

No such thing as a 'free' school

SAVE OUR SCHOOLS!

Cameron's election campaign promises that the Tories will open hundreds of new 'free schools'. But when did the Tories ever give away anything free, except to their friends in big business? These schools are 'free' from local democracy, free from the need for qualified teachers and recognised school premises. Free schools are another step towards privatisation.

Where would public money be spent? Would money disappear into the accounts of big business sponsors? Already some free schools have closed down. Fraud charges have been filed against a free school's founder in Yorkshire.

There is no real evidence that removing schools from local authority control - as happens with free schools and academies - improves education. Elected authorities should get the resources to plan education and build well-resourced new schools where needed, not rely on the private sector.

Labour - who introduced academies - meekly opposed Cameron's scheme for spending £214 million on schools in areas with enough places. Socialists in the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) prefer an audacious response to the threat of any school becoming an academy or free school.

On 5 March, hundreds of teachers, students and parents in Lewisham, south London, upset the City of London's slumber. They attacked the obscure medieval Leathersellers company's plans to turn local schools into academies.



Lewisham campaign: striking staff (above) and protesting students (inset)

Several hundred teachers and support workers had struck that morning in four schools against these proposals. 300 school students had joined a protest at Hilly Fields school the day before.

Three of the schools had close links to the Leathersellers. The governors had applied for an academy order to wrest them out of Lewisham council's control.

A large, noisy delegation of flag-waving teachers and students went from the picket

lines to give the Leathersellers a piece of their mind. Marchers sang and chanted, cheered and booed before handing in a letter from parents, staff and students asking them to withdraw their backing for the academy plans.

Teachers and students plan to make the campaign bigger and louder until their message is acted upon. The City bosses will have to invest - in earplugs!

Campaigners will make academies a hot issue in the election. The Lewisham branch secretary of the National Union of Teachers,

Martin Powell-Davies (prospective candidate for TUSC in Lewisham West) said members would discuss escalating to a two-day strike.

Lewisham's teachers and anti-academy campaigners will be demanding that local councillors and MPs come out in opposition to the plans. Whether locally or nationally, an active trade union-based campaign, not afraid to raise a socialist alternative, can beat off Cameron's plans for free schools and academies.

Roger Shrivess
Lewisham Socialist Party

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Economy: Reality doesn't match Tory rhetoric

Austerity works - unemployment is falling and wages are rising: that is the pre-election mantra of the Tory Party. Of course, if it were true, millions of workers would be breathing a sigh of relief that seven years of misery are finally drawing to a close. Reality - however - does not match the hype.

For the majority there is no sign of wages increasing. Yes, average wages were 2.1% higher in the last three months of 2014 than a year earlier. But that was only as a result of including the bonuses of the bankers and the few others who receive them! In reality average incomes have still not recovered from the effects of the 'Great Recession' and are 2% below their previous peak.

The picture is much worse for young people, whose wages today are around 8% lower than they would have been in 2007. Over the last six years, workers have suffered endless austerity. Poverty, hunger and destitution have returned on a level not seen since the 1930s.

And while the number of jobs may have increased, these are overwhelmingly 'McJobs'. Britain now has 4.5 million self-employed workers, more than any other country in western Europe. Most are self-employed because it is the only option available. The future facing the next generation is low-paid, insecure work. Even these jobs are centred in London and the South East - where the wages paid aren't enough to rent a cupboard, never mind a flat. Buying a home is totally ruled out for the majority - the average age of a first-time buyer in London is now 52!

Nor has austerity lowered the deficit as the Tory-Lib Dem coalition claimed it would. Osborne predicted it would be £37 billion in 2015; instead it is well over £80 billion! Of course, this will not prevent the next government continuing with austerity, whoever wins the general election. The Tories are planning to annihilate much of the public services that have survived the last five years, but Labour has also repeatedly made it clear that it too would continue with cuts.

Profits

What lies behind the drive for austerity is not simply deficit reduction, but British capitalism's aim to increase its own profits. Under the cover of the economic crisis an attempt is being made to dramatically lower the share taken by the working class - if they can get away with it, down to pre-war levels. This is not only about holding down wages, but also decimating the 'social wage' - public services. At the same time, the capitalists hope that the privatisation of public services, particularly the NHS and education, will provide new investment opportunities.

A section of big business recognises the dangers of offering only endless poverty pay for workers in Britain, and has even been toying with an increase in the minimum wage. This partially reflects awareness that an increase in incomes would increase the market and therefore improve prospects for economic growth. But it also reflects a fear that the working class - seeing the vast wealth at the top of society - will rise up to demand a

living wage.

They are right to fear this. We can already see the first signs of such a revolt, for example, in the tremendous battle of London's bus drivers to demand that their wages are 'levelled up'. Only by getting organised - both in the trade unions and politically - will it be possible to win significant wage increases from big business. It is one thing for some capitalists to recognise the general economic benefit of an increase in wages, quite another for individual employers to cut across their own profits by raising their workers' wages.

Beyond the general election the central struggles facing the working class will be the battles to increase pay and to stop public sector cuts. Maximising support for the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition's election challenge can play an important role in preparing for those crucial struggles.

Laughable

Osborne's claim that Britain's economy is returning to healthy growth is laughable. He can only make the claim at all because of the fall in world oil prices. This has multiple causes not the least capitalists' fear of a further slowdown in the world economy. In the short term, however, the fall in oil prices can slightly ease the strain on the bank balances of workers in Britain. But even in the short term this is only one side of the story. The jobs of many of the 450,000 workers in the oil industry in Britain are now at risk.

Despite the vast sum - £375 billion - that has been pumped into the British economy

via Quantitative Easing, levels of investment remain at a historical low. Far from the promised 'march of the makers', British manufacturing remains exceptionally weak. The productivity gap with other major economic powers continues to widen - output per hour is 16% lower than if the pre-crisis trend had continued.

What growth has taken place in the UK economy is based overwhelmingly on increasing the exploitation of the working class, and re-inflating the credit and housing bubbles. In November, consumers took on the highest level of new debt in seven years. To a far greater degree than before 2008, borrowing is being used not just for new purchases but as a means to make ends meet.

Whoever wins the election, a new phase of the economic crisis will be on the agenda at a certain stage. This could be triggered by international events, such as the crisis in the Eurozone, but also by a new financial crisis in Britain.

The increasing inability of capitalism to meet the most basic needs of the majority - a home and a reasonably paid job - is beginning to raise the need for a different kind of society. The ideas of socialism will be put on the agenda.

A crucial step towards solving the economic crisis would be to take into democratic public ownership the 125 or so big corporations that control around 80% of Britain's economy. This would provide the possibility of developing a democratic, socialist plan of production that could very quickly transform the lives of millions.

Get ready for a revamp of the Socialist!

Fortnight of action on sales and fighting fund

Sarah Wrack
Deputy Editor of the Socialist

In the next few weeks, the Socialist is moving to a new format with an exciting new design. To celebrate, we're organising a fortnight of action on sales of the Socialist and on the Socialist Party's fighting fund from 21 March to 4 April.

Socialist Party branches are now in full swing, working towards the local and general elections on 7 May. Our members are involved in more activity, meeting more people, who are asking more questions - the

clare to be the debate of the day, the Socialist gives workers a chance to have their say. We provide a socialist analysis of the real issues at hand - the economic crisis and austerity.

The Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) is the sixth biggest political party in terms of number of seats contested - and the only significant one to completely reject all cuts. Yet the mainstream press is doing its best to ignore our impressive challenge.

Bulding TUSC

The Socialist newspaper is the place to read about our candidates and their campaigning - that message has to be got out to workers and young people far and wide.

Recently we carried an interview with prospective parliamentary candidate for Walthamstow Nancy Taaffe, where she said: "I want to tell the truth about the crime of austerity being perpetrated against working class communities."

That week, Nancy's local Waltham Forest Socialist Party branch sold more than double their usual copies of the Socialist.

One of the best tools to build TUSC is the Socialist. So let's make sure we use it to the max during the election campaign - kicking off with the fortnight of action. We are ap-



NUT teaching union members with the Socialist photo Senan

pealing to all readers and sellers of the Socialist to play whatever part you can. During the fortnight can you:

1. Make a calendar of activity and plan to increase sales of the Socialist and donations to the Socialist Party in the run-up to May's elections?

2. Take out a subscription or convince a friend or workmate to do so?

3. Organise an extra campaign stall or sale at a workplace or college during the fortnight?

4. Have a discussion in your Socialist Party branch or discussion group on the role of the paper and

how to increase sales?

