

Greece:  
Syriza  
announces anti-  
austerity policies  
See  
page 2

# the Socialist

www.socialistparty.org.uk

5-11 February 2015

Issue 842

Price: £1 (Solidarity: £2)

## Struggling to live on low pay?



# GET ORGANISED AND FIGHT BACK

Geraint Thomas

None of my workmates at the major supermarket I work for would be surprised by the latest figures from the Institute for Fiscal Studies think tank. While employment has officially returned to its pre-crisis level, real-term hourly wages are down on average 4.7% compared with before this financial crash. 'Shocking!' says the press.

But for working class people this just confirmed what we already knew. Many of us have been hit by below inflation pay 'rises' year on year, particularly harshly affecting those of us in our 20s who've lost a

staggering 9% from our pay.

At my work, overtime's hard to come by, to say the least. Meanwhile the workload itself doesn't get any lighter. One colleague is using a pedometer and has been clocking an average of 10-15km a day!

When we get home the troubles don't stop: rent, bills and food costs make even single living a struggle, never mind supporting a family. And that's those of us 'lucky' enough to have hours on our contracts. For the millions on zero-hour contracts the winter is often the time when work stops and you've got no chance of paying your bills.

A massive chunk of the fall in wages is down to younger workers having no option but insecure, low-hours work, with pay at or

barely above the pathetic minimum wage. 20% of jobs created in the first three months of 2014 were this type of work, compared to 4.5% in 2013.

Yet there is a way forward. In the USA low-waged workers have been rising up in spectacular fashion for better pay, terms and conditions - striking and demonstrating for \$15 an hour and trade union rights. There's no reason why workers here can't do the same to fight for a minimum wage of £10 an hour. Bosses like to pretend that there's nothing we can do but workers have the power to bring the CEOs to their knees.

The Socialist Party calls for all workers, especially young workers, to join trade unions and join the fight to improve our lives.

Join a workplace union, or even work to set one up. If your union's pally with management, help fight to change it. Fight for better breaks, safety at work, and higher wages. Only by struggling together can we win.

**Join Youth Fight for Jobs:**

- ▶ [www.youthfightforjobs.com](http://www.youthfightforjobs.com)
- ▶ Text JOIN plus name and postcode to 07749379010
- ▶ [youthfightforjobs@gmail.com](mailto:youthfightforjobs@gmail.com)
- ▶ [@youthfight4jobs](https://twitter.com/youthfight4jobs)



photo Paul Mattsson



PO Box 24697, London E11 1YD • telephone: 020 8988 8777 • email: [info@socialistparty.org.uk](mailto:info@socialistparty.org.uk)



# the Socialist

The paper of the Socialist Party. Issue 842.

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

## Greece: Syriza-led government announces anti-austerity policies

**Niall Mulholland**  
Committee for a Workers' International

The new Syriza-led government has announced a series of policies that will come as a huge relief to Greek workers after years of brutal austerity measures that have driven many into penury. The new measures include restoring the minimum wage to pre-crisis levels (€750 a month); raising low pensions; abolition of hospital visit fees and prescription costs; ending the forced sale of homes of people who cannot keep up with mortgage repayments; scrapping planned privatisations (including the energy sector, airports and docks); re-employing public sector workers who have been sacked; abolishing the civil service 'evaluation' system which was created in order to provide continuous layoffs; re-establishing ERT as the state broadcaster and reemploying its workforce; and providing citizenship for children of immigrants born and raised in Greece.

### Dignity

Although these measures have to be passed through parliament, Greek workers feel that, at last, their self-confidence and dignity is being restored. The symbolism of Alexis Tsipras being made Prime Minister, without a religious oath, and his visiting a monument to communist fighters massacred by the occupying Nazis in 1944, is not lost on workers either.

All together, these initial meas-

ures (limited and partial as they are) fly in the face of decades of harsh neo-liberal so-called 'consensus', and the pro-austerity agenda of the eurozone and bosses' EU. These reforms are the by-product of the herculean mass struggles of Greek workers over several years, including over thirty general strikes. Although this did not prevent massive cuts, due to the role of conservative union leaders, it did politically radicalise millions of workers, preparing the ground for this major electoral upset.

The Syriza government's initial announcements also expose the

**These reforms are the by-product of mass struggles of Greek workers over several years**

craven position of traditional parties across Europe, including the former social democratic parties. When in power they carry out austerity and other anti-working class measures on the supposed basis that there is 'no other choice'.

Predictably the markets reacted negatively to these measures, with stocks in Athens falling to lows not seen since the worst of the debt crisis. It is reported that Greek deposit outflows sped up last week to €11 billion for January. Government ministers sought to downplay the prospect of a clash with creditors.

The Greek Communist Party (KKE), trying to excuse its sectarian approach (which saw it refuse to



"Good night, Ms Merkel!"

form a coalition government with Syriza) dismissed the reforms as mere 'peanuts'. While the new announced measures do not amount to a socialist programme - which would include repudiation of the debt, heavily taxing the rich, imposing capital and credit controls and the state monopoly of foreign trade, and taking the commanding heights of the economy into demo-

cratic public ownership - they will be very positively welcomed by workers in Greece and across Europe. These developments will act as a boost to the anti-austerity opposition in Spain, Portugal and Ireland, in particular, even bringing forward elections in some countries.

The EU ruling elites are reportedly astonished because they had reckoned on a 'centre-right' government coming to power in Greece, which would have continued the policy of conceding to the demands of the Troika (ECB, EU and IMF). But Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras came to power under pressure from the working class to carry out his basic pledges of cutting Greek public debt, raising wages and halting spending cuts. He claims that all this can be done while remaining in the euro but European leaders have warned ahead of negotiations on Greece's debt that Tsipras will have to choose which of those goals to aim for.

### Debt

Greece has about €320 billion of outstanding debt. It has to refinance Treasury bills on 6 February, of around €1 billion and another €1.4 billion on 13 February. Syriza said it does not seek confrontation over the debt and will seek a deal over rescheduling repayment. Is it possible that Germany's Chancellor Merkel will agree to negotiations that give some leeway to Athens? Merkel is under domestic pressure not to 'waste' more money on bailouts but also faces a European ruling elite increasingly divided over the best way forward. The Governor of the Bank of England recently criticised the results of the Troika's policies and warned of another 'lost decade' in Europe. As an

indication of the stagnant situation facing the eurozone, the European Central Bank was compelled to launch a bout of quantitative easing (money-printing).

Even if Merkel is prepared to make some concessions to Athens regarding debt repayment schedules and some debt relief, there will be strong political pressure from ruling parties across Europe not to give too much to Greece. They fear it would set a precedent that would threaten to unravel the whole austerity 'consensus' and create 'political contagion', giving a massive boost to anti-austerity opposition across Europe.

### Referendum

Prior to his election, Tsipras said if no deal can be made with Brussels and there is an attempt to force Greece out of the eurozone or if the EU attempts to stop Syriza's anti-austerity measures he will call a referendum.

It is not just a question of polls or parliamentary arithmetic. As the response of the markets and EU governments to Syriza's measures show, the ruling elites will fight every concession or reform for the working class. Even if Merkel and the European ruling elites have to grudgingly concede to Syriza's new measures, they will come back at a later stage to try to wrest away these gains, and in the meantime will work to destabilise, undermine and tame the Syriza government. Winning and maintaining even limited gains for the working class requires that they are part of a struggle for a full socialist programme and that the working class is mobilised, in the workplaces and communities, to challenge capitalism and to appeal for solidarity with workers across Europe.

## Why did Syriza and KKE fail to reach agreement?

**Translated extract from Xekinima (CWI Greece) website [dated 26 January 2015].**

Syriza has formed a coalition government with the Independent Greeks, a party that emerged from a New Democracy split and is faithful to the capitalist system. Syriza's cooperation with such a party is a dangerous trap!

Syriza moved in this direction after having invited the Greek Communist Party (KKE) to discuss the possibility of some form of collaboration in forming a left government. The KKE refused, including a clear and public refusal to give a vote of confidence to a Syriza government.

### "Ideological"

The KKE justifies this refusal on the basis of "ideological and political differences". But what prevented the KKE saying yes to working with Syriza under certain conditions?

It could have proposed, as a minimum for cooperation/vote of confidence, a series of measures such as the reinstatement of the minimum wage, of pensions and

labour relations, investment in education and health, for an end to privatisations, for the renationalisation of all privatised public services, for the banking system to pass to the ownership, control and management of the workers etc. (Some of which the Syriza government has actually promised to start carrying out.)

The KKE could have given a vote of confidence to the Syriza govern-

**What prevented the KKE saying yes to working with Syriza under certain conditions?**

ment, as long as it carried out pro-working class policies, but at the same time maintain its full political and organisational independence. The Syriza leadership would thus have had no 'justification' (or alibi) to turn to the populist, right-wing Independent Greeks.

At this stage, many Greeks regard coalition with the Independent Greeks as the only option for

Syriza and that the KKE leaders contributed towards this outcome. But it will be unstable.

### Popular policies

In the initial period, the Independent Greeks will probably agree to a number of popular policies - already the coalition government is in the process making a series of reforms welcomed by the working masses - but the central differences that will come up, sooner or later, will be around the fundamental character of the capitalist economy and the interests of the rich elite. It will be about the policies that tax wealth, that 'hit' the profits of the businesses and the multinationals, let alone nationalisations and workers' and social control.

There must be a struggle within Syriza, and from the left and workers outside it, for Syriza to adopt a bold programme that will consistently serve the interests of the working classes and the middle layers that are being crushed by the Troika policies. That, in essence, means a socialist programme.



