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CONFERENCE
ON 5 JULY
See page 4

the Socialist

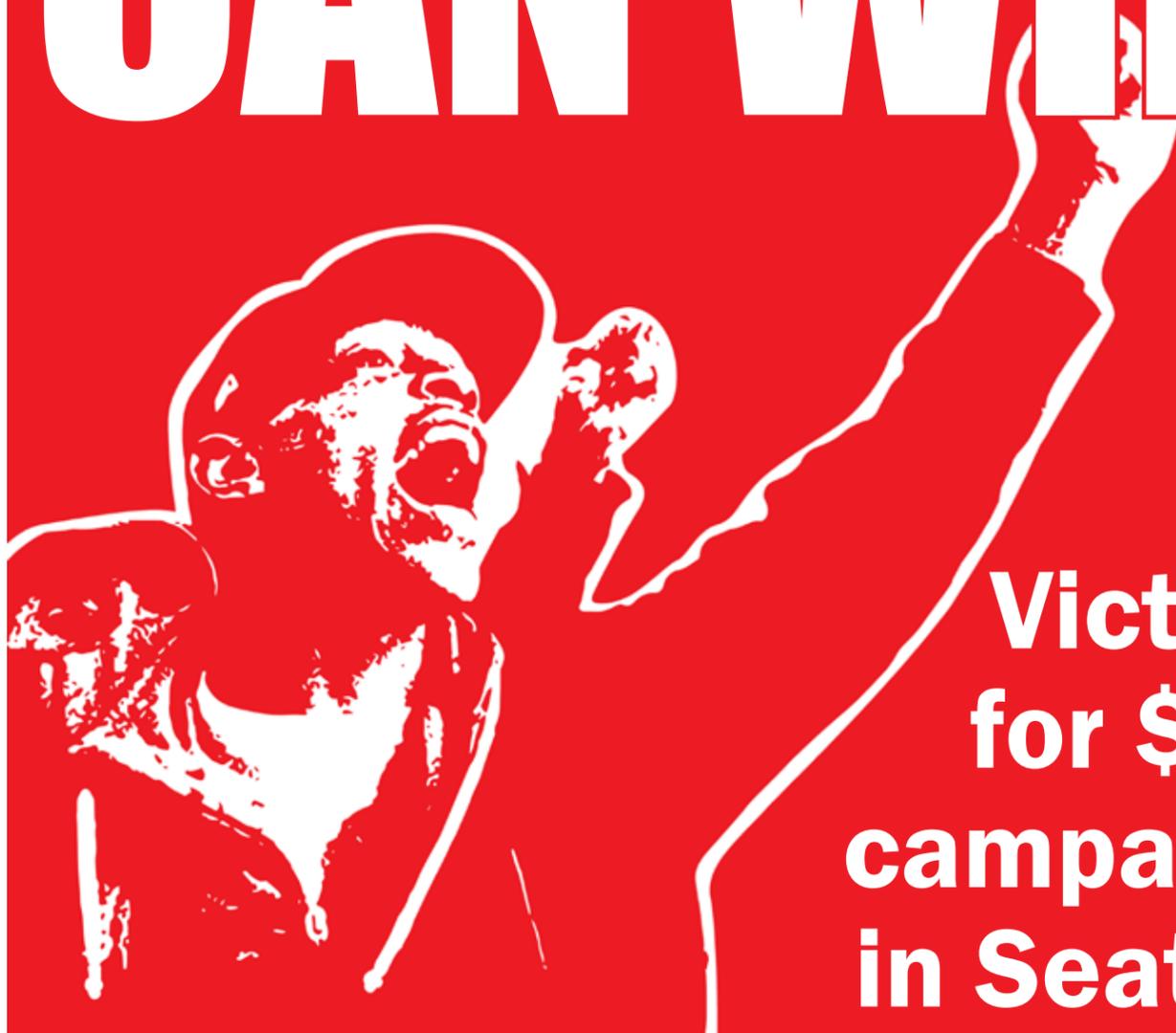
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WORKERS CAN WIN



Victory for \$15 campaign in Seattle

“We did this. Workers did this. Today’s first victory for \$15 will inspire people all over the nation,” said socialist Seattle city councillor Kshama Sawant.

She was speaking after the 2 June meeting of the city council which voted to adopt a minimum wage of more than double the federal US rate. \$15 an hour (about £9) will raise 100,000 low-paid workers in the city out of poverty.

What’s the difference between Seattle and the other cities in the US where workers have also been fighting heroic battles demanding \$15? Mass campaigning built support for \$15 and elected Kshama, a member of Socialist Alternative (co-thinkers of the Socialist Party in the US) last November. This was a turning point.

A Guardian website article reports: “Kshama Sawant, the only socialist city councillor in the US, whose election campaign last year

became a driving force behind the minimum wage legislation in Seattle, hailed the vote at a boisterous meeting before a packed council chamber as a ‘historic victory’ for working people.”

Kshama exposed and opposed how big business weakened the legislation but she voted for \$15. She said: “We’ll come back to the questions of tip penalty, the long-phase in, the training wage. What was lost through corporate loopholes is a reminder to us that outcomes are determined by the balance of forces... we need to continue to build an even more powerful movement strong enough to overcome the counterattacks from business.”

And Kshama explains: “My organisation, Socialist Alternative, was the backbone to this struggle. We have provided analysis and strategy, first to win this important seat in City Hall for a socialist and then immediately to turn it into a tool for organising.”

The 15 Now campaign set up by Kshama

and Socialist Alternative established neighbourhood committees across the city which organised rallies and meetings. Fast food workers had protests and strikes demanding \$15. Kshama pointed out: “This was not won at the negotiating table, it’s not a result of the generosity of the Democratic Party – it is a reflection of what workers won on the streets.”

The historic victory in Seattle shows what can be achieved when workers fight back. It shows the strength given to a movement when representatives of that movement are elected to political office and use their position to drive home its aims. This should be an inspiration, not just to workers in Seattle and the US, but to working class and poor people, socialists and trade unionists internationally.

As Kshama said after the vote: “\$15 in Seattle is just a beginning. We have an entire world to win.”

See www.socialistalternative.org and page 6 for more



“ENOUGH IS ENOUGH!”

1.5m workers could strike over pay

On 10 July, 1.5 million public sector workers could be on strike against a derisory pay offer. The Unite, Unison, GMB, NUT and PCS unions could all be walking out together. Two workers explain why they’re voting yes:

Daily routine: get up, a whirlwind rush to get everything done before eight o’clock, rush to get the kids to school and then myself to work. Clock in, clock out, then home to enjoy spending time with the kids and getting tea on the go for when the other half gets home? I wish! Once I finish work it’s off to my second job to bridge the gap between living on the breadline and affording to feed the family and keep a roof over our heads.

When I watch the news I feel that the government lives in an alternate reality to the majority of us. They’re too busy cutting jobs and services to care that they are breaking the backs of the people who are propping up the economy. Then they call us selfish when we make a stand by taking strike action! The politicians are the selfish ones – grabbing expenses for themselves, cutting jobs, privatising public services and demonising teachers and public sector workers for standing up for themselves and saying no to more work for less pay.

I am voting to take industrial action not because I can afford it, because I cannot, but because our voices need to be heard. I urge others to join in the fight because this is a battle we can win.

Monique

Workers in the public sector have suffered years of pay freezes - our income has decreased by more than 16% in real terms since 2010. Household budgets are stretched to breaking point and some are sinking into poverty.

The claim that the economy is in recovery seems ridiculous to public sector workers. There’s bubbling anger. Strike action over pay is now seen as the only option left to us.

I’ve worked in local government for over 30 years and have seen many good colleagues leave my workplace as a result of the cuts. I’ve never known morale so low and people so fearful for the future.

As an active trade unionist I believe it’s vital that we vote for industrial action and follow it up with a series of solid strikes. Enough is enough!

Dave



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Enough of 'all the same' capitalist politics!

Musician Paul Weller, when asked on breakfast TV last week if he's still political, replied: "Like the majority of people I'm disillusioned with it all. I can't tell the difference between the majority of the parties ... They all look the same to me and all sound the same".

A BBC reporter once pointed out that there are more members of the Caravan Club, or the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, than of all Britain's main political parties put together. Gone are the days when any of these establishment parties were 'mass membership' organisations.

In the early 1950s, the Conservative party had nearly three million members and Labour over one million. Now though, only about 1% of the electorate is a member of one of the three main parties and active campaigners for them have become extinct in many areas.

Last month's local and European elections indicated a continuation of this trend of aversion. In the euro elections, the Tories - the usual favoured 'A team' of the British capitalist class - came third for the first time in a nationwide poll since their party was founded. Over half the people who voted in the euros chose neither the Tories nor Labour.

Lib Dem catastrophe

The Lib Dems did catastrophically, losing eleven of their 12 euro MPs and over 300 council seats. Their leader, Nick Clegg has received his comeuppance for aiding the government's austerity drive by plummeting to new depths - he's the least popular leader of any party in modern times, on a paltry 13% approval rating according to a YouGov poll last weekend.

In the same week Lib Dem peer Matthew Oakeshott stuck the knife into his party leader, saying in his resignation letter (after being exposed for undermining Clegg) that he was "sure the party is heading for disaster if it keeps Nick Clegg". Oakeshott also reopened the cesspit of parliamentary corruption by revealing in his letter: "My efforts to expose and end cash for peerages in all parties, including our own... have failed".

The only saving grace for Clegg is that neither the Tories nor Labour are surging ahead. As Andrew Rawnsley noted in the Observer: "He would be in much deeper trouble with his party if it looked obvious that Labour or



Stepping towards the new mass workers' party which needs to be built photo Kent SP

the Tories were striding confidently towards a general election victory guaranteed to thrust the Lib Dems back into the margins".