5. Make a donation in celebration of the new design?

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perfect time for a fortnight of action.

While the big media follows pathetically behind whatever the leaders of the main capitalist parties de-

Women in the frontline of fighting austerity cuts

The United Nations says it will take 70 years to close the wage gap between women and men. However, a UK government spokesperson used International Women's Day (reports, page 8) to claim the gender pay gap in Britain was "at its lowest ever". But this narrowing is not the result of women's pay surging but because male workers pay has been falling faster. As PCS union Department for Work and Pensions group vice-president **Katrine Williams** explains, austerity measures and capitalist recession have hit women disproportionately hard.



Union action is vital in fighting cuts and for equal pay photo Paul Mattsson

Women make up the majority of low-paid workers. In contrast we see the very visible greed of the bosses and hear about MPs 'struggling' on their 'meagre' £67,000 pay. No wonder there is a growing anger and mood among women and men in the workplace to tackle low pay.

While the cost of necessities has soared our pay has fallen backwards. In my sector, if pay had kept pace with inflation, wages would be on average £2,300 higher than they are now.

Cuts in pensions and low pay also mean nearly 500,000 women are forced to work past 65 years. With cuts in public services there are increasing pressures on women to plug the gaps and undertake more of the caring responsibilities than before. Not surprisingly, women have been to the fore in the campaigns to defend our services from the cuts in communities.

A new Trades Union Congress (TUC) study confirms, despite government claims to the contrary, that making ends meet is a contin-

ual struggle - with women and their families facing "the worst squeeze on real income since Victorian times".

Only one in 40 of the net jobs created have been full-time jobs - the

While pay has fallen across the board, women's average wages are more than £20 a week worse off in real terms than they were in 2008. Those working part-time earn 38% less an hour than their male counterparts.

rest are part-time or self-employed. 1.3 million workers are under-employed as they can't find a full-time job.

Workers classed as 'self-employed' are very likely to be super-exploited by bosses who avoid paying proper rates of pay, holiday pay, sick pay, etc.

Zero-hour contracts are increasing year on year and over half of these jobs are done by women who

struggle to juggle caring responsibilities with bosses controlling their working hours.

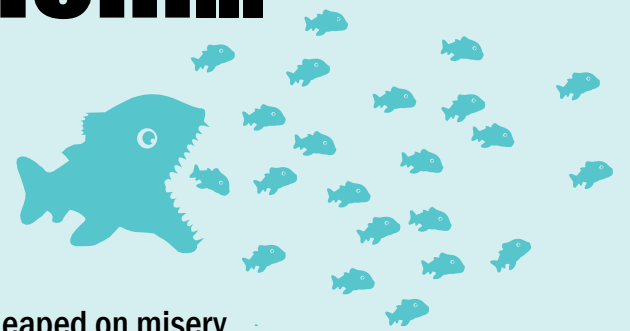
45 years have passed since the Equal Pay Act - showing that legislation is not enough to bring about equal pay.

The potential exists to build a strong trade union campaign to fight for equal pay but also for decent pay for all. We will work hard to build this potential into coordinated action across the public and private sectors to demand pay increases and an increase in the minimum wage to the TUC demand of £10 an hour.

Coordinated action can also help to use the strength of unions in the public sector to pile the pressure on to demand privatised areas of public services get decent pay and working conditions.

Trade union action is needed to increase rights for workers including access to flexible working, living pension, free childcare and a shorter working week to 35-hours, with no loss of pay.

Them...



Misery heaped on misery

The Tory/Lib Dem coalition has imposed massive council spending cuts with Labour-run authorities in the poorest boroughs dutifully wielding the axe.

According to the Institute for Fiscal Studies (IFS) overall council spending has fallen by a fifth since 2010 with the hardest hit areas being the north east, north west and London. The IFS also reckons that the next tranche of savage government austerity cuts will fall disproportionately on those boroughs that have already been hit the hardest.

company has deferred \$61.9 billion - around eight years' worth - of taxes. Whereas a US worker can be fined 25% of the tax due for late payment, it seems that large corporations are allowed to record profits on investments that are not taxed until later in the life of these assets.

During the recent 'great recession' Congress expanded these incentives for business investments. So Buffet is able to use the money for other investments - an arrangement he has described as 'an interest-free loan from the government'.

Global warning

60% more greenhouse gases were pumped into the atmosphere (largely from capitalist industry and transport) in 2014 than in 1990, the year against which most reduction targets are measured.

Never mind the 'b.....s'

Figures released under the Freedom of Information Act show that the UK's 50 worst air pollution hotspots are located in London. Each site exceeds the EU limit for nitrogen dioxide - linked to asthma, lung infections and other respiratory diseases - by at least two, and in some cases, three times.

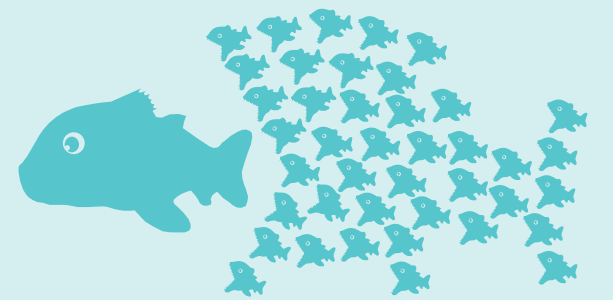
Last year, Tory London Mayor Boris Johnson dismissed as "bollocks" claims by King's College researchers that Oxford Street was one of the most polluted streets on the planet. Research by the Campaign for Clean Air found that 1,148 schools in London are within 150 metres of roads carrying 10,000 or more vehicles a day.

Interest-free loans

Coming in at number three on the Forbes Rich List is US tycoon, Warren Buffet. Buffet's wealth rocketed \$14.5 billion to \$72.7 billion, due to his Berkshire Hathaway company's rising share price.

Another feature of Berkshire Hathaway is its ability to delay paying corporate taxes. Astonishingly the

...& Us



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Spied on by the state and bosses

Neil Cafferky

One of the key industrial battles of the last five years has been the struggle of workers in the construction industry for trade union rights and better terms and conditions.

There have been a number of high profile disputes such as Lindsey, BESNA and Crossrail. A vital weapon of the employers has been victimisation of union activists.

Central to this strategy was the blacklist, where a shadowy organisation called the Consulting Association kept a central database of union activists. Those workers were then systematically excluded from employment by the big construction firms.

'Blacklisted', a new book released this month, tells the story behind this 30-year conspiracy against union activists. The book is co-authored by Dave Smith a prominent construc-



photo Paul Mattsson

tion militant and Phil Chamberlain, an investigative journalist.

As well as detailing the close links between construction industry bosses and the Consulting Association the book also reveals the active collusions of the government security services in passing on information about political activists to employers. In many cases this led

to people being excluded from employment simply for taking part in legitimate protests and campaigns.

These revelations come on the back of the scandal of undercover police targeting and infiltrating political organisations in the 1990s such as Militant and Youth Against Racism in Europe (YRE), as well as spying on the family of black murdered teenager, Steven Lawrence.

It reveals, once again, that far from being neutral guardians of public safety the security services are a tool of the employers and their political representatives in power. It therefore comes as no surprise that an independent inquiry into Blacklisting and the role of the security services has been ruled out by the Tories.

●The official book launch of 'Blacklisted' takes place on Thursday 12 March, 6-8pm, in Committee Room 15 of the Houses of Parliament.



The Socialist reports the victories that show that if you fight back you can win - from housing workers' disputes in Britain, to cleaners in Greece.

And we don't just report workers' strikes and the anti-cuts movement. We put forward a strategy to defeat the cuts, and to fight for a socialist alternative.

Our writers are real working-class fighters, actively involved in the strug-

gles they report - from workplaces, communities, universities and schools.

Previous years' May Day appeals have resulted in fantastic displays of the respect and authority the Socialist commands in the workers' movement. Let's make sure we do at least as well in 2015, and keep our paper number one.

Help the Socialist continue that work with a May Day greeting this year.

Get a 25% discount by paying by Wednesday 8 April. Final deadline Wednesday 15 April 2015. Greeting price guide: £500 for a whole page (£375 before 8 April); £300 for a half-page (£225); £170 quarter-page (£127.50); £90 one-eighth (£67.50); £50 one-sixteenth (£37.50); £30 1/32 (£22.50); £20 small box (£15). Other rates are available. For enquires please contact us at the details below. Phone 020 8988 8781 Email jamesivens@socialistparty.org.uk Give your greeting online at www.socialistparty.org.uk/mayday

Camden caterers demand Living Wage

Nick Auvache

"It is nothing less than a paralysis of will caused by an inability to basically understand the privations suffered by the very people they claim to represent."

