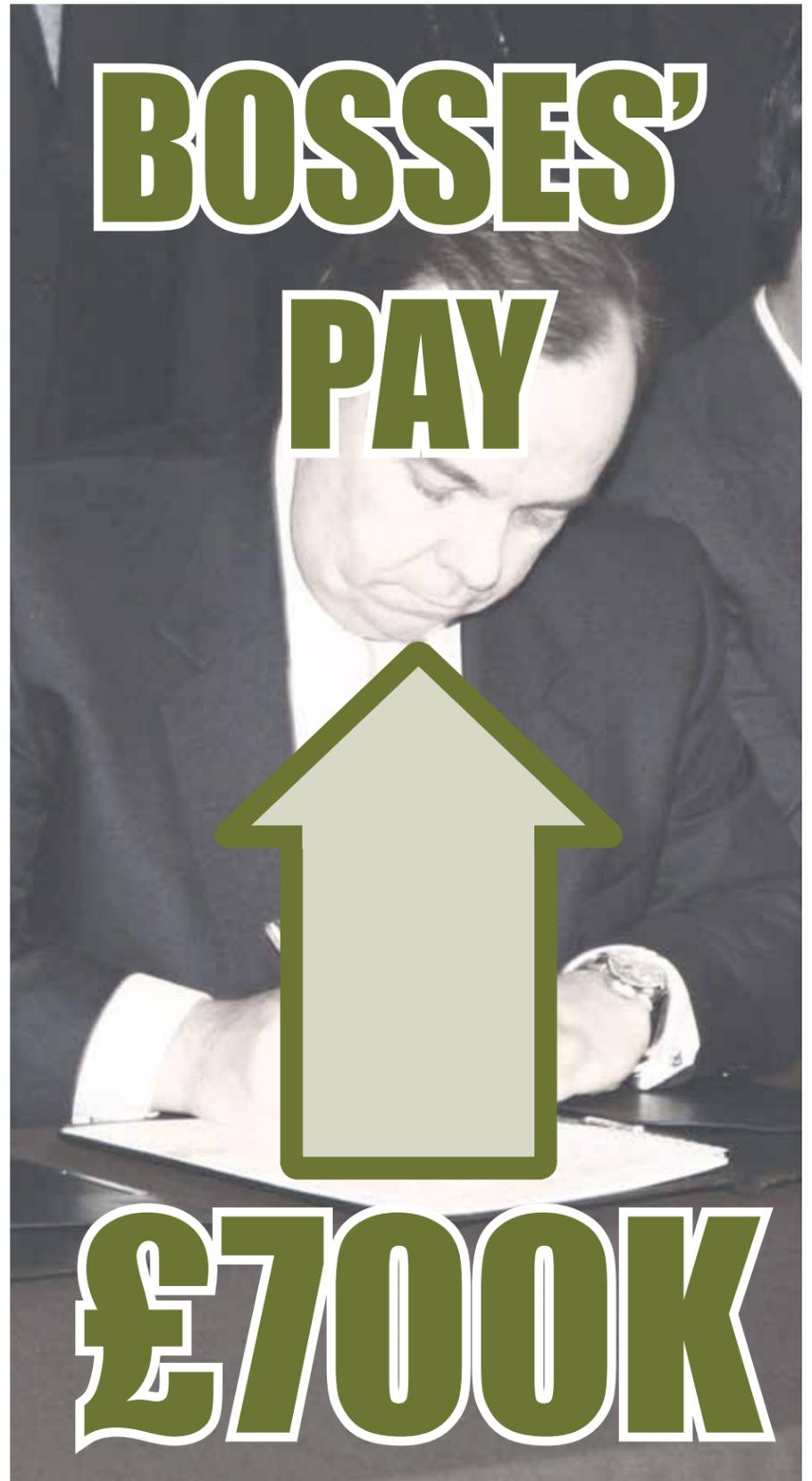




Striking St Mungo's Broadway worker photo Paul Mattsson



HSBC tax-dodge boss Stuart Gulliver photo Foreign Office / Creative Commons

Fight for decent pay, jobs and benefits

James Kerr

Feeling the pinch? Cutting back on spending? Wondering how you'll make it to the end of the month? You're not alone. Workers everywhere are struggling with stagnating wages and rising prices.

A recent TUC report confirmed what we're experiencing on a daily basis when it outlined that workers are £2,500 a year worse off since the start of the Con-Dem government.

That's an 8.4% fall in five years!

Government attacks on working class people are absolutely unrelenting. Cameron recently pledged to cut housing benefit for 18 to 21 year olds if the Tories win the next election.

Now, in yet another slave-labour workfare scheme, he wants young people to be forced to work for their benefits after six months of unemployment. And that's on top of cutting the benefit cap by another £3,000 a year - again hitting hardest some of the most vulnerable people

in society.

Contrast that with what's happening in Britain's boardrooms, where fat cats have seen their pay soar by 26% - £700,000 - in a year.

Big winner

Who is singled out as a big winner in the report? None other than Stuart Gulliver, chief executive of HSBC, the bank implicated in a massive tax avoidance scandal. It makes Cameron's 2009 "we're all in this together" refrain seem like a re-

ally sick joke.

It's clear that it's one rule for them and another for us. The enormous pay gap graphically highlights the staggering and growing inequality under capitalism. Working people pay the price for the contradictions of a broken system.

What's the alternative? All of the establishment parties are keen to bang the drum for the super-rich, squabbling for the crown of 'most pro-business'. It is clear that, whoever wins the general election, we'll need to fight for decent pay, jobs

and benefits you can live on.

The trade unions need to channel the anger that exists into a massive campaign for decent pay, including making the demand for a £10 an hour minimum wage a reality. We also need to build the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (see page 5) as an important step towards a mass working class party.

Ultimately we have to fight for socialist policies to ensure that the wealth is taken out of the hands of the super-rich 1% and used to benefit the lives of the mass of people.

the Socialist

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As we go to press the stand-off between the Greek Syriza government and the European Union (EU) finance ministers was continuing. The meeting on 16 February which discussed the bailout terms and their associated austerity measures had ended without agreement. But further discussion was possible.

The EU had offered a six months extension to the bailout, but on condition that there was no rolling back of the austerity measures agreed under the previous Greek government. Greek finance minister Yanis Varoufakis rejected this. But huge pressure was being put on the Greek government to back down under the threat of an exit from the euro.

Hundreds of thousands of people have demonstrated across Greece in support of the Syriza government's stance in negotiations with the Troika (the European Central Bank, The International Monetary fund and the EU). In polls, three out of four Greeks support the government's position which is seen as standing up to the Troika. This shows the huge potential, if linked to a clear socialist programme, for the mass mobilisation of workers and youth to resist.

In an article posted on Xekinima's (CWI Greece) website on 10 February, **Andros Payiatsos** looks at the options facing both sides in the dispute and the role of the working class in seeking a solution to Greece's ongoing crisis

Greece's clash with the EU will be very hard. German leader Merkel and the clique that runs the EU are not willing to accept the cancellation of the memoranda policies (austerity deals signed with previous Greek governments) that they have imposed over recent years.

At the time of writing, all possibilities are open. It is possible for a compromise to be found between

the Greek government and the EU and for Greece to remain in the euro zone. Syriza has already backed down on a series of issues in relation to its initial declarations but the EU leaders demand more and threaten that otherwise Greece will be forced to abandon the euro and go for a national currency.

This attitude of Merkel and co. is something that the Syriza leadership should have predicted and be

prepared for. It wrongly estimated that it could have 'negotiations' through which it could convince the European leaders with 'logical' arguments.

The Syriza leadership repeatedly reassured the Greek people there was no chance of a 'Grexit'. This was a serious mistake, because it leaves the Greek working class unprepared for such developments. But there is, however, time to fix this mistake.

Merkel and the EU leaders will not hesitate to throw Greece out of the euro if Syriza's government does not bend to their pressure and retreat from its pre-electoral commitments.

Bold stand

The Greek working people back the government's bold stand against the EU - precisely because they feel that the government has entered a major battle against the Troika. Polls put government support at 72%.

Nothing can stop the Greek working people from claiming back their livelihoods, which the memoranda have deprived them of... except an about-turn by Syriza!

