

# Smash the pay freeze

## Organise for strike action now

**Adrian O'Malley, Unison Health Service Group Executive (SGE), Yorkshire and Humberside, personal capacity**

Tory Health Minister Jeremy Hunt has declared war on NHS workers. He has imposed a 1% non-consolidated pay rise for 2014-15 and 2015-16 and no yearly incremental rises for the 600,000 staff who are not at the top of their pay band.

The announcement was greeted with anger but hardly surprise by NHS workers who have grown to expect the worst from the Con-Dem government. The main question I have been asked is: "what are we going to do about it?"

Workers in Mid Yorkshire Health Trust demonstrated their determination to fight back last year when they took nine days of strike action.

After being threatened with pay cuts and compulsory redundancies, the admin and clerical staff won an improved pay and job protection deal through this action.

Public sector unions Unite and GMB responded to the latest pay news by saying they will ballot for strike action.

Even the no strike RCN has murmured that it may lift its strike ban, arguing that nurses have lost over £2,000 in real terms since 2009.

Members of the biggest NHS union Unison, who were looking for a fighting response from our leaders, were left disappointed.

Head of Health Christine McAnea merely said: "we will be talking to our members about how we respond."

But four years of below-inflation pay rises have resulted in a 10% pay cut in real terms. The squeeze on pay is compounded by the third year of increased pension contributions which will gobble up 3% of the paltry 1% rise.

Added to the 3% "efficiency savings", ie cuts, in NHS budgets and staffing, this means that NHS staff are working harder every year for less money.

At the Unison national conference in 2012, general secretary Dave Prentis proclaimed to rousing support that the union will "smash the pay freeze".

Two years later we are still waiting for action and our wages are falling further behind the cost of living.

Unison has got to take a lead and announce a strike ballot of its 500,000 members in the NHS alongside our local government and higher education members who are also in dispute with their employers over the pay freeze.

Unison's health SGE meets on 2 April. The SGE must make a stand and recommend strike action to the union's health conference which starts on 14 April.

The conference should become the launching pad for the strike ballot which could smash the pay freeze.

## **URGENT: Prepare for strike to smash pay freeze**

**Rob Williams**

The hypocritical tributes from the mainstream press and capitalist politicians to Bob Crow and Tony Benn have grated on workers.

In contrast, ordinary people have remembered how it wasn't just that Bob and his union fought for their members, it was that they often won, ensuring that railworkers in particular have been able to protect their jobs and living standards.

This must be the approach with which the continuing pay freeze in the public sector is challenged by the unions.

There is absolute outrage that millions of workers will have their pay again pegged to 1% when RPI inflation is nearly 3% and even the government's preferred indicator, CPI, is almost double the pay offer.

Already, local government unions have put in a pay demand of £1 an hour across the board. As the RMT has shown, to win the unions must show they will fight for this.

All activists in the public sector must immediately bring motions to their union branches and shop stewards' committees calling for their unions to organise strike ballots to break the pay freeze. They should also call for the strike action to be coordinated.

These ballots must be linked to a campaign for a vote for strike action, involving mass meetings, including workplace meetings, so all members can have the opportunity to debate the strategy.

The recent tube strike showed that there would be massive public support for strike action to protect workers' living standards.

The heroic seven-day strike of low-paid porters and ancillary staff in Ealing hospital and also by care workers in Doncaster show the potential for coordinated action that could unite in-house NHS workers with those working for outsourced companies and agencies. Among the workers taking action the idea of a 24-hour strike is very popular.

In early 1988, 38 nurses took unofficial strike action in Manchester that ignited what became a mass movement to defend the NHS from Thatcher.

Months later, well over 150,000 people marched in London as well as countless local protests. There was a mood then for mass generalised action but the right-wing union leaders cut across it, as they did after the 2011 public sector pension strikes.

As Adrian O'Mally says on the front page, "the Unison health conference should become the launch pad for the strike ballot which could smash the pay freeze". That means activists preparing the ground now.

The campaign can also be fought in the vital elections in PCS, NUT, Unite as well as Unison. Members should vote for candidates who support a fighting strategy.

As the 2015 general election nears, some union leaders have argued that joint strike action should be put on the back burner in the hope of a Labour government.

Yet Labour leader Miliband agrees with the pay freeze. Ed Balls is "daunted" by the prospect of becoming chancellor in a Labour government continuing Tory austerity but undaunted in committing to maintaining the pay freeze.

Mass strike action now, up to and including a 24-hour general strike, would shatter the lull that is allowing the cuts consensus to dominate the political mainstream.

This yet again shows why the unions also need to urgently discuss launching a new mass political vehicle that inscribes opposition to austerity on its banner.

Now is the time to strike.

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## Obituary

# Tony Benn: steadfast in speaking out for socialism

Peter Taaffe, Socialist Party general secretary

In one week, the labour movement has suffered two big blows with the deaths of trade union left leader Bob Crow and now of Tony Benn. Bob Crow's death came as a shock, because he passed away at such an early age at the height of his powers and influence on working class people. Unfortunately, he has not lived to see the formation of a new mass workers' party (TUSC is a step towards this), which he fervently advocated and will be established in time.