This was how the Camden New Journal described the decision of Labour-led Camden council on 2 March not to implement the Camden school caterers' claim for the London Living Wage.

Only two years ago the council proudly boasted it would pay all staff the London Living Wage. Apparently that does not extend to the school catering workers as they are "contracted out".

Employers Caterlink pay the workers a miserly £6.60 an hour. Camden council says it cannot afford to fund the increase to £9.15 an hour.

How convenient it is for this Labour council to offload the responsibility. But they could not ignore

the workers' loud protests outside the town hall.

These workers are preparing food for school students but barely earn enough to put food on the table for their own families!

No bus fare

One worker at the demo spoke about how she had to walk the long distance to work and back because she did not have enough money to pay for the bus fare.

This is the sort of misery which councils are causing and then washing their hands of the problem by hiding behind private contractors.

But the catering workers are having none of it. They have got their own petition calling for the council to increase their pay with immediate effect.

If that is not successful, they will ballot for industrial action. Camden Socialist Party and TUSC will stand shoulder to shoulder with them.



See the Reel News video of the Camden caterers' town hall protest at youtu.be/0WqNg7eC3jI

Northern Ireland public sector general strike



A Northern Ireland public sector general strike, organised by Nipsa and other trade unions, is taking

place on 13 March in opposition to austerity. Marches and rallies will take place across the country.

The Stormont Assembly plans thousands of jobs cuts while cutting corporation tax.

Oppose tax office's 'company union'

A new 'company union' - the Revenue and Customs Trade Union (RCTU) - has been launched in HMRC, months after leaked documents showed such a move was planned as part of attacks on the socialist-led PCS civil service union. PCS national vice-president **John McNally** spoke to the Socialist.

"Setting up the RCTU is part of a coordinated process of union busting on behalf of the government. Their aim is to silence opposition to the government's cuts, privatisation programme and destruction of public services. It goes alongside attacks on check-off subs collection and facility time, and their refusal to negotiate with PCS at a national level.

The RCTU was founded by a disgruntled ex-PCS activist who was disciplined for trying to get fellow activists disciplined or even sacked. It's absolutely clear from the evidence we have that HMRC senior management are working hand in hand with this union busting outfit.

Instead of effectively dealing with tax avoidance, HMRC bosses are concentrating on attacking the PCS.

RCTU is completely undemocratic. Anybody applying to join has to be approved by their leadership. Their own rules says that any strike ballot has to be approved by 50% of their members - already implementing the proposed anti-trade union laws that the Tories are threatening to bring in.

They've also put into their rule book that the national executive committee can change rules at will. Yet we don't know who elected that executive, we don't know who they are, we don't know who appointed

The Tories have pledged to dismiss 30,000 Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) workers if they win the general election. Labour says it will 'just' sack 20,000! The DWP has already seen massive job cuts under the Con-Dems, with 121,000 posts having been slashed to 83,000 since 2010.

their senior officers. All instructions from the president - whoever that may be and whoever appointed them - have to be obeyed.

RCTU will fail because it offers nothing but bowing down to management attacks. It should be condemned by the entire trade union movement.

The PCS has a tremendous record in fighting for terms and conditions. HMRC workers are under massive attacks - that is why members should be in PCS and won't be taken in by this strikebreaking organisation."

NHS workers reluctantly accept 1% pay rise

A Buckinghamshire Unison member

Unison health members in NHS England have returned a two-to-one acceptance of a 1% pay rise for 2015-16 on a low ballot turnout. While some smaller health unions have rejected this offer, as Unison and RCN have accepted it is now likely to be implemented.

As Unison's press release states, this offer does not meet the original demands to regain what health members have lost over the past few years.

Some low paid members will benefit from the result of our collective industrial action. However, for others it will mean either no pay rise or a cut in take home pay after tax and pension payments are taken into account.

It therefore represents another divisive pay settlement that will do nothing to resolve the staff short-

This offer does not meet the original dispute demands

ages that we are now seeing within the health service and will not help staff morale.

We were told the government refused to speak to us after the first two four-hour strikes. It only came to the table in desperation after the 12-hour action - which was due to take place

on 29 January - was announced.

We know in an election year the health service is high on the political agenda and therefore unions held a strong bargaining position, which has now been lost on the basis that 'this was the best we could get from negotiations.'

Let's be clear: these small gains were not the result of negotiations but from the collective action we took and that this argument is used to derail members from taking further action.

Unison leaders

It is becoming increasingly obvious that the Unison leadership, like the Labour Party, in reality accepts the argument that there is no more money for services such as the health service.

It is likely that the pay review body will find that our payments for unsocial hours need to be made more 'flexible' - ie cut. While this would still have to go to the union staff council for negotiations, the incoming government will use such a proposal to launch a further attack on our terms and conditions to help slash £20 billion pounds in NHS 'efficiency savings' which all the main parties have signed up to.

Unison members will be forced once again to look to industrial action to defend the NHS and our terms and conditions. We need to build a left fighting leadership within Unison that involves its members and states clearly that there is an alternative.

Dundee hospital strike after 96% 'yes' vote

Porters at Ninewells Hospital in Dundee have begun a campaign of industrial action to win back a massive underpayment going back over a decade. NHS Tayside has admitted to an error through a grading process back in 2004.

The porters were placed on a lower grade than their colleagues at other hospitals in Tayside. Unite steward John Boland said the workers are collectively owed up to £5 million. Numerous attempts by their union Unite to engage in a negotiated

agreement have been rejected by senior management.

Faced with no alternative, Unite balloted for industrial action. On an 86% turnout the porters voted by 96% for strike action. Action began on 4 March.

Four-hour strikes are taking place every Monday and Friday until there is an acceptable resolution.

Messages of support and solidarity should be sent to john.boland@nhs.net
Socialist Party Scotland

Get the **National Shop Stewards Network** bulletin - sign up at: bit.ly/16sZJxm

Come to the NSSN conference: Saturday 4 July, Conway Hall, Holborn, London WC1R 4RL. Put the date in your diary now! Speakers include PCS general secretary Mark Serwotka www.shopstewards.net



Why we're standing for TUSC



The Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition is standing over 100 candidates in the 2015 general election in opposition to all cuts and privatisation. Three TUSC prospective parliamentary candidates say why they're standing.

Stop the destruction of our communities

I'm standing for TUSC because Cardiff's services have been ripped to shreds, and the 'opposition' politicians in the council, the Welsh Assembly and in parliament have done nothing to stop it.

Last week, anti-cuts campaigners in Cardiff took on the politicians and forced them to back-off from plans to close day centres for the elderly, play centres and libraries, and reduce the cuts in funding to youth clubs and the Alcohol and Drug Counselling Service.

Labour groups across Wales have been falling apart under the strain of implementing Tory cuts. There's been a 'palace coup' in Swansea, the mass resignation of half Labour's councillors in Wrexham and the expulsion of six councillors in Bridgend. But it's only in Cardiff that the pressure has resulted in the cancellation of

so many cuts.

That's because in Cardiff support for the idea of anti-cuts campaigners standing in elections to challenge the parties of cuts and austerity has been building support the quickest.

Victories

I've been secretary of Cardiff Against The Cuts for the last five years. As well as the victories described above, over the years we've helped save swimming pools, schools, leisure centres and many other facilities and services.

But it hasn't been enough.

Our communities are being torn apart by the cuts and the social problems that develop because of deprivation. We're only going to force a change if we hit these careerists where it hurts - in the ballot box.

Anyone that has fought to save a facility that is essential to their community, any trade union member who has stood up for

Our communities are being torn apart by the cuts and the social problems that develop because of deprivation

their workmates, would do a better job than those who meekly agreed to carry out austerity policies as the Tories demand.

Ross Saunders, TUSC Cardiff South and Penarth constituency PPC



If elected, Ross Saunders (left) would take an average worker's wage



Jacqui Berry photo TU Senan

Working on the front line of our NHS

Working in the front line of the NHS, I am sick to the back teeth of pro-cuts politicians saying they care about the service and they know what it needs.

We need investment, not cuts. We need to bring services in-house, not further fragmentation and privatisation.

We need to end the internal market in healthcare, which treats patients like numbers and sets some trusts up to inevitably fail.

We need to bring the providers of social care into public ownership. We have an ageing population and we need to be able to plan

care on the basis of human need, not people's ability to pay.