The mass of the Greek workers are worried - and they openly say so - that the Syriza government may back down. And for this reason they were relieved to hear Alexis Tsipras's speech in parliament on 8 February in which he emphasised that

Syriza will not back down on any of its promises (despite the fact that on a number of issues Tsipras had watered down Syriza's pre-election promises).

So what should Syriza do if the Troika puts a knife at the throat of the new government and demand 'submission or Grexit'? Syriza should without any hesitation ap-

peal to the 'popular verdict'. Either by means of a referendum or with new elections (if a political crisis results) in which Syriza should put the question squarely in front of the Greek working people: Keep the euro and the memoranda or go for a national currency and pro-workers' policies.

If Syriza goes ahead with such a bold counter offensive then the Troikians, inside and outside Greece, will suffer a crushing defeat! Exiting the euro on its own will not solve the crisis of Greek capitalism. The re-introduction of a national currency must by necessity be combined with bold socialist policies: like capital controls, state monopoly of foreign trade and democratic public ownership of the big corporations and banks - and a class internationalist appeal to the workers of the rest of Europe. Only in this way will a national currency work as a tool of recovery for the economy and to the benefit of the working people of Greece. Xekinima has explained numerous times that it is not the currency that causes the crisis, but the internal logic of the capitalist system: Though the currency does define, to a significant extent, the precise characteristics of the economic crisis.

The leadership of Syriza is unfortunately very far from this kind of thinking. It continues to believe that it can come to an agreement and a compromise with the European leadership, with the perspective of 'a different' EU, which is more sensitive to the needs of the weakest, more 'social' etc.

The class struggle is entering a new phase; the struggles of the working class and of social movements can radically change the agenda. It won't be the first time!

peal to the 'popular verdict'. Either by means of a referendum or with new elections (if a political crisis results) in which Syriza should put the question squarely in front of the Greek working people: Keep the euro and the memoranda or go for a national currency and pro-workers' policies.

If Syriza goes ahead with such a bold counter offensive then

Socialist Party election appeal

As the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) anti austerity election challenge gathers momentum, the donations have been coming in fast to the Socialist Party Election Appeal.

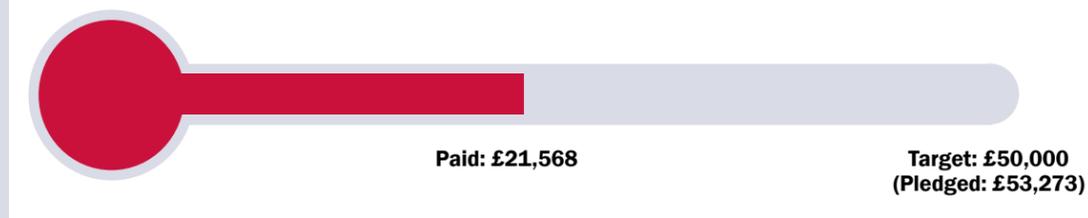
Over £21,000 has been paid in so far, with more than £30,000 pledged on top of that.

Our members and supporters are digging deep to fund anti austerity candidates and produce the campaigning material to show millions of people that there is a socialist alternative to austerity here in Britain.

Many are paying in instalments so they can donate the equivalent of a week's income.

Supermarket worker Geraint Thomas has paid the first instalment of his pledge of £120, Clive Walder is paying £300, in several parts.

All donations, big or small, will help us make a real impact between now and 7 May. This will put us in a much stronger position to campaign for the building of a new workers' party with a principled anti austerity programme af-



ter the general election - whatever the result.

Thanks also to James Clement who has donated £50, Brian Loader £60, Sean Vickers £50, Bob Severn £100, Gary Harbord £200, Roger Bannister £200, Sarah Welch £50,

Dan Crowter £30, Ted Woodley £200, John Davis £50, and Paul Gerard £1000.

You can donate on www.socialistparty.org.uk/donate, phone 020 8988 8777 to make a card payment, or post a cheque made out to "So-

cialist Party" to PO Box 24697, London E11 1YD. Please mark your donation "election appeal 2015". All donations need to be in by 30 April 2015.

Naomi Byron, Socialist Party finance department

HSBC tax dodging scandal

Put the establishment on trial!

Simon Carter

The HSBC tax dodging scandal has further exposed the rottenness of the political establishment. Both the Tory party and Labour received millions in donations and loans from super-rich tax avoiding clients of the UK based HSBC banking giant's Swiss branch.

Top officials at HM Revenue and Customs claim ignorance of whistleblower Herve Falciani's 2008 offer to send them HSBC's tax scam details. But by April 2010 HMRC had received the HSBC list. Why then in November 2010 did Prime Minister David Cameron elevate HSBC boss Stephen Green to the House of Lords?

Despite evidence of illegal tax evasion practices only one UK account holder has been prosecuted from a list of 2,000 handed to the HMRC. Incredibly, tax bosses failed to prosecute multimillionaire and HSBC Swiss bank branch client Paul Bloomfield despite concluding that he owed 20 years' tax!

So why haven't legal proceedings been taken against HSBC executives? After all, this was the bank fined \$1.92 billion by US authorities in 2012 for laundering drug cartel money through its Mexico operation.

Only now, after the proverbial horse has bolted, does the Treasury Select Committee say it will look into possible illegal practices at the bank. And despite successive Labour and Tory government Chancellors repeatedly announcing crack downs on tax dodging bil-



The corporate bankers are happy to service the super-rich photo S Beishon

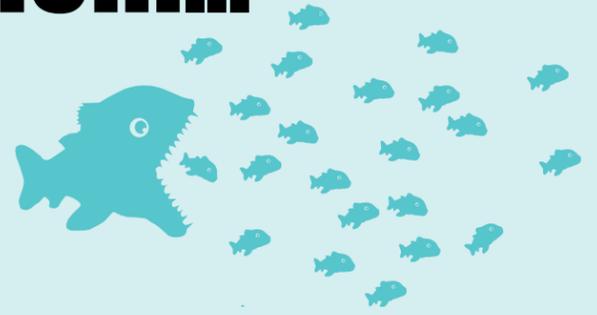
lionaires and corporations there is clearly little to show for their rhetoric. However these governments have relentlessly hounded those on the lowest incomes, sanctioning benefit claimants often for the most trivial of reasons.

None of this is surprising. The 2008 financial crash and subsequent 'great recession' demonstrated the unity of the super-wealthy, capitalism and political establishment in protecting the privileged elite with bailouts and more tax conces-

sions while making us pay. We need working class unity and socialism to rid society of these parasitic freebooters and hirelings.

- Close the tax avoiding loopholes of individuals and corporations
- Prosecute all those involved in illegal tax dodging
- Implement a wealth tax on the super-rich
- Socialist nationalisation of the banking system - under democratic workers' control and management

Them...



Vanilla fudge

Ed Miliband claimed a political victory after Lord Fink retracted his threat to sue the Labour leader who, in a parliamentary bun fight with Prime Minister David Cameron, had accused him of being a "dodgy donor" to the Tories. Former Tory party treasurer Lord Fink, who gave £3 million to his party, is named on the HSBC tax avoiders list but claimed he had only set it up to 'pay for the groceries' during his stay in Switzerland. Later, Fink's admitted engaging in 'mild' or "vanilla, bland" tax avoidance, as "everyone" does. However, before Miliband gets too smug perhaps he should explain Lord Paul's £500,000 donation and £2 million loan to the Labour party? Once a Labour peer, Lord Paul is also a named client of HSBC's Swiss branch. Does he not qualify as a 'dodgy donor'?

lucrative government contracts. PwC provided the Tories with staff technical support and professional advice worth £290,000 before the 2010 general election. However, it seems that PwC has hedged its bets by providing researchers to the offices of shadow chancellor Ed Balls and shadow business secretary Chuka Umunna worth a total of £163,000.

Exclusive advice

Speaking of tax avoidance... Cameron's wife, Samantha, works as an 'advisor' to luxury stationers Smythson. This company is owned via a holding company in Luxemburg and linked to a trust fund in Guernsey, both tax havens.