Tony Benn had recently been in ill health but his death comes as no less of a blow because of his association and lifelong work for the left within the labour movement. He was a powerful symbol and leader of the Labour left at its height in the 1980s, when it exercised a huge and sometimes decisive effect on events within the Labour Party and the trade union movement as well.

Tony Benn's political evolution contradicted the dictum of the cynics, which holds it is only to be expected to be radical and on the left when you are young, but inevitably, as you get older, you shift towards the right. It was to his great credit that he defied this stereotype evolving from the centre-right to the left. The gallery of right-wing Labour apostates is large: Neil Kinnock and Tony Blair are examples of a recent vintage of this kind. Once an erstwhile leader of the Labour left, Kinnock was transformed into the darling of the capitalists and Labour right, as he put the knife into both the Militant tendency - now the Socialist Party - and then the miners. He received a handsome reward in gold - with the estimated income of him and his family now standing at £20 million - as well as a Barony! Blair is now 'worth' £100 million!

Tony Benn stood on the centre-right in Harold Wilson's Labour government of 1964-70, when he supported Barbara Castle's anti-union legislation 'In Place of Strife'. This was defeated by an uprising of Labour Party rank-and-file members and the colossal pressure of the trade unions. He shifted towards the left under the impact of the 1971 Upper Clyde Shipbuilders occupation, which he championed, as well as other workers' battles at that time, such as the miners' strikes of 1972 and 1974.

## Nationalisation

At this time, Benn emerged as the major figure of the Labour left, supporting the ideas of nationalisation and workers' control of industry. He gave firm support to the Labour Party Young Socialists, led by Militant supporters. He worked together with Militant supporters, including Tony Saunois, Laurence Coates, Hannah Sell, Nick Bradley and others on the National Executive Committee of the Labour Party helping to shift the party decisively towards the left. Tony Benn supported the demand for the nationalisation of the top 25 companies, which was carried on the NEC with the deciding vote of the LPYS representative.

An indication of the left, socialist and radical mood at this stage was that even the leading right-winger at the time, Roy Hattersley, argued in favour of nationalising "North Sea gas and oil, development land and rented property". This seemed to indicate an almost unstoppable movement towards the left within the labour movement, not just in Britain but internationally. However, in September 1973 the left-wing Allende government in Chile was overthrown in the bloody Pinochet coup. Jack Jones, General Secretary of the Transport and General Workers Union (TGWU, now part of Unite), remarked at a fringe meeting, with Tony Benn sitting alongside him, that he could perceive a situation where a Labour government led by Benn could come to power and be faced with the same kind of conspiracy as Allende faced in Chile.

Tony Benn reflected the huge radicalisation that was taking place in Britain but also pushed it forward with his speeches and articles in favour of Labour adopting a socialist programme. These proposals did not go far enough for the Militant tendency. There were big elements of Allende's programme of limited nationalisation in the proposals of Tony Benn. They were a big advance over the outmoded ideas of the Labour right, but because they did not propose to take away the fundamental powers of the capitalists, the ownership of the monopolies, the capitalists would be able to prepare the ground for a decisive blow, as in Chile.

## **Left advances**

However, throughout the 1970s, the left continued to advance both within the Labour Party and the unions as the campaign for Labour Party democracy scored important successes, with Militant and Tony Benn's supporters collaborating. This was despite the fact that the Labour right, prompted by big business, used the 1975 defeat of the left in the 'Common Market' (now the European Union) referendum, to move him from Secretary of State for Industry to a less influential position in the Cabinet as Energy Secretary. The experiences of that right-wing Labour government in turn prepared the ground for an even bigger shift towards the left within the Labour Party following its defeat in 1979.

Tony Benn stubbornly resisted the right and put his full weight behind left, socialist policies. This culminated in his standing for the deputy leadership of the Labour Party in 1981, which he only lost by 1%, due to the betrayal of former lefts, like Kinnock, who voted for his opponent, Denis Healey, or abstained. This in turn led to the offensive of the Labour right through the 'Gang of Four', led by Roy Jenkins and David Owen, who subsequently split from the Labour Party and formed the Social Democratic Party. Their aim was to split the anti-Tory and Labour vote in the 1983 general election, which they succeeded in doing. This helped to maintain Thatcher in power and prepared the way for the emergence of a determined right-wing offensive within the Labour Party, backed by Thatcher and the press. Their stalking horses were former lefts like Michael Foot and Neil Kinnock.

## **Militant MPs**

However, this did not stop the election of three Militant supporters as Labour MPs in the 1983 and 1987 general elections, in which Tony Benn gave sterling support to their campaigns. Neither did it prevent the victory of the socialist Liverpool councillors between 1983 and 1987, nor the outbreak of the mighty miners' strike, with Tony Benn backing these causes to the hilt. However, following the defeat of the miners, the Liverpool councillors and the print workers at Wapping, the Kinnock 'counter-revolution' against the democratic rights of Labour Party members and socialist policies began in earnest. Kinnock's work was carried on by John Smith, then by Blair and now has been completed by Miliband with the elimination of the organised presence of the trade unions within the party that they founded.