Nationalise

For too long, we have allowed private companies to profit out of the long-term care needs of the vulnerable and the elderly.

TUSC stands for a nationalised social care service. You can't control what you don't own.

It is a travesty that in a rich country like Britain, there are millions without adequate housing.

It is a travesty that thousands of working people are reliant on food banks.

We have Labour politicians who wring their hands about how terrible it all is, but have signed up to

We need to bring the providers of social care into public ownership

the 'save austerity' agenda of the current government.

Jacqui Berry, TUSC Gillingham and Rainham constituency PPC

London: A tale of two Lambeths

While Lambeth's Labour council allows property developers to roam free and make millions, there is another Lambeth beneath the tacky charade: the Lambeth of Gloria and her daughter.

Gloria cries most days and cannot believe that she is where she is. Gloria was made redundant from a local council after the catering department she worked in was outsourced to a private contractor. Although she only earned £900 a month for 40 tireless hours a week, the job gave security if not wealth.

All that went when Gloria lost her job. Then poverty came to visit, and with that her health has declined rapidly. Worse was to

come when recently Gloria and her daughter had to be referred to a local food bank. She fought back tears: this was one of the worst days of her life.

Any dreams Gloria had were smashed and have been replaced by a growing anger. Gloria and her daughter have been hit hard by the bosses' recession, Con-Dem government austerity — and by Labour's abject failure to fight cuts and privatisation.

But they are unbowed, and have been talking about alternatives and the need for radical change. This is why they will seriously consider voting TUSC on 7 May.

And like a lot of folk, Gloria is also a fighter. Gloria and her

sacked colleagues are taking their case to a tribunal with support of their trade union. They're not too sure if they'll win, but as Gloria said: "It's better to fight than go under."

The tribunal takes place on 26 March, and I for one will be hoping they win.

And those are the two sides of Lambeth. One where Labour and the wealthy see London as a playground. And the other, where working-class people have taken a hammering - but are still standing, and are now looking for a serious political alternative.

TUSC provides that alternative.

Steve Nally, TUSC Dulwich and West Norwood constituency PPC



Steve Nally

TUSC also aims to stand 1,000 council election candidates this year. TUSC 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. tusc.org.uk

Russell Brand: on the side of those who fight back BUT HOW CAN WE CHANGE THINGS?



Sarah Sachs-Eldridge
Socialist Party national organiser

Everywhere you go, if there is struggle against austerity you'll probably find people talking about Russell Brand. His book *Revolution* describes itself as "the beginning of a conversation that will change the world". We are in an era of gross inequality, dysfunctional political systems and seemingly endless austerity. Every day in the campaigns the Socialist Party participates in and leads, we are having this conversation.

This is particularly the case among young people. Little wonder - recent figures show that the median pay of 22 to 29 year olds is 9% lower in 2014 than in 2008. In general, despite talk of economic recovery, incomes are still below where they were in 2010. And across the world poverty, inequality and wars dominate the lives of the 99%.

In September 2013 we wrote in the *Socialist* that: "Below the surface a volcano of anger is bubbling up, fuelled by many issues." Two weeks later Russell Brand appeared on *Newsnight* with Jeremy Paxman. He smuggled news of that anger into the Westminster-bubble-dwelling, pro-capitalist media. And he struck a chord. The interview clip has had over ten million YouTube views.

There is anger at the establishment - that includes the big business-owned media that doesn't challenge the austerity lie. The popularity of Russell Brand's *Trews - 'True News' - internet broadcast*, is a reflection of this. Young people and workers are searching for the truth about the super-rich 1%'s domination of the world, including the wealth they hoard and how their interests are represented by pro-capitalist governments in legislation, both domestic and foreign policy.

Anger is particularly felt towards those

capitalist politicians. The latest 'MPs for hire' scandal only adds to the well-established sense that they are in it for themselves. However, experience of austerity is the major factor. "Angry" was the word chosen by 47% of respondents when a *Guardian*/ICM poll asked for the single word best describing "how or what you instinctively feel" about politics and politicians in general.

In 2010, around 29 million people out of an eligible population of around 50 million cast a vote and less than half the population voted for the Tories and Labour combined. Polling indicates this could be even lower in May, almost certain to result in some form of coalition. The next government of whatever political stripe will attempt to carry on with austerity but it will be unstable and therefore unable to do so if opposition is organised.

Question Time

When he appeared on *Question Time* (QT) it was a scandal that Russell Brand was the only one who represented the widespread view that the working class shouldn't pay for the economic crisis.

Ukip leader Nigel Farage who was also on that QT panel (appearing for what feels like the zillionth time) likes to be seen as a fellow 'comedian'. In reality his divisive party represents the same big business interests as the Tories. At Ukip's spring conference in February policy chief Suzanne Evans said that she had already identified up to £35 billion a year of cuts.

Labour is also a capitalist party that accepts the austerity lie. The lie is that cuts are necessary. The bankers have had over £100 billion in bonuses since their leading part in the economic crisis. But instead of saying that the super-rich should pay, Labour has agreed that more years of austerity are necessary. In January only five Labour MPs voted against Tory



Russell marching with the New Era campaign photo Paul Mattsson

plans for £30 billion of extra cuts over the next three years.

In the capitalist media, it was therefore down to Russell Brand to, for example, defend the firefighters union FBU fighting against vicious cuts to their pensions. But the people looking to Russell Brand need a choice at May's election in terms of a party that would stand on the side of the millions suffering austerity. In the biggest left-of-Labour stand in 60 years, the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) aims to provide this.

Voting

Brand has been attacked from many directions. Murdoch's viciously anti-working class Sun tried and failed to discredit him. A right-wing BBC journalist said he was "not only daft but dangerous". The bishops have been having a go at ConDem inequality but also piled in attacking Russell's comments on voting - probably motivated by his popular call for revolution. There have also been attacks on his voting stance from others in the comedy industry - including those who seem to be more liberal, such as Robert Webb who said Brand's plans would inevitably lead to "death camps" and "repression".

Brand told Paxman: "The only reason to vote is if the vote represents power or change." Snubbing his call for a challenge without an 'alternative' is fundamentally to invite acceptance of the status quo - austerity. And if the alternative to not voting is to invite a Labour vote, that amounts to asking people to back austerity-lite. On 8 May, or whenever a new government is formed, if the leader is Ed Miliband he will make cuts and say that the votes he received are a mandate for that.

Russell Brand also wrote: "A system

that serves the planet and the people. I'd vote for that." And that is the point. Following the election in Greece of the first anti-austerity government in Europe in decades, Brand tweeted: "I would vote for Syriza." We need an anti-austerity choice in Britain.

In Seattle, Socialist Alternative (co-thinkers of the Socialist Party in the US) member and city councillor Kshama Sawant gave a glimpse of what that could mean in power. Her election campaign took up the demand for a \$15 an hour minimum wage that fast food workers and other campaigners had started to popularise.

Kshama's election meant this struggle, taken up by unions and the 15Now campaign, had a determined and reliable representative in the council chamber where legislation is passed. Her presence revealed that it was the Democrats in that city who brought the interests of big business to the table, fighting on the bosses' behalf for delays in implementation of \$15 and for tips to be included. As a result of tireless campaigning of activists, strikes of workers and also of Kshama's role in the city council, \$15 is becoming a reality in Seattle.

TUSC

We need a mass party in Britain that would act like Kshama has - that is accountable to our interests. TUSC is fielding over 100 candidates pledged to vote against cuts in the general election and is inviting working class fighters to help it reach its target of 1,000 no-cuts candidates for the local elections.

These targets are in part motivated by the threshold set by the BBC and other broadcasters for a party to receive 'fair media coverage', including a TV broadcast, of standing in one sixth of the seats

up for election. TUSC is denied a voice in the national media.

As a TUSC press release announcing the latest tally of 111 Westminster candidates reports: "we were contacted by a journalist working for BBC One's Election Night programme with David Dimbleby, asking if one of our candidates would be available for interview on the night of 7 May. An interview before the ballot boxes had closed, on the other hand - or, God forbid, a panellist on Dimbleby's *Question Time* programme - was obviously impossible."

Bear in mind that, while TUSC has had a press blackout, the divisive Ukip got a helping hand from the capitalist and state media. In 2013 prior to Ukip's electoral breakthrough, winning the Euro elections and two byelections (with Tory candidates) it received 23,000 press mentions. Between 2009 and 2013 Farage had more appearances on *Question Time* than any other politician.

