

Stop the Con-Dems destroying our NHS!

Cameron's government is destroying the National Health Service by privatising huge swathes of it. Last year Simon Stephens was appointed chief executive of NHS England. Stephens used to run US health insurance company UnitedHealth's European arm.

This firm wanted to take over parts of the NHS that were being hit by public sector cuts. Now their man is in charge of the NHS.

UnitedHealth are part of a forum of companies bidding for the clinical commissioning groups that are responsible for two-thirds of the NHS budget for purchasing patient care.

Cuts and privatisation are ruining the health service. NHS privatisation makes no medical sense. Figures comparing health services show that publicly owned and controlled systems, which the NHS is still at present, are more efficient in cost and in health terms.

The machinations of big business and capitalist politicians are threatening the NHS at all levels - they must be fought by the health trade unions and political parties.

We say:

- No to Con-Dem attacks on the NHS! No to all cuts in jobs, pay, services and pensions
- Don't let the private vultures tear apart the health service - kick out the private contractors!
- Renationalise all privatised services with compensation paid only on the basis of proven need.
- We need a socialist NHS that provides for everyone's health needs - free at the point of use and under democratic control.

Support the people's march

Jon Dale

Many local people turned out to welcome the People's March for the NHS as it came through the East Midlands. About 200 welcomed the march into Chesterfield and a similar number at Mansfield the following day. 600 met the march arriving in Nottingham.

Noreen, a retired postal worker from Mansfield, said she'd felt for a long time that "something needed to be done." When she read about the march, she decided she had to join, and planned to keep going for a few days.

Other local marchers also shared this view. Action is desperately needed and they were glad of the chance to show their anger at the destruction of the NHS.

At each rally, Labour MPs and council leaders pledged support for the NHS and promised to "take it back." Such talk is meaningless unless they disown the record of the last Labour

government and stop carrying out cuts. As a local GMB official told the Socialist, "That government built the bridge that this one is marching across."

At Kings Mill hospital in Mansfield, as the march prepared to leave my workplace, I spoke to the crowd and was applauded for attacking the last Labour government that brought in the PFI deal, draining the hospital of vital funds.

Tories launch biggest privatisation with Stafford cancer care

Andy Bentley

The Tories have launched the biggest single privatisation of NHS services, inviting private companies to bid for contracts worth £1.2 billion to provide cancer care across Staffordshire. Private companies would compete to deliver cancer and end-of-life treatment for all - involving diagnosis and treatment (radiology, radiotherapy, breast screening, chemotherapy) nursing and surgery for patients in hospitals, hospices and at home.

We need action now to defend the NHS from these private vultures! Ordinary working class people had to fight to win a publicly owned NHS, now we have to fight to save it!

As news of the Tories' plan broke last March Labour ministers showed resigned acceptance. Andy Burnham, Labour's shadow health spokesperson said: "David Cameron has placed the NHS on a fast track to fragmentation and privatisation. The next election presents the last chance to change course."

Labour's recent promise to repeal the Health and Social Care act is a step in the right direction. But we cannot trust Labour with the NHS's future even if they form the next government. The coalition government's current £20 billion 'savings' imposed on the NHS actually arose from Labour's plans.

Former Labour health secretaries Alan Milburn and Patricia Hewitt have earned tens of thousands of pounds a year advising firms specialising in healthcare investments, running private hospitals or providing outsourced services.

Foundation Trusts

To become a Foundation Trust in 2005, Stafford Hospital had to comply with financial targets set by the then Labour government. This meant 'overcoming' a debt of £10 million while forking out more money on a private finance initiative (PFI) deal to build a new entrance. Workers paid for this with 160 job losses in 2006 on top of 100 already been cut. This proved to be a disaster for some patients.

The last Labour government saddled the NHS with £65 billion of repayments for big business PFI projects worth only £11.4 billion with Andy Burnham telling us at the time that they were: "the right schemes and offer value for money"!

Supporters of Staffordshire Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) along with Unite and others set up the Cancer Not for Profit (CNFP) alliance which has had a significant

impact in just three months. Stoke South Labour MP Rob Ffello has been pushed into saying in July: "This project must be stopped because it represents a massive extension of the creeping privatisation".

More importantly 10,000 people who have already said no to the sell-off by signing the CNFP petition along with 300 people who crammed into a CNFP public meeting in August in Stoke looking for a way to stop the sell-off of cancer care across Staffordshire.

Last year 50,000 marched through Stafford against Tory plans to dismantle Stafford Hospital. The fight goes on with a protest camp now well established at Stafford Hospital. This opposition along with tens of thousands marching in Lewisham and elsewhere, health workers striking in Doncaster etc shows the massive anger nationwide at NHS privatisation.