This inevitably led to the political isolation of the Labour left and of Tony Benn because it was part of a worldwide process, the roots of which lay in the collapse of Stalinism and, with it, the planned economy. This allowed the capitalists to conduct a ferocious ideological campaign against all the ideas upon which the labour movement was built: socialism, trade unionism and solidarity.

It is to his great credit that Tony Benn steadfastly held on to his socialist and left opposition and for that he was held in great esteem. But his isolation and, therefore, loss of political influence, particularly amongst the younger generation, was increased because he clung to the Labour Party, which was no longer a political vehicle for working-class people. This comes through clearly in the remarks made by Tony in his recent and last diaries, which are disarmingly honest. [See 'The Labour of Tony Benn', *Socialism Today* 174, December/January 2014.] He stated that a Tory election candidate revealed to him that when Norman Tebbit asked Thatcher what she regarded as her greatest achievement, she replied "New Labour". He comments in his diaries, "That says it all really."

## **Criticism of Labour**

Yet, unfortunately he did not draw the necessary conclusions from this, that it was therefore necessary to take an entirely different road to the dead end represented by New Labour. He came very close, however, at times, to breaking

from New Labour. For instance, when he was approached by representatives of Bob Crow, to support 'No to EU' in the European elections of 2009, he was initially favourable. But, unfortunately, pressure was exerted by his family, particularly by Hilary Benn, who warned him that he could be expelled from New Labour, which in turn would mean a possible breach with his family. This undoubtedly represented to him too much of a hurdle in a vulnerable period towards the end of his life.

In his diaries, he commented at various stages that the Labour Party has been "assassinated". He conceded: "New Labour has come out more violently anti-union and anti-left than for many, many years... Constituencies are no longer on the left, because all the decent socialists have left, so it's a Blairite rump." [More Time for Politics, Diaries 2001-2007.] The conclusion to draw from this would surely be that the Labour Party is now irredeemable from a left and socialist perspective. It cannot be rescued in order to perform its original job as the political expression of the organised working class. This can only be done through a new mass party of the working class, with the trade unions in the lead.

I spoke with Tony Benn, alongside Tony Mulhearn and Len McCluskey, last year at one of the last meetings he addressed. It took place in Liverpool to commemorate the 30th anniversary of the heroic struggles of the socialist city council and the working class of that city in the 1980s. This meeting witnessed the deep affection and veneration for Tony Benn; he had given them unswerving support in their hour of struggle and need, as he had done for the struggles of working people everywhere. We should use the example of his life to reaffirm once more our implacable opposition to the capitalist system and for a new socialist world.

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## **After Bob Crow and Tony Benn: We fight on!**

### **What we think**

A deluge of tributes followed the sad and shocking death of Bob Crow, elected leader of the Rail, Maritime and Transport union.

He was known and respected beyond the ranks of the RMT because the union is to the forefront of militant action.

As the Economist put it, "Under Mr Crow, the RMT stood out, forsaking protests for traditional industrial activism." In fact the RMT supported a range of action - demonstrations, occupations as in Vestas on the Isle of Wight, and strikes.

Members enjoy, as the BBC admitted, "pay rises every year even during austerity, good pensions and good holiday allowances", prove that combative working class action results.

### **What next?**

The Economist asks: "What will happen to his union now?" The magazine's pro-capitalist target audience will hope for a 'moderate' successor.

Working class fighters will watch carefully, hoping for the election of someone who stands in Bob Crow's tradition.

Who the next general secretary will be is for RMT members to decide. In doing so they will be conscious that their union plays a wider and leading role - in Britain and internationally - in standing up for the working class as a whole.

The union stands for the working class using its power to defend and extend its rights and share of the world's wealth and for socialist change.

The messages of condolence and solidarity from the US, Cuba and elsewhere reflect this wider role. It is immortalised in the RMT banners that carry the words of the traditional socialist and workers' song, 'the Internationale'.

Bob Crow stood for the general resistance of the working class to all attacks. He was central to the RMT's role in establishing the National Shop Stewards Network (NSSN) in 2007.

This was a clear recognition of the inadequacy of many right-wing trade union leaders who rest on the 'official structures' and have tended to hold back the movement.

The NSSN was an attempt to give voice to the rank and file of the unions. This, of course, cannot be seen as a substitute for transforming those unions, but is a complementary aid to defending members.

Against austerity, the NSSN plays a vital role in putting forward a general programme for resisting the government's attacks.

Bob Crow seconded the motion calling for a 24-hour general strike at the 2012 TUC in Brighton. He also moved the motion at the 2013 TUC to keep the 24-hour general strike on the table.

The new leader must continue his proposals to build united effective action, including efforts to coordinate with other left unions and leaders.

## **Political strategy**

Under Bob Crow's leadership the union also drew conclusions about the need to have a political strategy.

A decade ago the RMT was expelled from the Labour Party because it supported socialist candidates in Scotland.

Bob and others in the leadership recognised that, in order to defend RMT members and the wider working class, they had to take steps to build a political voice.

The union debated the issue at two national delegate conferences and on both occasions backed participation in the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC).