On the contrary, in the local elections the cuts-driven Tories lost over 230 council seats and are trailing 12 percentage points behind Labour according to polling by Tory Lord Ashcroft done in 26 key marginal constituency seats. The party is acutely divided on many issues, with the extent of Britain's involvement in the European Union recently at the forefront of their infighting.

Meanwhile the Labour party has gone from a 14 point poll national lead over the Tories to a small one at present because it offers nothing substantially different to the government's agenda.

The latest Labour shadow minister to rub our noses in their 'prudence' on behalf of the rich was shadow chief secretary to the treasury, Chris Leslie, who asserted last week: "I'm not heading into this expecting popularity. Quite the opposite. All government departments in the next Labour government will have to face fundamental questions as never before."

"We won't be able to undo the cuts that have been felt in recent years ... A more limited pot of money will have to be spent on a smaller number of priorities".

However, the "fundamental question" that is occupying the minds of Labour MPs is

Shadow chief secretary to the treasury, Chris Leslie, asserted last week: "I'm not heading into this expecting popularity. Quite the opposite. All government departments in the next Labour government will have to face fundamental questions as never before."

"We won't be able to undo the cuts that have been felt in recent years ... A more limited pot of money will have to be spent on a smaller number of priorities".

how they can keep their seats if their party is "not expecting popularity", an unsurprising dilemma causing turmoil in the party regarding its campaign strategies and assessments of Ed Miliband's capability of leading the way to election victory. But virtually none of them have any intention of proposing manifesto policies that would really inspire working class people to vote Labour.

The unstable state of the main political parties of British capitalism is a reflection of the decay of the capitalist system itself in this era - its inherent contradictions and unprogressive nature. Given both the Con-Dems and Labour are completely wedded to capitalism, none of them can offer improved liv-

ing standards for most of the population and at the same time satisfy their big business sponsors.

In the local elections 17% of those who voted kicked all the mainstream politicians by voting for Ukip, and 27% did likewise in the euros. A Survation poll last week showed that people intending to vote for Ukip in the Newark byelection are again mainly motivated to do so by unhappiness with the main parties.

Yet the trend of growing alienation from 'politics' due to disenchantment with the traditional three main parties certainly won't be reversed by the likes of Farage's Ukip, that seeks to lower taxes for the highest earners and has a constant stream of corruption, bigotry and racism scandals in its ranks.

Ukip pro-capitalist

As the Socialist has explained, the policies of Ukip are those of yet another staunchly pro-capitalist party, in this case one that is dangerously trying to give the impression that a nationalist and anti-immigration stance will safeguard the living standards of ordinary people.

After Paul Weller had replied to the question on whether he is still political, the interviewer retorted: "But you were very heavily involved in the past". Weller responded: "Yeah I was, back in the 80s. It was a different time with Thatcherism. Very definite - you were either with it or against it. There were clear lines drawn".

Today, it isn't 'politics' that's the problem, but precisely the lack of "clear lines" in mainstream politics. Class lines. Labour, the Tories and Lib Dems have all gone further than even Thatcher dared to go in attacking the living standards of working class and middle class people, and Ukip will do too, given a chance.

This is why the Socialist Party has long been arguing the need for a new mass workers' party to be built with a socialist programme, and is closely involved in developing the electoral challenges of the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (see page 9).

Mass confidence in 'politics' will only be restored by a mass party that genuinely represents the interests of the overwhelming majority in society - working people, pensioners, benefit claimants, students, etc - and that is kept on the right track by being democratically run by those whose interests it serves.

Socialism
TODAY

The Socialist Party's
magazine

The June issue
includes:

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Cracks in the establishment

● **Euro polls**
A warning from voters

● **The Snowden files**
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2014 SOCIALISM

A WEEKEND OF DISCUSSION AND DEBATE
LONDON 8-9 NOVEMBER

FIGHT AGAINST CUTS, CRISIS & CAPITALISM

Capitalism is a system in crisis. It is delivering austerity for the majority and unimaginable wealth for a few at the top. Inevitably it is increasingly being questioned. This is true even in the belly of the beast. In the US, Seattle saw a Socialist councillor, Kshama Sawant, elected with nearly 100,000 votes at the end of 2013. In Britain, coordinated action is on the cards again with local government workers

taking action in the summer, as well as teachers, civil servants and firefighters. Socialism 2014 will hold rallies, discussions and debates not just on the capitalist crisis but fighting back and building the socialist alternative. Speakers will include socialists, trade unionists and anti-cuts activists from Britain and worldwide, including the US, South Africa and Europe.

The Socialism weekend is an annual event hosted by the Socialist Party.
Book your tickets by phoning 020 8988 8777 and keep updated on www.socialistparty.org.uk

PUT THE DATES IN YOUR DIARY NOW

Inclusive capitalism? You're having a laugh!

John Sharpe

If you're going to have a press conference, have a dear one. Get the mayor of the City of London and Lady Lynn Forester de Rothschild to organise it. Book the Mansion House in the City of London, wheel in Prince Charles to open it and line up your main speakers: former US President Bill Clinton, Christine Lagarde, International Monetary Fund (IMF) chief and Mark Carney, Bank of England Governor.

Oh, and get the Financial Times in as a co-sponsor and invite an audience of 200 financiers representing a third of the world's liquid assets and the chief executives of multinational companies such as UBS, GlaxoSmithKline and Unilever.

Lady de Rothschild (an investment banker don't you know) ticks off her check list: date, venue, speakers, catchy name. Name! We need a name. 'All bosses are evil'? 'Ruthless exploiters of the working masses'? 'Capitalism is crisis'?

Nearly, not quite there though. 'Inclusive Capitalism', yes, that's the one. Warm, touchy feely and, as de Rothschild admitted, an oxymoron. Two words that don't belong next to each other.

Bankers and the big capitalists know that everyone hates them and they are starting to feel nervous. If it carries on like this, they fear, it could really kick off and they'd lose the lot.

Sections of them, at least, feel the need to perhaps curtail some of the "excesses". We're all nice really and promise to be good in the future. So they organised the conference 'Inclusive Capitalism' to spread the message.



photo Paul Mattsson

Prince Charles recalled during the fall of the Berlin Wall there was a "certain amount of shouting about the triumph of capitalism over communism". He worried that if society didn't change "we might end up coming full circle."

Lagarde tried to frighten them with threats of tougher regulation and tighter supervision, railed against "growing inequality" and called for a change in culture. Even making income and property taxes "more progressive".

This from the IMF, whose bailouts during the recession (on her watch) were tied to massive privatisations, raising taxes for workers, cutting taxes for the rich and corporations, dismantling of the welfare state and

the dumping of millions of youth into unemployment!

Carney joined in by demanding the "too-big-to-fail-banks" should be broken up and rather shockingly called for measures to curb bankers pay. Globalisation is "amplifying the rewards of the superstar... now is the time to be famous or fortunate."

As a PR exercise it was a success. Blanket, wall to wall uncritical coverage on TV, radio and in the papers. De Rothschild must know she has made it now she's been interviewed on 5 Live.

All this effort will amount to nought. All the glitzy fanfares are just so much smoke and mirrors. Their worst nightmares will come true.



Join the fightback! Join the Socialists!

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Children handed poverty "life sentence"

James Ivens

Five million children condemned to poverty by 2020. This is the stark reality for low-income families in Britain. A new charity report - A Fair Start for Every Child - warns of child poverty "among the highest ever recorded in the UK."

Save the Children's report blames welfare cuts, flatlining wages and the ballooning cost of living. Its research shows that this "triple whammy" has disproportionately affected children of lower earners. And these children can look forward to a lifetime of poverty.

Food prices have bulged, growing by 19% more than other goods from 2007 to 2011. Poorer children are more likely to develop asthma, diabetes and obesity. In some areas, more than one in ten families can't afford new shoes for their kids.

The Child Poverty Act 2010 committed all political parties to eliminate this blight by 2020. The charity slams this legislation as "window dressing", saying now only a "radical strategy" can achieve the goal.

Responding to the report, a government spokesperson said: "The



Five million children will be poor

government is committed to ending child poverty by tackling its root causes as part of our long-term economic plan." But the report identifies three key drivers for childhood poverty. Low wages, no social security and high cost of living. Coalition policy is exacerbating all three. The report itself is based on applying the

effects of promised cuts to the government's own statistics.

Labour blames the Tories. "Under David Cameron child poverty is set to rise, not fall, and the cost-of-living crisis has left millions of families struggling to make ends meet." This is true. But Labour has promised to match Coalition cuts. And the research shows that underlying trends started in 2004, under Labour!

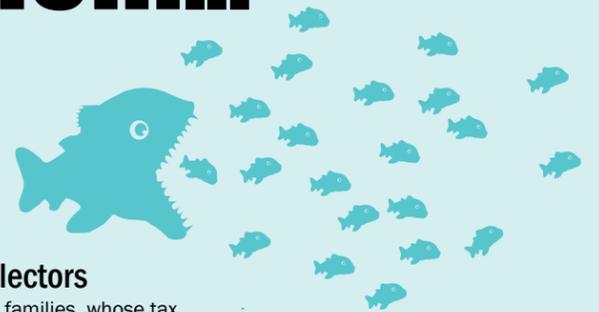
Small wonder the report finds that the main parties' "commitments are no longer credible."

The charity's proposals are modest. Quality, affordable childcare for all. A guaranteed income for parents of under-fives. And a "national mission" for children to read well by eleven.