In his interview for the *Guardian* (which was streamed into 200 cinemas in October 2014), Russell Brand referred to himself as an attention seeker who brings attention to important campaigns. He championed the tenants on the New Era estate in Hackney, east London, who successfully fought against sell-off and rent hikes. This is not insignificant. But no amount of 'attention' would have helped without the tenants' own organisation, determined campaigning and wide support

including from the Socialist Party. One of Russell's first public mentions of the New Era campaign was when he tweeted a photo of a Socialist Party campaign leaflet in the summer of 2014.

Housing

These housing struggles go on. They have benefited from Russell Brand's support but to be successful and part of the campaign for a decent home for all requires more than he can offer. There is definitely a case to link up the current housing struggles and future ones that will erupt as workers find the gap between low wages and sky-high housing costs force them into action. TUSC stands for the immediate implementation of rent control and investment in a mass programme of building and refurbishing council homes.

Russell Brand has also stirred up discussion and thinking about the concept of revolution. Experience of capitalism in crisis, particularly the "galling inequality" and "ecological destruction," he describes, has prepared a receptive audience. The big movements in recent years, including the Arab Spring, Occupy and the election of Syriza in Greece, have provoked discussion about what is needed to challenge capitalism.

In his book what's clear is that Russell is on the side of the suffering, that he is compassionate and understanding about

the ravages on humanity that living in a brutal unequal society exact. And that change is needed and wanted. But he's not so clear about what that change will be and how it will be brought about.

Karl Marx, still the most famous bearded proponent of revolution, was the first to explain that capitalism is a system based on class divides and exploitation. One of his most famous lines is possibly the kind of thing you wouldn't be shocked to hear Russell Brand say: "The philosophers have only interpreted the world, in various ways. The point, however, is to change it!" But unlike Brand, Marx and Engels and many since, including the Socialist Party, have ideas about how to change the world.

Working class

In capitalism's early days Marx showed the potentially powerful role of the working class because of its role in the economy - as the producers of wealth. Marx also explained that capitalism is a system that is based on short-term profits for the minority at the top and is therefore not rational. The alternative he put forward is socialism - a system based on democratic planning to meet the needs of the overwhelming majority. To get that, Marx explained, requires mass struggle with the working class playing the leading role.

Decades of propaganda tell us that the working class is no longer capable of playing this role, but experience of austerity shows that it is and must be. The magnificent millions-strong public sector strikes in 2011 gave a glimpse of the potential power the working class has. In 2012, a London bus workers' strike won an Olympic bonus that the bosses had no intention of paying.

The Socialist Party organises to assist the working class because, when organised and acting independently, it is the biggest social force. It is capable not only of resisting austerity, but also of promoting a different type of society, one where the wealth is democratically planned to meet the needs of all not just the super-rich - a socialist society.

History gives us confidence that the working class will take action. But not just history - look at Ireland today. Austerity has hit that country hard. Youth unemployment has resulted in famine levels of emigration. Public sector pay has been slashed. For many years it has appeared that the bankers and the bondholders who caused the crisis and then got bailed out were getting away with it. But a proposed water charge, a double

But a proposed water charge, a double

Inspired by revolutions?

In his book, among many issues he chews over, Russell Brand looks at a number of revolutions. He quotes George Orwell's *Homage to Catalonia* and writes: "I'd never heard of this [Spanish] Revolution; the reason for this is of course because it's so fucking inspiring." He recognises that the history most people learn in school and through the media side-lines and distorts such events. Discussing and drawing lessons from revolutions and working class struggle, as well as organising to build the struggle now are just some of the things we do at Socialist Party branch meetings - and reasons you should come along!



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and unfair tax, has been the straw that broke the camel's back and massive anger erupted.

Russell Brand's *Trews* featured this movement. An episode that included Paul Murphy, member of the Socialist Party and of the Irish Parliament for the Anti-Austerity Alliance, has had over 160,000 views. Paul and the Socialist Party in Ireland are giving a lead and a strategy based on the democratic and mass organisation of the working class and non-payment - like the movement that defeated Thatcher's poll tax that was led by Militant, now the Socialist Party. Now it's Paul and other socialist TDs who are on the talk-show couches.

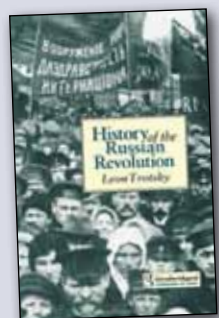
Recently Paul gave a speech at a 10,000-strong march where he outlined a clear strategy to defeat both water charges and the government: "This is about who rules in Irish society. It's about the possibility of a massive, left movement in this country for an economic and political revolution. It's about the possibility of ending the rule of the bankers and bondholders."

"It's about the possibility of fundamental and socialist change and about bringing about, for the first time in this state - together with our brothers and sisters across Europe - the rule of the majority, the rule of the 99%."

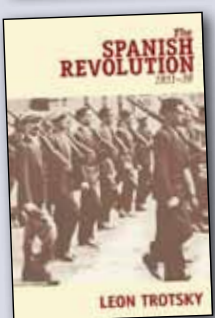
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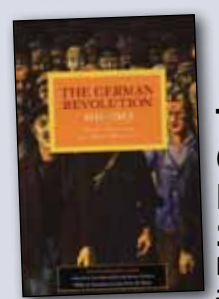
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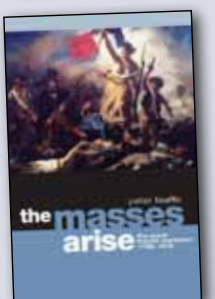
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Russell is on the side of the suffering, he is compassionate and understanding about the ravages on humanity. Change is needed and wanted. But he's not so clear about what that change will be



Russell Brand and Nigel Farage on Question Time

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Socialist Students leads in Leeds

Aggie Chaplin and Iain Dalton
Socialist Students

Socialist Students members organised a march for free education of around 150 in Leeds on 6 March. Students and young workers were attracted from across Yorkshire.

Donations from trade unions, including lecturers' union UCU and transport union RMT, supplied vital funds to produce leaflets. Local trade unionists assisted students in stewarding the march. Bakers' union BFAWU even sent Sarah Woolley, a member of their executive, to speak on our platform.

Sarah, who is a local Greggs worker, linked zero-hour contracts to student fees and debt. As she commented: "You shouldn't have

to have a dad who went to Eton to get a university degree!"

Mary Finch, University of Leeds student and one of the event's organisers, also spoke. She is standing to be her student union's education officer. Real students' representatives don't just sit in an office: they get out on the streets and organise.

Marketising

Lily Green is a sixth former and Socialist Students member from Huddersfield. She spoke brilliantly on the disastrous effects of marketising education.

Sam Morecroft, a PhD student at the University of Sheffield, represented the anti-casualisation campaign run by UCU. He highlighted the plight of university teachers

paid an exploitative hourly wage. He also stressed the importance of a united front of students and workers in fighting education privatisation.

Many speakers criticised Labour's pathetic pledge to reduce tuition fees to 'only' £6,000 a year. In this context, it was significant that the only speaker for an electoral group was Megan Ollerhead.

Megan is a University of York student organiser. She is also a prospective parliamentary candidate for the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC - see page 5). Megan called for students to support TUSC as a union-backed electoral alternative campaigning to abolish all fees and cuts. She also explained that "whatever combination of colours gets in this May, it's

still going to be the same flavour ... We need to continue to organise events like this."

Success

Socialist Students members worked hard to build this event, and throughout the demonstration successfully engaged with students and workers alike. Quite a lot joined the march along the route, including a big group of students from Notre Dame sixth form.

This was an excellent starting point for further action from the free education movement throughout the country. It shows once again that Socialist Students is the group on campuses that gets things done, even when the National Union of Students is dragging its heels.



photo Jonny Dickens



International Women's Day

International Women's Day (IWD) took place on 8 March. Socialist Party members and TUSC supporters took part in the global action around the day, bringing socialist ideas to the fight against the oppression of women. Below are brief reports of some of the many activities.



Million Women Rise

"Power to the women" was the slogan of the Million Women Rise march through London on 7 May.

Women from the 'Democratic Republic' of the Congo highlighted UK corporations profiting from forced labour and war in the region. Iranian women carried placards showing the effects of horrendous acid attacks on women who refuse to conform to the regime's dress and behaviour codes. A contingent of Turkish and Kurdish women from the Day-Mer group marched (see picture right), as did a contingent of Sudanese women.