Bob was a co-founder and sat alongside Socialist Party members and others on the steering committee. He also led 'No2EU-Yes to workers' rights', a coalition set up to contest the European elections.

There have been innumerable expressions of solidarity with what Bob was trying to achieve, including a willingness to stand in May's elections.

The latest batch of local election candidates to be approved by the TUSC steering committee, for example, includes the Finsbury Park RMT branch secretary and an Arnos Grove rep who have come forward just this week as prospective candidates.

These London activists see standing as part of their battle to defend jobs and services on London Underground. Eight Portsmouth RMT members have also stepped forward as prospective candidates.

But now there could be a danger that the right wing in the generally left RMT may begin to try to undermine Bob's legacy both industrially and politically.

What alternative can they offer workers facing privatisation, job losses, and pay cuts? Asking workers to wait for a Labour government in 2015? That is no alternative whatsoever.

Labour has shown in words and deeds that it will continue with privatisation, job losses, and pay cuts.

Rachel Reeves has warned a Labour government "would be tougher" on benefits than one that has presided over a

regime where every two minutes a young person has their paltry benefits stopped. Ed Balls' comment, "We've backed 1% pay restraint," says it all.

Labour-dominated councils are decimating services and jobs. They claim to 'feel bad' about it but only a tiny handful of councillors have actually voted against the cuts. And they have mainly been expelled from Labour.

The death of Tony Benn is another sad loss to the working class (see obituary on page 2). He was a staunch defender of socialism. But on Labour he was mistaken. The time for equivocation is over - as Bob made clear.

Left journalist Owen Jones has commented on the situation after Bob Crow and Tony Benn but offers no way forward.

He writes of a "fragmented" left but the real left exists not in little groups or in celebrities like him.

The future of the left is in the unions and in the workplaces - organised and as yet unorganised. As wider sections of the working class determinedly take up the fight, as the care workers in Doncaster and the health workers in Ealing are currently doing, new trade union leaderships and the mass political party the working class needs will be forged.

Owen Jones says that "the left's real mission is surely hope". But, hope for what Owen? That Labour will be the vehicle to change society? This is not hope.

This is utopia. The strategy of Owen and those who want to ensnare the workers and all suffering austerity in the Labour dead end basically amounts to 'a hope and a prayer'.

Meanwhile there are springs of real hope as workers draw left and socialist conclusions from their experience of capitalism in the 21st century.

In the US the fight for a \$15 an hour minimum wage involves young workers who want a share of the so-called economic recovery.

## Legacy

In South Africa the working class is taking vital steps to construct a new mass party to continue the legacy of the anti-apartheid struggle, particularly in the form of the Workers And Socialist Party.

This pioneering work, with socialists central, recalls Shelley's revolutionary credo: "To defy Power, which seems omnipotent; ... / to hope till Hope creates / From its own wreck the thing it contemplates."

RMT members, by electing a leader who will continue the RMT's role in building both TUSC and determined trade union action to defend the working class at every turn, will be standing in Bob Crow's powerful legacy. And the Socialist Party will back them every step in that direction.

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# 'Destructive' element in Labour was not Tony Benn

**Tony Mulhearn, Liverpool 47**

The Dross Machine goes into overdrive - Newsnight, Andrew Rawnsley in the Observer, the 'Life of Tony Benn'.

A parade of relics of the undead belched out their resentment at Tony Benn's 'destructive' behaviour as a leading Labour Party figure.

A smug Neil Kinnock was at his most repellent. Stripped of all the verbiage, Benn's 'crime' was the advocating of socialist policies and having the temerity to stand in the election for Labour's deputy leader in 1982.

Naturally, Militant figures prominently in their invective. Andrew Rawnsley in the Observer writes: "For a nice man he kept some nasty company.

"He never disowned and stood in the way of dealing with the Militant Tendency and other far-left entryists who were poisoning Labour from within.

"He does not bear sole responsibility for the split that led to the formation of the SDP, but he was one of the most crucial triggers for it."

For Rawnsley Benn, in advocating the implementation of elements of the socialist Clause 4 of the Party constitution is the 'destructive' element.

But the traitors are those who, defeated in the battle for ideas in the Party, fled and formed the Social Democratic Party (SDP).

Those who could not stomach the Labour Party embracing socialist ideas included Shirley Williams, one of the gang of four with Roy Jenkins, William Rodgers and David 'I adore nuclear weapons' Owen.

In the 1983 general election they stood as a phoney 'left of centre' SDP and divided the Labour vote.

The Tory government ruled for 13 years with catastrophic consequences for the working class.

Denis Healey, former right-wing Labour chancellor (founder and steering committee member of Bildeburg, the self-appointed organisation of movers and shakers of world capitalism), was also wheeled out posing as a sage of British politics.

In reality he was a justifier of nuclear Armageddon and a Thatcherite before Thatcher.

"He was a destructive force," he croaked. He meant: 'I was the natural deputy leader, what right did Benn have to stand as well?' In spite of having an election team which included pension thief Robert Maxwell, Rupert Murdoch, the BBC, ITV, the Daily Mail and Express, Healey defeated Benn by a tiny margin of 0.05% of the vote.