# Stop toxic fracking

Hugh Caffrey

Hydraulic fracturing or 'fracking' - the environmentally toxic extraction of shale gas and oil - is banned in numerous countries and widely opposed in Britain.

Instead of investing in renewable energy and energy efficiency on the basis of democratic socialist planning, the energy industry and its financial backers want to frack as widely as possible across Britain because of the apparent short-term profits on offer.

The pro-fracking lobby led by big businesses and their politicians is nevertheless trying to push ahead, with David Cameron even offering extra money to local councils if they grant permits for fracking.

Lancashire county council nearly became the first local authority in England to actually reject an application by a fracking company, when its planning officers recommended not giving Cuadrilla four permits to drill across two sites because of concerns about noise and traffic.

Hundreds of protesters, including Socialist Party members, demonstrated outside the council's Development Control Committee, calling for the permits to be refused and for fracking to be rejected.

Labour MPs are split over the issue, but are clearly not opposed to fracking. By abstaining in a parliamentary vote on 26 January, Labour ensured that even a moratorium on shale gas exploration was defeated.

However, shortly afterwards the Scottish National Party announced that fracking would be put on hold in Scotland until a public consultation has been held.

## Decision postponed

Cuadrilla demanded a postponement of the decision in Lancashire and was granted it for at least eight weeks. Delays cost the fracking companies money, but they are using the time to lean on the politicians to grant the permits on the



basis of "additional information".

Further delays are not impossible. With elections in May many local and national politicians will not want themselves and their parties to be seen as blatantly pro-fracking so soon before facing the electorate.

As growing political pressure coincides with the collapse in the oil price and doubts among the financial backers of fracking over the potential profits, the fracking 'industry' has never been in so weak a position.

If one local authority denies permission to frack, this will give an enormous boost to anti-fracking campaigns and communities elsewhere. The limited decision in Scotland will add to the pressure on politicians south of the border.

Every anti-fracking campaign comes up against the pro-fracking main parties. We need an alternative. The Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) fielded hundreds of local candidates last May and this year is standing 1,000 council candidates and 100 parliamentary candidates, all opposed to fracking.

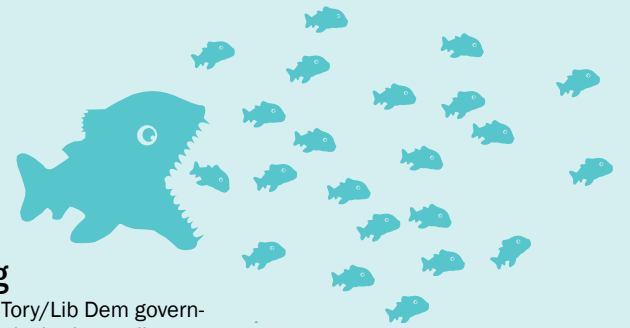
In Salford, in local elections following the Barton Moss protests, Greater Manchester, TUSC made opposition to fracking a major part of its election campaigns.

Unfortunately, Green Party candidates didn't even raise the issue, although many members and candidates are committed to opposing fracking. However, we need a party that everywhere is opposed to fracking and willing to build a mass movement of opposition based in the communities and trade unions.

The Socialist Party says:

- No to fracking. Local authorities should refuse to take the bribes, and refuse to grant permits to frackers!
- For a mass movement of opposition, involving local trade unionists, residents and community campaigns, to blockade fracking sites.
- Take the profit motive out of energy production and distribution. Socialist public ownership and democratic control of the 'big six' to plan energy production, distribution and pricing.

# Them...



## Uncaring

Labour and Tory/Lib Dem governments have slashed spending on elderly care by 20% over the last decade. £1,188 was being spent in 2003-4 per person over the age of 65. By 2013-14 that had fallen to £951.

staff. Last year the government stole £400 million from the basic need budget to plug a gaping £800 million hole in the free schools scheme.

## Black gold to virtual gold

Apple, the technology corporation, announced record quarterly profits in the last three months of \$18 billion, higher than oil giant ExxonMobil's previous quarterly record set in 2012.

Currently, Apple is sitting on \$178 billion in cash - enough to run the National Health Service. But despite all this money the hi-tech giant only paid £11.4 million in British corporation tax in 2013-14 despite sales of £10 billion.

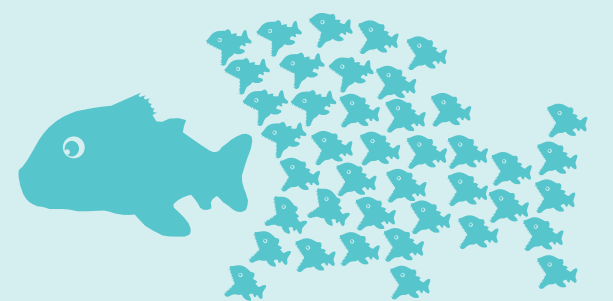
## Rising homelessness

Ten empty homes for every homeless family in England. That is the shocking headline underlining the steady rise in homelessness since 2011 after nearly a decade of decline. Some 60,940 households were placed in temporary accommodation last September while 635,127 homes lay empty. House building is at its lowest since the 1920s.

## Social cleansing

The Tories will reinforce their twisted social cleansing housing policy if reelected in May. As well as abolishing housing benefit for 18-21 year olds (see page 5) Cameron and Co intend to lower further the benefit cap by £3,000 a year, making unaffordable every three-bedroom social home provided by one housing association in the entire south east of the country. Moat housing association added that under the cap all two-bedroom homes would become unaffordable within six years. However, Tory welfare minister Iain Duncan Smith won't have any difficulty continuing to reside in his multi-bedroomed country mansion as it comes rent-free courtesy of his aristocratic family connections.

# ...& Us



Have you got news for the 'fishes'? Email: [editors@socialistparty.org.uk](mailto:editors@socialistparty.org.uk)

**Join the fightback! Join the Socialists!**  
[socialistparty.org.uk/join](http://socialistparty.org.uk/join) **020 8988 8777**  
 text 0776 1818 206 @Socialist\_party /CWISocialistParty

# Death, taxes and energy profits

Dave Carr

Energy companies' rising profits can be added to Benjamin Franklin's famous remark that the only certainties in the world are death and taxes.

Ofgem, the toothless industry watchdog, reckons the 'big six' energy giants will squeeze an average household profit of £114 next year (up from £105), despite wholesale energy costs falling by 30% in the last 12 months.

As usual, the big six protest that they're cutting consumer bills. But this comes after years of huge price rises and, typically, most of the bill reductions will occur after the worst of the winter weather, when energy demand begins to fall.

According to government statistics (the most recent are from 2012)



some 2.28 million households were experiencing fuel poverty. However, under the previous definition of fuel poverty - ie spending 10% or more of income to heat your home - some 4.5 million households were affected.

Many people are having to choose between heating their homes or eating properly. Many also are in working households.

It shows that this government is doing next to nothing to assist cash strapped families while the cash tills

continue to ring for big business.

Labour, eyeing the forthcoming general election, says it will give Ofgem powers to force energy companies to cut gas and electricity bills if wholesale prices fall, as well as freezing energy prices for 20 months.

The latter promise begs the question as to how Labour would prevent companies, before and after the price freeze, ramping up domestic bills if wholesale energy prices marginally increase? Clearly as long as the big six companies remain privately owned, controlling prices will prove to be elusive.

The obvious solution to setting affordable prices is to nationalise the major energy companies as part of an overall economic plan of production. In other words, you can end fuel poverty by socialist measures.

**Socialism TODAY**

The Socialist Party's magazine

The February issue includes:

- **Britain's tipping point election**
- **Are the Greens an alternative?**

£2.50 including postage:

**Socialism Today** PO Box 24697, London E11 1YD.  
 Subscribe for £18 a year at [www.socialismtoday.org](http://www.socialismtoday.org)



# Fighting for one London bus pay rate

As we go to press, London bus drivers are due to ramp up strike action with three days of action on 5, 13 and 16 February demanding sector wide negotiation (SWN). These days follow their first successful walkout on 13 January.

**A London bus driver** told the Socialist why they are fighting for SWN.

SWN will give us the chance to get all London bus companies around one table to thrash out one pay scale and one set of terms and conditions for all London's bus drivers.

Since privatisation, operating companies win route contracts by setting the lowest bid. There are other factors involved but usually the lowest bid wins. Resources like buses, fuel, buildings, infrastructure and rents all have set costs. So the operating companies cut pay in order to make a profit.

We have all seen attacks on our pay, terms and conditions with below inflation pay rises and an increase in the working day. Bus drivers are £2,000 a year worse off than seven years ago.

Arriva recently introduced a £9.30 starter rate which lasts for eight

years before moving on to a higher grade. By clipping the top rates and introducing lower top rates they effectively drive down our wage.

SWN would stop this race to the bottom by firstly setting a minimum acceptable wage, in effect bringing up the pay of the newer drivers close to, or the same as, the higher earners.

## Better for all

Then we can get a common set of terms and conditions based on the best that are available. Only then will we be able to negotiate a better rate for all London bus drivers. We have to bring the bottom earners up to stop the higher earners going down.

Many people ask: 'How much are



At the Clapton garage picket in Hackney on 13 January photo Paul Mattsson

we going for?' It's impossible to say because, by the time all this is in place, wage deals will be ongoing. But it will be better than where we are now.