The Socialist Party supports these measures. But if we are to seriously address the question of childhood poverty, we need more. We need control of the billions that austerity has siphoned off from workers and the poor.

By 2020, "the face of poverty in the UK will be that of a child, usually within a working family." Only socialist policies can grant children clemency from a "life sentence" of want.

Them...



Debt collectors

Low income families, whose tax credits were incorrectly calculated by the HMRC, are being hounded for overpayments by HMRC-contracted debt collection agencies. Along with being bombarded with text messages, phone calls and letters demanding repayment, in at least 80 tax credit cases, people's assets have been seized. Meanwhile, the super-rich and giant corporations continue to avoid paying taxes using legal loopholes left open by millionaire Tory Chancellor George Osborne.

Hubble bubble

The bosses' organisation, the CBI, is chiming with Chancellor George Osborne's upbeat message of an expanding UK economy. Presumably this sanguine outlook is based on CBI members' own rising fortunes! However, this rosy optimism might be short lived if the Bank of England has to increase interest rates to cool down the current housing bubble being fuelled by government policies.

Missing scripts

The Chilcot inquiry into the devastating Iraq war, which has dragged on since 2009, says it will not publish correspondence between George Bush and Tony Blair after a shoddy deal was struck with the current Con-Dem government. Instead of transcripts revealing how the decision to invade and occupy Iraq in 2003 was concocted, Chilcot will now simply give "the gist" of the Blair/Bush discussions. Any suggestion of a blatant white-wash is merely the propaganda of lily-livered Bolsheviks.

Dope heads

But are the stated increased growth rate figures based on the real economy, or do they include some unsavoury market activities? According to the Financial Times: "Prostitutes and drug dealers are set to give Britain a £10 billion boost as it revamps the way the economy is measured." Apparently, the UK isn't the only government to massage (pun intended) the economic figures. Last year the US expanded its definition of investment to include sex and drugs to boost its GDP by 3.6%!

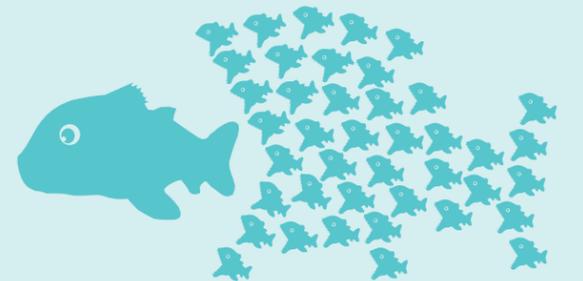
Save or spend

The Post Office has recently published research showing that the richest 20% of the population in the UK has, on average, a surplus of £18,680 a year to put into their savings while the poorest 20% will spend £1,910 more than they earn. The Post Office also reckons that the indebtedness of the poorest 20% is set to continue, notwithstanding government claims of an expanding economy. And, according to housing charity Shelter, millions of people are one pay cheque away from becoming homeless.

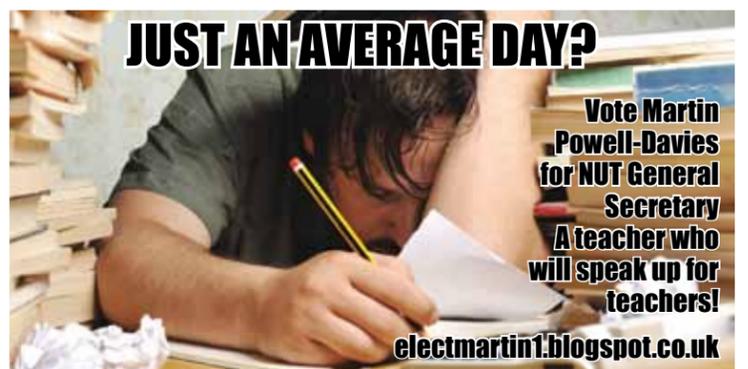
Ab fab

Some reps of the capitalist class may be feeling jittery about their conspicuous consumption (see opposite) while the rest of us are on rations. But the message of 'caring capitalism' hasn't penetrated all quarters of the super-rich. Recently, the Evening Standard described a typical fiesta put on to entertain London's well-heeled elite. "A Game of Thrones forest, flocks of pink flamingos, 24,000 peonies and a feast of 800 lobsters". One banker (their description) described her experience at a garden party: "We were served with our own personal bottle of Dom Perignon on arrival. There was so much to look at, including a trapeze on which guests were invited to have a go. It was fabulous, albeit a little bizarre."

...& Us



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



As unions prepare united pay battle Come to NSSN conference!

Linda Taaffe

Secretary, National Shop Stewards Network (NSSN)

What has distinguished the NSSN from other broad campaigning organisations over the last few years has been its consistent agitation for the trade unions to organise national coordinated strike action as a serious strategy to fight back against austerity. We have energetically organised demonstrations and lively rallies at the TUC; we have raised it at union meetings and in the course of workers' disputes; we gave utmost support to those unions who persuaded Congress in 2012 to overwhelmingly agree to coordinated action in principle - and we have kept up the campaign.



Supporting building workers fighting blacklisting photo Paul Mattsson

10 July strike

In the next few weeks it will become clear whether some unions will finally manage to get together to carry out the first coordinated strike since 2011 on 10 July. The teachers in schools and colleges are lined up. Local government unions are in the process of deciding. The public service workers of PCS, who have consistently argued for coordinated action, have a live dispute and could join in - possibly others too.

So, with the prospect of the log-jam of inaction being broken, what a great time to hold our annual NSSN Conference on 5 July! What a great time for trade unionists to come together to discuss how to get involved on the strike day, and how

to build on this first step in forging a real fightback against ruthless big business parasites and their spokespeople in Parliament.

Also, it will be an opportunity to hear from rank-and-file fighters who have been conducting all kinds of struggles day in and day out, like against the scandalous blacklisting of construction workers, the fight of the Doncaster care workers, and others.

We will hear from the bakers' union about the fight for £10 an hour for the young people who work in bars and restaurants. And it looks like we will have a representative from 15 Now in Seattle where they have just scored a marvellous victory on the city council for \$15 an

hour.

Kshama Sawant, the Socialist Alternative city councillor, together with the 15 Now campaign has shown that it is possible to carry on a fight for better wages on the streets and in the community. Just because low-waged workers tend not to be union members does not mean they can't fight for better pay and conditions. The Seattle victory has been a political battle that now needs to be made a reality by union action.

There will also be other opportunities in workshops to get answers to many of the big questions

being raised by workers, including: why should we vote because no main party speaks for us?

The results of the local and European elections give much scope for discussion - can the marvellous 68,000 votes for the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition, despite the media blackout, be increased? Where is Ukip, with its daily media coverage, really going? Can Labour win, and if they do, will it make any difference to the looming cuts coming down the line?

There are some things that you really can't afford to miss. NSSN Conference on Saturday 5 July in London is one of those occasions. Not only will it be a place to speak about all the pressing issues of the day, but it will also be a chance to socialise in the evening and make friends with others willing to struggle to make a better future. So don't delay. Book now!

National Shop Stewards Network conference

Saturday 5 July 11am-5pm in Conway Hall - 25 Red Lion Square, Holborn, London WC1R 4RL

Delegate/visitor fee £6.
Send your fee payable to: 'National Shop Stewards Network' at PO Box 54498, London E10 9DE.
online at: www.shopstewards.net
twitter: NSSN_antcuts e: info@shopstewards.net

Unite conference: Fighting policies needed

Kevin Parslow

Unite LE1228 branch secretary, personal capacity

Unite's new Executive Council (EC) meets from 9 June for the first time following the results of this year's elections declared in April. As expected, the United Left (UL) maintained its majority of the slightly smaller EC. It won two seats in the merged GPM/ITC (print and IT) sector.

However, the UL also lost two seats, including Kingsley Abrams in the Not for Profit sector, to the right-wing Unite Now group. This was despite Kingsley's suspension in 2011 for refusing to vote for cuts as a Lambeth councillor, in line with Unite policy. Unite must vigorously defend its members who refuse to implement anti-working class policies.

The EC, which holds office for three years, and the biennial Policy Conference, which begins at the end

of the month, must set out fighting policies to galvanise our members. Already, the union is rolling out a campaign on the NHS, attacking the plundering of the health service by private companies. Unite could also find itself at the forefront of industrial action this summer and autumn if local government and health workers vote for action on pay. Unite must put the union at the forefront of the campaign to regain the wages lost as a result of the Con-Dem government's pay freeze.

With a general election next May, some unions may try to limit any action in the hope of minimising any perceived harm to New Labour's chances of victory. Unite must not succumb to this mood, as there is every indication that New Labour will be as unrelenting on austerity as the Con-Dems, if it wins the election.

Unite should demand that all unions involved in the pay dispute campaign for a huge response with action, including strikes.

The relationship with New La-

bour will be an important issue for the new EC to deal with. Criticism of the union's backing for the party is growing, despite the reduction of its Labour affiliation and cash by half at the last meeting of the previous EC. There are resolutions critical of the union's political strategy on the agenda of the policy conference and a Rules Revision Conference is scheduled for next year, where challenges to the union's affiliation to Labour can be made.

Many Unite activists will welcome the decision of the April Executive to start formal merger talks with PCS. But the incoming EC should have an open, welcoming and flexible approach which is able to incorporate the democratic gains made in PCS under its left fighting leadership if a merger took place.

The opposition to the UL-dominated EC seems weak. Unite Now made limited progress and the Grassroots Left organisation made no gains with its three candidates. In fact, one of its candidates promptly

resigned following his defeat to set up a branch of the right-wing Community union (formerly the Iron & Steel Trades Confederation) in Scunthorpe steel works!