Healey's political vision was revealed as political myopia when, after Lord Kinnock's treacherous attack on Liverpool council at the 1985 Labour conference, he said to Kinnock: 'by that speech Neil you have won us the next general election.' In the subsequent general elections Labour went down to the two worst defeats since 1931. So these 'destructive elements' gifted the Tories a further ten years of government.

The memory of Tony Benn will live in the consciousness of the working class, long after the Labour lieutenants of capitalism in the ranks of the workers' movement are forgotten.

**Tony Mulhearn, a Militant supporter and now Socialist Party member who was also president of Liverpool District Labour Party (DLP) from 1980 to 1986**

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## Obituaries:

- [Tony Benn: steadfast in speaking out for socialism](#)
- [Bob Crow: A great fighter for the working class](#)

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# Re-elect Keith Morrell, Coxford rebel councillor

"I thought the last lot were bad, but this lot are worse. Yes, I support Keith and Don and what they have done."



This was a local resident in Coxford, Southampton, struggling to cope with the hit on her pocket from the bedroom tax and angered at the continuing cuts from the Labour council elected in 2012.

All across the Coxford area, Keith and Don have touched the lives of their local community, supporting their stand to Save Oaklands Pool and forcing the council to invest £1.6 million and re-open the pool.

Coxford has two representatives who are willing to fight alongside the community to ensure services like Erskine Court, supported living for the elderly, are saved.

Keith and Don mobilised hundreds to surround Erskine Court in a determined show of defiance against the council bulldozer and won.

When the local Sainsbury's supermarket closed a pathway used by hundreds of people to do their shopping, the community was mobilised and the path re-opened.

When First Bus took away a local bus from elderly residents used to get back from the shops, the community was mobilised and the service saved.

Now as further blows rain down from the Labour Council with a 10% rent increase, cleaning charges and parking charges digging into people's pockets and the future of Lordshill library under threat, Keith is continuing to mobilise support to save services in the area.

In May Keith will stand for re-election to the council. In three years he has shown that he will not betray his promises to those who elected him as others in the Labour Party have done.

Alongside side Councillor Don Thomas he has shown what is possible. Let's make sure Coxford keeps its rebel councillors, they are needed now more than ever. Give your support and re-elect Keith Morrell on 22 May.

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## Setting the record straight

It is deplorable that Guardian columnist Polly Toynbee used an invitation to talk about Tony Benn and his role in politics on Channel 4 news (14 March) to vilify the Militant, forerunner of the Socialist Party.

This from the woman who joined the rightward split from the Labour Party, the short lived Social Democratic Party (SDP).

She portrayed the Militant, tireless workers for the party, in Lambeth as alien infiltrators.

The capitalist media and most commentators and politicians are keen to portray Tony Benn's politics and socialism as outdated and outmoded.

On the contrary, Tony Benn was an expert at explaining why socialism is necessary and how it would work. He also clearly explained that capitalism does not work except for the rich.

Tony Benn did not draw the wrong conclusions about Labour's electoral failure. The SDP and New Labour decided that it was because it was too left wing.

Tony Benn, like the Militant, knew that it was because Labour was not socialist enough.

Capitalism tried to draw the sting out of Benn's politics by adopting him as an eccentric uncle.

The young woman in Bristol who said that he was her hero, a conviction politician, shows that Benn's ideas will always

be relevant and modern.

**Clare Wilkins, Birmingham**

## **The following letters were printed in the Guardian**

It's a shame that in an article of over 1,600 words Owen Jones couldn't bring himself to seriously discuss the political projects that Bob Crow was actually involved in ('Don't mourn.

Organise', 15 March). But perhaps that fits a narrative Owen wishes to promote, that there is no future for any electoral politics outside Labour.

Bob, however, saw the creation of a new political voice for working people, rooted in the organisations and communities of the working class, as an essential aspect of the struggle against austerity.

For the past four years we had worked together building the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC), in a project officially backed by the RMT itself.

TUSC will stand hundreds of anti-austerity candidates in this May's local elections in the biggest left-of-Labour challenge since the second world war.

Despite a number of approaches, Tony Benn didn't agree with an electoral challenge to Labour (though he did appear in the 2009 electoral broadcast for No2EU).

I think he should have left the Labour Party, which had so clearly left him, but unfortunately he disagreed.

In his latter years Tony was more a prisoner in New Labour, reduced to smuggling out notes through the bars.

The socialist policies he stood for were killed off by successive Labour leaders from Neil Kinnock onwards, but they still exist in new projects, like TUSC and No2EU, co-founded by Bob Crow.

**Dave Nellist, National chair, TUSC**

In his obituary for Bob Crow (12 March), Christian Wolmar states that Bob "was not a member of a political party when he died".

However, Bob sat with me on the national steering committee of the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC), which stands in general and local elections, from its foundation in 2010.

Indeed, it was only a few days ago that we were discussing what public meetings he could do to support TUSC's 2014 local elections campaign, in what will be the biggest left-of-Labour challenge in such elections since the second world war.

Bob was also the national leader of No2EU - Yes To Workers' Rights, a political party registered to fight the 2014 European elections.