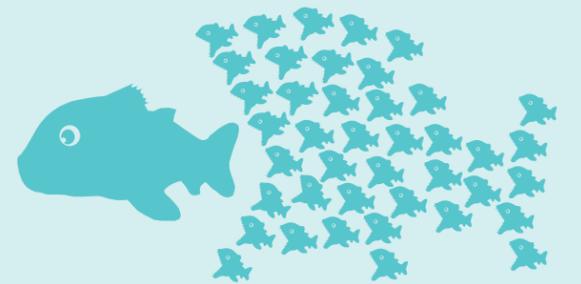
It's all Balls

In the wake of the HMRC scandal Labour Shadow Chancellor Ed Balls says Labour will crack down on tax dodgers. However, the party's track record in office doesn't exactly inspire confidence. The number of 'non-doms' (typically, super-rich residents who claim 'non-domiciled' status to avoid paying taxes) in the UK exploded under Labour's Tony Blair premiership. They rose from 67,600 to 137,000 between 1997 and 2007. Fellow minister Peter Mandelson said the government was "intensely relaxed about people becoming filthy rich", so long as they paid their taxes.

By your friends...

HSBC banking giant is in the doghouse but there's another tax avoidance tale. It's about the cosy relationship between global accountancy giant PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC) and the Tories. Oh yes, and Labour. MPs on the Public Accounts Committee have accused PwC of promoting tax avoidance by multinational companies "on an industrial scale" while enjoying

...& Us



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

Join the fightback! Join the Socialists!
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How the super-rich get away with it

Caroline Vincent

"Tax avoidance - everyone does it." That is according to multimillionaire, former hedge fund manager and Tory donor, Lord Fink. While his claim certainly isn't true for the majority of us, amongst the circles that Lord Fink mixes in, it is par for the course.

For the wealthiest in society there are loopholes and quirks in the system that can be exploited to save them billions of pounds in taxes.

One such quirk is 'non-dom' tax status. It's claimed this benefits the country by encouraging rich foreigners to spend time in the UK. In fact this status has loose terms that allow UK residents registered as foreign nationals to avoid paying taxes on their earnings abroad.

Those who are lucky enough to benefit from this privilege can even pass it on to their heirs; there is an emerging class of 'hereditary non-doms'. This means that someone who was born, raised, educated in the UK, and in possession of a British passport could still benefit from this concession - if they have the right parents. Applying for the

status is as simple as ticking a box on their tax returns.

Conservative MP Zac Goldsmith may have given up his non-dom claim in 2010, but he still enjoys hereditary tax breaks. His late father, the Anglo-French corporate raider Sir James Goldsmith, distributed his £300 million fortune offshore amongst 15 family members. Zac is the beneficiary of a trust that is administered by an office in Geneva.

Similarly, Lord Fink transferred shares into family trusts for his children, while working in Switzerland, as he "wanted them to have something to help them make their way in the wilder world." Well, what could be more helpful than a tax-free lump of money?

Offshore havens are used to dodge taxes on a massive scale, with trillions of pounds being hoarded. If taxes are high in one location, you can simply register your location as another, more favourable one.

For instance Verton Holdings Ltd - a company which Zac Goldsmith is linked to - is registered in the Cayman Islands, which is now home to more than 85,000 companies. This means there are more registered organisations in the Cayman Islands



than there are people!

In addition to aggressive (but legal) tax avoidance schemes, the PCS union has estimated that the cost of tax evasion (which is illegal) to the UK economy will rise to £100 billion by 2018. Meanwhile, we continue to face an onslaught of cuts to our jobs and services as we're told that the money just isn't there. Of course it isn't there, it's all offshore!

The super-rich may defend tax avoidance by saying that these practices are legal, but they are also unfair, immoral and a blunt reminder of the increasing inequality in society.

What we saw **The Chancellor's advice - how to avoid paying taxes!**
 On You Tube

Tory Chancellor George Osborne back in 2003 on BBC2's Daily Politics show advising viewers to use "clever financial products" to avoid paying inheritance tax and care costs!

Lewisham: striking against 'academisation'

Cain Shelley

NUT union members from Sedgehill and the three Prendergast Federation schools, in Lewisham, south London, came out on strike on 12 February against the threat of forced 'academisation'.

After enthusiastic picket lines, with approval from many local residents and passers-by, the teachers congregated outside Prendergast College to lobby its board of governors, who were making their way inside to vote on an application for an academy order.

The usually quiet surroundings of Hilly Fields were quickly filled with shouts of "no ifs, no buts, academy status sucks!" from the large crowd. 150 students walked out of the college to join the protest.

Forty students then met at lunch

time the next day to move the campaign forward. They wrote a petition letter to the governors and planned a protest for after half term.

Governors go ahead

Governors chose to ignore the clear display of opposition and voted to apply for an academy order. They have also refused to hold a ballot to measure the support for their proposals.

Lewisham NUT secretary Martin Powell-Davies is set to be the TUSC candidate for Lewisham West and Penge in May's general election. Nearly all the teachers on strike offered their support for Martin.

Academy status takes schools out of elected local authority control, which threatens the children's education as well as staff's pay, terms and conditions.



Teachers and students protest outside Prendergast College photo Martin Powell-Davies

London bus strike suspended - now prepare for more action

Rob Williams

Socialist Party industrial organiser

London bus workers' union Unite has suspended their planned strike action on 13 and 16 February, following a meeting of reps on 11 February.

The bus workers want sector-wide negotiations across all 18 bus operators, to reduce and eliminate scandalous pay differentials that mean some bus drivers are paid £5 an hour less than others.

On the first strike - 13 January - even Transport for London (TfL)

eventually acknowledged that only one tenth of buses were on the road.

Despite TfL pulling out all the stops on the second strike, 5 February, the bulk of the service did not run. Picket lines of up to 100 drivers have showed the potential to win big concessions off the employers.

In 2012, Unite was able to secure a £500 Olympic bonus after one day of action. But the current dispute, demanding permanent gains for drivers across the capital, was always going to be a stiffer test and require more strike days.

There are dangers to pausing the action as momentum can be lost and management can be emboldened. Therefore, the message must be sent that this dispute is still very much on, with strikes ready to be called if the employers don't move.

Build confidence

Unite should call meetings in every garage during the suspension to build workers' confidence for the necessary further strikes. The union should commit major resources, both human and financial, into

this campaign.

This dispute has raised again the need for the 18 bus companies to be renationalised to end once and for all the bosses' 'divide and rule' that fosters pay inequality.

Unite has just donated £1.5 million to the Labour party's election campaign, with more to come. But bus workers will not see bus renationalisation in Labour's manifesto (whereas it is in the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition's manifesto).

But surely the very least the workers should expect for the union's

money is a commitment from Labour that it will force the bus companies to talk collectively to Unite? Making this commitment now, weeks before an election, would add huge pressure on TfL and the bus companies.

The Socialist Party and the National Shop Stewards Network, like many thousands of other union activists and the majority of the travelling public, will continue to stand with the drivers and their union as they look to defeat TfL and the cartel of bus companies. Solidarity with the bus workers!

Protest wins Crossrail worker's reinstatement

National Shop Stewards Network

Construction workers were celebrating on Monday 16 February after a worker on the huge London Crossrail project was reinstated after being sacked on 13 February for the crime of raising health and safety issues.

His employer, Costain, said he was laid off because of lack of work. Yet he had only been employed four days earlier on a job that has three years left!

These underhand methods are the insecure reality for construction workers and a massive obstacle for trade union activists who try to ensure that sites are safe and workers aren't ripped off by the bosses.

The sacking came on the very day that blacklisted workers were at the High Court in the long running battle that has exposed how the building companies kept union members out of the industry for years.

Oxford Street blocked

A protest on 16 February over the sacking was organised by rank and file Unite members in the building industry. By 8am the protest had stopped Oxford Street with traffic backed up either side of the Bond Street site.



photo NSSN

Soon after, we got word that the sacked worker had been put on full pay with a promise that he will get his job back.

We all left the road but warned that we will be back, with more protesters, if the promise isn't kept.

Monday's victory shows that workers can win, providing they and their union are prepared to

fight. Many of those workers who gave solidarity today are veterans of the successful struggle against the BESNA contract that electrical companies wanted to impose in 2011 that would have cut wages by 35%.