However, that is no guarantee that the UL can take the union forward. There are examples in the past of left-led unions moving to the right. Within the UL, there will be debate on the way forward in which Socialist Party members will play a constructive role in directing the union towards fighting socialist policies.

Socialist Party meeting at Unite Policy Conference

6pm Tuesday 1 July, Jury's Inn, Keel Wharf, Liverpool (next to Policy conference venue, the Arena and Convention Centre)

Speakers include Peter Taaffe, Socialist Party general secretary and Tony Mulhearn, Liverpool 47 councillor

UCU Congress: Members losing patience with leadership

Edmund Schluessel

The 2014 congress of the University and College Union (UCU) brought to the fore members' dissatisfaction with an eighth consecutive year of a right-wing leadership undermining lecturers' and academic staff's need to fight and circumventing union democracy.

Last year UCU members in higher education voted by a solid majority to take national action

against yet another real-terms pay cut. UCU's leadership promised an escalating programme of multi-day strikes as well as a marking boycott, but delivered neither, so the congress decided - for the second time in three years - to give UCU's higher education committee a formal rebuke for abandoning a winnable fight.

With a new attack on the USS pension scheme on the horizon, UCU's higher education leaders must reverse course immediately

and pursue militant action, not tokenistic two-hour strikes.

In the further education sector the picture looks no better, after a decision not to back the NUT's call for coordinated national action in July. The pay dispute in English FE was similarly undermined by UCU's leadership, with only a single strike day taken despite members' demands.

Leading members of UCU see these votes as resulting from a collapse in confidence in the union's leadership to deliver a successful

winning strategy.

In sharp contrast, there was thunderous applause for the actions of Lambeth College UCU, who on 3 June commenced indefinite strike action against privatisation and cuts in the college.

UCU remains a union where the average member remains organically opposed to cuts and austerity. It needs to be developed into a force which can fight and win against attacks on education and all public services.

In brief

Mark Harding

In an important victory for all trade unionists, RMT branch secretary Mark Harding has been found not guilty of charges relating to February's tube strike. Mark was charged under the anti-trade union laws and, in a clear politically motivated attack, under the Serious Organised Crime and Police Act. Originally he was also put under draconian bail conditions which were dropped when challenged by a union solicitor.

This verdict is not just an important one for Mark but for all trade unionists seeking to picket effectively during strikes.

The battle to defend jobs and services on London Underground goes on.

Leeds strike

Members of Unite the Union at Optare, a bus manufacturing company based in Sherburn-in-Elmet, near Leeds, took a second day of strike action on 2 June as part of a dispute over changes to holiday entitlement.

The company plans to have a two week shut down in August, forcing staff to take annual leave for the period. As union reps explained to us, the average cost of a family holiday then is 92% higher and for some it had can be over 180% more expensive!

The strike has so far been solid with around 90% of the shop floor workforce on strike, with a number of lorries turning round instead of crossing the picket line. Negotiations are scheduled, but if the company doesn't back down then workers are prepared to take further action.

Please send messages of support to muzzy84@live.co.uk

Iain Dalton, Leeds Socialist Party

Leeds council

The trade unions within Leeds City Council's collective agreement - Unison, GMB, Unite and Ucat - have formally notified the employer of our opposition to the cuts they are proposing. The council has already made cutbacks of up to £150 million over the last three years resulting in almost 2,000 job losses. They intend to wipe off another £150 million over the next three years with a further 600 jobs to go. The council cannot guarantee there will be no compulsory redundancies.

Over the last two months the trade unions have organised several stewards' and members' meeting at many workplaces across the city that have combined the council cuts issues with the national pay dispute.

A Shop Steward

I am Bryan

A strike in support of One Housing convenor Bryan Kennedy, who has been victimised and suspended, will run from 8am on 6 June to 8am 10 June. Pickets will be at 100 Chalk Farm Road, London NW1 8EH on 6 and 9 June and at 402a Caledonian Road, London N7 8UA on 7 June.

Messages of support to bryan. kennedy13@gmail.com

Website

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



Bakers' Union Interview: "We can stop this race to the bottom"

Ian (on megaphone) on one of the Fast Food Rights protests in London photo Youth Fight for Jobs

In 2013 the Bakers Food and Allied Workers' Union (BFAWU), along with Youth Fight for Jobs and others, initiated the Fast Food Rights campaign to fight for decent pay, terms and conditions for fast food workers. This came after the union's successful strike against zero-hour contracts at the Hovis Factory in Wigan.

In the run up to the union's annual national conference on 8 to 12 June BFAWU president Ian Hodson spoke to Claire Laker-Mansfield from Youth Fight for Jobs.

Why did BFAWU initiate Fast Food Rights?

It was the issue of zero-hour contracts and the success we had at Hovis. The bosses see McDonalds, Subway, etc, as a great testing ground for the type of working conditions our members have been subject to in bread factories and sweet factories. All of those practices that have been in place for a long time in fast food are filtering through into everyday employment practices in our organised workplaces.

We saw this as an opportunity to help people who aren't currently involved with a trade union, who don't believe they have any rights. By joining together with the differ-

ent elements - not just a trade union campaign but a community campaign and a political campaign - we can stop this race to the bottom.

Research shows that 80% of people who go into a workplace that has never been organised by a trade union will never join a trade union. We're hoping this campaign will

All of those practices that have been in place for a long time in fast food are filtering through into everyday employment practices in our organised workplaces

bring an understanding to people who work in this industry that there is an alternative to what they get told on a day-to-day basis. By doing the campaign we're going to places we've never been - we normally organise outside factories, we don't normally go on the high streets.

What were the lessons from the Hovis dispute?

It demonstrated that if people stand

and fight together, they can win. The company tried all sorts of tactics - threats of closure, £1,000 to cross the picket line, bringing people in to intimidate the pickets.

But the workers said no, we're not going to be intimidated, we're not going to take the cash, we're going to stand here until you recognise people should be treated fairly.

How have you been able to win people to the union in places like Greggs?

The first thing we did was organise the bakeries and then through our negotiations with the company we said we want access to the shops as well.

We've been able to represent a number of shop workers and demonstrate that by being in a union they can get better terms and conditions - they get a pay increase each year, they're not on minimum wage, they don't have to put up with zero-hour contracts, or accept that they're not entitled to holiday pay.

What sort of demands should Fast Food Rights be making of politicians and the government?

Legislation that allows an employer to treat people like second class citizens or like they're not important needs to be changed.

It can't be right that politicians sit in the Houses of Par-

liament and debate about improving employment by making people more vulnerable, more insecure and worse paid. Politicians have a duty to actually start serving the electorate, not just the people who buy their dinners.

Since BFAWU's founding in 1847 we've had a commitment to a living wage. One of the things this campaign has highlighted to me is that the youth rate needs to be scrapped.

What has inspired you to develop the campaign?

Something that's really inspired me is what's happening in places where people have been brave enough to actually put a figure on the minimum wage - like \$15 in the US. We don't currently have a figure as a trade union but I'm going to try and put one at our

upcoming conference.

I think we need to give working class people a clear understanding of what our trade union is fighting for - a £10 figure, why shouldn't working people get £10 an hour?

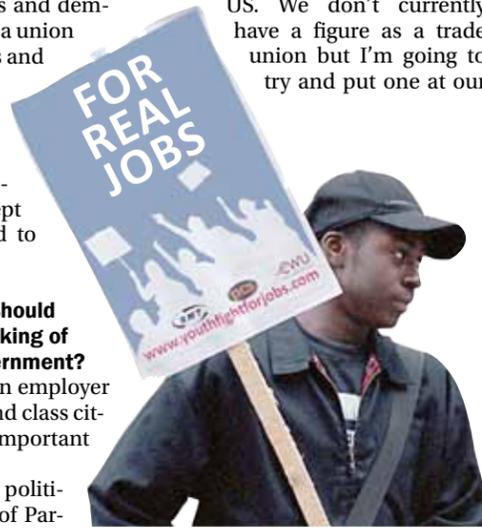
Even if they get the current living wage, it would still only give them enough to maybe afford to throw their children a party and maybe afford to pay for a holiday. I don't want people to 'maybe' afford, I want them to be able to.

I went over and attended the International Union of Foodworkers conference in New York and

Why shouldn't working people get £10 an hour?

listened to some of the McDonalds workers about why they decided to take action. One of them was a single mother, the other was a 22 year old young woman. I asked her what she would say to other young people about why they should join a union or take action.

She said: "because it's all been given away and we've got to take it back. If we're going to get out of the poverty we're living in, so that I don't have to make a choice between whether I catch a bus to work or I'm able to eat, then the only way to do it is to organise". It was so inspiring.



Fast food worker says: "we deserve better"

Here, originally published in the Socialist in 2011, a young fast food worker from Coventry explains what it's like working in the industry.

I work for a famous fast food chain restaurant. Despite its regular occurrence in lists of 'great jobs', it's awful.

People work shifts of up to 15 hours, with a one hour break, and often won't move from their station for the whole shift. Sometimes this means people will be working by an extremely hot grill for ten hours at a time.

Unsurprisingly, people have passed out from heat exhaustion before - the management response is to walk them to the crew room while the rest of us carry on working!

We're constantly told to work faster, and given scripts that we have to use to talk to customers. Yet at the same time we're told to smile and not talk like robots. Whenever sales

go down, we all get less hours and we're expected to work even harder when we are in.

We're not a unionised workplace, as the company is notoriously anti-union. In America and Canada they have closed down restaurants where staff joined unions, and in France they framed a union organiser for armed robbery, after bullying him for months. They refuse to deal with unions, saying they "prefer to deal with staff on an individual basis".