He was going to be the lead candidate for London. Bob couldn't have been clearer on the need for working-class people to have an independent political voice, which none of the establishment parties can provide.

**Clive Heemskerk, Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition national election agent**

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The Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) is an electoral alliance that stands candidates against all cuts and

privatisation.

It involves the RMT transport union, leading members of other unions and socialists including the Socialist Party.

This May TUSC plans to stand hundreds of no-cuts candidates in the council elections against all the austerity parties voting through the destruction of jobs and services. Could you be a candidate?

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

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## No to the bosses' EU - Yes to an independent socialist alternative

Hannah Sell, Socialist Party deputy general secretary

The question of a referendum over Britain's membership of the European Union (EU) is problematic for all the mainstream capitalist parties.

In this parliament Tory Prime Minister David Cameron has faced enormous pressure from the predominantly 'euro-sceptic' Tory back benches, fuelled by increased support for Ukip - a right-wing populist, anti-EU party.

Ukip are promoted by the capitalist owned media as the best stick with which to beat the pro-austerity parties.

Cameron has attempted to defuse the issue by 'promising' an in-out referendum on EU membership in 2017.

Membership of the EU will, however, be posed even more acutely for the next government, whatever its stripe.

Opinion polls on membership of the EU fluctuate, although over recent years most show a larger number saying they would vote to leave the EU than would vote to stay in.

All polls have, however, shown overwhelming support for a referendum on the issue taking place.

The Labour leadership had remained silent on this issue up until last week, when Miliband declared that a Labour-led government would only call a referendum if a future treaty revision ceded further powers to the institutions of the EU, indicating that he considered this unlikely.

Why has the Labour leadership made this electorally unpopular pledge? As it was put in the Financial Times, it is designed as "a sedative for anxious businessmen" which gives "one compelling reason to hold fire on Mr Miliband." (Janan Ganesh 15/3/2014).

The CBI, representing big business, welcomed Miliband's announcement as 'giving businesses certainty'.

Labour under Miliband - as under Blair and Brown before him - is a safe party for British capitalism. The shadow cabinet has demonstrated this again and again.

As the late Tony Benn aptly put it Labour now represents the interests of 'Great Britain PLC'. This means a Labour government would continue to attack the living standards of the majority, the working class.

Meanwhile the passing of the Collins Review - at the behest of the Tories and the right-wing capitalist media - has destroyed the last vestiges of a voice of the organised working class within the Labour Party.

Nonetheless, in order to stand a chance of winning the election, Labour has to put forward some policies that are popular with the majority, such as the promise to freeze fuel prices for 20 months.

Modest as they are (renationalising the energy companies would be far more popular, over 70% of people support it) these proposals are unpopular with the capitalist class, who object to giving up even the tiniest bit of their gigantic profits.

Big business also correctly fears that a Labour government would be under huge pressure to go further, as workers that have suffered years of austerity demand that a Labour government offers them some relief.

It is in this context that Miliband has set out to show big business that Labour is more 'reliable' for them on Europe than the Tories.

Since then the pro-EU Tories have tried to reassure big business of their own party's reliability on the issue.

The majority of the British capitalists support remaining in the EU because it is a market of 500 million people which is the UK's biggest export market.

A majority of the financial sector, which plays a dominant role in the UK economy, also consider membership of the EU helps to maintain London's status as a global centre for financial markets.

Smaller businesses, as represented by the Institute of Directors - tend to be more anti-EU, as are one wing of the financial capitalists - who dream that leaving the EU would deliver them a City of London free from even the most minimal regulation.

What attitude should socialists take to the issue? We have to support the democratic right for a referendum to be held which would give the working class a chance to oppose the bosses' EU.

In Britain, in recent years, it has been the right-wing media, Ukip and ultra-right Tory backbenchers that have been associated with opposition to the EU.

This can give the utterly false impression that opposition to the EU is the preserve of the right and is in itself reactionary or nationalist.

In fact both Tony Benn and Bob Crow, two prominent socialists who sadly died in the last week, campaigned against the EU.

## **Working class opposition**

Bob Crow stood for No2EU-Yes to Democracy in the 2009 European elections, while Tony Benn appeared in the election video.

No2EU was an election platform offering a working class-led internationalist opposition to the EU, which is standing again in this year's European elections under the name 'No2EU-Yes2Workers' Rights', on both occasions with the support of the Socialist Party.

Karl Marx famously declared 'workers of the world unite' because the struggle for socialism is international.

Workers across Europe - and come to that, around the world - have more in common with each other than with the capitalist class of their own countries.

That has been graphically demonstrated over the last five years, as workers in country after country - from Greece, to Spain, to Britain - have demonstrated and struck over the same issue; opposition to brutal austerity being meted out by their capitalist governments.

For those in the eurozone, in particular, their banners have also often featured demands against the institutions of the EU, which are demanding ever greater austerity for the 'periphery' of the eurozone.

The EU capitalist project is fundamentally a series of inter-governmental treaties that act in the interests of the capitalist classes.

Despite the fig leaf of a few workers' rights, the EU's directives and treaties push forward the interests of capitalism: deregulation, privatisation and the 'liberalisation' of labour markets are the norm.