In training we are told that we are professionals, have a long his-

tory and a noble profession. So why are we not treated with respect? Transport commissioner Sir Peter Hendy says bus drivers are paid different levels dependent upon their skill level. But if I change employer my skill level disappears out

of the window and I go to bottom rate again!

It is time to make a stand, say enough is enough, and fight for a better future by getting one wage and one set of terms and conditions for us all.

# FBU recall conference: escalate pensions action!

On 10 February, the FBU firefighters' union is holding a recall conference over its pension dispute with the government, which is insisting on increasing firefighters' retirement age from 55 to 60 from April 2015.

**A West Midlands firefighter** spoke to the Socialist about the conference.

## Why is the recall conference taking place?

It's to decide the next step in our campaign following a parliamentary early day motion (EDM) vote over firefighters' pensions.

The EDM saw a debate about our pensions scheme and the industrial action that the FBU have taken. Unfortunately we didn't win the vote.

It's time now for the recall conference to get the views of the members nationally about where we go from here and what will win

the campaign.

**At the parliament debate, fire minister Penny Mordant gave 'guarantees' over firefighters' job safety which helped push the vote in favour of the government. What were these promises and is there any truth to them?**

Mordant said that no firefighter would be sacked for not being able to make the minimum fitness requirements. All the FBU's evidence shows that fitness declines with age,

particularly between 55 and 60. On the government's own figures 66% would face dismissal for not being fit enough.

But the FBU has written to every fire authority in England to find out if those guarantees are in place. Many fire authorities have replied saying that there is no legal guarantee that a fire fighter won't be sacked. Penny Mordant has misled parliament.

## Has anything else been offered?

Originally, before we took industrial action, there was a 21.8% reduction in pensions if you retired at 55. When we decided to strike that was changed to 47%. Last year it was offered at 21.8%. That's the only offer - it wasn't a revised offer as it was put on the table before.

## So what action could the FBU now take?

I think most firefighters want to escalate the action. The recall conference should register that the government has been forced by our members' action - but only in words.

Only by calling more strikes can this be really guaranteed.

The precise tactics have to be hammered out in the conference and then campaigned for amongst the members. We have to get over to them that a real victory can be won.

Many NHS workers are fighting for the new pay offer to be rejected. But the planned 29 January health strike was able to squeeze some concessions out of ministers, showing that action can win.



photo Steve Score

## National Gallery workers walkout against privatisation

National Gallery workers in the PCS union started their five day strike against privatisation on 3 February. The London gallery plans to hand over all visitor services to a private company, part of bosses' plans to privatise almost all staff. Private security firm CIS has already taken over one wing of the gallery without any

competitive tender or consultation. The tourist attraction has also gone back on a promise to introduce the London living wage of £9.15 an hour. It is now the only major museum or gallery in the capital that pays some staff below the rate. The day before the strike, management suspended a senior rep on

the negotiating team for sharing a document that showed privatisation costs with a full time union official. PCS thinks reps have a legitimate right to involve officials on a matter of strong public interest. PCS general secretary Mark Serwotka (below left) spoke to the gallery's picket by Trafalgar Square.



photo Rob Williams

## Ferry workers win pay and conditions battle

### A Greenwich Unite member

Unite members working on the Woolwich Ferry have scored a big victory against Briggs Marine who run the boat service on behalf of Transport for London.

A number of grievances had been outstanding for some time, with no prospect of the employer ever intending to reach an agreement. Workers were angry at pay disparities, cuts to sick pay (with one worker who has cancer receiving a demand in the post for overpaid sick pay!), use of agency staff and the lack of an inflation matching pay increase. A meeting finally took place involving regional officials, at the request of the membership. At this meeting, the employer refused, point blank, to move on any of the issues raised by the union.

Previously, management stated they did not care about a strike ballot and nor did Transport for London. The 100% yes vote for strike action soon changed this.

First the employers attempted a puny legal challenge, which was robustly rebuffed. Then they claimed that there had been some confusion as to what we were asking for.

So we met them again and spelt it out. Over the course of two meetings, every demand was not just discussed fully and openly, every demand was conceded by the employers.

### Agreement

The agreement is for a 2.2% pay rise, no cuts to sick pay, agency staff usage to be reduced with permanent staff being offered the hours instead and pay disparities to be addressed, by agreement with a target date of 1 May on the basis of no pay cuts.

The union also demanded a goodwill gesture where, in the run up to 1 May, interim payments would be made in two particular areas where pay disparity was a significant problem - and the employer agreed. As one worker pointed out, we should have added the nationalisation of the company under workers control as a further demand!

This is a great win for Unite, showing that standing together with the right strategy and a campaign led by the members can win. The ferry workers were fully backed by their Greenwich Unite branch, which is led by Socialist Party members and has a tradition of successful struggle.



**nationalshopstewardsnetwork**  
www.shopstewards.net

Get your latest trade union news with the National Shop Stewards Network bulletin.  
Sign up at: [bit.ly/16sZJxm](http://bit.ly/16sZJxm)

**Come to the NSSN conference:** Saturday 4 July, Conway Hall, Holborn, London WC1R 4RL. Put the date in your diary now!



# Londoners march for homes



photos Paul Mattsson

## Paul Callanan

Average rents in London have now reached an eye-watering £1,160 a month. Council house waiting lists are ballooning. Evictions are on the rise.

Anger at this situation is felt particularly keenly by young people who also have to contend with endemic levels of low pay and huge student debts. This was reflected in the youthful make-up of the capital's recent March for Homes, with marchers largely drawn from 'generation rent'.

In total around 5,000 Londoners converged on City Hall on 31 January demanding a genuine solution to the capital's housing crisis. The march demanded rent control and council house build-

ing. It was called by a coalition of housing campaigns and anti-cuts groups including the Socialist Party.

Among the protesters were residents from the New Era estate and Focus E15 campaigners who have led important struggles over housing in the past year. There was also a visible trade union presence, particularly from Unite the Union's housing workers branch, which organised a successful strike at the St Mungo's housing charity at the end of 2014.

The Socialist Party and the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) have been to the fore in local campaigns for the demands that the demo was called around. Nancy Taaffe, prospective parliamentary candidate for TUSC in Walthamstow, spoke

from the platform at Shoreditch saying that we have to use "all the weapons in our armoury" including strikes, protests, occupations. Nancy said that ultimately we have to build a political vehicle for workers and youth which will fight for a programme to solve the present housing crisis.

The march was met with huge levels of support from by-standers. As the South London leg of the march snaked its way around Southwark's working class estates, people on the streets spoke about their increasing resentment at gentrification pushing up rents and forcing working class families out of the area. Many people signed up to find out more about the Socialist Party having seen our members' lively participation in the march.

## "These cuts will sink us further into poverty" Hands off our housing benefit!

### A young renter

The government's plan to abolish housing benefit for under-21s has demonstrated, once again, how sorely out of touch they are with reality. For those of us who have fled from home due to abuse, overcrowding or because they are not welcome, among many other reasons, these cuts will sink us further into poverty.

Cameron defends this proposal, saying that it will fund 300 apprenticeship places but those targeted by these measures are in no position to benefit from this. Just 2% of young people supported by youth homelessness charity Centrepoin have access to apprenticeship schemes.

### Vulnerable

Far from living a life of luxury with parents who will always have a room for them, figures show that young people are hit harder than ever by the housing crisis. 8% of under-25s report that they have been homeless during the last five years and the number of under-25s sleeping on the street has more than doubled over the last three years.

From personal experience, I know that the family home is not always the welcoming place the Tories would have us believe. I left home when I was 19 to escape a controlling and emotionally abusive family. Trying to have a social life and become independent was emotionally draining so in the end, I had to leave.

I am now 21 and I receive no sup-

port of any kind from my family. I will soon graduate from university and start looking for work. If I do not walk into a job, housing benefit will be vital.

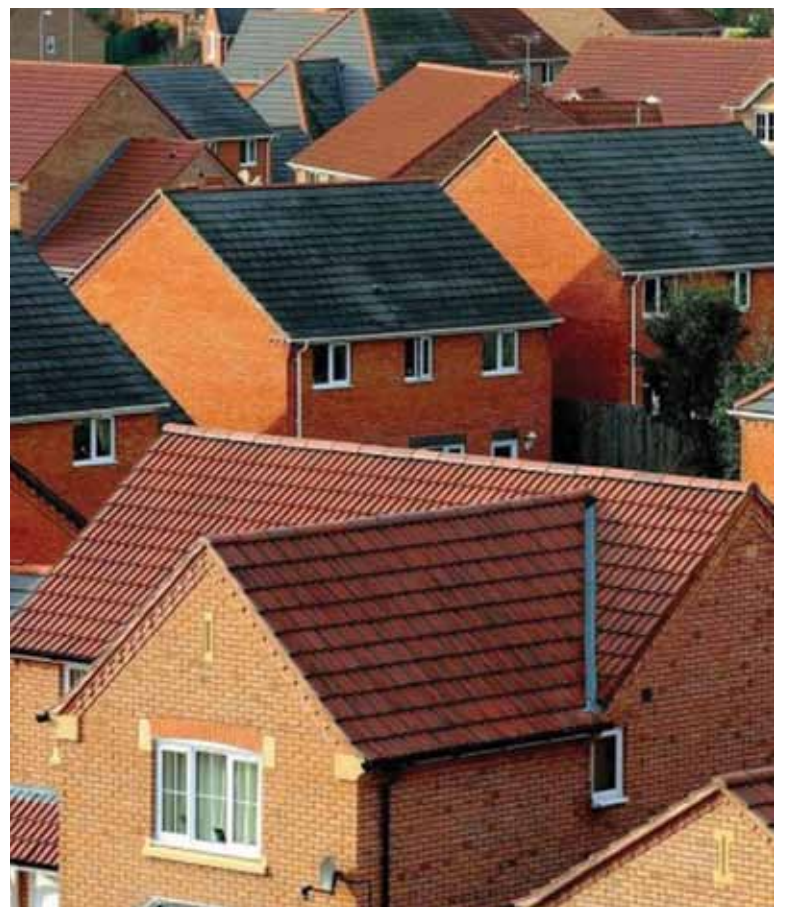
# 8%

of under 25s report that they have been homeless during the last five years

It is from people like me that the government wants to steal a lifeline which would tide us over during those in-between periods and times of financial hardship. I have friends who have suffered horrific abuse and neglect and who have had the courage to leave home. They have done so only to find that the government wants to condemn them to doing several poorly paid jobs on zero-hour contracts to make ends meet.