The last few years have also seen victimisation fought and won at Crossrail, Ratcliffe, Runcorn and Romford to name but a few sites.

Hopefully this victory will inspire more construction workers to join a union and get the sites organised.

The inquest into construction worker Rene Tkacik's death, who was killed on Crossrail, is taking place at St Pancras Coroner's Court, Camley Street, Camden N1C 4PP, on Monday 23 February. There will be a vigil outside from 9.15am.

Tories' probation disaster

Chas Berry

Napo national vice-chair (personal capacity)

The probation service as we knew it was broken up and signed away into history on 1 February. Workers in probation union Napo fought long and hard but were unable to prevent 50% of services being outsourced. Eight owners now run 21 separate Community Rehabilitation Companies (CRCs).

On day one of the new contracts, community payback teams were stood down in many areas because the new companies had no van driving insurance. The companies have shown they are also unprepared to deliver the new Offender Rehabilitation Act (ORA) that extends supervision to those with sentences of less than 12 months.

Staff had no advance training and there is widespread uncertainty about how to, and who will, manage an estimated 60,000 additional offenders covered by ORA. One colleague described it to me as "like watching an approaching tsunami; you know a disaster is heading your way and you're wondering what to

grab hold of to keep you afloat."

Meanwhile staff working in the rump National Probation Service (NPS), who are now civil servants managing high risk cases, face the prospect of increased workloads and drastic cuts. New trainees are struggling with limited support and will not be ready to take on the extra work until 2016.

As predicted by Napo, all this is placing unbearable stress on staff and may be putting the public at increased risk. Many will be asking, however, if the union can protect both our members and the public in an increasingly fragmented 'criminal justice market'.

If Labour forms the next government we need to pressurise it to tear up the contracts signed by Tory Justice Secretary Chris Grayling. But any government is likely to carry on with the austerity agenda, so how can we achieve permanent change?

Just voting for one of the established parties won't be enough. I appeal to all activists to get involved in the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC - see page 5).

Defend access to justice rally, 23 February, 1-2pm, Old Palace Yard, Westminster

Fighting for a £10 minimum wage

This month I attended the Bakers, Food, and Allied Workers' Union (BFAWU) national executive, representing Youth Fight for Jobs. I spoke about the tremendous victory when Seattle became the first major US city to pass a \$15 an hour minimum wage, sending shockwaves nationwide and internationally. This couldn't have been achieved

without both Socialist Alternative (US co-thinkers of the Socialist Party) councillor Kshama Sawant and the trade unions.

We then discussed repeating that feat here in Britain. BFAWU has already successfully campaigned to make fighting for a £10 an hour minimum wage TUC policy.

Ian Pattison



Get your latest trade union news with the National Shop Stewards Network bulletin.

Sign up at: lists.riseup.net/www/subscribe/shopstewardsnet

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

“Vote for hope and an alternative”

Ex-Labour councillor stands for TUSC in Harrow

Nana Asante, former Labour mayor and Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) prospective parliamentary candidate in Harrow East, spoke to the Socialist.

Why did the split occur in the Labour Party in Harrow?

Unfortunately, Harrow Labour was betraying fundamental Labour values like equality and respect so a number of us resigned from the group and asked London Labour Party to come in and mediate to resolve the situation. We also wrote to Labour's National Executive Committee (NEC). Our complaint was not taken seriously.

Without dealing with our request for mediation, without replying to our letters to the NEC, Labour expelled us - we heard through the media before they sent us letters. We realised at that point that the Labour Party was no longer the party based on socialist values. We decided to form the Independent Labour Group.

You've managed to build up an impressive group of community supporters over the last year. Why do you think that is?

We have responded to people and organised consistently at the grassroots. We have organised meetings to deal with issues which residents told us they wanted to discuss. For example: 'How do we get back the Spirit of 45?' And 'What can we learn from the Scottish Referendum?'. We

recognise that while people are fed up with the Westminster consensus, they still care very much about society and their communities.

What do you think about the Labour Party and its policies on austerity?

The Labour Party is a shell of its former self and I doubt if the founding fathers and mothers would recognise it. Although there are still Labour Party members who value Labour principles, I believe they are a minority, fighting a losing battle.

Labour seems to believe in austerity-lite rather than fighting the corner of working people and insisting that those responsible for the crisis pay for getting us out of it. If elected, Labour would pursue the same failed policies which have brought such misery to so many.

Where there is a TUSC candidate, people should vote for hope and an alternative to austerity and cuts. Syriza has shown the way and the equivalent of Labour in Greece, Pasok, took a beating in the recent elections. If you betray the people you are meant to represent, you deserve to disappear!

Why did you decide to stand for TUSC?

A coalition of left-wing socialist groups and trade unionists, TUSC is closer to my politics than any other group. I attended the TUSC conference last year and was inspired by the very real resistance to cuts being offered by councillors in Southampton. People need hope and TUSC offers it. As a coalition, TUSC makes



Nana speaking at last year's TUSC conference, where she was inspired to stand under its umbrella photo Paul Mattsson

it possible to remain part of the 'Independent Labour Group' which we are building from the ground up.

Anything else you would like to say?

TUSC candidates will deliver the sort of positive transformation

that is needed. TUSC will not try to outdo Ukip on immigration, and instead will seek to have the sort of justice in the world that reduces the pressure of economic immigration. As we approach Fairtrade Fortnight, it is worth considering that if workers in other parts of the

world were paid a fair wage and a fair price for their products, there would be less pressure on 'fortress Europe'.

I urge all those who believe another world is possible to vote TUSC and only consider other candidates where there is no TUSC on offer.

“I want to tell the truth about the crime of austerity”



Nancy is standing in Walthamstow photo Paul Mattsson
Inset: Nancy's TUSC trolley ready for action! photo Nancy Taaffe

Nancy Taaffe, TUSC's prospective parliamentary candidate for Walthamstow, spoke to the Socialist.

Why are you standing?

I'm a socialist and a Socialist Party member who has fought every cut and privatisation in my home borough of Waltham Forest for nearly 30 years. I stood for parliament in 2005 against then Labour MP Neil Gerrard who debated with me and said that PFI privatisation at our local hospital was "the only show in town". That 'show' has led to our stroke unit being closed and moved miles away.

I had my two children in the local hospital Whipps Cross and they went to local schools. I worked for Waltham Forest libraries for 12 years before my job was deleted in 2012 due to cuts. So I have been both a user of public services and a provider of them.

I loved my job in the library - serving local school children and the elderly who were housebound. I shall never forgive those who elevated their salaries and expenses and gladly cut jobs and services for the Tories and their mates in the city.

This is part of the reason why I am standing, I want to whistleblow in the most public arena, an election. I want to tell the truth about the crime of austerity being perpetrated against working class communities and their families.

What are your plans for the campaign?

We are outsiders who are fighting to be noticed, so we'll be as

lively and imaginative as we can. We think it's important to have a campaigning routine so we have decided to make Monday morning 'TUSC morning'.

We have our trusty TUSC trolley and our banner (erected with some bungee ropes and hiking sticks!) and we set up in key sites around the borough and hand out our bright pink leaflets. These activities are designed to make a splash, make some noise and raise some cash.

We produce a regular e-newsletter called Nancy Newsflash Newsletter, sent to around 200 people. Then it goes on our blog and round social media. I have nearly 3,000 followers on Twitter and regularly get retweeted by various groups from within the borough.

I'm speaking soon at the London region of the firefighters union FBU and I intend to speak at a trades council and college hustings.

We want to visit as many primary schools in the constituency as possible. Young families are particularly open to bold socialist ideas and we think that many of our 5,500 votes in the local elections last May came from this section of people. This was particularly because we focussed our campaign on the demand for rent control, which we will still be talking loudly about this time round.

Why is housing such a key issue for TUSC?

Many (particularly young) people feel that the basic right to housing is being denied. Council homes are almost impossible to get, buying is out of the question for most and in

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

www.tusc.org.uk

January this year the average rent in London was £1,418 a month - and it's rising all the time.

We held various meetings and started to raise the demand of rent control. We've initiated a rent control petition, hoping to force a council discussion on the issue and we have been campaigning on the streets and outside the colleges.