But isolated protests and anger alone will not stop the privatisation juggernaut. It's now urgent that a plan of action is drawn up nationally by the health trade unions, other unions, local communities and campaign groups to plan and carry out an organised campaign against the dismantling and privatisation of the NHS, including strike action if necessary.

We should call for an end to all privatisation, including the Private Finance Initiative (PFI) and Public-Private Partnerships (PPP) along with a return of privatised NHS services and utilities into a high-quality, free National Health Service under democratic public ownership and control. Such a campaign would receive support from millions across Britain.

We could stop the privatisation crusade and get rid of this government even before the next general election. It would also be a warning to any incoming government to keep the private vultures out of the NHS.

Pre-election Britain - crisis brewing on all fronts

The 2015 general election is a mere eight months away yet impossible to call. But, as Hannah Sell, Socialist Party deputy general secretary writes, what is clear is that none of the capitalist parties hold any real attraction for working class voters.

The French government crisis, with the eviction of several ministers, has led to a flurry of commentary in the capitalist press and comparisons with a future Labour government in Britain. Likenesses have long been drawn between French President François Hollande, of the misnamed Socialist Party, and Ed Miliband, leader of the Labour Party.

Some of the similarities are seemingly superficial. Even before his election Hollande was known as 'flanby' because he resembled a bland, wobbly French dessert. Others are more profound. Hollande is now on 17% in the polls - the most unpopular president in the history of the Fifth Republic. His fate is likely to be shared by Miliband if Labour manages to win the general election.

This is not certain. Hollande was elected primarily because of anger with the previous right-wing government of Nicolas Sarkozy. But Hollande also attempted to increase his electoral support by giving the impression that his presidency would mark a certain change from the completely pro-big business policies of Sarkozy. In particular Hollande promised a 75% tax on the top rate of income of the super-rich. Instead he has presided over continuing economic crisis and the same old austerity policies, leading to his massive unpopularity.

Polly Toynbee wrote in the Guardian that: "the Labour leadership has "learn[ed] the salutary lessons of François Hollande's over-promising and under-delivering". But Miliband and his advisors have looked at France and not drawn the conclusion that Labour should make and carry out bold promises, but rather promise almost nothing! This is not a recipe for mobilising popular support!

Endless austerity

Nonetheless, despite themselves, Labour can form the next government - possibly even a majority government, although a minority government or coalition is probably more likely as people vote for them in desperation to get rid of the Tories and hoping against hope that Labour will at least offer some respite from endless austerity.

Hollande's government shows how those hopes will be shattered. Hollande is no socialist in terms of favouring public ownership and planning, but he did before the election at least nod in the direction of that wing of the capitalist class that favoured trying to spend their way out of economic crisis; although from the beginning he also planned austerity measures. He only proposed to lengthen the time he aimed to take to eliminate France's deficit by one year!

Once in power, his government has been completely ineffectual, ground between the giant millstones of the powerful French working class on the one hand and the French capitalists on the other. He signed up to the demands of the majority of the capitalists - for austerity and vicious attacks on the working class as a means to restore their profits - but was afraid of the mass uprising of the French working class that could be provoked by fully implementing such a programme. His government has pleased no one but irritated everyone.

Now the 'Keynesian' wing of the government has been ruthlessly spat out at the behest of the dominant section of the French capitalist class, and also of the eurozone's dominant power, Germany. In a sign of how Hollande was dancing to the tune of the capitalists, he sacked the industry minister Arnaud Montebourg for saying continued austerity was a 'financial absurdity'. This was just as one right-wing daily 'L'Opinion' was in the middle of a 14-part cartoon entitled 'the kidnapping of Arnaud Montebourg' in which he was kidnapped by a group of neoliberals in order to save France!

Enormous mistake

The French capitalists are making an enormous mistake however, if they imagine that removing the 'unreliable' elements in the French government will make the French working class accept austerity. On the contrary Montebourg and Co were only very faintly echoing the anger of the French working class, which at some stage will be expressed in mass protests. Montebourg has been replaced by a vicious neoliberal and former Rothschild investment banker, Emmanuel Macron. He is reported to have been horrified at Hollande's original promise to tax the super-rich, declaring: "It's Cuba, without the sun!"

In the next period we are likely to see a significant new upturn in struggle by the French working class as they attempt to stop the threatened €50 billion worth of cuts being implemented. Under the pressure of French workers' anger, splits in the Socialist Party can take place. New opportunities for the French left will be posed to create a genuine mass party of the working class with a real socialist programme.

