

# WE ARE FIGHTING BACK!

Across the world young people and workers are increasingly challenging governments and their big-business masters who insist that 'there is no alternative' to cuts. This feature hears from activists involved in the Occupy Wall Street movement in the US and a

participant in the Jarrow March for Jobs in Britain. See [www.socialistworld.net](http://www.socialistworld.net), the website of the Committee for a Workers' International (CWI), the world socialist organisation to which the Socialist Party is affiliated for updates on the struggles in Chile, in Greece, in Kazakhstan and all across the planet.

## US: Occupy Wall Street: Demanding jobs not cuts

Bryan Koulouris of Socialist Alternative, CWI supporters in the US, spoke to the Socialist, about the Occupy Wall Street movement which has been spreading across hundreds of towns and cities in the US. See [www.socialistalternative.org](http://www.socialistalternative.org) for updates.

These demonstrations, after the police repression of Wall Street a couple of weeks ago, have sprung up throughout the country. The most significant thing about the demos isn't just the amount of people turning up - it's the widespread sympathy for them in US society.

This is reflected in the major unions supporting and participating in the demonstrations and in the fact that the cops or the state do not feel like they can just repress the demonstrations in city after city, over and over again.

I think it's a start of things to come in US society. With a severe amount of austerity coming in the next six months there's likely to be an outbreak of working class struggle on a wider scale even than what we saw in the massive opening up of the fightback in Wisconsin.

We see the movement growing. That won't be an even process - it'll be different in different areas. Also in the next few months it gets cold in the US and you can't occupy forever.

In November the congressional 'super committee' that came out of the Democratic-Republican debt deal is going to propose a lot of cuts.

Already Socialist Alternative is building a 'Jobs Not Cuts' campaign. We've initiated a call for a week of action from 16 to 23 November that can be one of the concrete next steps when it gets too cold to continue the occupations. A number of trade unions have endorsed it as well as a number of prominent left writers like Noam Chomsky and Chris Hedges.

### Anger comes to the surface

So this movement is the coming to the surface of massive pools of anger. This has been accumulating not just since the crisis and the bank bailouts but from before then. The Bush years were years of low-wage jobs, falling living standards, of a huge amount of anger at the political establishment, etc, and it's only become even more pronounced since the economic crisis.

The poverty rate is at the highest level in decades. One in six people in the US is impoverished - and an incredibly low official bar disguises a much worse situation. At the same time the budget cuts have, to a large extent, taken away what social safety net the working class had. Public [state] schools are being shut down throughout the country. Health care services are under attack.

Combined with this you have what was a big factor in the movements in Egypt, Tunisia, Spain and Greece - a massive amount of youth unemployment. To-

gether with that in the US is student debt of tens of thousands of dollars and that is not just an aberration but a regular thing that young people in their early 20s have. That's combined with no prospects of decent work or, in some cases, of work at all.

US society isn't as isolated now from world events as it was in the past. People have been inspired by what happened in Egypt and Tunisia. A lot of young people, not the wide majority, but a lot, followed what happened in Spain and Greece and were inspired by that as well. But some think that the victories came out of simply occupying a public space rather than seeing the mobilisation of the working class, as happened in Egypt, as necessary to defeat the austerity measures.

But it's interesting that even before concrete demands have been formulated by the movement the trade union movement has largely signed on in support. But it would be more effective in terms of an active support to take up concrete demands against budget cuts and for a jobs programme. That's what Socialist Alternative is putting forward and we are getting a big echo, especially among the more working class folks.

Clearly proposing that would be an effective way forward, not only to build support, but also to prepare the movement for when there are divisions between those who want to funnel the movement into the dead end of supporting the Democratic Party and those who want to continue to put forward a principled position against budget cuts and for a jobs programme no matter what the Democrats are doing in the next election.

We have found it extremely easy to raise a socialist programme. Some of the organisers are hostile to politics but in reality they often have politics of their own but don't want to have a political discussion. But there is a widespread thirst for ideas. Everywhere we set up a stall they are flooded with people. There are almost too many people who want to talk to us about joining Socialist Alternative!

We've made speeches in the general assemblies about concrete steps forward for the movement. We have put forward the idea about outreach to the trade unions and have played an instrumental role actually in getting some of those union endorsements that have made such big news.

As yet there is no worked out alternative put forward by the movement but there are some very clever slogans against the cuts that resonate, in particular pointing out the 1% versus the 99%. But these occupations provide a lot of opportunities for building the socialist movement.

