pay with their jobs for a crisis not of our making. But they all have a hand in devastating cuts - whether they're vicious cuts, hypocritical cuts, hand-wringing cuts or Welsh cuts is irrelevant. I may have had worse Friday nights out (I can't remember any off-hand) but at least my determination to build the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition in Wales was strengthened.

Debate on the environment

Don't ignore carbon capture and storage

The European Union Framework for climate and energy conference recently agreed, after much wrangling, only a timid response to the threat of climate change. Their resolution merely hoped for a 40% cut in carbon dioxide (CO2) emissions by 2030 and to produce just over a quarter of Europe's energy by renewable sources.

The capitalist class and their profit-driven system cannot produce an environmentally friendly energy system and will probably obstruct even these timorous plans. The working class movement has to work out an alternative.

In this feature, as a contribution to this debate, Blair Smillie and Pete Dickenson discuss whether clean coal and carbon capture and storage (CCS) can play any role.

Blair Smillie

As the great grandson of Robert Smillie, the great miners' union leader from 1912/22, I wonder what he would feel like if he could see the destruction of an industry which once fuelled the country through two world wars, and with the miners' dependents, represented 13% of the UK population.

He may wonder why, with over 1,000 coal plants planned throughout the world, we are not exploiting the reserves of coal in this country which are proven to be able to supply us for the next 200 to 300 years.

He may agree with scientists that CO2 (carbon dioxide) helps to create global warming and indeed he would also be backing the need for efficient carbon capture and storage (CCS). I think he would be terrified of nuclear which is supposed to be 'clean' yet the spent uranium will hold grave danger to the world for 500,000 years.

I am sure he would not agree with windmills spoiling our coasts and countryside, unless, and I repeat, unless they were cost-effective and

efficient. So that brings us back to two words 'coal' and 'miners'

These two words scare the devil out of politicians. It is well seen why they're intent on not discussing the issue of CCS and the possibility that reopening our coal mines and employing thousands of men and in turn reviving our mining communities. No it is easier for them to ignore the fact that although the Don Valley CCS project in South Yorkshire was seen by Europe as our 'best hope' to fuel our country at much lower cost than nuclear and renewable energy, it still involved keeping our pits open.

Imported dangers

Let's then look at the danger we face as a country reliant on imports of coal and uranium:

- Uranium is now becoming much harder to find. They're having to go deeper to source supply for an ever increasing world market.
- Coal is presently imported from Russia, Columbia, USA and even South Africa. Have any of our politicians been down a South African or Russian mine? I very much



Coal stockpiles photo Sharon Loxton

doubt it and if they had been they would see the horrendous conditions which these people have to work in. Why do you think it is cheaper to ship coal half way across the world with the resultant waste of energy? It wouldn't be so bad if they chose to build their ships here and they help to save our ship building industry!

- We do not control the pricing and as the suppliers are capitalists, the knowledge that we have closed down the access to our own coal,

will no doubt trigger price rises.

- The development of China and India with their planned 750-plus coal powered plants under construction, are we going to have priority, no I don't think so.

We need to build our mining industry again where the creation of jobs is paramount. We need to work to develop ways to make using coal in the energy market safer for our country and then we need to export that technology throughout the world.

The only way forward is clear, well-informed discussion about energy and the way ahead, I always remember the last paragraph in Robert Smillie's book *My Life for Labour* published in 1924.

It was: "By far the struggle in life is greater than the successes." There will be an energy crisis in the future. Now is the time, when the mining industry is hanging by a thread, to struggle to breathe new life into it for the sake of our children and grandchildren.

Jobs, safety and the environment are the big issues

Pete Dickenson

Blair Smillie's letter makes some useful points about how capitalist energy markets operate against workers' and consumers' interests. Quite correctly, he points out that carbon capture and storage (CCS) could have the potential to be part of a green energy strategy.

I certainly hope that Robert Smillie would have agreed that carbon dioxide causes global warming because the evidence is now overwhelming. I also agree that the dangers of nuclear power are terrifying, but I don't think windmills are undesirable as an eyesore.

The often justifiable complaints from local communities could largely be resolved by building wind farms off-shore; in my opinion these developments, such as the one off the Kent coast, are not a great blot on the seascape. Some may disagree, but I think it is an acceptable price to pay to tackle global warming.

There are safety issues to be resolved before CCS could be adopted, but even if these were sorted out, I cannot agree that 'clean coal' should be at the centre of a green energy programme.

At most, it could play a useful auxiliary role in British climatic conditions. In countries where the

weather is favourable to using solar power for example, I cannot see any justification for adopting clean coal.

And it looks as though there is no chance that CCS will be introduced anyway. As a result of the age of austerity, Cameron's rhetoric has moved from 'vote blue to go green' to 'dump the green crap'.