The government tries to give the impression of prioritising jobs over homes when in fact they are looking for another way to attack the vulnerable and bully them into non-existent jobs.

There is enough money in the pockets of big business and the super-rich to fund the apprenticeship scheme and to ensure that a generation of young people does not have to endure homelessness and poverty. Why doesn't the government start looking there?



## Election appeal 2015

The Socialist Party is appealing for £50,000 to help fund our candidates for the 2015 elections, as part of the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC). On Sunday 1 February members at our South East regional conference pledged an excellent £4,478.

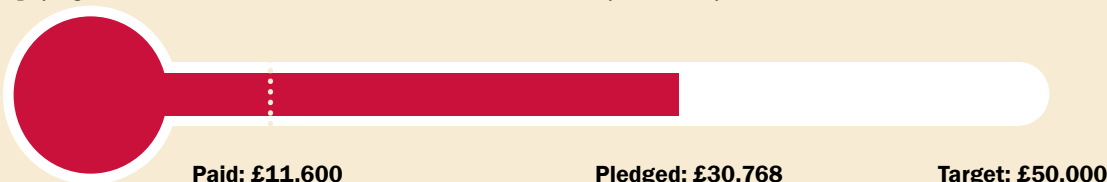
This takes us just over halfway to our target on pledges. Over £12,000 has been paid in. Many members are paying a week's income in instal-

ments over several months, others are paying what they can afford. Every donation, large or small, is vital to help us get the anti-austerity message across in the next three months.

Thanks to all who have donated so far including Ian Reynolds £30, Derek Evans £150, Neil Stonelake £70, Mia Hollsing £300, Cormac Kelly £40, Elizabeth O'Hara & Simon Kaplan £50, Jane Ward £30, Chris Pickett £250, Joyce Newby

£2,000, Geoff & Kate Jones £200, Rob Williams £150, Heather Rawling £200, Nathan Perrin £20 and Pete Dickenson £320.

**You can donate on www.socialistparty.org.uk/donate, phone 020 8988 8777 to make a card payment, or post a cheque made out to "Socialist Party" to PO Box 24697, London E11 1YD. Please mark your donation "election appeal 2015".**



**Subscribe now!**

[socialistparty.org.uk/subscribe](http://socialistparty.org.uk/subscribe)

020 8988 8777

text 0776 1818 206 @Socialist\_party /CWISocialistParty



# CUBA: Diplomatic relations with USA restored, embargo eased

## CAPITALIST RESTORATION THREAT ACCELERATES

**Tony Saunois**  
Committee for a Workers' International (CWI)

As 2014 drew to a close, 2015 was ushered in by US President Obama and Cuba's Raul Castro announcing a series of historic agreements.

These restored diplomatic relations between the two countries, relaxed travel restrictions and took the first steps towards the easing of the trade embargo which had been imposed since the revolution in 1959-60. The release of prisoners held by the Cuban regime, including US nationals, and Cubans held in the US has already taken place.

This represents a decisive shift in the policy of US imperialism towards Cuba. It also signifies a further step by the Cuban regime towards capitalist restoration, which has been unfolding for a number of years.

These announcements are the culmination of secretive talks between the two governments which have been taking place in Canada. Negotiations involving the right-wing Canadian government and the Pope have been crucial in brokering the current agreement.

Obama made these announcements recognising that "You cannot keep doing the same thing (for more than 50 years) and expect a different result". The European ruling classes, Canadian and much of Latin American capitalism took a different approach - one which Obama has now adopted.

Raul Castro made the announcement and urged that Obama be awarded the Nobel Peace prize! As US president he has carried out more drone attacks than George Bush!

### Embargo

Since the Cuban revolution in 1959-60, US imperialism has enacted a strict embargo and undertaken various attempts - including armed intervention in 1961 - to overthrow the Cuban regime and restore capitalism.

Despite the crippling consequences of the embargo, estimated to have cost the Cuban economy \$1 trillion since its enforcement, this policy has failed. This was mainly due to the deep social roots and support for the revolution. It was a policy which was also geared to winning the political support of the Miami Cuban exiles who fled from the revolution.

Now US imperialism is adopting a new policy of beginning to lift the embargo. The threat of capitalist restoration to an isolated workers' state can come not only from the threat of military intervention. As Trotsky warned in relation to the former USSR, it can come in the form of "cheap goods in the baggage train of imperialism".

The objective of US imperialism is the same, but now they hope to reach it by a different route. They intend to flood the Cuban economy with goods and investment with the objective of fully restoring capitalism.

This change of policy by US imperialism has been facilitated by a change in outlook within the exiled Cuban community. While previously wedded to support for the embargo and a struggle

to overthrow the regime now, according to some opinion polls, 52% of Cubans living in the USA support ending it. Sections of the capitalist class, like the sugar magnate Alfy Fanjul, have pronounced in favour of lifting the embargo, eyeing the prospects of new markets within a capitalist Cuba.

The devastating economic situation in Cuba means many Cubans are dependent on remittances they receive from families in the USA. An estimated 62% of Cuban households now receive support from abroad. According to some economic estimates, they sustain an incredible 90% of the retail market.

The dire economic situation in Cuba has been disastrous for the masses. The massive social gains conquered as a result of the revolution and overthrow of capitalism have been eroded, particularly since the collapse of the former USSR. Wages in Cuba today are estimated to be worth only 28% of what they were then.

### Regime

Yet support for the revolution and opposition to capitalism and US imperialism meant that the Cuban regime, incredibly, was able to maintain the planned economy and bureaucratic regime throughout the 1990s (the 'Special Period') and into the early part of the 21st century. This was despite the tidal wave of free market capitalism which dominated the world economy.

The regime was also able to sustain itself politically using the US embargo which fuelled hostility to US imperialism. The arrival of Hugo Chavez to power in Venezuela also brought it breathing space through its supply of cheap petrol and oil.

The lack of genuine workers' control and democracy and the consequential bureaucratic mismanagement and corruption further aggravated the economic and social crisis caused by the embargo and isolation.

The revolutionary convulsions which swept Venezuela, Bolivia and Ecuador at the beginning of the century offered the prospect of Cuba breaking out of its isolation.

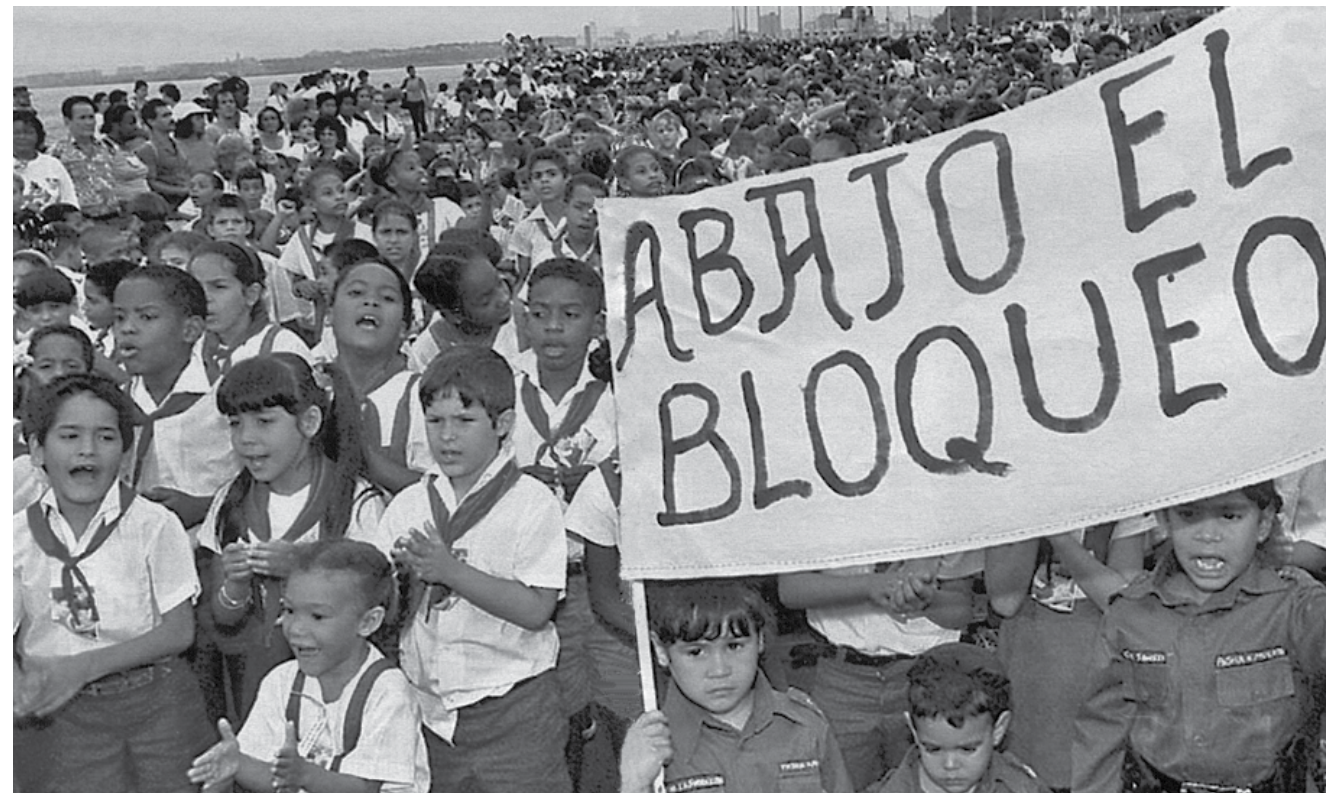
A genuine workers' democracy would have seized this opportunity and taken the steps necessary to try and form a socialist federation of these countries.