There's a general feeling in society

about how much money has been thrown at the war and the banks. It's over a trillion dollars to the big banks and over a trillion dollars to the war. Now we need to move beyond the simplified explanation that you need to tax the corporations and end the war but that is a widespread accepted sentiment on the demos that this means there's no need for these cuts.

Obama has made some comments that show some sympathy with people's frustrations with Wall Street. But there wasn't any kind of euphoria that Obama has made this statement. It's part of an overall populist turn on taxes, on jobs. But he can't actually implement these things because of the political crisis - it's election cycle populism.

And when he had the opportunity he did nothing for working people. They had two years when the Democrats could have implemented the policies that we were promised such as trade union rights, in terms of health care, social programmes, in terms of taxes on the rich. What happened? The wars continued and the banks got bailed out but there were no new positive labour laws. One of our main slogans, which gets a great response is: "Wall Street has two parties, we need one of our own!"

### We say:

- Spread the occupations across the US and into schools and communities. For systematic, mass campaigning to mobilise workers, young people and labour unions into struggle.
- Organise weekend mass demonstrations that call for: no cuts to social services; a massive jobs creation programme; major tax hikes on the super-rich and big business; end the wars; slash the military budget; and defend trade union and democratic rights.
- Build up to the 16-23 November national week of action to combat the Congressional Super Committee plan for \$1.5 trillion in cuts to social services. We demand jobs not cuts!
- Prepare to run independent anti-corporate, working class candidates in 2012 to challenge the policies of the two parties of Wall Street as a first step towards forming a new party of the 99%, a mass workers' party.
- End the dictatorship of Wall Street! Bring the big banks that dominate the US economy into public ownership and run them under the democratic management of elected representatives of their workers and the public. Compensation to be paid on the basis of proven need to small investors, not millionaires.
- Build the movement to replace the rotten system of capitalism with democratic socialism and create a new society based on planning to meet human need.



Matt on the first day of the march in Jarrow photo Paul Mattsson



## 5 November - national demonstration and rally FOR JOBS, EDUCATION AND A FUTURE

Assemble 12 noon at Embankment for the final leg of the Jarrow March

We will hand in a petition to Downing Street followed by a rally in Trafalgar Square

Speakers include:

Jarrow Marchers; Bob Crow, RMT general secretary; Matt Wrack, FBU, general secretary;

Paul Murphy, MEP (Socialist Party Ireland); Lizi Gray, descendant of 1936 marcher; Stephen Hepburn, Jarrow MP; Young Deacon, rapper performing his track about the riots called 'Failed by the System'; Ed Marsh, NUS VP union development; Day-Mer Youth speaker

[www.jarrowmarch11.com](http://www.jarrowmarch11.com)  
Find out about transport from your area

## Interview with a Jarrow marcher

Matt Whale, unemployed organiser for Youth Fight for Jobs (YFJ) spoke to the Socialist about the Jarrow march as it passes through Yorkshire. See below for how to join and support the march.

### How's the Jarrow march going?

Brilliant! On Saturday 8 October we had two demos. Hull's second on the youth unemployment statistics and has been near the top for the past two years since YFJ was set up. We thought it was vital we had a presence in the city. Plus BAE Systems proposed cuts of just under 1,000 jobs in Brough, just outside Hull, threatening the end of manufacturing industry there.

The private sector was supposed to pick up the slack of the public sector cuts - according to the Con-Dems - this is clearly not true. Cameron says we're going to 'sell to the world' but that's not possible if they're cutting back on manufacturing. We've got a very simple message and that's nationalise the BAE plant and bring it under democratic working class control so they can carry on building what they think's right.

When approached, the BAE workers completely backed the Jarrow march and agreed to organise a joint demo under the YFJ banner. About 700-800 people turned out including BAE workers, Jarrow marchers, local authority workers and local people. It was a great demo through the city with a lot of people applauding us and lots of press coverage.

There was also a demo of about 200 in Leeds which challenged the racist EDL. These racist bigots only want to divide working class communities along arbitrary racial and religious lines, at a time when we need to be more united them ever.

### What's the Jarrow march about?

The 330-mile march was organised to highlight the issues facing young people. Youth unemployment is officially about to go over a million but if we include people, for example, who are on zero-hour contracts who sometimes get absolutely no hours in a week, then you can see that unemployment is absolutely horrendous for young people, as is underemployment.

Behind the official figures are also the numbers on apprenticeships that don't pay the minimum wage, people who don't know their rights who aren't getting overtime payments or who are working through breaks they're legally entitled to have.