I participated in the organising committee of the March for Homes in January and spoke at the start of the east London leg. In the capital many groups have been leading really inspiring campaigns for decent housing - the New Era estate and E15 mums are probably the most well-known. TUSC has supported all of these and thinks that they need to be linked up and to have a political voice.

2015 Socialist Party Congress: PREPARING THE FORCES TO FIGHT CAPITALIST AUSTERITY

Last weekend, branch delegates and visitors gathered at 2015 Socialist Party congress to discuss and debate the key political developments internationally and in Britain, and to map out the party's tasks over the next 12 months. Documents and motions outlining these perspectives and tasks were voted on, and a new national committee of the party was elected. The following articles touch on the main themes of conference.



Congress photos Senan

A world in turmoil

Manny Thain

The whole world is being rocked by political, social and economic turmoil. The speed of developments is accelerating and the capitalist ruling class has no long-term solutions to the multiple crises. This places colossal responsibility on the shoulders of working class and socialist forces - just as it presents us with great possibilities.

Those were some of the themes developed by Peter Taaffe, Socialist Party general secretary, in his introduction to a wide-ranging discussion on world perspectives at this year's party congress.

The significance of the election victory in Greece of the left-wing Syriza party was a key theme in the discussion, linking the eurozone's economic crisis with the emergence of new formations fighting against austerity.

The cuts have been cruel and people responded to Syriza's anti-austerity message - in spite of an onslaught by the capitalist media. Immediately after the election, Syriza summed up the mood with the positive declaration: 'Hope is coming!'

The Syriza leaders' visit to the graves of those killed fighting the Nazis, and their rejection of the parliamentary dress code also marked them out from the political establishment. Syriza has promised to re-employ thousands of public-sector workers, halt privatisation and stop evictions due to mortgage arrears.

Of course, it is not straightforward. The Communist Party's refusal to back a minority Syriza government is shameful.

Not one step back

Syriza and the workers' movement face huge difficulties. German capitalism and the Troika - European Central Bank, European Commission and International Monetary Fund - lord it over Greece like a colonial power. The governments of Spain, Portugal, Ireland and others - pushing through brutal cut-backs on the troika's orders - also demand that no concessions are given to Greece.

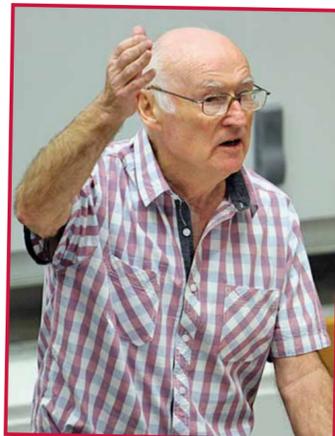
Xekinima, our sister party in Greece, raised the slogan on demonstrations after Syriza's victory: 'Not one step backwards! And, in order for Syriza to withstand the immense pressure to concede ground, it will need the support of mass mobilisations of workers, youth and the middle classes - and to fill its ranks with worker and socialist activists.'

The meteoric rise of Podemos in Spain is another example. This radical movement now has 300,000 members, many of them 'online'. Getting all of them actively

involved in decision making and mobilisations will be crucial if Podemos is to mount a consistent challenge to Spanish capitalism's austerity programme.

The Irish state is lashing out viciously in its attempt to make working-class people pay for the economic crisis. Paul Murphy, TD (MP) for the Anti-Austerity Alliance, was arrested along with 20 others for campaigning against the introduction of water charges, in a desperate attempt to stop the growing mass non-payment movement.

Paul and other Socialist Party members are proving that they are a principled alternative to the establishment parties and are mounting a major election campaign. If successful, that would add a powerful socialist voice to the emerging anti-austerity formations in Europe.



Desire for change

Further afield, in India, many on the left were in despair following last year's election victory of the right-wing BJP. Yet the BJP was recently defeated in Delhi by the Common Man party. Although it does not have a socialist programme, it is another indication of the widespread anger at the political establishment and the desire for change.

Other areas of the world face other kinds of crisis. In the Middle East, the catastrophic consequences of imperialist intervention are only too plain to see. Syria is being torn apart - as are Iraq and Libya. Western power miscalculation in Ukraine has brought conflict to the EU's borders.

Meanwhile, the rise of Isis is a stark warning that the political vacuum which exists can be filled for a time by ultra-reactionary Islamist forces, in the absence of a mass socialist alternative.

'Blow-back', such as the attacks in Paris on Charlie Hebdo and a kosher supermarket, is a direct result of imperialism's policy in the Middle East. Those attacks are now being used to introduce further measures of state repression which will be turned against future workers' movements in Europe.

The global economy is also on the rocks. The US economy is limping along. Obama even called for a tax on company cash hoards - colossal wealth lying idle because of a lack of profitable outlets - as a means of kick-starting the economy.

The EU is stagnant and the eurozone could be shipwrecked on Greek rocks. Growth in the Chinese economy is

slowing. Tensions between nation states are rising, initiating competitive devaluations through currency 'manipulation', as countries attempt to gain an advantage by lowering the price of their goods on world markets.

There is a real possibility of deflation, the vicious spiral of falling prices. Indeed, we could be on the threshold of a new economic collapse like that of 2008 - this time deepened by years of austerity.

Hand in hand with this is the relentless increase in inequality. Some capitalists are even waking up to the fact that this flammable mix is fuelling anger and revolt. Capitalism however, especially in a time of systemic crisis, will not grant serious reforms without mass, even revolutionary, struggle.

Developments will not move in a straight line. But a new period of mass movements, and of new mass formations, will be one in which socialist forces, armed with a flexible approach and a correct programme, can play a decisive role.

The conference speeches of Peter Taaffe and Hannah Sell can be seen on the socialistparty.org.uk website. Socialist Party members should ensure they get report backs of Congress deliberations and decisions. The finalised documents on international developments and Britain, as well as on the party's organisational tasks, are now available. Copies can be obtained via your regional secretary or the national office - 020 8988 8777.



A demonstration in Greece, which formed a central part of the discussion on world perspectives

TUSC lays down its election challenge

Paula Mitchell

Socialist Party executive committee member Clive Heemskerck - and national agent for the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) - reported on TUSC's 2015 electoral plans.

A debate is intensifying in the trade unions about their relationship with the Labour Party and the question of backing candidates that actually support trade union policies.

In this debate, TUSC is the reference point - even for those who still argue to retain the link with Labour at this stage.

There are now 91 applications in to stand for TUSC in the general election, with more to come. The report emphasised, however, the importance of the council elections where TUSC hopes to field 1,000 candidates.

Whoever wins the general election it will in effect be a 'change of management' only. With local government cuts so deep that they will bring councils down to the bare legal minimum of service provision and in some cases below even that. Moreover, with the public

sector pay freeze being maintained, no matter who wins, councillors will be in the frontline in the battle to defend services and pay.

TUSC is not yet a reference point for the broad mass of working class people - currently they are more likely to look to Ukip and the Greens as an alternative, not least because of the huge press publicity given to both. Also, in the general election many people will still vote Labour despite all their misgivings, in the hope of kicking the Tories out of office.

But if TUSC reaches its targets then it could secure a TV broadcast and the potential to start to break the silence of the mainstream press.

There can be no doubt that events are preparing the way for the development of a new anti-austerity political voice. With attacks on trade union rights escalating, Clive reminded us that it was the infamous Taff Vale case - allowing a union to be sued for damages by employers if it took action - that paved the way for the start of the Labour Party 100 years ago.



Britain: An upswell of anger

Dave Carr

With all the main parties committed to pursuing savage austerity cuts in the new parliament, and the working class and middle classes facing a cost of living crisis for another five years, Hannah Sell (deputy general secretary) asked: 'Will Greece come to Britain?'

Hannah told delegates that beneath a seemingly calm political landscape in Britain, a volcanic upswell of anger over public service cuts, job losses, low wages, insecure employment and widening inequality, is likely to explode whichever party - or more likely combination of parties - forms the next government.

This prospect hasn't been lost on the super-rich, many of who can see the 'pitchforks' coming and are hastily buying up offshore island bolt holes!