This could have allowed economic co-operation and planning between them and could have begun to appeal to the working class of the whole of Latin America by offering an alternative to capitalism.

However, unfortunately, neither the Cuban bureaucratic regime nor the reformist leaderships of Morales, Chavez and Carrera were prepared to do this. The latter three have remained trapped within capitalism despite initially introducing reforms and taking some measures to encroach on the interests of the ruling class and imperialism.

The Cuban regime, on the other hand, introduced a series of incremental steps beginning the process of capitalist restoration. These latest developments suggest a further step in this process.

Although the easing of travel restrictions will be welcomed, other measures represent a threat to the remaining gains conquered by the revolution. These were



Cuban schoolchildren protest against the island's trade blockade by US imperialism



The two leaders shake hands having reached a deal to normalise relations



Former Cuban president Fidel Castro (left) with his brother Raul

already being eroded and dismantled.

The new labour code represents a serious attack on workers' rights. The age of retirement was raised by five years in 2008.

### Convertible Peso

The introduction of the 'dual currency' exchange, whereby some workers are now paid in dollars, vastly exacerbated inequality between those paid in dollars and those in pesos. The regime created the 'convertible peso' pegged at 1:1 with the dollar, used in the tourist sector and for imported products.

Local products use the local peso which is worth a fraction of that. The government announced its intention to scrap this dual currency but this has not so far been implemented.

This has inevitably boosted the black market. The government established a target of removing over one million workers from the state sector and allowing the establishment of thousands of small and medium sized businesses; 500,000 licenses have already been issued to 'cuentapropistas'.

However, these have centred on small businesses like restaurants. The number of workers employed in the private sector has increased from approximately 140,000 to 400,000 since 2007. This is significant but still a minority out of a total workforce of over five million.

A bridgehead for capitalist restoration has been developed in the tourist sector, which has been the centre thus far of foreign investment from European, Canadian, Brazilian and, more recently, Chinese enterprises.

Prostitution, banished from society following the revolution, is now back on the streets of Havana, especially in the tourist areas.

Special Development Zones have been opened, like the building of a new port facility in Mariel Bay - financed by investment from Brazilian and Singaporean capitalism. This was with a future eye on

the ending of the US trade embargo and also to capitalise on the expansion of the Panama Canal and the new canal being planned in Nicaragua.

Investors will be given 50-year contracts and can have 100% ownership. They will be charged no labour or local taxes and granted a 10-year reprieve from paying a 12% tax on profits.

Despite these developments, foreign investors are compelled to negotiate with the government or state-run companies. While the Cuban regime still uses some socialist rhetoric, in part reflecting the support which still exists for the revolution, especially amongst the older generation, it increasingly refers to Jose Marti, the 19th century leader of the independence movement against the Spanish colonisers.

The younger generation, desperate to enjoy new freedoms - use of the internet and international travel amongst others - have experienced not the gains but the regression of the revolution, economic and social crisis and the stifling dead hand of the bureaucracy.

The arrival of "cheap goods in the baggage train of imperialism" may hold an initial attraction until the reality of life in capitalist society becomes apparent.

These developments clearly represent an important move towards the re-introduction of capitalism. This is underway in some sectors but under continued state supervision and agreement.

The state still maintains powerful control and could choke off these steps at a certain stage. The decisive sectors of the economy have still not been privatised or sold to foreign capitalists.

For socialists and the working class, the moves towards capitalist restoration represent a backward step. They will signify the erosion of the gains of the Cuban revolution for the masses. They will also be utilised by the ruling class, especially in Latin America, to try again to discredit the idea of socialism as an alternative to capitalism.

However, this will not have the same effects as the ideological offensive against the idea of socialism, which the ruling class unleashed following the collapse of the former Stalinist regimes in the ex-USSR and Eastern Europe.

A new phase of capitalist crisis has opened up internationally. The working class and the masses have passed through 25 years of the 'supremacy of the free market' and are beginning to struggle against it.

In Brazil, Argentina, Chile and other countries a new cycle of workers' movements has begun.

The lifting of the embargo represents a defeat for the past policy of US imperialism and its attempt to overthrow the Cuban regime. It will give Cuba the opportunity to trade on the world market.

However, without the existence of a genuine workers' democracy, there is the danger that it can accelerate the process of capitalist restoration.

A state monopoly of foreign trade, controlled by a genuine regime of workers' democracy, is essential to help prevent this threat. Socialists welcome the increased freedom to travel however.

### Complexities

The transition to a full capitalist restoration in Cuba will not be a straightforward uninterrupted process. Sections of the regime do not seem to want to go in this direction. Significantly, Mariela Castro, daughter of Raul, firmly stated as this deal was announced that the people of Cuba "do not want to return to capitalism".

On 28 January for example, after the U.S. Assistant Secretary of State Roberta Jacobson met with dissidents in Cuba, Raul Castro warned the US not to 'meddle' in its internal affairs saying it could make the moves to normalise relations "meaningless".

Under the conditions of new international capitalist crisis, moves towards capitalist restoration can be checked. A mixed or hybrid situation could continue for some time.

Initially, gains from the revolution, such as healthcare and the education system, may be maintained, although even these have suffered greatly from lack of investment in the recent period.

Many obstacles remain to be overcome and some resistance is likely as the reality of capitalist restoration becomes apparent. Sections of the population are already fearful of losing the gains of the revolution and of Cuba being turned into another Puerto Rico.

The need to build resistance to the developing pace of capitalist restoration, and struggle for genuine workers' democracy and a nationalised planned economy in Cuba is more urgent than ever.

Such a movement could link together with the working class and youth throughout Latin America, who are increasingly moving into battle to defend their interests, and begin to offer a real socialist alternative to capitalism that has fully learnt the lessons of the Cuban revolution.

## The Cuban Revolution

Extracts from Cuba: analysis of the revolution, Peter Taaffe, 1978.

Before the revolution, Cuba was a paradise for the rich but a nightmare of poverty for the workers and peasants. Under the Batista dictatorship, tens of thousands had died at the hands of the military.

Proportionately fewer children went to school in the 1950s than in the 1920s, yet Havana in 1954 had more Cadillac cars than any other city in the world! Land was concentrated in a few hands, in huge latifundia. The economy was dominated by the giant American monopolies.

A heroic three-year guerrilla struggle, with the support of the peasantry, led by Fidel Castro, his brother Raúl and Che Guevara finally defeated Batista in 1959. This was greeted with a general strike when the guerrillas entered Havana.

Castro, up to this stage, had been a radical democrat whose ideal was democratic capitalist America: But faced with a life and death struggle with American imperialism, he started speaking of the socialist revolution as the process developed. He relied on the peasants and the rural population, which shaped the character of the movement.

On the one side, was the inability of Cuban capitalism to show a way out of the impasse of society. At the same time, there was the colossal pressure of an aroused peasantry and the working class. With the defeat of Batista, the peasants moved to occupy the land and the working class clamoured for wage increases and the reinstatement of those sacked under the previous regime.

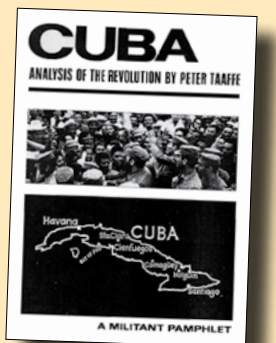
US companies refused to refine Russian oil imported into Cuba and the US government stopped the import of Cuban sugar, aiming to bring the Castro regime to its knees. In response the sugar mills, the oil refinery, the Cuban telephone company, the electric company and were all nationalised. In the next few months, in a rapid succession of blows and counter-blows, all Cuban and American

big business was taken over. By the end of 1960 capitalism had been eliminated in Cuba. US imperialism retaliated by declaring a complete trade embargo and preparing for a military intervention to crush the Cuban Revolution.

A workers' state had been established - but with power concentrated in the hands of a layer of privileged officials, rather than through workers' and peasants' councils. There was undoubtedly an element of workers' control in the factories in the first period of the revolution and every neighbourhood and street had a 'Committee for the Defence of the Revolution'. An indication of the widespread support for the regime is demonstrated by the enormous crowds which gathered in Havana to listen to Castro's speeches.

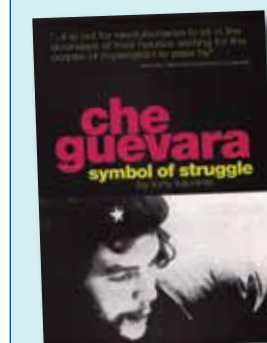
But at the same time the masses had no control or management of the state machine. This was concentrated in the hands of Castro and his supporters, the governing party and the army.