Bullying

Like in most workplaces, some managers are fine - but some are bullies who victimise crew members, particularly women. Due to the lack of union representation it is near impossible to do anything about these bullies - management is a 'boys' club', where if complaints are made they close ranks to protect each other.

There are loads of accidents that are never reported, as despite the



"People work shifts up to 15 hours and often won't move from their station"

company rule that all accidents should be written down, managers see accident reports as a waste of time. This means that despite the

regular injuries crew incur, safety measures are never brought in to prevent them happening again.

Finally, the worst aspect of the

job - the money. I'm on £4.93 an hour - and that's after a pay rise! The promised two pay reviews a year never materialise - I've been there

Management is a 'boys' club' where if complaints are made they close ranks to protect each other

over three years and I've had one. Pay rises are as low as 3% - on my wage, that amounts to just 14p extra an hour.

Young people deserve better than this. We deserve to get a decent wage, to work in decent conditions, and to have the right to union recognition - and if they won't give us those things, we're not afraid to fight for them.



photo Alex Garland

It was the election of Socialist Alternative candidate Kshama Sawant to Seattle City Council in November that was decisive in creating an unstoppable political momentum for \$15 in Seattle

Seattle is the first major US city to pass a \$15 an hour minimum wage. 100,000 workers will be lifted out of poverty, and millions will be inspired all over the country and around the world.

On 29 May the city council's committee dealing with the minimum wage voted to raise Seattle's minimum wage to the highest in the country.

The proposed law will mean that starting on 1 April 2015 all workers in big businesses like McDonalds and Starbucks will see an immediate increase to \$11 an hour and by 2025 all workers will be making a minimum of \$18 an hour.

Altogether it is estimated that Seattle businesses will have to pay their workers an additional \$3 billion in wages over the next ten years! This demonstrates that struggle pays - ordinary people can take on the biggest corporations in the world and win, when we organise and fight back.

The movement of fast food workers, inspired by 2011's Occupy, put \$15 on the agenda across the country. This received a boost in Seattle when the labour movement successfully won a \$15 ballot initiative last November in SeaTac, a small town outside Seattle. But it was the election of Socialist Alternative candidate Kshama Sawant to Seattle City Council in November that was decisive in creating an unstoppable political

momentum for \$15 in Seattle. Kshama ran on a bold platform of \$15, creating a major debate throughout Seattle, and won with almost 100,000 votes.

Shortly after the election Kshama and Socialist Alternative launched the campaign '15 Now' to keep the pressure high. 15 Now set up eleven action groups in neighbourhoods across the city mobilising in the streets and at public forums.

Exposing the Democrats

Through her public position Kshama was able to counter the propaganda in the corporate media and expose big business's attempts to water down \$15 and hide behind the concerns of small business. Against the claims of some that electoral politics only serves to co-opt movements, we showed how elected office can be used to build and strengthen them.

Initially all the Democratic Party politicians in Seattle opposed the demand for \$15. But given the huge public support that was developing, the two main Democrats running for Mayor both came out in favour of \$15 last September. After winning the November election, Mayor Ed Murray said he supported \$15 but wanted to do it in a way "that would work for business, too."

Murray set up an Advisory Commit-

tee of business and labour leaders (but mainly business) to negotiate a compromise. The business and political establishments recognised that there was no stopping \$15, but they used the process to insert a number of corporate loopholes such as a phase-in over many years. Business fought until the final days of the city council process to water the bill down further.

At the vote, a majority of Democratic Party councilmembers moved to change the implementation date until April next year and include sub-minimum teenage and training wages. 15 Now and Socialist Alternative mobilised supporters to come to the City Council meeting on 2 June to fight for the removal of all loopholes.

This process has demonstrated the reality that, even though the Democratic Party uses more progressive rhetoric than the Republicans, fundamentally both parties work to serve the interests of big business. On a national level, the Democrats have failed to seriously organise and fight for a \$10.10 an hour minimum wage which President Barack Obama floated in his 2014 'state of the nation' speech. Instead they are using it as an electoral gimmick for the 2014 elections.

That is why Socialist Alternative argues, as we did in Kshama's election campaign, that working people need

SIGNS OF WORKERS' RESISTANCE

AAA

antiausterityalliance.ie

IRELAND: ELECTORAL SURGE AGAINST AUSTERITY

Danny Byrne
Committee for a Workers' International (CWI)

Ireland was no exception to the rejection of pro-austerity governments in the European elections. Three sets of elections took place on 23 May: local elections, European elections and two byelections to the Irish parliament. These were the first nationwide elections since the coming to power of the Fine Gael-Labour coalition in 2011.

The Socialist Party (CWI in Ireland), and the Anti Austerity Alliance (AAA - which the Socialist Party initiated following the battle against the household tax) had very successful election campaigns. Ruth Coppinger was elected as the second Socialist Party TD (member of parliament) for Dublin West, and 14 AAA councillors were also elected. Paul Murphy, while unfortunately missing out on a seat, won 30,000 votes in the European elections in the capital.

Against the backdrop of a deepening cost of living crisis, after six years of wage cuts and mass unemployment, a housing crisis and mass emigration, low and middle income voters looked to options which could express their opposition to austerity.

The extent of the defeat suffered by the government is clear. Fine Gael lost over 12% support since the general elections, while Labour suffered a near total collapse, dropping from 19% to 7% and being left with no MEPs. Fianna Fáil, while improving on its disastrous 2011 wipe-out, failed to regain anything close to its previous levels of support. The vast majority have not forgiven FF for its role in sinking the economy and bringing in the Troika of the EU, the European Central Bank and the IMF.

The electoral results have already precipitated a crisis in the government and the resignation of the Labour Party leader and Tánaiste (deputy prime minister), Eamon Gilmore, who was facing two simultaneous 'no confidence' motions. It cannot be ruled out that Labour could be forced to pull out of the government in the near future under threat of electoral extinction.

The main winners were Sinn Féin. Sinn Féin presented itself as the biggest anti-austerity force and as the best way to kick back at the main establishment parties. It received a huge rise in its vote, becoming the biggest party in Dublin. But Independent candidates (especially those seen to oppose austerity, water taxes, etc) and the fighting



Ruth Coppinger was elected with over 12,000 votes. Achieving this, despite vicious attacks from other candidates and the swing to Sinn Féin is a testament to the strength of the Socialist Party, its ideas and record in the area

See socialistparty.ie for more

left also made important gains.

The Socialist Party waged a tireless campaign in the Dublin West byelection. Our campaign material, posters and manifesto tuned in with the anger of a working class community betrayed by Labour sell-outs. "Labour sold out on the water tax and austerity: don't just shout at the TV", was one of many slogans on Socialist Party and AAA posters plastered all over the constituency.

Ruth Coppinger was elected with over 12,000 votes. Achieving this, despite vicious attacks from other candidates and the swing to Sinn Féin is a testament to the strength of the Socialist Party, its ideas and record in the area, where Socialist Party TD Joe Higgins has served as public representative for nearly 25 years.

AAA stood 39 candidates in the local elections in six cities. AAA won 14 seats from eleven wards in five councils. The campaign was a huge success, and represents a breakthrough for the fighting left.

Perhaps most significantly, AAA made a huge breakthrough in Limerick city, three out of four candidates were elected. This result, along with the breakthrough in Cork city where three AAA councillors were also elected, makes AAA the only fighting left organisation with an important base and public representatives in Ireland's three main cities.

and admiration throughout the city and country, as a militant and capable defender of the working class and socialist ideas.

The People Before Profit alliance (dominated by the Socialist Workers Party) also won councillors but made the sectarian decision to stand a candidate, Brid Smith, against Paul, a sitting, fighting left MEP with a record of assisting workers in struggle in Ireland and internationally. This split and damaged the left challenge. Considering this, as well as the swing towards Sinn Féin, Paul's result is a considerable achievement.

Having two left candidates altered the dynamic of the campaign from its early stages, as opinion polls showed the left challenge as split and marginal. This situation will have led many to support Sinn Féin with their number one votes, as seemingly the most viable option to elect an austerity-critical MEP for the city. The combined first preference vote of Paul and Brid Smith, who finished in seventh place, was nearly 54,000, which would probably have allowed a single left candidate to be elected. Many workers and activists outside the Socialist Party have expressed their anger and dismay at this situation.

While the 'rise' of Sinn Féin has been more limited than some polls predicted they have doubled their first preference votes in the local elections to 15.2% and now have three MEPs. This still represents a huge rise in support, based on anti-austerity rhetoric in the south of Ireland despite their implementation of austerity as part of the coalition government in Northern Ireland. Sinn Féin also benefits

from anti-establishment credentials built up from the past. In this sense, the rise in its support reflects radicalisation and an openness to an anti-austerity and left political position in Ireland.

However, Sinn Féin is not a fighting socialist movement which bases itself on the active struggles of workers to transform society. Instead it makes a radical nationalist, anti-cuts appeal that does not pose a fundamental break with the rule of big business. While opposing the household tax and water charges in words, Sinn Féin was absent from the campaign of mass non-payment against the household tax, which was built and led by fighting lefts including the Socialist Party.

The perspective of the Sinn Féin leadership is to enter government following the next general election, most likely with Fianna Fáil. This has the potential to provoke mass disillusionment among workers who have placed some confidence in Sinn Féin, as has been the case with Labour. Indeed, a few days after the elections, a leading Sinn Féin spokesman told reporters that the party was opposed to a campaign of non-payment of the water tax, and would not even commit to withdrawing the tax when in government!