How is it then that the 1%, the wealthy capitalist class, continues to escape the wrath of the population? Hannah explained that the absence of a generalised fightback by workers is down to the baleful role of the right wing trade union leaders.

Notwithstanding this road block to struggle, a number of coordinated strikes - the NHS pay campaign and the London busworkers' dispute - have recently broken out, giving a glimpse of widespread battles that could develop in the next year.

Struggles against austerity can also develop in other arenas - as expressed by many voters in last September's independence referendum in Scotland.

Pressing social issues such as the housing crisis especially in the large cities can also act as an outlet; witness the recent thousands-strong demos in London against sky high private rents, the New Era tenants' victorious struggle against a rogue landlord, and the anti-eviction protests of the Focus E15 mums.

No political voice

The absence of a sizeable left political voice to represent the working class is also an obstacle to struggle but this hasn't stopped the fracturing of the traditional party political system in Britain. And as the rapid development of Syriza in Greece and Podemos in Spain shows, new left-leaning political formations can develop mass support very quickly.

Labour is repelling potential electoral support by its slavish adherence to capitalist austerity measures. Yet many trade union leaders continue to spout the mantra: 'Labour is the only show in town.'

Several contributors in the discussion highlighted the fact that only five Labour MPs, in January, voted in Parliament



Funding the fight for socialism

In addition to the travel and accommodation costs, conference delegates donated a magnificent £10,859 to the party's fighting fund. This huge sum, raised from many low income members, is on top of donations to the party's general election campaign fund. Readers who share our enthusiasm about the prospects of building the forces of genuine socialism in this election period can also donate (see page 2). This spirit of financial sacrifice was further expressed in the pledged increases in members' regular party dues. The thirst for ideas by those attending congress was reflected in the sales of over £1,000 of literature from the party's bookstall.

Whatever permutation of parties coalesces after the election the next government will be weak and unstable. Not least because the ruling class, whatever policies it adopts - more austerity, economic stimulus measures - will remain trapped in a straitjacket of capitalist crisis. What is guaranteed however is that the trade unions can expect a ferocious onslaught - on a scale not seen since the 1920s and 1930s.

Claire Job and Mark Evans from Wales explained that the right-wing trade union leaders campaigned for Labour. But control of the Wales Assembly has not led to Labour resisting the Tory/Lib Dems austerity. On the contrary, Labour has unhesitatingly passed on the cuts.

Matt Dobson, from Socialist Party Scotland, explained that Labour in Scotland could suffer meltdown in the general election similar to what happened to Pasok in Greece. The main beneficiaries would be the Scottish National Party (SNP), whose ranks have swelled by tens of thousands since last year's referendum.

But increased support for the SNP as an anti-austerity party will dissipate when Scottish workers experience further SNP administered cuts.

Disintegration

In England, Labour too is in a process of disintegration. Ukip hopes to cash in on working class disillusionment with the main parties by projecting an image of being anti-establishment, notwithstanding Ukip's pro-austerity agenda and backing by wealthy ex-Tories.

This right-wing threat can only be seriously challenged by building a serious left alternative to Labour. Such a formation, of which TUSC is an embryonic beginning, could cut across anti-migrant worker sentiment by adopting policies that unite the working-class in fighting for a living wage, reversing the cuts and inequality by means of nationalising the banks and major monopolies.

The Green Party is trying to position itself as an anti-austerity, anti-establishment alternative to Labour. However, their stated opposition to cuts has not been borne out by many of their council representatives and it could prop-up a pro-austerity Labour government.

Young people

Claire Laker explained that the roll back of wages and conditions by employers and the attacks by the government on access to benefits means that the current generation of young people will be materially worse off than their parents. But renewed student protests and young workers' actions against low pay and precarious employment can be expected.

The effects of austerity particularly on women both in and out of the workplace was also discussed, including the wider related issues of sexism and campaigns to defend women's rights. Lizi Grey exposed the government's attitude by pointing out that there are more animal shelters than women's refuges!

Summing up the session on Britain executive committee member Judy Beishon said that after the general election, there will inevitably be increased pressure from members of the largest trade unions to disaffiliate from the Labour Party and at some stage concrete steps will be taken to build a new workers' party.

Such a party would be a "powerful draw" to workers, young people, pensioners - all those facing the driving down of their living standards at the hands of the present government ministers.

Irish government unleashes “dogs of war” against anti-water charges movement



One of the protests against the arrests

Cillian Gillespie and Mick Barry
Socialist Party (CWI Ireland)

“**C**all off the dogs of war on people in Jobstown.” These were the words of Socialist Party TD (member of parliament) Ruth Coppinger when she challenged the Tánaiste (deputy prime minister) Joan Burton in the Dáil (Irish parliament) on 12 February. She was speaking against the shameful political policing that has resulted, at the time of writing, in the arrests of 23 anti-water charges activists and protesters in Dublin.

Gardaí (police) have mounted dawn raids on homes arresting the 23 for participating in a protest against Burton herself in the working class community of Jobstown in November. During the protest her ministerial Mercedes was impeded for two hours as the protesters staged a peaceful sit-down protest in front of it. For doing so, those who have been arrested face potential charges of unlawful imprisonment of Joan Burton!

Mass movement

Each day we have woken to hear of fresh arrests, with some newspapers reporting (no doubt having been tipped off by the Gardaí) that the number of those arrested is likely to rise to 40 people. This is an attack on the mass movement of working class people against water charges which, after six years of brutal austerity in Ireland, has been active since last September.

It is also an attack on the Anti-Austerity Alliance (AAA), which includes the Socialist Party and has been to the forefront of the battle against this austerity tax. Among the first group of four to be arrested on 9 February were Socialist Party members AAA TD Paul Murphy and AAA councillors Mick Murphy and Kieran Mahon.

Incredibly, six Gardaí called to Paul’s home before 7am and brought him to the local Garda station where he was questioned for eight hours. An enormous amount of Garda resources have gone into the arrests that have taken place, for example eight and ten Gardaí were deployed to arrest two teenagers aged 14 and 16 years old.

Political policing

Did government ministers put pressure on the Gardaí to take these actions? Did they give them the green light? It is entirely possible that they did. But even if they did not, the Garda action is still political in its essence. The Garda commissioner is appointed by the government and both government and Gardaí defend the same capitalist establishment shaken by the power and the scope of the anti-water charges movement.

The role of the Gardaí as enforcers for Irish Water, water metering and the hated water charges has torn the veil of Garda ‘impartiality’ from the eyes of many in recent months.

The Socialist Party demands that this political policing be ended. The Gardaí should have no role to play in policing community campaigns and struggles by working class people. Democratic control of the Gardaí by working class communities is needed as an alternative to being run as a centralised force led by a government-appointed commissioner.

This political attack will be fought until the case is dropped or the charges defeated. Of course, the attack will be fought using legal weaponry - the weak case of the establishment will be subjected to the strongest legal scrutiny and exposure.

But first and foremost, a political attack must be fought politically. A good first step has been the exposing of the hypocrisy of these charges by the AAA and other left TDs. Pro-

tests have been organised against political policing. Over 600 attended a protest, called at relatively short notice, outside the Department of Justice the day Ruth challenged Joan Burton in the Dáil and a similar number protested in Tallaght two days later.

The questions asked by the TDs have weakened the Garda case: Why is a working class community being penalised for actions similar to those taken in the past, for example by students, without penalty? Why are such huge Garda resources being put into this case when real crime affecting communities goes unpunished due to scant Garda resources?

Shameful political policing has resulted in the arrests of 23 anti-water charges activists

The anti-water charges movement has clearly shaken the Fine Gael-Labour coalition government and the capitalist establishment generally. A series of mass national demonstrations have seen hundreds of thousands take to the streets and thousands of working class people have been activated in opposition to the charge and to the installation of water metres.

The number of local campaigns that have sprung up is illustrated by the fact that there are approximately 350 Facebook pages of different local campaigns across the country. The scale and size of the movement forced the government to make a number of concessions before Christmas, including the water charges being introduced at a smaller flat rate charge until 2019 and also that the water pressure of



Paul Murphy speaking to press after his release

non-payers could not be turned down.