The Russian bureaucracy supported Cuba, without which the Cuban Revolution would have collapsed. The enormous aid extended together with the advantages which flow from a planned economy meant a gigantic development of Cuban society. There were huge steps forward in areas such as life expectancy, health and education.



Cuba: Analysis of the Revolution by Peter Taaffe £1 including postage. Available from Socialist Books

Cuba: Socialism and Democracy by Peter Taaffe is currently out of print but it can be read online: [www.socialistworld.net/pubs/Cuba](http://www.socialistworld.net/pubs/Cuba)



Che Guevara: Symbol of Struggle by Tony Saunois £5.50 including postage.

Socialist Books, PO Box 24697, London E11 1YD 020 8988 8789 [www.leftbooks.co.uk](http://www.leftbooks.co.uk)

### Committee for a Workers' International (CWI)

The Committee for a Workers' International (CWI) is the socialist international organisation to which the Socialist Party is affiliated. The CWI is organised in 45 countries and works to unite the working class and oppressed peoples against global capitalism and to fight for a socialist world. For more details including CWI publications write to: CWI, PO Box 3688, London E11 1YE. email [cwi@worldsoc.co.uk](mailto:cwi@worldsoc.co.uk)



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

[www.socialistworld.net](http://www.socialistworld.net)



# Why I joined the Socialist Party



The economic crisis was triggered by 'junk mortgages'

**Beth Sutcliffe**  
Lewisham Socialist Party

I come from a small mining village in Kent, so I was quite politically aware while growing up. I often had conversations about politics with my parents.

In 2008, just after the financial crash, I was 14. I remember asking my mum if everything would be back to normal by the time I left school at 18. She said she didn't think so.

It seemed baffling to me then, as it does now, that something so seemingly abstract could affect people's lives so directly. The news was constantly repeating the names of American real estate companies that, before then, I had never even

heard of.

Since then, the coalition government has set its sights on those least able to pay. We are to take responsibility for this capitalist crisis. Labour has been equally eager to assure us they will continue with austerity should they win the election.

## Debt tripled

I will finish university in May with £50,000 worth of debt at the age of 21. The fees I pay were tripled from £3,000 to £9,000 a year. Even so, university workers are forced to fight employers over paltry pay 'rises', amounting to pay cuts in real terms.

I used to read the news and feel frustrated and powerless, and at times I still feel like that. But joining the Socialist Party has given me

a way to fight back, and cause to be hopeful for the future.

Last November I heard Kshama Sawant and Paul Murphy, members of our sister parties leading huge struggles in the United States and Ireland. They were two of many speakers at Socialism 2014, the Socialist Party's annual weekend of public discussion and debate. Their example proved to me that change is possible, and that perhaps there is a socialist alternative on the horizon.

## Academies victory: one down, four to go!

**Martin Powell-Davies**  
Lewisham NUT

The Tories' latest announcements show they are determined to take the whole of education out of democratic local control. They want even more schools made into privatised 'academies'. In Lewisham, teachers, parents and students are determined to stop these attacks.

Lewisham branch of the National Union of Teachers (NUT) has balloted members in five schools for strike action against privatisation. A

first walkout is planned for 12 February. News has just come in that one of the schools, Bonus Pastor, has announced it isn't going ahead with academy plans.

### No solution

Campaign meetings have heard from students, parents and staff who know from their own experiences that academies are no solution to educational issues. In fact, they make things worse. Staff pay and conditions are threatened. Parents complain about how their chil-

dren have been treated in schools that are like 'exam factories'.

Unlike some neighbouring boroughs, Lewisham has largely resisted the spread of academies. Then news emerged that five schools might be starting on the road to academisation.

The Stop Academies in Lewisham campaign was set up to oppose these threats. Hundreds of students rallied outside Lewisham town hall to protest at the threat to Sedgehill School in particular (see issue 839).

The good news from Bonus Pastor makes it one down, four to go!

## Rebuilding the student movement in Leicester

**Caroline Vincent**

"Students and workers, unite and fight!" was the chant that summed up the spirit of the Leicester March for Free Education. With support from local anti-cuts councillors, environmentalists and trade unionists, student activists took to the streets to build the movement to end austerity.

### Reclaim

"We're leading the struggle against fees, cuts and privatisation," said one organiser from Socialist Students. "We aim to rebuild the student movement and reclaim our student unions and National Union of Students as fighting organisations."

TUSC councillor Wayne Naylor added his wholehearted support,



What do we want? Free education! photo Caroline Vincent

saying "Education should be a right and not a privilege. Quality education should be available for everyone, regardless of their income."

Another student said: "We're

fighting for education that is fully funded, publicly owned, democratically run and universally free at all levels. We're fighting for a socialist education system."

## Gateshead fights for working class heritage

**Elaine Brunskill**  
Socialist Party Northern region

"We have to fight for our libraries. They're part of our working class socialist heritage." This was the response of a woman involved in the campaign to keep our Gateshead libraries open.

Alongside other anti-cuts activists this campaigner also recognised the need to fight against all cuts in public services, in order to ensure one

group isn't pitted against another.

Just two years ago Gateshead boasted 17 publicly run libraries. If the Labour controlled council go ahead with planned cuts only eight libraries will be left.

### Kept awake

In neighbouring Newcastle, Labour council leader Nick Forbes has said he is kept awake at night worrying about cuts. Instead of worrying, why aren't these councillors fight-

ing back?

The Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition is standing for election across the borough. If you want councillors prepared to fight austerity - vote TUSC in May.

In the meantime, join us to march against Gateshead's £46 million cuts to services. Even cremation is set to become more expensive!

**Assemble at 2.30pm on Saturday 7 February at West Street, Gateshead, to march to the Civic Centre.**

## Campaigns news in brief

### Trade union day school

I was fortunate enough to attend a Socialist Party regional day school on trade unionism in Manchester on 31 January. The course was very informative with lots of good advice on what to raise at union meetings.

I feel more confident and better informed as a result, and would wholeheartedly recommend day schools to members looking for a more active role in their unions.

**Jimmy Tyson**

### Salford TUSC

Salford Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC - see box on page 10) has announced it will be standing candidates in all 20 wards in the city for the May elections.

We have also announced two parliamentary candidates, including Noreen Bailey. Noreen spearheaded the campaign against cuts

tary of Salford City Unison, which has been instrumental in the fight against Labour council cuts.

We are delighted that everyone in Salford will have the chance to vote for a genuine, anti-austerity, working class political force at the next elections.

Read more at [salfordtusc.org](http://salfordtusc.org).

**Matt Kilsby**

### Derby pool closure

Derby's Labour council caused uproar at its recent meeting discussing a swimming pool closure in the city (see previous issues). Campaigners in the public gallery had



I'm just an ordinary mum and I never thought I'd do anything like this

to adult passenger transport, and says:

"I'm just an ordinary mum and I never thought I'd do anything like this. But because of the cuts we've faced to the services our loved ones need, I've decided to have a go. I want to give people a voice. None of the other parties seem to care about what is happening to us, but TUSC have helped us all the way. They are genuine and they care."

Our other parliamentary candidate is Steve North, branch secre-

been expecting a vote on a motion to keep the pool open until a replacement is finished.

Labour underhandedly passed an amendment which removed any commitment to this. Councillors ignored questions challenging them to use reserves. As one member of the public said, "I can sum them up in one word: spineless."

**Chris Fernandez**

### Leeds TUSC

TUSC supporters in Leeds joined other anti-cuts forces to host a packed meeting on 26 January ahead of the general election. The meeting of 65 agreed to mount the widest socialist challenge possible in May.

**Iain Dalton**

## SOCIALIST PARTY FIGHTING FUND

	£ received	£ target	January to March 2015	Deadline 6 April 2015	
North West	540	1,200	█	█	45%
Yorkshire	877	2,900	█	█	30%
West Midlands	548	2,100	█	█	26%
Southern	219	2,100	█	█	18%
Wales	385	2,300	█	█	17%
South West	217	1,400	█	█	15%
South East	115	750	█	█	15%
Eastern	158	1,200	█	█	13%
East Midlands	188	1,600	█	█	12%
London	232	6,100	█	█	4%
England and Wales	161	3,650	█	█	4%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>3,640</b>	<b>24,400</b>	█	█	<b>15%</b>



# NHS England strike called off in face of inadequate pay offer

## Socialist Party members in Unison Health

The Unison Health Service Group Executive (SGE) voted to suspend NHS England strike action scheduled for 29 January.

Due to the determination of NHS staff, Tory health secretary Jeremy Hunt was compelled to meet health unions on Wednesday 21 January. He wanted the strike to be suspended, or an extension of emergency ambulance cover.

The government's hand was forced following numerous press reports on the crisis in the NHS. NHS and ambulance trusts said that the planned 12-hour strike would have a much greater impact than the previous two four-hour strikes and that it was drawing in further groups from the workforce.

It is also clear that there is huge public anger about the crisis in the NHS, which could be mobilised by the health unions specifically and the wider union movement.

Support for the strike had grown following news that employers wanted to cut unsocial hours payments which would have a massive effect on many staff.

### The offer

The offer to the health unions is a 1% consolidated pay rise beginning in April 2015, some concessions to ambulance staff and the offer of further talks about redundancy pay.