No obligation

The government still supports CCS in theory, but the energy bill being debated in Parliament only has the proviso that at some unspecified future point, coal plants must be able to demonstrate that carbon capture and storage technology could theoretically reduce their emissions by some unspecified amount.

In other words, generating companies will effectively have no obligation to spend any money on CCS when they build new coal-fired power stations.

I do not necessarily agree that CCS is cheaper than renewables - it is very difficult in capitalist economic terms to be precise about the cost of a technology such as CCS not yet developed and implemented, in a constantly changing and anarchic market.

It is probably true though that CCS would be cheaper than nuclear once the huge hidden and open subsidies for that industry

are excluded. The capitalists will go for the cheapest option where they can, but they also have political considerations.

As Blair Smillie's article implies, the ruling class is wary of developing the coal industry for political reasons linked to the miners' historic role in the class struggle. This is why the government chooses to import large amounts of cheap coal rather than develop a local coal industry.

For the bosses, profit will ultimately come first, but for the labour movement jobs, safety and the environment are key issues. With CCS, there are real safety issues associated with storing carbon dioxide for an indefinite period in the future.

Several years ago in central Africa, CO2 escaped from the bottom of a lake due to natural causes and because the gas is heavier than air, it rolled across the surrounding area suffocating thousands of people.

As stored CO2 builds up, as a result of CCS, a way will have to be found to keep it safely. It will never be possible to release it, because to do so would recreate the problem of global warming.

More research

This issue needs to be fixed through more research before CCS should be used, especially since tried, tested

and safe forms of renewable energy already exist. The main renewable resource in Britain is wind power.

People often ask what will happen when the wind stops blowing? This is where CCS could play a role, in providing back-up power for the relatively rare occasions in the UK when there is insufficient wind.

Whether CCS is eventually used

should be based primarily on a consideration of environmental and safety issues, which is very unlikely to happen with our present profit-based system.

Only when power is taken out of the hands of the capitalists by a workers' government will it be possible to resolve this issue in the long-term interests of society.

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SUPPORT THE TUBE WORKERS' STRIKES

No closure of ticket offices - stop job cuts - no compromise on passenger safety

Rob Williams

The battle lines are being drawn ahead of the tube strikes which start on 4 February. It promises to be the most polarised industrial dispute in London for decades.

Tory London Mayor, Boris Johnson, wants to axe 950 tube workers and close all Underground ticket offices (having previously campaigned against closures), regardless of the safety implications and the service provided to the travelling public.

But the unions have come out fighting. RMT and TSSA have voted for action by big majorities. And they have enormous potential power - transport workers can bring London to a halt. The planned strikes will show the whole country that workers can resist austerity. So we have a duty to support them.

The right-wing, red-baiting press have been trying desperately to find ordinary people prepared to denounce the RMT and the TSSA but without much success.

What they can't understand is that most working class people and even many middle class commuters have been hammered by the Tory cuts, including massive train fare rises, and are glad that someone is prepared to fight back.

The daily rush hour experience of millions who crowd onto the Underground is one of packed city centre trains and stations where there isn't enough staff now.

At Victoria station, for example,

commuters are forced to queue in sections to get into the Underground station and then again onto the platforms.

When trains or signals break down, it's management who are rightly blamed, not the workers. After all, it was London Underground management's decision to outsource a £350 million contract for the fitting of new signals to Bombardier which, despite pulling out part way through, will still get paid £85 million. Because of the incompetence of the privateer-loving management, it has now been admitted that £100 million of taxpayers' money has been lost!

Support

The National Shop Stewards Network and the Socialist Party give their full support to the tube workers' fight. We are confident that millions of workers will be firmly behind them as well.

Back in November 2011 the public responded positively to the mass strikes and trade union protests to defend workplace pensions. It showed that people will support workers and their unions who are prepared to fight back against cuts imposed by the bosses and this government.

But the trade unions can go a step further. This strike is about facing up to yet another tranche of government austerity cuts. Before Christmas teachers, lecturers, probation workers and civil servants all took action to defend jobs, pay and the essential public services



London Underground transport workers are defending jobs and a public service photo Paul Mattsson

they provide.

We call on all unions, particularly those in dispute, to immediately meet with the RMT and TSSA unions to discuss how industrial action can be coordinated. The rail transport unions must link up with

the bus drivers who also, in effect, work for Transport for London and who, through a solid strike, won a bonus payment for extra work during the 2012 Olympics.

In this strike, perhaps more than any other since this government of

the fat cats came to power, it's time to decide: 'Who's side are you on?'

We're clearly on the side of the tube workers. We call on the rest of the trade union movement to make that stand as well and ensure that they don't fight alone.

see page 2 for more

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 45 countries.

Our demands include:

PUBLIC SERVICES

- No to ALL cuts in jobs, pay, 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!