Nearly half of those who were liable to do so did not register with Irish Water (the company set up to administer the water charge) by the time of the deadline of 2 February. Polls have consistently shown that one-third of the population will not pay the water charge.

We Won't Pay

In the coming months the AAA and the We Won't Pay campaign will be seeking to build a campaign of mass non-payment to ensure a majority of householders don't pay the water charges bills that arrive in April and May.

The anti-water charges movement needs to link the defensive battle against the arrests in Jobstown by the state with an offensive one that organises non-payment. We can sink Irish Water and in doing so bring down this austerity government.

The Socialist Party and AAA will be energetically building a campaign to defeat water charges in

The Committee for a Workers' International

The Committee for a Workers' International (CWI) is the socialist international organisation to which the Socialist Party is affiliated.

The CWI is organised in 45 countries and works to unite the working class and oppressed peoples against global capitalism and to fight for a socialist world. For more details including CWI publications write to: CWI, PO Box 3688, London E11 1YE. email cwi@worldsoc.co.uk

www.socialistworld.net

the coming weeks and months. We also want to build a mass party of the left that can be a real alternative to all the main parties of Ireland's capitalist class. An active movement of working class people that is based on non-payment of the water charges can lay the real basis for the building of such a party.

"Driver, why are you late?"

A London bus driver

When I was new to bus driving, it wound me up when bus controllers asked: "Driver, why are you late?" I'm driving a busy bus in lots of traffic and the timetable is almost impossible to keep to.

Most controllers are ex-drivers trying to earn a crust like us. They know the hold-ups but from their viewpoint they need to know the specific delays. Even so, some controllers seem fuelled with hostility towards drivers.

Now when I hear "why are you late" on the bus radio I start explaining what happened at every stop;

every old lady who had to fumble for her bus pass, then I'd wait for her to sit down.

When I hear "why are you late" on the bus radio I start explaining what happened at every stop

And every parent with a child in a buggy who struggles through a crowded bus to park it safely in the

wheelchair space before I could move off. I explain the traffic delays at every junction and every set of traffic lights.

When the controller realises that a full reply to his question would further delay the bus, he gives me the benefit of the doubt and lets me get on with my job!

I always encourage drivers (and controllers!) to do the job exactly as they trained you.

Some people say I'm on a permanent work to rule. I say you'll have more stress and more accidents if you rush and try to do the impossible. Part of building a strong union is giving every worker the confidence not to be bullied.



"Part of building a strong union is giving every worker the confidence not to be bullied" photo Paul Mattsson

TV review: Angry, White and Proud Shallow look at racist far right

Ian Pattison

Jamie Roberts' Channel 4 documentary, *Angry, White and Proud*, claimed to shine a spotlight on Britain's far-right today. Filmmaker Roberts is worried about the violent threats of newly splintered racist grouplets after the collapse of groups like the English Defence League (EDL) and BNP.

These groups can no longer mobilise thousands to street protests, which is a step back for the far-right. On the other hand we have seen Ukip's electoral rise.

Jamie Roberts said recently that his documentary is "definitely not in support of what they [the far-right] are doing, I would say the opposite."

Channel 4 frequently produces controversial programmes about the far-right, often blowing their minuscule support way out of proportion or unwittingly providing their bigoted views a platform.

Little challenge

Roberts admits that the far-right supporters he interviewed "let me film it because they want someone to see what they're doing," and simply refers to racist thugs as 'nation-



The EDL has splintered, but far-right groups are still a threat photo Paul Mattsson

alists'. He can be heard off camera countering some of the ultra-reactionary things he hears, but the whole documentary lacks any serious challenge to the violently racist ideas expressed.

Elsewhere Jamie Roberts has said: "You do wonder if austerity measures have affected these people's lives."

"This isn't excusing it, but a lot

of places where these groups come from, the cuts have hit hard, social centres have been shut down and things like the bedroom tax - those sorts of things feed this feeling of fear, isolation, powerlessness and despair. As a result, these people find an enemy in the immigrant population."

However, none of this is featured in *Angry, White and Proud*.

Individual registration excludes voters...

David Maples
Lambeth Socialist Party

Almost a million fewer people are registered to vote than last year - another barrier to anti-establishment campaigners in elections. The Con-Dem government replaced the flawed traditional household registration system, where an estimated six million people were not registered, with individual electoral registration (IER).

This is no answer. People who move frequently are more likely to go unregistered under IER. Lambeth council says that each year, during the electoral registration canvass, it would expect to add 40,000 people newly eligible to vote, and delete 40,000 who are no longer eligible (moved, died etc).

This year, it reports, only around 10,000 people have been added and 10,000 deleted. So, 30,000 people on the register should not be entitled to vote and a further 30,000 who should be eligible are missing.

What's more, while Lambeth recorded 5,000 additional proper-

ties, the electorate has declined by 8,500. This is in a council where the Electoral Services Team goes to significant lengths to identify electors. IER is another obstacle to voting.

Funding

Lambeth's usual £200,000 expenditure on the canvass, had increased this time to over £450,000. But when the one-off Home Office funding ceases, the numbers on the electoral register will fall further.

Who benefits from lower registration? Parties that rely on older settled voters, not those worst hit by austerity, from students to those hit by the bedroom tax.

Scotland's Independence Referendum showed electoral registration can surge when people feel a real prospect of change.

Anyone with a national insurance number and who meets all the other already established criteria and is not already registered, should be able to register to vote. And as in the Scottish Referendum, the voting age should be reduced to 16.

...but socialist politics encourages them!

Getting young people registered to vote can be difficult, but the best way to do it is to offer something worth voting for!

In Liverpool, students who have been selected to stand for the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) at May's local elections welcomed the voter registration drive at the city's John Moores University (JMU).

TUSC's key student policies for free education include guaranteed employment, and affordable accommodation.

Jack Yarlett, 19 year old history student at JMU, said: "I'm supporting TUSC because I want a party

run for and by young and working-class people. I want an end to tuition fees, an end to high rents and decent pay and conditions for higher education staff."

India Taylor, third-year undergraduate at University of Liverpool, said: "I support the TUSC proposal to scrap student fees because education is a civil liberty that should be free for all people at all times."

"Education creates social mobility which is being stifled by imposing crippling student debt. Education is now a commodity that is bought for the price of £27,000."

Merseyside TUSC

The crazy world of capitalism

Would it be a good idea for the Socialist to have a regular column possibly entitled 'The crazy world of capitalism'? I suggest this because I heard a bloke on the radio (I think from top accountants PriceWaterhouseCoopers) explaining that bank customers would be better off if the bank charged them for having a current account. I may be old-fashioned but I think if you are charged for something that was free,

you will feel worse off.

He also said, incredibly, that the banks may have mis-sold products because we get our accounts free. I must disagree, the banks mis-sold products because they thought they could get away with it, just as they rigged and fiddled anything else they thought they could get away with too.

Pete McNally
Worcester Socialist Party



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Decades of disastrous and bloody interventions

Niall Mulholland
Committee for a
Workers' International

Why do the mass media and politicians tell "stories" about Western foreign policy which are "increasingly unconvincing and hollow"? To answer this, film-maker Adam Curtis examines the western "narrative" through the "prism of Afghanistan".

While somewhat reductionist, and lacking a clear class analysis of imperialism and capitalism, *Bitter Lake* is a harrowing, powerful documentary. It forcefully condemns decades of disastrous and bloody military interventions. A lingering scene of a resting American soldier entranced by a small wild bird that perches on his shoulder - while all around him, we assume, war continues - is illustrative of the film's artful poignancy.

Media

The film intersperses scenes representing mainstream media interpretations of events with something approaching the real situation, to the accompaniment of eerie background music. Ukrainian men, apparently drunk, are shown dancing in the woods in 1989 - as the Stalinist USSR crumbled. Next we see Ukraine through a camera lens smeared with human blood in the immediate aftermath of armed carnage from the current conflict in the east.

Home movies recorded by Americans working on building huge dams in Helmand, Afghanistan in the 1950s are spliced with scenes of soldiers carrying out house-to-house searches during the recent occupation. Grainy night-time footage captures US soldiers boasting on camera about carrying out "unapproved killings" of Afghans. In a very different vein, excerpts from *Carry On Up the Khyber* parody colonial rule.