The government only intervened because union members stood firm



Have Unison leaders waved goodbye to the chance to win their members a better pay deal? photo Paul Mattsson

and showed they were prepared to deliver further and longer industrial action. It demonstrates that the government can be moved when faced with determined action from the unions.

Some union members may also see this as a victory for the action they took. However, the government has conceded nothing on the pay claim for 2014, one of the key issues

triggering the strike.

Overall this offer does not represent the aspirations of union activists and members to return what we have lost, estimated to be 10-12% since 2010. Members already at the top of their pay grade will not get any increase at all.

More could be achieved if we had a determined and strong leadership. NHS England bosses all but admitted they were in a difficult position and wanted to end the action. In these circumstances, it is a poor negotiator indeed who manages to come up with less pay than the small amount that was asked for.

It was an opportunity to win a better pay increase, knock back the continual attacks on terms and conditions and strike a blow against threats to unsocial hour payments. However, the Unison leadership is

fixed to 'concession bargaining'.

It is not unreasonable to think Unison leaders were interested in this two-year 'deal' so they could maintain industrial calm for the benefit of their hoped for Labour government after the general election.

### Oppose the deal

Despite some concessions to the ambulance workers, which the employers will look to attack later, Socialist Party members on the Unison Health SGE voted against suspending the strike action because of the inadequacy of the offer.

There will now be a ballot putting the offer to the membership, with a new strike date to be looked at if the offer is rejected. Friday 13 March was suggested to coincide with a public sector strike in Northern Ireland, where NHS strike action by

3,000 Unite and GMB members did take place on 29 January.

Unite, GMB and other trade unions are also suspending their NHS action.

Socialist Party members in the unions will campaign for a rejection of the proposed offer. We will continue to argue for increases in pay to reflect what we have lost. This can only be won through strong and determined leadership with an explanation of where funds can be found for pay as well as the services we operate.

We know that this is only the first skirmish in what will be ongoing attacks on our terms and conditions to meet the demands of the austerity political parties. Collective industrial action, as we have seen, will be the only force to prevent these parties and big business having their way.



Donate to fund the fightback!

[socialistparty.org.uk/donate](http://socialistparty.org.uk/donate)

020 8988 8777

text 0776 1818 206 @Socialist\_party /CWISocialistParty

## Barnsley lecturers strike against contract changes

Around 160 Barnsley College teaching staff, members of the UCU union, struck on 29-30 January and Monday 2 February in their dispute against the imposition of a new unagreed contract.

This follows a three-day strike in the autumn term after Colin Booth, the college principal, re-

fused to negotiate about the new contract. This contains detrimental changes to pay and conditions affecting all new appointments and existing staff who undergo 'restructuring' in the summer.

The strike action, and the threat of escalating to four-day and five-day strikes in February and

March, has forced some concessions from the principal but not yet on the substantive issues such as the downbanding of course leaders, cuts in holidays, and performance-related pay.

**Alistair Tice**

• Read more at [socialistparty.org.uk](http://socialistparty.org.uk)

## Lambeth College strikers return to work

**James Ivens**  
Lambeth Socialist Party

Striking teachers at Lambeth College have returned to work after winning concessions in a dispute over contracts. Three terms of action saw off principal Mark Silverman's intractable stubbornness, a high court injunction and several senior managers.

Although lecturers' union UCU conceded in the struggle against a two-tier workplace, many staff will retain old terms and conditions. Action also won limited improvements to new contracts at the south London FE college.

Trade unionists across the country will rightly be delighted that this bitter and drawn-out fight has finally got results. The return on 22 January ended eight months' discontinuous industrial action, including two periods of all-out strike.

The union has not won every ob-

jective picked out at the start of the struggle. In spite of this, UCU members were right to accept this partial deal.

Given the high-risk strategies adopted during the dispute, extending it could have led to outright

**Eight months' action included two all-out strikes**

defeat. Both management and the union have taken knocks, and strikers have done well to push the principal back this far.

Congratulations to all workers at Lambeth College. Without the strike, the whole staff would be on reduced terms and conditions. Activists will now want to regroup, building membership and confidence in preparation for future battles.



photo A Tice



## 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.

**Saudi Arabia – more beheadings than Isis**

Simon Carter's article in the Socialist 841 went into the despicable hypocrisy of Cameron and Obama with their eulogies to the Saudi King, Abdullah. These world leaders marched in Paris to uphold the fundamental right to free speech and then jetted off to the funeral of Saudi Arabia's 'modernising' despot.

As Simon wrote, for decades before its recent switch in strategy, the Saudi

can't drive and atheists are treated as terrorists", he states, "beheads more people than Isis".

In October last year, Newsweek carried an article detailing how "America's closest Arab ally" carries out "punishment by the sword" at a rate of nearly two a week. During Abdullah's last years, the number of executions jumped from 27 in 2010 to around 80 each year after that.

Will anything change under the new king? On 27 January the Daily Mail reported: "Saudi Arabia carried out the second, third and fourth beheadings under the reign of King Salman just days after he assumed the throne." With friends like these...

**Clare Doyle**

**Follow Greece's lead**

Britain needs to follow Greece's lead and vote for the socialists. 'Bailing out' Greece was to safeguard the money invested by the super-rich and not for the betterment of the Greek people.

Greece is living proof that capitalism doesn't work for ordinary working people. The sad thing is that Greece had to see hundreds of thousands go homeless cold and hungry before the penny finally dropped that only socialism can offer them a way out of this man made hell.

The world's working classes must now keep the momentum going. How many times has capitalism got to go bust before we all see it doesn't work.

**Eric Thorpe, retired shop steward and TUSC member**



regime sponsored reactionary Sunni jihadist groups which "spawned the various branches of Al-Qa'ida and, more recently, Islamic State".

This reminded me of a particularly stark statistic, confirmed in an article by Gary Younge in the Guardian this week. Saudi Arabia, "where women

# Victory of the Marigold gloves



**Cleaners at the Finance Ministry, laid-off by the previous Greek government, celebrate their reinstatement**

**Heather Rawling**

"They came after cleaners with very small salaries and families, forgetting we are women, we are mothers, and if you mess with us we can become like the harpies in the ancient Greek legends... I never thought that a rubber cleaning glove could become such a symbol of struggle, but it has."

These are the words of Despoina Kostapoulou, quoted in the Telegraph. She was explaining the victory of nearly 600, mostly middle aged, cleaning women who had been sacked by the previous pro-austerity Greek government in 2013

The women used to clean the buildings of the government Finance Ministry but became victims to austerity. Now they appear on posters around Athens, brooms in hand, sweeping away the bureaucrats that sacked them.

Last year, the cleaning women showed how determined they were; they barricaded EU and IMF officials into the Finance Ministry who had to flee through the basement, pursued by the women demanding their jobs.

These women showed immense courage also. The riot police treatment of them was brutal (Amnesty International complained about the 'unnecessary and excessive use of

force' by Greek police) yet they refused to be scared off.

They picketed the Finance Ministry daily in all weathers, camping out on the pavement suffering the summer's intense heat and the winter's cold.

Their struggle for reinstatement became a symbol for anti-austerity protesters – the cleaning glove with two fingers in the V for victory gesture. Within days of Syriza coming to power, the women were reinstated.

These women showed that with courage and determination and the election of an anti-austerity government, we can fight back against cuts and job losses.

## Disciplined for political comment

A Labour Party leaflet, outlining its policies on the NHS, was delivered to many homes by Royal Mail workers in January. Many politically conscious workers in the CWU postal union questioned the leaflet's content.

It had no reference to Private Finance Initiative (PFI) - implemented by Labour - which contributes heavily to the crippling debts of many NHS institutions.

There was also no apology for Labour's part in privatising NHS Hinchingsbrooke, which failed dramatically and highlighted the need for NHS services to remain out of private hands.

Using Twitter, I posted a photo of the leaflet with a comment pointing out that Labour didn't mention PFI.

Labour made an official complaint so I became disciplined under Royal Mail's code of conduct!

They swiftly looked at this complaint despite it being of a political, not industrial nature. I have been 'warned' about my conduct and given 'guidance' on the use of social media.

The sick irony is that the person filing the complaint is paid by the Labour Party.

As a member of the CWU, a Labour-affiliated trade union, a political levy is taken from my subs of which large amounts are paid to the Labour Party. So, in effect, I am paying the person who made

the complaint that forced me into disciplinary procedures!

I have since written to my CWU branch secretary, asking for my membership (which currently includes the political levy) to be changed to non-levy paying status. Labour supporters are clearly monitoring the comments of genuine socialists - perhaps they are searching for genuine policies on matters such as the NHS!

**CWU postal worker and Socialist Party member**



photo Paul Mattsson

## At least we got Labour's fish and chips!

**Tom Sloman**

Plymouth Socialist Party

Labour Shadow Chancellor Ed Balls recently made a regional visit to Plymouth in what was scheduled as a 'meet and greet' with the paying public and Labour supporters. Anyone who felt the need for Ed Balls' company paid a £20 fee for fish and chips with the Labour politician – a steep price in times of austerity considering that the supplier - my local fish shop in West Hoe - charges under a fiver!

Ready to meet him were Socialist Party members and other supporters of the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) with three letters - one for Ed and one each for Plymouth's Labour parliamentary candidates. The letter urged them to support an immediate increase in the minimum wage, trade union rights, opposition to cuts and re-nationalisation of the railways and Post Office.

In the event only one MP, Alison Seabek, turned up and took the letter - Mr Balls and Luke Pollard were considered a no-show after we had waited for over an hour and a half. Was it cowardice and ignorance that Ed Balls kept paid members of the



**Labour's unpalatable policies?**

Labour Party and the public waiting for an overpriced fish supper? Why didn't he turn up?