We want massive investment in a programme of socially useful job creation. That would mean reversing all the cuts to youth services, creating green jobs and building houses. That would also provide much-needed homes to address homelessness and over-crowding. You've got oversubscription in schools - why don't we have more teachers, why can't we create smaller classes? More doctors, more nurses, put the training in place for people to do the jobs that people want to do so they can actually feel 'socially useful'. Don't throw them out on the scrapheap.

We want the re-instatement of EMA payments for all 16 to 19 year old students. To meet training needs we also need real apprenticeships on trade union-agreed rates of pay. Higher education should be

free, not a privilege for the rich or a source of crippling debt.

Another demand is an end to workfare schemes which are basically slave labour. If a job needs doing then a job should be paid for. It shouldn't be used to undercut the current workforce.

### Can these demands be met?

We're under no illusions that we'll get to London and all of a sudden the Con-Dem government will reverse its policies and create jobs and become supporters of working class people.

What we want to do is become a rallying point for young people and the anti-cuts movement linking with the trade unions and those going into struggle in the coming weeks and months. We want to have young people and workers united to fight back against this government.

We've been very successful in that already in the first week of the march. With AEI cables workers in Birtley and then with BAE in Brough, YFJ is taking a lead in uniting young people and workers in struggle and that's how we'll bring about our demands.

### Is there support for your demands?

On the route all that I've heard so far is positive feedback from the public as we pass through the towns and cities, saying good on you for having a go and we support you 100%. At an inspirational meeting in Darlington a public sector worker got up and said 'you're representing not only yourselves but also the working class'. It's those sorts of acts of solidarity that have really inspired the marchers so far.

### But a Tory MP has had a go at the marchers, saying people are dropping out and you're not up for the task.

Of course the more marchers we have the better and we want more people to join us. I'd love to invite that Mr 'Goodwill', MP for Scarborough, down to do a leg of the march or even more. Maybe he can help fund the march by taking some of the £145,000 of expenses he claimed in 2008 to actually fight for a future for young people.

And if 'not being up for it' means organising two demos over a weekend with around 1,000 workers and youth involved - then they've got us bang to rights! But the Tories have undoubtedly been briefed against us - it's their policies we're attacking.

Iain Duncan Smith, Tory work and pensions minister, who we're going to visit in his constituency on 4 November, is going on about making 'work pay'. Well, if they want to make work pay that's brilliant - but where are the jobs? I don't know any unemployed per-

son who doesn't want a job. When I was unemployed for eight months it was really depressing not being able to find work.

Living in Hull where there are 83 people going for every job, that means there are 82 people who won't get the job. Benefits are there as the bare minimum to allow people to survive. We don't want to see a return to Victorian times when there were people dying on the street because people couldn't afford to feed themselves.

### What would you like to see the march achieve?

Well I'd like to see big demonstrations in every town and city we go through and a big demo at the end on 5 November in London. The march is a good way of inspiring young people to fight back. We're informing people about the history of the original march, with the tagline 'no return to the 1930s'. We're saying that prevention's better than the cure in this situation. We're also linking in with workers going into struggle.

I want to see YFJ speakers and representatives linking up with the trade unions to a) unionise young workers and b) to support them in the public sector general strike over pensions on 30 November. And I want YFJ representatives speaking on every platform about the plight of young people, growing the campaign, growing the movement and eventually having a campaign that's capable of toppling this government.

As they see their lecturers and teachers go out on strike, fighting for their jobs and futures, I think last year's student movement will be re-ignited. Whether it's in the same way as last year is debatable but students have a history of being one of the first groups to fight back.

As someone who was unemployed I was involved in the occupation at Hull University. I saw it as my future being affected as well as those at the university. It's absolutely vital that young people are linked together in a common struggle because there is a common enemy - this system that bails out banks and chucks us on the scrapheap.

### But all we hear about is the deficit. How can we afford this?

The banks got bailed out and the bankers got their bonuses but working class people face cuts. You've got unpaid tax of £120 billion a year according to the PCS union. Only one year of collecting this would make the plans for four years of cuts unnecessary. So when we're told that our aims aren't achievable we know that's absolutely rubbish. The truth is that the money's there in society - it's just in the hands of a few rather than in the hands in the many.

## Support the fightback! March and donate

Join the march!  
Young people and supporters are welcome to join the march for any amount of time between now and 5 November.

Public support has been massive but they still need financial support to cover the costs of the march. Can you or your trade union branch sponsor the march?

See the Jarrow blog for information, daily updates, details of where the march is going, events en route and how to donate.  
[www.jarrowmarch11.com](http://www.jarrowmarch11.com)