The electoral breakthrough for the fighting left in the local elections and Dublin West byelection must be used to prepare for struggles against the continuing austerity offensive of big business via the Troika, whatever government is implementing it. These election results and breakthroughs can also serve to inject hope among working class people that austerity can be effectively opposed. The Socialist Party and AAA will now turn its attention to using this success to build for a campaign of resistance.

Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition

Next steps in building a political voice for workers

On 22 May the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) presented the biggest left-of-Labour electoral stand in generations. Our candidates included many trade unionists and community campaigners who had never stood in an election before, but saw TUSC as an opportunity to take the battle against austerity onto the electoral plane. Contesting 12% of the seats and 17% of the wards up for election, this was greater than anything attempted before in the four-year history of the coalition (for the full picture, see www.tusc.org.uk/txt/306.pdf). The following week, TUSC's national steering committee met to discuss the election results, the next steps for TUSC supporters, expanding the electoral coalition and preparations for the general election. Here we print part of the letter to TUSC's candidates and election agents that the committee agreed.

31 May 2014
To: All TUSC local election candidates and agents

Dear comrade,

Hopefully all TUSC supporters have had a chance to catch their breath after the hard work of recent months, because this letter is mainly about how we develop TUSC from here. The general election is now only eleven months away, on 7 May 2015. On that date there will also be local elections in the overwhelming majority of Metropolitan and Shire District councils in England.

General election preparation

Whichever party wins the general election we will face a continuation of government for the billionaires. The Labour leadership has repeatedly made it clear that a Labour government will implement austerity. Now Labour leader, Ed Miliband, has even stated that he would consider increasing the already draconian anti-trade union laws. As the growth in support of the right-wing nationalists of Ukip has shown, it is urgent that we step up our work to build a political force that actually stands in the interests of working class people and has a clear anti-cuts, anti-racist, socialist programme.

That means continuing and stepping up the TUSC campaigning work that is taking place in local ar-



reas. It also means starting to prepare our general election challenge, with local groups making plans now, including discussing potential supporters that could be drawn into the campaign and the issue of finance, with a £500 deposit to pay just to get on the ballot paper. Regular donations should be organised now, either through standing orders or regular PayPal payments (see the TUSC website at <http://www.tusc.org.uk/donate>) to prepare for this.

One campaigning proposal we are suggesting to build support for a general election challenge and gain publicity is that TUSC groups organise, in each parliamentary constituency, union delegations or



TUSC supporters protest against job cuts in Coventry photo Coventry SP

lobbies of Labour prospective parliamentary candidates (PPCs) to demand that they sign up to support John McDonnell MP's trade union freedom bill, agree to support the reversing of all the cuts in public services and benefits that have taken place under the Con-Dems, and support an incoming Labour government banning zero hour contracts and immediately introducing the 'Living Wage' (£7.65 an hour, £8.80 in London).

If, as is likely, Labour PPCs are not willing to sign up to these very minimal demands, or even to meet a trade union delegation, we should use this to publicly add their constituencies to the list TUSC are considering contesting.

Next year's local elections

Alongside standing in the general election, we should also, in our view, be looking to build on what we achieved this year and to stand as widely as possible in the local elec-

tions. There will be, in fact, more seats up for election in May 2015, outside of London, than were up for election this year.

Without doubt there will be some workers who reluctantly feel obliged to vote Labour nationally, but who will vote for anti-cuts councillors locally, in order to provide them with some defence against the cuts that are coming post-election. Even in the context of a national focus on the general election, TUSC can organise a vigorous local election campaign – with the added advantage that, with no election deposits, there should be no obstacles other than persuading enough candidates to stand in reaching the 'fair coverage' broadcasting threshold for these contests.

Organising local groups

In order to facilitate this work it is important that TUSC is organised locally. If no local structure already exists we recommend that a local steering committee or branch is urgently set

up and that all those who have participated in the local election challenge are invited to participate.

While it is up to local groups to determine exactly what structure best suits your locality, they should operate on the basis of consensus, as is the case nationally, in order to build the maximum possible unity between the growing forces involved in TUSC.

TUSC national steering committee members would be very happy to come and speak to local meetings if that is helpful. In any event we would be very pleased to hear from you before the next steering committee meeting on 2 July about your ideas and plans to build on the big steps forward taken by our coalition in May's elections.

Yours comradely,

Dave Nellist, TUSC national chairperson
Clive Heemskerk, TUSC national election agent

Stevenage: March against the far-right, racist EDL

The far-right, racist English Defence League (EDL) is planning to hold a march in Stevenage on 7 June. They want to spread their hatred and racist propaganda.

Stevenage has never had an event like this in its history – far-right supporters in the area in the 1970s and 1980s never gained any support. Trade unions and socialists have always shown that working class unity is our strength and stood up to these ideas and kept them from growing. But this means that we have not developed a well-oiled network to confront the far-right as has been the case elsewhere. So we've had to start from square one.

The local trades council, including members of the Socialist Party, called a counter demonstration. It put out a statement which has been circulated as wide as possible in the trade union and anti-racist movement and in the local press.

Following a court case, highlight-

ed by the EDL, where two Muslim men and one woman from Stevenage were charged with trafficking, grooming and prostitution, the trades council explained that "...The

Stevenage has never had an event like this in its history - far-right supporters in the area in the 1970s and 1980s never gained any support

vast majority of Muslims and of the Pakistani community are horrified by this crime, so why are the EDL demonstrating? The EDL want to promote racial division. Stevenage



photo Socialist Party

and District Trade Union Council will organise a counter demonstra-

tion because we feel that such hatred cannot go unchallenged and

the division created between working people must not be allowed to grow."

Far-right groups like the EDL try to exploit legitimate fears that working class people have, particularly about a lack of jobs, homes and services. They want to see working class people turn on each other rather than on the bosses and politicians who are really to blame. That's why it's important that it's the trade unions showing the lead in Stevenage – the organisations who can lead united struggles against all attacks on workers.

In just two weeks we have built up quite a campaign against the EDL. Their trip to Stevenage will not be welcomed and the two or three EDL members in the town will remain isolated.

Oppose the far-right, racist EDL Meet 1pm Town Square Gardens, behind the swimming pool, Stevenage

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.

Don't butcher DSA!

Disabled Students Allowance (DSA) is a needs-based payment designed to meet additional disability-related costs of attending a course. The scheme has so far been very effective in supporting disabled students to study on a more equal basis, graduating with better results compared to disabled students that don't receive DSA.

Many students are outraged by the plans to butcher DSA announced by the privately educated David Willetts, Minister for Universities. The cuts include a massive scaling back of support, particularly to students with specific learning disabilities such as dyslexia, and removal of all funding to pay for specialist accommodation.

These changes will take effect as soon as September 2015. The cost of a disability will be passed onto individual universities or students, or not met at all. It is vital that we organise to defeat these unfair cuts and as a first step support the NUS national lobby of MPs on Friday 6 June.

We also have to demand as a matter of urgency that our universities are prepared to use surpluses to meet the cost of any support that is withdrawn, and that they do a better job of communicating what support is available to disabled students on open days.

Ben Golightly
Swansea Socialist Students

Labour's democracy?

My grandparents have always been members of the Labour Party. So we were shocked when my Nan was called a "traitor" by a Labour Party councillor for raising concerns about a trolley bus scheme.

It's disgraceful that a councillor would speak to a member of her own party in this way. Why shouldn't my nan be allowed to raise objections through the structures? Where is the party's democracy?

My Nan's belief that working class people deserve a decent standard of living hasn't changed all her life. It's the Labour party who are the traitors because that's not what they stand for any more.

Helen Pattison

**Ukip: austerity party**

Ukip supports austerity, opposes family allowances and sick pay, supports anti-trade union laws and adores the rich. Ukip is not so much a breath of

fresh air, more a foetid stench, masquerading as anti-establishment. In fact their policies leave the current banker-friendly, tax dodging system untouched.

Aristotle is credited with the axiom: 'politics abhors a vacuum', which history shows in pre-war Germany, Italy and Spain, can be filled by murderous forces dedicated to maintaining the rule of big capital by crushing democracy. Currently Ukip is colonising that vacuum. Why?

The policies of the three main parties are so identical that the electorate is effectively deprived of a voting alternative. The Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) offers an anti-cuts socialist alternative but receives little or no publicity, whereas Farage receives colossal media coverage, including a weekly column in the Daily Express.

Where TUSC received fair publicity, as in Southampton, it decisively beat both Labour and Ukip. If TUSC received the same coverage as Ukip the political landscape would be completely transformed.

Tony Mulhearn

**Big Pharma's threat**

"The abuse of antibiotics has led to the emergence of resistant bacteria and hard-to-treat infections", New Scientist magazine said (24 May) "and since antibiotics are poor earners, there's little new in the drug delivery line."

It explains that a "successful antibiotic drives its own obsolescence; the more of it you sell the more bacteria resist it. You can't improve sales through marketing, for fear of encouraging overuse, which also promotes resistance."