Plymouth TUSC are waiting for a reply to our letters but we can't wait for ever. If we cannot get agreement we will announce our intention to

stand in both seats by the end of the week.

Meanwhile - due to the low turnout and rather than let them go to waste, TUSC supporters standing in the cold outside got Labour's fish and chips for free!

The Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) is an electoral alliance that stands candidates against all cuts and privatisation. It involves the RMT transport workers' union, leading members of other trade unions including the PCS, NUT and POA, as well as the Socialist Party and other left and anti-cuts groups and individuals.

[www.tusc.org.uk](http://www.tusc.org.uk)





## 1984-85 miners' strike

# A vibrant array of support groups



Blyth Miners' Wives support group photo D Pearson

The great 1984-85 miners' strike ended 30 years ago next month. **Dave Beale**, chair of Chorley and Coppull Miners' Support Committee in Lancashire during the strike, explains the vital role of support groups.

In 1984-85 members of the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM) fought tooth and nail to stop Thatcher's plans for widespread pit closures and the decimation of mining communities.

Although the Thatcher government gained a major victory, the miners' defeat was not inevitable. Fatally, as Ken Smith shows in 'A Civil War Without Guns' both the Labour Party and TUC leaderships turned their backs on the miners.

But the enormous struggle that the strike unleashed against the Tory establishment clearly showed the potential for a united working class movement to transform society. Money and material donations for the NUM, the miners and their families came from many unions and sympathetic individuals. An important element in the strike was the vast network of local and community-based miners' support groups.

Reports published after the strike suggest that Britain had over 300 miners' strike support groups in 1984-5. North Yorkshire had 34 women's support groups. Liverpool had 14 support groups that raised £1 million for the strike, while Lancashire and Manchester had 19 support groups. This gave the lie to the right wing press' cynical claims that the miners would get no support.

### Women

The National Coal Board's head of pit closures Ian MacGregor said early in the strike that many miners' wives were not supporting their striking husbands. This provoked a furious reaction from strikers' wives and girlfriends. They organised enthusiastic support for the strike and widely publicised it. This triggered the growth of what were first called miners' wives groups and then became more broadly based women's support groups.

Most women's support groups were not prepared just to limit themselves to the 'domestic' tasks their men often expected of them. They were as good at picketing, and organising meetings and protests as the men! Many such groups made a political statement that women had an independent role to play in the

**A Civil War Without Guns: the lessons of the 1984-85 miners' strike** by Ken Smith, £8 (postage included)

**Socialist Books, PO Box 24697, London E11 1YD**  
[leftbooks.co.uk](http://leftbooks.co.uk)  
 020 8988 8789

strike. Women Against Pit Closures was established as an important national body that helped coordinate the women's groups.

A diverse pattern of miners' strike support groups soon emerged; some were women's groups, others more broadly-based. They provided food to miners and their families, raised money, housed and assisted striking miners away on picketing duties or touring the country to raise support and funds for the strike, visited picket lines and attended meetings, rallies and demonstrations, often with their own banners.

Activists in Hoyland in the heart of the Yorkshire coalfield were serving 1,600 meals in their village alone to strikers and their families, and joined miners on the picket lines when they could! Chorley and Coppull support group raised £26,000

in 12 months, spending most of it on providing weekly food parcels to about 80 striking miners who lived in its area but worked at Parkside Colliery.

It was set up jointly by the local Labour Party (supporters of Militant, forerunners of the Socialist Party, played a key role in the initiative) and the local Trades Council. Local striking miners and their families participated in the group, establishing Lancashire NUM recognition for it. Full support soon came from key shop stewards committees in local workplaces.

The support group's record book for 23 July 1984 records the following typical parcel details: "Contents: beans, soup small, soup large, peas, carrots, minced beef, hot dog sausage, pie, hamburgers, fruit, rice pudding, tea, margarine, biscuits and cornflakes, six egg, 4lb potatoes. Any miners who have children must fill in the tear-off slip from the news bulletin for record purposes before they claim the extra £1.50 worth of food per child."

Outside the coalfields, many support groups were set up and twinned with one particular colliery. Such support groups were not necessarily based on traditional trade union organisation. There were students' miner's support groups, those led by the unemployed, and many community-based support groups in other countries. The recent film 'Pride' highlighted the impressive support provided by gay and lesbian activists.

### Solidarity

Despite the support groups' invaluable role, however, the power to win the strike rested with the unions, the TUC and the Labour Party. Nevertheless, the tremendous

### With Banners Held High

National Union of Mineworkers' event, marking the 30th anniversary of the 1984/85 strike.

**Saturday 7 March 2015.** Daytime and evening events 11am to 11pm. Unity Works Wakefield, (two minutes' walk from Wakefield's Westgate station)

Celebrate the courage, strength and spirit of the miners and their communities on the 30th anniversary of the return to work after the year-long strike.

Organised by supporters of Coal not dole, Orgreave Truth and Justice Campaign, Wakefield Trades Union Council

To book go to [www.unityworks.co.uk/events](http://www.unityworks.co.uk/events)  
[wbhh@talktalk.net](mailto:wbhh@talktalk.net)

achievements of the support groups demonstrated the potential for the fullest forms of class solidarity and socialist consciousness built from the bottom.

The longer the strike went on, the more it drew towards it wide layers of people, those aggrieved at work, the poor and unemployed, students, women, black and Asian workers, and gay and lesbian activists were increasingly brought together through the miners' support group network.

A genuine broadly based movement was being built, aligned with the working class and the sections of it that wanted to sweep the Thatcher government from power, hoping to see the beginnings of the struggle for a much better world.

The achievements of the support groups demonstrated working class people's ability to run their own lives and the society they live in. The strike also showed the need for a democratic, militant and mobilised trade union movement, alongside a mass socialist political party that could sow the seeds of revolutionary change and a democratic, socialist society.

## Save our pits!



Over 500 miners, their families and supporters marched through Knottingley, West Yorkshire, to save England's last three deep coal mines. Many local trade unionists came to support the miners: Yorkshire Shop Stewards Network and Wakefield NUT being prominent. Orgreave Truth and Justice Campaign brought their banner too. Leeds TUSC and Socialist party activist Iain Dalton was interviewed by BBC Look North news.

As the local Socialist Party placard said: "Why can't £300 million be found to save Kellingley, Thoresby and Hatfield pits while £66 billion could be found to rescue Lloyds Bank?"



The film *Pride* showed support from a London-based Lesbian and Gay group



# NHS crisis

## Establishment parties can't be trusted

Dave Murray

You don't have to be a rocket scientist to work out how important the National Health Service (NHS) is to people. But for the record, physics professor Stephen Hawking - who has motor neurone disease and considers that the NHS saved his life - has said that it "must be preserved from commercial interests who want to privatise it."

If you have watched how other publicly owned services and industries have been privatised, there is a 'playbook' which successive governments have clearly been working to with the NHS.

First, attack the workers' pay and conditions. Second, introduce artificial markets, and thirdly, starve it of resources. All three arms of this strategy are coming together right now.

Health service workers have seen the value of their earnings fall by 10-12% since 2010 under the coalition's pay freeze - something that will not be fixed by the shoddy pay deal currently on offer (see page 9).

The NHS 'internal market', started by the Tories in 1990, was given further scope by successive Labour governments' support for Private Finance Initiative (PFI) deals.

PFI contracts are a licence to print money for companies which build and service hospitals - leasing them back to the NHS for a tidy profit and bleeding health service budgets white in the process.

When the first NHS hospital (Hinchingbrooke, in Cambridgeshire)

was shifted into the private sector, it was with the approval of the then Labour health minister and current shadow health secretary, Andy Burnham. But not being able to make enough profit resulted in private 'vulture company' Circle Healthcare walking away from the ten-year contract after just two years.

To top it all, the financial crunch has finally come.

In the crazy world of the internal market, one section of the health service, NHS Providers, has entered into a stand-off with another, NHS Monitor.

NHS Monitor sets the price list for various treatments, procedures and services, and is demanding price cuts of £1.2 billion this year - on top of successive cuts since 2010 that amount to £20 billion overall.

NHS Providers represents 94% of NHS hospitals, which have to balance their books by charging the NHS for their services. They have lodged a formal objection, saying that they "can no longer guarantee safe and effective care unless they are properly and fully paid for the patients they treat."

This means that either NHS England will have to redirect resources from elsewhere or the government will have to come up with more money.

With a general election looming it would be nice to think that one of the major parties at least would reflect the overwhelming support amongst voters for a fully funded NHS. Sadly, this is not so.

In words, the Labour party has changed its pro-privatisation

stance. But a close look at its policies reveals it doesn't intend to exclude private health companies from NHS contracts but will stick to the current government's 'deficit reduction' plans.

When it comes to the establishment parties' NHS claims, 'trust me' is not a believable policy.

### We say:

- No cuts or closures - full funding for our health care
- End the Private Finance Initiative - bring PFI companies into public ownership
- Reverse council cuts to social care to ease the A&E crisis
- Public ownership of the drugs companies
- Pay health workers - end the pay freeze and the low pay scandal



Cuts and privatisation have wrecked the health service photo B Severn

### 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 £10 an hour without exemptions as a step towards a real living wage. 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 MASS 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 mass workers' party! Support the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition as an important step towards this.

##### SOCIALISM AND INTERNATIONALISM

- No to imperialist wars and occupations.
- 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!