Many women on the march were survivors of violence, rape or child sexual abuse. The Million Women Rise movement has a number of demands we support. Safe houses for victims of trafficking. Abolishing the 'no recourse to public funds' rule for people from abroad. And proper funding of all services for women escaping violence.

Eleanor Donne



photo E Donne



photo Lincoln TUSC

Lincoln TUSC

Elaine Smith (pictured above), TUSC prospective parliamentary candidate, said: "International Women's Day this year falls, once again, during a period of mass struggle by the working class

against austerity.

"Working class women are disproportionately affected in government attacks on public sector jobs, benefits and attacks on services and there is more to come whoever is in government after 7 May."

Women's day school

Socialist Party members in Yorkshire celebrated IWD with a women's day school in Leeds.

We talked about how socialism is vital to feminism, held a workshop on public speaking and discussed Marxist philosophy.

Five branches were represented, including many newer members and potential members.

Tanis Belsham-Wray

Eleanor Marx

Lewisham Socialist Party visited Eleanor Marx's former house in Sydenham, south London (right). Eleanor was a leading 19th century socialist activist and trade union organiser.

Reclaim the day

Christine Lagarde, head of the bosses' International Monetary Fund (IMF), spoke on a 'Women of the World' platform. Women of the World has the Duchess of Cornwall as its president, and is based on women who represent the super-rich 1%. Not quite the world you and I know!

Lagarde talked about making the workplace fairer for women. But her focus was how this can boost national economies, rather than how it could improve the lives of women and their families.

Not surprising really. As president of the IMF, her role is to defend capitalism and big business

by making the poorest in society pay for the economic crisis.

IWD began as a socialist political event to promote equal rights and suffrage for women. It was founded to commemorate a strike of women textile workers.

In 2015, women in the UK and around the world still earn less than men and suffer from discrimination and sexual harassment.

But many are now reclaiming the day, and celebrating the true meaning of IWD. Women will be at the forefront of the struggle to overthrow capitalism and build a socialist future.

Heather Rawling



photo Lewisham SP

SOCIALIST PARTY FIGHTING FUND

	£ received	£ target	January to March 2015	Deadline 6 April 2015	%
North West	1,660	1,200	[Progress bar]	[Progress bar]	138%
Northern	488	600	[Progress bar]	[Progress bar]	81%
Yorkshire	2,178	2,900	[Progress bar]	[Progress bar]	75%
West Midlands	1,494	2,100	[Progress bar]	[Progress bar]	71%
East Midlands	1,061	1,600	[Progress bar]	[Progress bar]	66%
Eastern	692	1,200	[Progress bar]	[Progress bar]	58%
South West	778	1,400	[Progress bar]	[Progress bar]	56%
Wales	1,233	2,300	[Progress bar]	[Progress bar]	54%
London	3,079	6,100	[Progress bar]	[Progress bar]	50%
Southern	606	1,200	[Progress bar]	[Progress bar]	50%
South East	299	750	[Progress bar]	[Progress bar]	40%
England and Wales	5,236	3,650	[Progress bar]	[Progress bar]	143%
TOTAL	18,804	25,000	[Progress bar]	[Progress bar]	75%

Socialist Party general election appeal 2015

Naomi Byron
Socialist Party finance team

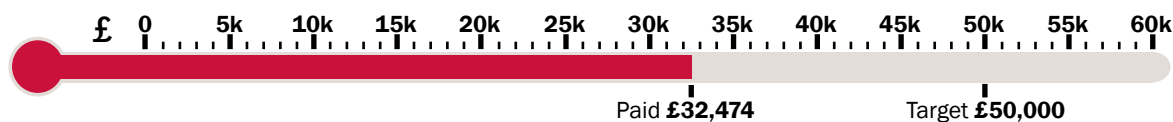
As the main parties squabble over election debates, Socialist Party members and TUSC supporters are building a real alternative to their sterile arguments over what to cut and in what order.

Our election appeal is aiming to raise £50,000 to help pay for our campaigning work during the election.

Thanks to all who have donated, including Mark Baker £200, Chris Moore £300, Dave Warwick £600, Alex Moore £400, Steve Wootton £500, Sheila Caffrey £200, Alfie Lethbridge £500, Frankie Langeland £300, George Fidler £40, Adam Goulcher

£250, John Ewers £200, Laura Collins £140, Matthew Carey £500 and Michael Carley £300.

You can donate at socialistparty.org.uk/donate, phone 020 8988 8777 to pay by card, or post a cheque made out to "Socialist Party" to PO Box 24697, London E11 1YD. Please mark your donation "Election Appeal 2015".



Southampton care homes protest

“I want my voice to be heard”

Residents' carers, workers and supporters gathered in Shirley precinct in Southampton on 7 March to rally support for Woodside Lodge and other day services and care homes under threat from the Labour council. The campaigners then marched to Woodside Lodge to hold a solidarity rally outside. The campaign has received the support of care workers who are disappointed their unions Unite and Unison are not doing more to back the campaign. Other Unison activists there from the health service however have given their full backing.



Stop the threat to day services and care homes! photo Nick Chaffey

Linda Hayes, Southampton, leads the campaign to save Woodside Lodge care home and day centre. Here she explains how she became an activist.

I am a proud mother of two sons, and work within the local community as a hairdresser, in particular with people with high needs, such as Alzheimer's and dementia sufferers. I aim to help vulnerable people who don't have a voice. I have always stood up for what I believe is right: I am passionate and I am a people person.

In the year 2000, my father was diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease and Lewy Body dementia. He was a wonderful father and fantastic hus-

band to my mother, who sadly died in 2003 of lung cancer. I then cared for my father alone. I had to fight long and hard to get my father into a suitable nursing home.

I realised that many others would be in a similar situation to mine and made my first protest on YouTube in 2006. I fought for the government and Nice (national institute for health and care excellence) not to stop the use of a drug called Aripicept, which is important in prolonging quality life for those who suffer this disease.

My voice was heard and they agreed to keep the tablet available on the NHS. This helped my father at the early stages, but sadly he passed away in 2007.

I attend Woodside Lodge day centre and care home twice a week where I support people with Alz-

heimer's and dementia with community and hair dressing services. Woodside was a fantastic support for my father. He would stay there to give my mother rest, especially in the time she was undergoing chemotherapy. He enjoyed the visits to the day centre.

I learned, at the end of 2014, that Woodside Lodge was to be closed down by the local council in favour of apartments being built. I do not believe this is right.

We were advised that the needs of the residents were assessed, and they will be relocated: But there are no places nearby with 24/7 facilities that could support these people. It means increased stress for families and local hospitals. Staff will also lose their jobs.

I have attended the meetings at the Southampton City Council rep-

resenting the public and it was a waste of time, as sadly they had already committed to the closure of Woodside. Don Thomas and Keith Morrell (Southampton Councillors Against Cuts - supported by TUSC) have helped my campaign, as has the Socialist Party.

I have been on BBC radio Solent, and in my local newspaper. I have made the local councillors and Labour MP aware. I've also contacted Russell Brand.

Margaret Thatcher ended her days in the Ritz at a cost of nearly £3,500 a night. She was well looked-after with dementia with private care around the clock. These people are not as fortunate and do not deserve to be treated this way.

If Southampton Labour council still wants to close Woodside Lodge, our next protest will be to David

Cameron at 10 Downing Street in London!



Linda Hayes photo Nick Chaffey

Leicester: £3 an hour wage slavery scandal

Mike Barker

(TUSC prospective parliamentary candidate, Leicester East)

2,500 garment workers in Leicester, half the total in the city, are paid £3 an hour or less. This horrifying statistic, highlighted in a recent report, exposes sweat shop bosses who flout minimum wage laws.

The Ethical Trading Initiative (ETI), a campaign backed by companies, trade unions and non-governmental organisations, commissioned the report by Leicester University researchers.

This shocking study on the prevalence of modern-day slavery in Leicester says that across the East Midlands in 2010, textile companies probably defrauded workers of at least £50 million in wages. It

emphasized that the average take home pay for garment workers grafting usually for about 28 hours a week with a "near complete absence of employment contracts" was a measly £79.

It goes on to observe "late payment of wages, and the official declaration of a portion of wages only. Employers often consider welfare benefits as a 'wage component' and force workers to supplement wages below the minimum wage with welfare benefits."

In 2008 the TUC pointed that the "HMRC (Revenue and Customs - responsible for enforcing the minimum wage) has around 5% of the number of inspectors that are available to the Department for Work and Pensions benefit fraud unit." The number of enforcement

visits undertaken had fallen by 14,930 per year since 1988.