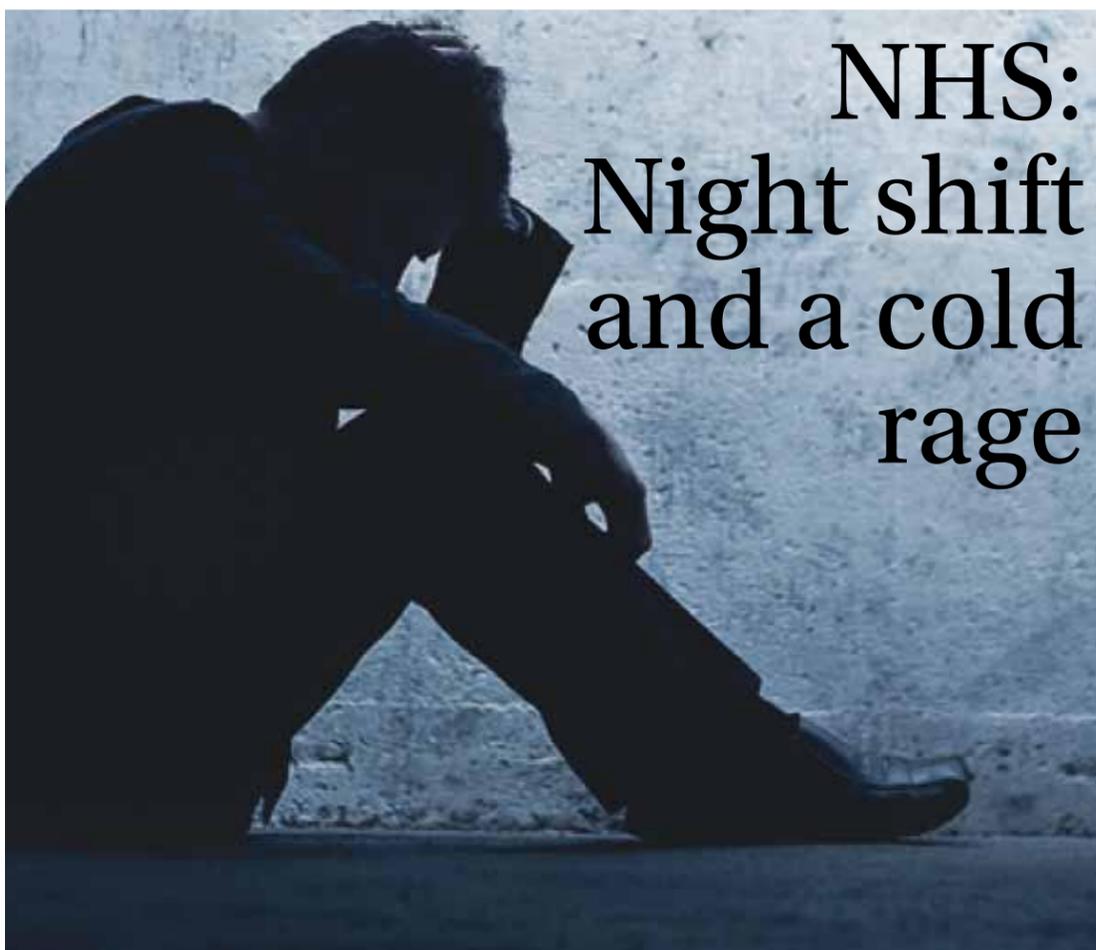
So Big Pharma, the huge private firms that dominate the market for medicines on the basis of profitability is not only distorting medical priorities, it is threatening the health of the world through drug resistant bacteria. New Scientist's leader article says: "Fixing the market failure in antibiotics production means transforming pharma companies into public goods producers, with public interest rather than profit driving research and development and marketing."

This policy is well to the left of those of Britain's big business-dominated mainstream political parties. We should stop letting profit-hungry big business threaten our future health.

The starting point for this must be to nationalise the pharmaceutical industry with compensation only on the basis of need.

Medical and scientific workers worried about how big business could put our future at risk should join the fight for a socialist planned economy and society that can maintain and exceed the NHS's original aims.

Roy Stevens

**A mental health worker**

I'm a psychiatric nurse in a crisis/home treatment capacity in a South Yorkshire mental health trust. Tonight I worked a night shift. I assessed three very different people in the local A&E department, three people who are all in their own ways victims of austerity.

The first was a young woman who, earlier that day, was subjected to a sexual assault by her partner. Despite experiencing such an awful ordeal, one of the woman's principal anxieties was about money.

With the partner now gone, she realised it will take the DWP weeks to adjust her benefits and having no family living locally, she had no idea where she would find money for food and to pay her payday lender. In a humane society the victim of such an assault would not have to contend with these worries. But where's the humanity in Iain Duncan Smith's benefits regime?

The second was a resident in a private care home that claims to specialise in accommodating people with mental health problems. That afternoon the man had got drunk and become troublesome to staff and was sent to hospital in an ambulance, with a request for a mental state assessment.

By the time I spoke to him he had

sobered up and calmed down. His behaviour was not the product of mental illness - he is unhappy living in the care home and wishes to live independently. This is not an issue a crisis worker can address at two in the morning. All I could do was to suggest that he returns to the care home and asks to see his social worker to discuss his placement in the morning.

The care home staff initially refused to take this man back. The A&E sister had to argue with them over the telephone for almost an hour before they relented. The home charges the local authority £1,200 a week to provide "specialist care" for this man.

Private care homes regularly dump residents they find difficult to manage onto local NHS hospitals and then try to walk away from their duty of care. I don't actually blame staff in these homes. They're often paid the minimum wage and with minimal staffing levels. I can understand why they seek to remove individuals who display challenging behaviours.

What makes my blood boil are the owners, who charge the NHS and local councils huge sums of money for services they clearly cannot deliver.

The final assessment was with a woman who had taken an overdose. On benefits and with two teenage sons, she cannot afford to buy her

boys new shoes. In a moment of despair she saw suicide as the only way out.

She was tearful and contrite when I spoke to her, ashamed of her actions. Beyond showing compassion, there was little I could actually do for her. The NHS does not have a cure for poverty.

It was a fairly typical night for a mental health crisis team working in Cameron's Britain. We see some people whose difficulties are due to mental illness but for the most part our client group are victims of an inflexible benefits system, of private providers that attempt to shirk their duties of care and of poverty.

Rain fills the sky as I leave the hospital to return to my base. The heavy grey clouds matched my mood. Back at the office I revive my spirits with coffee and a cigarette. I "officially" gave up smoking six years ago but caffeine and nicotine are the only things keeping me going throughout a night shift.

Like many health professionals, the stresses of the job make me a lousy poster boy for healthy living. Another typical night and typically I am angry. It's a cold rage that I feel, but a rage of empowerment which steels my determination to fight for socialism and to win the day when the stories I heard tonight become distant memories of a cruel and defeated past.

Save Rhydyfelin Library

Dave Reid

Community campaigners occupied Rhydyfelin Library near Pontypridd on 31 May in protest at its closure by Rhondda Cynon Taff (RCT) council. Four of them chained themselves to the bookshelves for four hours.

The library was due to close that afternoon but 100 local people thronged into it in a community show of support for the library, defying the Labour-led council. They held a big, enthusiastic meeting with speeches and poems against the cuts, including a very good one written by ten year old Rebecca.

RCT council was hoping to close 14 of the area's 27 libraries, a massive cut in community facilities. Rhydyfelin, a last minute addition

to the list, is proving determined to fight the closure. The campaign applied for a judicial review on the grounds that the process for selecting it for closure is flawed, the review will be held at Newport County Court on 5 June.

But RCT council went ahead with the closure anyway, only to be met by the occupation. Campaigners believe Rhydyfelin was cynically selected because the ward has been a rock-solid Labour seat so Labour will not lose the seat in the elections in 2017.

But Labour on RCT council are in for a shock: one of the fighters, Caron Hadland, told the meeting that she was standing to oppose all the council cuts, standing as an independent at the next council election.



PCS-Unite merger: Will it strengthen our fightback?

John McNally

PCS national vice-president
(personal capacity)

One of the main debates at PCS annual conference in May was on a possible merger with Unite the Union. Conference showed that PCS activists and members need information, clarity and assurances that it would be in the best interests of both unions' members. Members will expect the PCS leadership to leave no stone unturned in fighting for their interests.

Over the last 13 years PCS's left leadership has taken a serious approach to representing its members, including fighting government attacks. Following Unite's approach, PCS has first looked at joint work and then at potential amalgamation. Last year's conference outlined the expectations that PCS would have in any formal talks with Unite. Key is maintaining the lay democracy that the leadership team fought for when the previous right-wing was defeated.

A motion opposing any merger was defeated at this year's PCS conference. The national executive's (NEC) motion essentially sought authority to take up Unite's offer of formal talks and set out a rigorous democratic process, including full reports to the NEC and branches on the talks, a widespread consultation, a special delegate conference to debate any such proposals, and lastly, a ballot of members.

Protecting democracy

Unfortunately, the NEC motion was defeated, but an emergency motion was passed which also authorised talks with Unite. However, the motion that was passed erroneously claimed that previous conference policy had set 'minimum pre-conditions' for talks around issues of lay democracy and the political fund. Members are open to the potential gains of a merger but are rightly absolutely determined to protect union democracy.

Unite general secretary Len McCluskey spoke at PCS conference a few years ago and raised the possibility of closer working and the possibility of a merger between both unions. A public sector group of half a million, with the existing PCS in the majority, could make a real difference to the struggle against austerity.

While PCS was influential during the pensions dispute a few years ago it was simply not strong enough to obviate the influence of the right-wing trade union leaders who engineered a shameful surrender. Had a force, as envisaged by the joint leaderships of PCS and Unite, been in existence at that time the outcome may well have been different, not only in terms of that dispute but significantly strengthening our movement to stand against the government's austerity programme.

No serious trade unionist or socialist could disagree with this aim. But the prospect of building such a force has caused consternation in the trade union movement's right wing that is horrified by the very idea of a viable, mass alternative to their collaborationist approach.

PCS's 2013 conference gave the leadership the authority to engage in talks if approached by Unite. Since then both unions have seen a period

of intense activity. The Unite leadership has had to deal with an all-out assault by corporate gangster Ratcliffe of Ineos, aided and abetted by the Coalition government, in a naked assault on union rights.