## **Defy the directives**

The EU is an attempt to overcome the limits of developing the productive forces within Europe's nation states and to enable the different capitalist classes of Europe to compete better with other global capitalist powers and blocs.

But, as the Socialist Party has always predicted, capitalism has been proven incapable of overcoming the barriers between states and the antagonisms between the competing ruling classes.

Unity from above, in the interests of the bosses, has not created harmony and a genuine coming together of the peoples of Europe, but instead is creating inevitable recoil from the EU.

Workers in each EU country should demand that their government defy the pro-market, anti-worker EU directives and rulings.

As opposed to a capitalist bloc, socialists stand in genuine international solidarity with workers in Europe and across the world to fight for a better future.

The crisis in the eurozone is not over and will enter a new stage, with countries abandoning, or being forced out of the eurozone, or even a breakdown of the EU itself.

The Socialist Party campaigns for the working class to have its own independent position: no to the bosses' EU - for a socialist Europe.

## **No2EU - Yes to workers' rights demands:**

- Exit the EU on the basis of socialist policies
- Reject EU treaties and policies that privatise our public services. Yes to the NHS as a publicly owned, socialised health care service free at the point of delivery - No to the EU-US Trade Agreement. Reverse the privatisation of Royal Mail - No to EU postal services liberalisation
- No to public spending cuts - whether they come from politicians in Brussels or Britain
- Defend and develop sustainable manufacturing, agriculture and fishing industries in Britain
- Repeal anti-trade union rulings by the European Court of Justice (ECJ) and the EU rules which undermine collective agreements, workers' conditions, pensions and pay
- Blame the bosses and bankers for the crisis, not immigrants. No to racism and fascism. Yes to international solidarity of working people
- No to EU militarisation and an EU army
- Yes to restoring democratic powers to EU member states
- Replace unequal EU trade deals with fair trade that benefits developing nations
- Scrap EU rules designed to stop member states from implementing independent economic policies. Keep Britain out the Eurozone

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## **Unite to end racism and cuts**

**Marvin Hay, Waltham Forest prospective TUSC candidate**

On Saturday 22 March, as part of the UN's International Anti-Racism Day, the TUC has coordinated marches in London, Cardiff and Glasgow.

We will be flying the banners of the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) and the Socialist Party and call on others to join the protests.

It is indisputable that the plight of workers under the tsunami of austerity and neoliberal reforms is a cause for a mighty fightback.

But the cuts are having a disproportionate effect on certain sections of the working class. Unison and TUC research in recent years has shown that since the Coalition came to power young black men have experienced the sharpest rise in unemployment.

## **Unemployment**

In September 2013 the Department for Work and Pensions reported that while the unemployment rate for white people aged 16-24 was 19%, for young black people it was more than double that, at 45%. For young Pakistani and Bangladeshi workers it's even worse at 46%.

And it's not just young black and Asian people who are being affected. In 17 London councils (arguably the most diverse) black workers are being disproportionately hit by job losses - by up to 32%.

All this goes to demonstrate how much the austerity measures are worsening the already unequal situation faced by black and Asian workers in Britain, with a similar effect in austerity-hit countries around the world.

The Immigration Bill (now in the committee stages in the House of Lords) is part of the Tories drive to make Britain, as described by home secretary Theresa May, "a hostile place for illegal immigrants".

It has been described as one of the most racist pieces of legislation passed in the UK.

## **Threat to welfare state**

Under pressure from Ukip's right-wing populist propaganda, combined with the government's attack on workers' rights to justice (made worse in the wake of legal aid reforms) the government is seeking to take back rights won by workers in the past.

The Bill will see foreign students charged to use the NHS, terror suspects (before conviction) stripped of British citizenship, the right of appeal against immigration decisions limited and the courts' and tribunals' right to give weight to the Human Rights Act restricted.

This will be used as a wedge against universal access to all aspects of the welfare state.

The Immigration Bill will see private landlords required, under the threat of a £3,000 fine, to ensure that 'illegal' immigrants are not given access to their properties.

The nasty reality of this draconian provision is that ethnic minorities will have a higher hurdle to climb to secure accommodation in what is already a process riddled with inequality and racial prejudice.

Despite the clear racist and xenophobic suggestion of the legislation and its attack on human rights, it was passed in the House of Commons by 303 votes to 18, with only six Labour MPs and three Lib Dems opposing.

It's telling that just 4% of local councillors, 2.3% of MPs, and 3.5% of senior civil servants are black.

Almost none stand up for the working class. Pro-big business politicians have no solutions to the problems we face.

The reality is that legislation like the Immigration Bill, combined with continued attacks on workers' rights, including human rights, are increasing real racial inequalities, as well as whipping up divisions between workers.

This has the potential to weaken any movement to resist the austerity attacks and must be opposed.

That's why only a united mass workers' party with a socialist programme can represent the struggle to genuinely combat racism, which is what the Socialist Party and TUSC will be arguing for on the demonstrations on 22 March.