Cuts in the HMRC have affected these. The Low Pay Commission says that there are only half the number of compliance officers in post now compared to the number of Wages Council inspectors in the 1950s, despite "the considerable expansion of 'at risk' populations such as part-time ethnic minority and women workers".

In the past Leicester was a major centre for the hosiery and knitwear industry, but was hit by the closure of all the major factories as the work shifted to the far east. Now third world conditions are being imported back here.

The ETI urges retailers to check that their suppliers are acting 'ethically', but the trade unions are the key to changing the situation. The



High street chains profit from sweatshops photo Ch4 Dispatches

secretary of Leicester Trades Union Council, Tony Church, said: "I believe we should work with local unions to reach out to those workers and organise them in order to ensure their rights are won."

Cases like this exist across the country. The Socialist Party cam-

paigns for a £10 an hour minimum wage now.

To that we must add urgent action is needed by government to enforce the minimum wage. But it will take a fight by trade unions, and a political will to make it happen.

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.

Homeless suffer

"No Place to call home" is a BBC documentary about homeless people in Britain. It shows how government policies, the 'hard decisions' Iain Duncan Smith (IDS) and his millionaire colleagues make, affect the lives of the poor.

The programme shows how the council can wash their hands of a family they call intentionally homeless. How many politicians with fat expenses have had to live a winter without heating because their landlord cannot be bothered to fix the boiler? Would they choose to leave that house and make themselves 'intentionally homeless'?

IDS should be nailed to a chair and forced to watch this programme. It shows why the politicians would like to ditch the BBC in favour of Rupert Murdoch. TV is already mainly celebrity bullshit and repeats. They would prefer it to be 100%.

And none of the political class could care less about this. Well, 'don't care was made to care'. Vote against this canaille and for socialist and anti-cuts candidates.

Derek McMillan

Silver screen

Remember when we were 'all in it together' in an international economic crisis and we had to collectively tighten our belts? Somebody obviously forgot to tell Hollywood.

All nominees for an Oscar will walk away with a goodie bag worth \$125,000 this year. Although 'worth' is a strange idea when that includes a \$20,000 package for somebody to fly to you for a personal horoscope reading, dream analysis and training in mind control or French Mediterranean sea salts 'worth' \$1,200.



Such displays of wealth are a small but public demonstration that austerity has been a lie to make the poor pay for a crisis we didn't cause, while the lifestyles of the rich remain untouched.

Ronnie Job

Lagoon blues

Two recent news items, that a US general wanted the UK to spend more on the military, and that the go-ahead had been given for a tidal lagoon in South Wales to use tidal power for electricity generation, together reminded me of a schoolday in the 1960s.

An oceanography teacher from Swansea gave us a lecture on a method of generating electricity from wave power as well as, or instead of, from tidal power. Such a method would not need large tidal ranges but could be used off most coasts.

He said he'd got all the necessary consents from his employers and research

institutes to try this out but that at the last moment the Ministry of Defence had intervened to stop him. They insisted there should be no competition from this quarter to the continued development of "civil" (!) nuclear power generation, irrespective of cost, as the military needed the by-products. Yet some people still argue that a socialist society would inhibit new inventions!

Steve Cawley

Workers' MPs

The following letter from Coventry socialist Dave Nellist was published in the Independent

Gus O'Donnell is correct to say that there are too many MPs who "just don't get it". And after the May election, if MPs salaries rise to £74,000, they will no longer be on what the Chief Executive of the Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority has described as the "miserly amount" of £67,000. They will be even more out of touch with ordinary people.

In the 1980s, three of us in Parliament served our terms living on the average wage of a skilled worker; in my case, nine years at less than half an MP's salary. The balance we gave to community campaigns, strike funds and charities.

Gus will be pleased to hear that this May, dozens of socialists and trade unionists are standing in the general election who share the view that the best way to reflect ordinary people's lives and problems in the House of Commons is to share the same standard of living as the majority, not to be insulated from those problems.

**Dave Nellist
Chair, Trade Unionist and
Socialist Coalition, Coventry**

Mind the gap

My tube train got stuck in the station with its doors shut on the way into work recently. So the driver got on the tannoy to explain.

Apparently an automated system had made us overshoot the platform. The driver explained he'd managed to stop the train in time, but it wasn't safe to open the doors. He'd have to take us to the next station.

This minor inconvenience could have turned into a major catastrophe if it weren't for the driver's intervention. A warning, perhaps, to London's mayor and transport authority, who dream of foisting driverless trains on the capital to smash up transport union RMT.

James Ivens

Valleys Rebellion

Scott Jones reviews the BBC 2 documentary Valleys Rebellion



Michael Sheen photo BBC

Actor and activist Michael Sheen returned to his home town Newport in South Wales for a recent TV programme, 'Valleys Rebellion', commemorating the 175th anniversary of the 'Newport Rising'.

In this 1839 armed revolt, thousands of workers marched from the Valleys to the local seat of power in Newport to demand the vote. This was part of the Chartist movement, one of the world's first working-class movements.

Sheen also visited the Valleys towns these Chartists descended from to discuss the Chartist legacy and ask working class people what they thought of political representation now. Today Merthyr, Blaenau Gwent and Rhondda, the hotbeds of Chartist and early trade unionism, are some of Britain's most deprived, unemployed and unhealthy areas and have some of Britain's lowest voting turnouts too.

Tredegar is now home to more boarded-up shop fronts than anything else while Blaina, home of Chartist leader Zephaniah Williams, has a male unemployment rate twice the national average!

Sheen interviewed James Dean Bradfield, frontman of left-wing band the Manic Street Preachers, in Blackwood where the Chartists met, to discuss the legacy of the rising, remembered in the Manics' recent song 'Stow Hill'. He held telling interviews with Neil Kinnock and Tory MP David Davies. Davies near enough admitted that he would

have been frightened by the rising so would have been egging on the soldiers who opened fire on the Chartists and killed 22 of them.

Typically Kinnock came to the defence of Chartist leader John Frost, who had no stomach for revolutionary action, constantly urged restraint and was distrusted by many workers in South Wales.

More important were Sheen's conversations with the Valleys'

The hotbeds of Chartist and early trade unionism, are now some of Britain's most deprived areas...

working class people. A local man in Rhymney was fed up with not being listened to, and said we need something like the Chartist uprising now.

A community action group in Merthyr showed that people are not apathetic but are organising themselves. They said they were making their voices heard even though politicians see them as just 'sick, thick and lazy'.

These groups and others were asked what they would like to see on a new People's Charter. Some said they would in effect like to see the right to recall of elected repre-

sentatives, a key tenet of socialist democracy. A young hairdresser said politicians should be paid less, to bring them in line with the people they represent - a workers' MP on a worker's wage.

12% of the population of one Valleys town needed to use food banks in a recent nine-month period. The Chartists' descendants are clearly not apathetic but angry and prepared to organise and fight if given a lead.

The parallels between then and now are huge. Now most of Chartism's demands have been won. But having fought for pay for MPs so that not only the wealthy could afford to go to parliament, now practically all working class MPs have been absorbed by the capitalist class and its system.

On St. David's day, the actor delivered a passionate call to arms at an NHS demo in Tredegar. He pointed out the damage done to the NHS by both Labour and the Con-Dems and said no mainstream political party is willing to safeguard its future.

Also on that platform was Mariam Kamish, speaking for the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition which truly follows in the footsteps of the Chartists and is made up of working class people like those that fought and died for the vote.

We aim to build a new force, and a real party for the workers built by the workers.

Valleys Rebellion can be seen on BBC iPlayer until 24 March.

Defend the right to protest

Dan Celardi's article (Socialist 845) showed the dangers of the Metropolitan Police's decision not to police many demonstrations in London, leaving it to campaigners to employ private companies to formulate their traffic management plans and steward road closures.

This may partly be a protest against cuts by the police themselves. But its effect could be to intimidate people, especially first-time campaigners, from protesting, as they will face either having to pay out sums of money they can't afford or being bold enough to go ahead anyway without getting permission.

After public outcry the police backed down from insisting these costs are borne by 'Million Women Rise' and the Campaign against Climate Change on their protests,



FBU strikers on 25 February took over the streets outside Parliament
photo Paul Mattsson

but they say this does not mean a change in policy.

However, the Fire Brigades Union strike and rally in London on 25 February was a magnificent answer to this threat. Thousands of firefighters marched from their rally to parliament, protesting outside and blocking traffic, then marched up Whitehall to do the same at Downing Street. This was a completely peaceful and fantastic, bold protest.