Worse in some respects, Unite also faced a coordinated assault by the Labour leadership in an attempt to destroy the union's strategy of challenging the rightward drift of the party. This included Ed Miliband reporting union activists to the police. Therefore, it was only just before Christmas 2013 that talks of an exploratory nature began and only in April that Unite's Executive was in a position to ratify formal talks. Those talks were fully reported to the NEC and material has appeared in union publications and a briefing has been sent to branches.

PCS has fought back through its industrial and its political representation strategy. This fighting tradition has bred a real commitment to lay-led democracy and a detestation of all the mainstream political parties

Perhaps inevitably this hiatus meant that the conference debate lacked detail about what the new formation would look like for PCS members, causing genuine concern among some activists. There is nothing in itself negative in this - PCS activists want to retain the best aspects and traditions of their union. That should be welcomed by the PCS leadership - and the Unite leadership. The details can and will be resolved in formal talks.

PCS has fought back through its industrial and its political representation strategy. Its alternative, once scorned as "deficit denial", is now mainstream in the trade union movement. This fighting tradition has bred a real commitment to lay-led democracy and a detestation of all the mainstream political parties who offer nothing but austerity, including Labour to which Unite is affiliated.

Political manoeuvrings

While the majority of conference delegates acted from the healthiest of motives, the political manoeuvrings of individuals and groupings disingenuously distorted the debate and played on activists' concerns. Among those opposing the merger are some activists who for one reason or another rule out PCS joining Unite. It can only be hoped they will engage in the debate on the basis of looking at the detail of what comes out of formal talks.

But the core of the grouping opposing merger are anti-NEC oppositionists. They invited the unsuccessful Unite general secretary candidate Jerry Hicks to speak at an anti-merger fringe meeting. It is regrettable that Hicks did not even bother to contact anyone in the leadership of PCS to gain some idea of why it wants talks



PCS and Unite members march on 20 October photos Senan

with Unite. Bringing a union with PCS's militant history into his union should be the logical position of someone claiming to be fighting for a more 'socialist' and 'fighting' union. Instead he came to PCS conference, critical of his own union and telling PCS members: "Don't join us."

The motion carried was constructed by the Socialist Workers Party (SWP). Unfortunately, they resorted to deliberate misinformation. Although many delegates in the hall took action with Unite members on 10 May 2012 to defend pensions the SWP falsely claimed that Len McCluskey signed the Heads of Agreement surrender alongside Unison and the GMB in December 2011 that threw away the momentum of the huge N30 strike.

It was claimed that only Labour Party members can be Unite full-timers, a deliberate lie. In reality the SWP are opposed to a merger but they seem to recognise that outright opposition without formal talks and

democratic decisions will be seen as an untenable position.

As a Socialist Party member said in the debate, we must have a sense of proportion. Listening to some contributions, you'd be forgiven for thinking the NEC was suggesting we merge with Usdaw.

One delegate argued he wasn't opposed to a merger and that it may even be necessary at some stage if PCS continues to lose members. But as every workplace representative understands, isn't it better to negotiate from a position of strength in order to gain the best terms, if it is on the correct basis?

Maximum solidarity

PCS, like other organisations, has been negatively affected by the financial crisis in respect of pensions but the union is financially viable even if it is does not merge with Unite. Finance has never been a driver in this process. Despite actually seeing an

increase in its union density in the civil service, PCS has lost membership as a result of an anti-public sector austerity programme. Under its left leadership PCS will continue to exert an influence - but it would be a bigger voice in a merged union.

Neither Left Unity nor the Socialist Party have a fixed position on the merger other than the necessity of engaging in talks and then conducting a democratic debate and allow members to decide. But we see the possibilities of a merger.

There is enormous potential for building maximum solidarity and unity in fighting austerity and the relentless attacks on the public sector and a clear industrial logic in building a campaigning public sector group that can, within the context of the biggest union in the UK, coordinate a fightback on pay, pensions, privatisation and terms and conditions.

That is why we believe the formal talks should begin.

NHS PAY

WE DEMAND A LIVING WAGE!



Michael Wrack

On 5 June, Unison - the biggest trade union in health - is organising a day of protest over pay. And there is plenty for us to protest about.

The recommendation of the NHS Pay Review Body this year was for an across the board rise of 1%.

1%! ...After a three year pay freeze.

1%! ...This is at a time when the cost of living is soaring, meaning most NHS workers have suffered around a 10% real value pay cut.

1%! ...When 20,000 NHS workers don't earn the living wage and an increasing number are forced to rely on food banks and payday loans.

1%! ...When existing NHS cuts mean a smaller number of workers expected to do a larger amount of work and future threatened cuts mean we all expect that ratio to get worse not better.

A measly 1%!

Far too generous, says Tory Health Secretary Jeremy Hunt! How could we afford it, he asks?

Perhaps chasing millionaire tax avoiders who cheat the public purse out of billions of pounds that could be spent providing nurses with a living wage would be a start. Millionaire tax avoiders like, for example, Jeremy Hunt, found in 2012 to have avoided paying over £100,000 tax on a dodgy property deal.

Just one recent high profile tax avoidance scheme allowed its rich and famous investors, including Tory-funding singer Gary Barlow, to dodge paying over £130 million in tax.

Following this revelation, David Cameron defended Barlow's OBE on the basis of his charity work. The kind of charity work that would not be necessary if the government demanded the super-rich pay their fair share to properly fund public services like the NHS.

But instead of going after these parasites, it is low-paid workers who face the government's wrath. A 1% pay rise is unaffordable

they say. They have instead offered a one-off unconsolidated 1% rise for the longest serving staff at the top of their pay bands. Everyone else must make do with the yearly increments of which we are already entitled, meaning 60% of us once again get nothing and, in effect, a real pay cut.

Yet Unison estimates it would cost less than £20 million a year to make sure every NHS worker was paid a living wage.

We have had enough and that is why we will be protesting. It is also why Unison health conference overwhelmingly voted for a strike ballot on pay. 5 June must only be the start of a serious, determined battle over pay, including industrial action.

The union must also learn lessons from the defeat over pensions in 2011, when a fantastic day of strike action on 30 November was followed by the leadership backing down the very next day. Members have not forgotten that, and will be determined for it not to happen again.

What we stand for

The Socialist Party fights for socialism – a democratic society run for the needs of all and not the profits of a few. We also oppose every cut, fighting in our day-to-day campaigning for every possible improvement for working class people. The organised working class has the potential power to stop the cuts and transform society.

As capitalism dominates the globe, the struggle for genuine socialism must be international.

The Socialist Party is part of the Committee for a Workers' International (CWI), a socialist international that organises in over 40 countries.

Our demands include:

PUBLIC SERVICES

- No to ALL cuts in jobs, pay, public services and benefits. Defend our pensions.
- No to privatisation and the Private Finance Initiative (PFI). Renationalise all privatised utilities and services, with compensation paid only on the basis of proven need.
- Fully fund all services and run them under accountable, democratic committees that include representatives of service workers and users.

- Free, publicly run, good quality education, available to all at any age. Abolish university tuition fees now and introduce a living grant. No to academies and 'Free schools'!

- A socialist NHS to provide for everyone's health needs – free at the point of use and under democratic control. Kick out private contractors!
- Keep council housing publicly owned. For a massive building programme of publicly owned housing, on an environmentally sustainable basis, to provide good quality homes with low rents.

WORK AND INCOME

- Trade union struggle to increase the minimum wage to £8 an hour without exemptions as an immediate step towards £10 an hour. For an annual increase in the minimum wage linked to average earnings.
- All workers, including part-timers, temps, casual and migrant workers to have trade union rates of pay, employment protection, and sickness and holiday rights from day one of employment.
- An immediate 50% increase in the state retirement pension, as a step towards a living pension.
- Reject 'Workfare'. For the right to decent benefits, education, training, or a job, without compulsion.
- Scrap the anti-trade union laws! For fighting trade

unions, democratically controlled by their members. Full-time union officials to be regularly elected and receive no more than a worker's wage. Support the National Shop Stewards Network.

- A maximum 35-hour week with no loss of pay.

ENVIRONMENT

- Major research and investment into replacing fossil fuels with renewable energy and into ending the problems of early obsolescence and un-recycled waste.
- Public ownership of the energy generating industries. No to nuclear power. No to Trident.
- A democratically planned, low fare, publicly owned transport system, as part of an overall plan against environmental pollution.

RIGHTS

- Oppose discrimination on the grounds of race, sex, disability, sexuality, age, and all other forms of prejudice.
- Repeal all laws that trample over civil liberties. For the right to protest! End police harassment.
- Defend abortion rights. For a woman's right to choose when and whether to have children.
- For the right to asylum. No to racist immigration laws.

NEW WORKERS' PARTY

- For a new mass workers' party drawing together workers, young people and activists from workplace, community, environmental and anti-war campaigns, to provide a fighting, political alternative to the pro-big business parties.
- Trade unions to disaffiliate from the Labour Party now and aid the building of a new workers' party! Support the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition as an important step towards this.

SOCIALISM AND INTERNATIONALISM

- No to imperialist wars and occupations. Withdraw the troops immediately from Afghanistan!
- Tax the super-rich! For a socialist government to take into public ownership the top 150 companies and the banking system that dominate the British economy, and run them under democratic working class control and management. Compensation to be paid only on the basis of proven need.
- A democratic socialist plan of production based on the interests of the overwhelming majority of people, and in a way that safeguards the environment.
- No to the bosses' neoliberal European Union! For a socialist Europe and a socialist world!