- London: assemble near Nelson Mandela statue in Parliament Square at 11am for march to Trafalgar Square where there will be a rally 1-4pm
  - Cardiff: assemble 11am - venue tbc
  - Glasgow: assemble George Square 11am for a march which will leave at 11.30am and be followed by a rally
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## Osborne's more cuts budget

Steve Score

The 'debate' in the run up to Tory Chancellor Osborne's Budget statement missed the point. It should have been about whether the government's austerity was really necessary, how to deal with the capitalist crisis, how to solve the problem of poverty and continued inequality, and all the other pressing issues faced by the vast majority.

But it wasn't. When Osborne argued that cuts must continue, Labour shadow chancellor Ed Balls agreed.

When Osborne argued that a recovery was underway, Balls weakly pointed out that most people weren't feeling the benefit, while failing to put forward any alternatives that could solve the collapse in people's living standards.

The Tories claim a stable recovery is underway. But the predicted growth levels are far from showing stability.

The economy is still below the level of production before the crisis in 2008, and the long-term prospects are not good.

### Few concessions

This was the penultimate Budget before the next general election but as an electioneering budget it offered precious little.

The pressure from inside the Tory party was to help those on £42,000+ a year by raising the 40% tax rate threshold.

They are likely to increase the personal tax allowance instead, but for most workers it will be a tiny amount of benefit, if any, against a deluge of cuts to real living standards.

The government says it has cut taxes for "hardworking families", yet it has raised VAT to 20% - which impacts much more on low-income families.

There is a proposal on childcare, an allowance to cover up to 20% of childcare costs, up to £2,000. This is upping the amount announced in last year's Budget. However, it would still leave up to £8,000 to be found by parents.

The government talks of building a new "Garden City" in Kent and will continue to encourage house building.

But for the vast majority of those desperately needing housing it is no solution. Most people cannot afford to buy houses and there is an inadequate amount of affordable social housing.

The key issue is the Con-Dems' ongoing commitment to cuts. At least half of those announced by the government since

they came to power have not yet been felt.

But the strain on services such as the NHS, local government and education has reached breaking point. Now Osborne wants another £12 billion of welfare cuts.

The latest plan is to introduce a welfare "budget cap". This would require a government to either hold a vote in parliament to increase the budget for welfare each time the spending nears the limit, or introduce even more cuts to benefits.

The welfare budget is rising because more people are forced out of full-time work and into poverty incomes.

The creation of proper jobs and decent pay would reduce overall welfare spending. But since a government based on capitalism in crisis won't do that, it is those on benefits and low-paid workers who suffer.

The stark reality of capitalism is that, to preserve the interests of the richest, the poorest must be crushed.

The budget also shows the differences between the three main parties are minor. We need a socialist alternative to these pro-big business budgets!

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## **Oxfam report: A tale of capitalist inequality**

Earlier this year the Oxfam charity pointed out that a mere 85 billionaires worldwide own the equivalent wealth of 3.5 billion people - half the world's population.

Now Oxfam has reported similar levels of inequality in Britain with five super-rich families owning more wealth than the poorest 20% of the population.

In its Tale of Two Britains report, Oxfam says the poorest 20% have a combined wealth of £28.1 billion - an average of £2,230 each. In contrast, the top five richest families between them have property, savings and other assets worth a staggering £28.2 billion.

The super-rich list includes central London property magnate the Duke of Westminster, mining and metals tycoons David and Simon Reuben, industrial and finance capitalists the Hinduja brothers, aristocrats and property owners the Cadogan family, and Sports Direct retail boss and Newcastle United owner Mike Ashley.

### **No 'trickle-down'**

Prime Minister David Cameron's infamous remark that "we're all in it together" under the Con-Dems' austerity regime and Chancellor George Osborne's equally ludicrous claim that 'everyone can expect to share in the prosperity', of the UK's weak and ephemeral economic upswing, are punctured by Oxfam's report.

Its authors point out that the wealth gap in the UK is becoming wider due to the super-rich grabbing the profits from growth. But that hasn't stopped Osborne slashing a further £12 billion from welfare spending in the budget.

Also, since the mid-1990s, ie starting under Labour, the incomes of the top 0.1% have grown by £461 a week or £24,000 a year. By contrast, the bottom 90% have seen a real terms increase of only £2.82 a week or £147 a year.

So, what is Labour's alternative? According to shadow chancellor Ed Balls, an incoming Labour government would continue and extend the Tories' austerity plans.

As an election carrot he says Labour will reinstate the top rate of income tax for those earning over £150,000 a year from 45% to 50%.



But he says this 50p rate is only temporary and a maximum, in order to reassure the wealthy that Labour is not 'anti-business'.

Labour's timid tax measures will not provide the resources to lift millions out of poverty, reverse inequality, nor provide long-term increased funding for public services.

To achieve that a socialist plan of economic production would be needed through the nationalisation of the major corporations and banks, under democratic workers' control and management.

- Since 2003, 95% of the population have seen a 12% real terms drop in their disposable income after housing costs, while the richest 5% of the population have seen their disposable income increase
  - The number of children living below the poverty line could increase by 800,000 by 2020
  - The most affluent family in the UK (Gerald Cavendish Grosvenor and family), has more wealth than the poorest 10% of the population, 6.3 million people (£7.9 billion and £7 billion respectively)
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