'Modernisation'

As part of the 'oil for modernisation' deal made between US President Franklin Roosevelt and Saudi rulers in the late 1940s, the Americans promised to 'leave faith alone'. This referred to Wahhabism, an extreme fundamentalist form of



Lost in the storm photo US Army / Creative Commons

Islam, the guiding ideology of the tribes which brought the Saudi royal family to power.

Wahhabism and related Salafism grew as "a reaction to modern imperialism". Adherents called for a return to an idealised 'caliphate', or Islamic theocracy. They proved dangerously destabilising to the new ruling elite.

Fundamentalists

In the 1960s, King Faisal responded to dangers from both domestic Wahhabism and "Communism spreading throughout the Middle East" by exporting Islamic fundamentalists outside Saudi Arabia's borders. He set up Wahhabi ma-

civilians and at least one body-guard dead.

Oil price

Curtis regards the oil-price shocks of the 1970s as pivotal events that "changed the balance of forces". Egypt launched an attack against Israel - which then relied on US assistance to militarily beat the Arab states. In retaliation against Israel and the US, Saudi rulers cut oil production, causing a spike in prices. Increased oil revenues saw the rise of the 'petro-dollar', which in vast amounts was funnelled to western banks, helping create today's powerful multinational financial institutions.

The oil shocks compounded social strife in the west, radical-

ing conflict between Afghan mujahedeen - guerrilla jihadi fighters - and Soviet forces was cast as "good versus evil" by US President Ronald Regan and a compliant media. America and its allies massively increased arms supply and funding to the mujahedeen.

After Soviet forces left Afghanistan, mujahedeen groups fought bitterly among themselves for power, destroying the capital, Kabul. No longer receiving US funds, the brutal warlords turned to the opium trade.

Taliban

Amid this chaos, the Taliban - originating among Afghans edu-



photo Paul Mattsson

19th century, to deal with a "Taliban uprising". *Bitter Lake* shows local elders telling British commanders that the real problem was the brutal and corrupt local police, who were seen as "a violent militia for warlords". British military support for the police, like "mass bombings", only alienated the local population and allowed the Taliban to return. In a telling interview, one officer concludes the British presence exclusively made things worse.

Curtis draws the sweeping conclusion that the 2009 bank bailouts marked western leaders' acknowledgement that "democracy" in the west had failed. However, there is some truth in his idea that pouring more funds into Afghanistan was part of a desperate ploy to claim a success. But only 'crony capitalism' was created in Afghanistan, with \$10 million a day of 'aid' smuggled out. So unpopular was the occupation that when British forces left at the end of 2014, even war memorials were taken with them.

Islamic State

Also departing was a former Bin Laden associate, Abu Musab al-Zarqawi. He brought jihad to Iraq and established the so-called Islamic State, which has swept over large parts of Iraq and Syria with barbaric brutality.

Curtis ends by saying that the "simple stories of the west do not make sense anymore". We need stories "we can believe in".

For socialists, this is not simply a question of media narratives. It means revealing the underlying class motives of the ruling elites, be they in Washington or Kabul. Moreover, it means supporting all efforts to develop the unity of working people and the poor to be rid of imperialist wars and occupations, warlordism and reactionary Islamic fundamentalism.

Bitter Lake is available on BBC iPlayer until 25 January 2016

Further reading:
"Afghanistan, Islam and the Revolutionary Left" (socialistworld.net)

Review *Bitter Lake*



Great Bitter Lake in Egypt, site of the 1945 'Quincy agreement'. American President Franklin Roosevelt and King Ibn Saud of Saudi Arabia agreed US military assistance in exchange for access to Saudi oil. photo Nasa

drasas - religious schools - across the region, eventually reaching Afghanistan. Due to its Cold War imperative to counter the Soviet Union at any cost, the US gave tacit support to this policy.

In the mid-1950s, giant dams were built in Helmand with American engineering know-how, during the intensifying Cold War struggle. The Afghan regime under Daud Khan played off the US, China and Soviet Union against one another. But the dam projects were used, at the expense of other ethnic groups, to boost the position of Daud's Pashtun support base - "creating bitter divisions over power and influence in Helmand".

Consequences

The long-term consequences of these divisions are alluded to by the film's most dramatic scenes. At close quarter, we see former Afghan president Hamid Karzai, apparently being greeted by supporters as his car winds through streets. Suddenly they come under fierce gun attack, leaving two

ising youth and students. Many young Afghans sent to study in the US in the 1960s were influenced by left-wing ideas on campuses. One of them, Nur Muhammad Taraki, overthrew Daud and became president of Afghanistan. He espoused land redistribution - but did so from on high, rather than with through the democratic decisions of local populations. According to Curtis, "land reforms made the situation worse [with] hatreds and rivalries [between] village and village, tribe and tribe".

Soviet Union

After Taraki was killed by a rival, the Soviet Union sent in troops, fearing the consequences of the break-up of Afghanistan on its border. Social gains and advances in women's rights were achieved, as indicated in the documentary - albeit based on the bureaucratic, top-down, Stalinist model of the Soviet Union.

Curtis argues that the escalat-

cated in Pakistan's madrasas, run by Saudi money - offered stability and an end to corruption, eventually taking control.

In 1990, Saddam Hussein's Iraqi army invaded Kuwait. The US sent half a million troops to Saudi Arabia to safeguard it. But Osama Bin Laden, a Saudi and veteran Afghanistan jihadist, "saw the US as the real enemy" - and the Saudi ruling family as part of the problem for letting them in. Mirroring the language of Reagan and Thatcher - and later Bush and Blair - al-Qaida spoke about "good versus evil".

Following the 9/11 attacks - mainly carried out by Saudis who could easily obtain American visas - the US-led coalition invaded and occupied Afghanistan. They removed the Taliban from power and initiated a doomed policy to "modernise" and "democratise" the country.

Helmand

British soldiers were sent to Helmand, where tribal warriors crushed British forces in the

SUPPORT THE FIREFIGHTERS

Pensions strike and demo, 25 Feb

Firefighters in the FBU union will be striking for 24 hours from 7am on 25 February in their battle against government changes to pensions. A national FBU demonstration is also taking place in Central London the same day.

Dave Pitt, a West Midlands firefighter and the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) prospective parliamentary candidate for Dudley North, spoke to the Socialist.

“The national demonstration is being held to highlight the lies Tory fire minister Penny Mordaunt told other MPs to win a parliamentary vote in favour of the new pensions deal. This changes firefighters’ retirement age from 55 to 60.

At an FBU recall conference, every local brigade said they wish to continue the union’s campaign on pensions. There was a varied response over how much strike action we should take. The executive council resolution unified all the brigades there by stating the union would take strike action if necessary, including striking alongside other unions. This starts with the 24-hour strike on 25 February.

Mordaunt said she can guarantee that no firefighter will have to take a reduced pension if they retire before 60 because of failing a fitness

test. After the FBU wrote to the local fire authorities to seek these legal guarantees, every authority that’s replied said there is no such legal guarantee in place. Such a guarantee would be unlawful as it needs the amendment of the pension regulations, which only the government can do – and of course they’ve not.

Struggle continues

The pension changes are coming in this April 2015, however it won’t mean our campaign is finished. The regulations can be changed by whichever government is in office. Part of the executive’s resolution is to seek assurances between now and the next general election – but they are yet to be given to us.

It was the previous Labour government that first proposed changing the retirement age to 60 anyway,



FBU members in Leicestershire, where firefighters could face the axe from £7.5 million cuts photo Steve Score

though without such massive pension reductions for early retirement due to bad health. We must be ready to continue the campaign into the next parliament even if there is a Labour government.

Labour-controlled fire authori-

ties, like the West Midlands, are also carrying out massive cuts. Similarly, Leicestershire fire authority – where Labour is the biggest group – looks set to make £7.5 million of cuts and the first compulsory sackings in the fire service since World War Two. I

believe an alternative is needed and I am standing as a TUSC candidate.”

**FBU national protest, Westminster 25 February, 12 noon
Methodist Central Hall, Storeys Gate, London SW1 9NH**

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

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

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

ENVIRONMENT

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

RIGHTS

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

NEW 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!