This shows us a way to overcome this latest threat to the right to protest. Trades councils and trade union branches in all London boroughs should make a public declaration that they will offer stewarding and assist local people who want to organise protests on issues that are in line with union policies.

Paula Mitchell

30 years since the end of the miners' strike

“It wasn't easy, but I wanted to defeat Thatcher”



Miners rally in Wales, April 1984 photos D Sinclair

Neal Davis, member of Mansfield Socialist Party, spoke to former Shirebrook (north Derbyshire) miner Ronnie Rodgers.

How did you manage to stay on strike for a year?

Well, it wasn't easy, but I wanted to defeat Thatcher and the government. It was the solidarity with those on strike that kept it all together and the community spirit was good for most of the time.

My ex-wife was working, and she stood by me and helped me through it. I got strike pay and picket money and the union was paying my electricity bill and paid off a fine for me for stealing coal from the pit yard towards the end of the strike. Some people would donate money or buy you a pint or two.

How did the mood of the strike change from the beginning to the end?

At the beginning some doubted the strike - at times I was resentful of that and tried to explain that we needed to stand together to win. As

time when on they started to rally behind it.

It got tougher mentally towards the end of the strike though. By the end my heart was telling me to keep going, but my head was telling me to give up. When the end came it was very sad that we had lost. But I have fond memories about all the community pulling together at the time, it was probably the best Christmas I'd ever had.

I have fond memories about all the community pulling together at the time, it was probably the best Christmas I'd ever had

Could the outcome have been different?

If the pit deputies would have adhered to their ballot at the time then

Not in vain

As 6 March 1985 approached I felt great sadness and yet so much pride. I wanted to shout from the highest mountain: "You may have won the battle Thatcher but you ain't won the war."

On the day, we marched up the pit lane following one of the longest disputes I have ever been involved in, with our heads held high. Our families, our friends, our supporters and those that cared were there and gave me a sense of belonging I had never felt before or since.

30 years on it's clear that it was a major loss for the working class as a whole, but not the end. Once the working class finds itself again, learns from its own history, builds its own political identity and moves to change its own destiny, then our struggle in 1984-85 won't have been in vain.

Rebel With A Cause

the miners in Nottinghamshire (one of the only areas where the majority were not the strike) wouldn't have been able to work and we could have won. I remember at the time the Area Director saying they had no plans to shut any further pits in Derbyshire and in the end they shut all ten.

It also could have been different if the TUC had put its weight behind the fight - starting with a 24-hour general strike. Lots of other workers were under attack at the same time and would have been willing to take solidarity action.

What impact did the strike have on your ideas?

It made me want to battle on for socialism. I wanted to oppose the privatisation of industry and deregulation of the banks. At the time I could see the way the Labour Party was going and they weren't going to stand up for ordinary folk.

I had a look around and in around 1991 I found Militant (forerunner of the Socialist Party). I saw an advert in the paper saying something like: "If you want to build real socialism, join Militant."

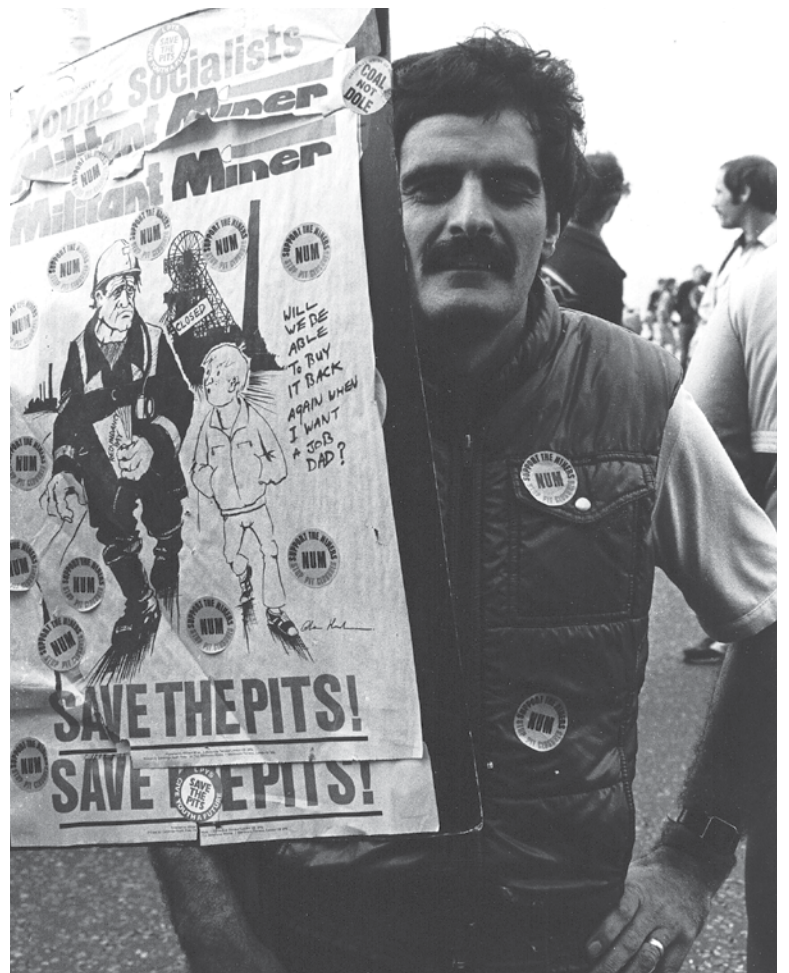


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Striking miner 1984



Miners lobby the 1984 TUC

Labour Party's role

A large group of Socialist Party members spent an enjoyable evening watching Still The Enemy Within in Chesterfield. The film brought back many memories of the great miners' strike for me personally and had the understandable effect of raising the hackles of many of the, to put it politely, ageing audience.

Two things in particular struck me. The first was the issue of age. Our group probably contained the two youngest members of the audience (I think I was probably in the lower quartile and I was in my twenties in 1984!).

There is a crying need for this film to be shown to a younger generation - maybe Socialist Students groups or local Youth Fight for Jobs campaigns should think about buying a copy and organising a screening.


The second is a criticism of what otherwise, as acknowledged by

Rob Williams in his review (the Socialist issue 827), is a very good film.

There was virtually no mention of the role of the Labour Party leadership in assisting the ruling class to defeat the strike. This had a tremendous bearing on the trade union leaders who were able to use it as an excuse to ignore rank and file members' demands for solidarity action.

I'm having difficulty understanding this omission. Taken alongside statements of some miners involved in the film about how massively increased picketing (especially at Orgreave) could have won the dispute, I was left with a feeling that the film's 'angle' was almost syndicalist, and actually repeated the mistakes of some on the left at the time who believed the 1984-85 strike could just be a rehash of the 1972 and 1974 victories.

Dave Gorton



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TAKE THE WEALTH OFF THE 1%

Wyllie Hume
Sheffield Socialist Party

While working class people struggle to make ends meet, the wealthy continue to get increasingly rich. The recently published Forbes Rich List showed that the combined wealth of the world's 1,826 billionaires has reached \$7.05 trillion. That's up from \$6.4 trillion the previous year.

At the same time ordinary people have had to suffer the burden of austerity - job losses, cuts in services and wages, etc - to pay for an economic crisis caused by the super-rich and their capitalist profit system.

And while the world's wealthy sit on unimaginable amounts of money, over one billion people globally struggle to survive on less than \$1.25 a day.

The charity Oxfam estimates that if the current trend in rising inequality continues then the world's richest 1% will own more than the 99% combined by 2016! Already, in Britain, the 100 richest people own more than 30% of all households and the richest five people own a combined wealth of £35 billion - the same

amount as planned in the next round of government cuts.

Meanwhile, the representatives of the rich in parliament are set to gain a whopping 9% pay increase this year from £67,000 to £74,000 per year. This is their reward for passing through severe attacks on the living and working conditions of working class and poor people. MPs are happy to pay themselves inflated salaries while workers have experienced the longest fall in real wages since the 1870s.

The Socialist Party is part of the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) which is standing hundreds of candidates all over the country in the general and local elections. If elected, Socialist Party representatives would only accept the average wage of a skilled worker, not the inflated wages that the capitalist MPs take.

Under capitalism, the rich get richer and the poor get poorer. Why should we pay for a crisis caused by their rotten system?

We need socialist policies to take the wealth off the 1% and end the poverty and exploitation created by capitalism.

Vote TUSC on 7 May and help build a new workers' party to represent the interests of the 99% not the super-rich 1%.

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!