Responding to the situation, Guardian columnist Larry Elliot wrote a piece imagining France in 2017 with the far-right Front National politician Marine Le Pen about to win the presidential election. It concludes: "[In 2014] the policy errors of the late 1920s and early 1930s were repeated, resulting in longer dole queues and rising levels of poverty. Parties on the extreme left and extreme right were dismissed as irrelevant. But support for them grew. And grew."

While Elliot is only speculating, he makes an important point. Capitalism is incapable of offering a secure, comfortable future for the vast majority: both the working class and growing sections of the middle class. The resulting failure of the capitalist parties of all stripes to offer anything except endless misery means that millions of workers are starting to look for an alternative.

The absence of powerful workers' parties has, in many countries, allowed the far right to partially step into the vacuum, demagogically claiming to stand up for 'the little men and women' while whipping up anti-immigrant feelings. In reality, these parties also defend the capitalist system and offer no way forward for the working class. The only way to cut across them is the building of mass parties of the working class on radical, socialist programmes. This will be on the agenda in the next period not only in France, but also in Britain and other countries of Europe.

Volatile politics

This is understood by the most far-thinking sections of the British capitalist class. Writing in the Sunday Times (10/08/14), the managing editor of the Economist warns of the consequences of the growth of inequality in Britain. He concludes: "Tony Blair liked to think he was re-inventing the Labour party for a moderate and middle class future. In fact, he was retrofitting it for a world about to disappear."

He adds: "The crisis of the middle class will create increasingly volatile politics. Minority parties such as Ukip may make dramatic gains. But even if they fail the Westminster mould is hard to break - disruption is coming. Protest groups will become more combustible as old certainties are removed. Established parties will flirt with more radical ideas - withdrawal from the European Union on the right and nationalisation of industry on the left - as they compete to harness popular anger."

It is not a coincidence that the Observer (31/08/14), in an article on low pay in Britain, quoted a US billionaire, Nick Hanauer, who is a self-proclaimed supporter of the Seattle \$15 an hour minimum wage, pointing out that "the CEO-to-worker pay ratio since the 1950s has risen by a staggering 1,000%" and warning: "I see pitchforks ... it is the masses that are the source of growth and prosperity, not us rich guys."

It is in this context that the right-wing media in Britain are hysterically decrying Miliband as 'red Ed'. Nothing in Labour's programme is any threat to the interests of British capitalism.

On the contrary, on issue after issue - from the building of council housing, to the reversal of cuts to local authorities, to free schools, to tuition fees, to the repeal of the anti-trade union laws - Labour is unwilling to move even more than a hair's breadth from the policy of the current government. This was summed up at Labour's policy forum, which - in the only vote of the whole weekend - overwhelmingly agreed with sticking with Tory spending plans for Labour's first year in government.

However, the capitalists still fear that a Labour government could awaken demands by the working class for serious measures in their interests - such as nationalisation of the utility companies, a living wage, and a mass programme of council house building. They are right to be afraid, but these appetites will be awakened regardless of who wins the election.

The coming storm is indicated by the differences between this and any other pre-election period in the last 30 years. For the majority, desperation to get rid of the Con-Dems is not translated into enthusiasm for Labour. Instead there is a deep-rooted feeling that 'they are all the same'.

Fracturing support

This will result in many not voting, although others will go out and vote Labour through gritted teeth as the best means to get rid of the 'current lot'. The fracturing in support for the traditional parties is shown by the possibility of Tory defector Douglas Carswell being elected as a Ukip MP in Clacton. If he succeeds in this it could lead to other Tory defections to Ukip, even before the general election.

If Labour cannot even beat the Tories in such circumstances, the demand to build a real anti-austerity party will be taken up by significant sections of workers.

If Labour wins, however, they will not have a honeymoon in the traditional sense. While there is bound to be a certain mood to 'give Labour a chance' workers will not put up with years more austerity from Labour before they take matters into their own hands both through strikes, and by beginning to build a mass political alternative.

The fact that a new wave of coordinated strike action is developing even before the general election is a clear harbinger of what is to come. In the past the leaders of the Labour-affiliated trade unions would have argued there was no need to strike in a pre-election period, because a Labour government would act to solve workers' problems. Today this argument is simply untenable.

Instead, even the most uncritically pro-Labour union leaders - like Dave Prentis, general secretary of Unison - are forced to call strike action and pose it as a means to put pressure on a Labour government. Prentis may hope that it will prove unnecessary to strike again under a Labour government but, on the contrary, the demand for a 24-hour general strike against austerity will come back onto the agenda with renewed force beyond the general election.

Socialist transformation

The root of the unpopularity of all the major parties is the fact that they act within the framework of capitalism - an increasingly diseased and crisis-ridden system. In Britain the myth that the economy was recovering has fuelled workers' anger - because it jarred so

sharply with the reality of endless belt-tightening. Now, however, even the propaganda of recovery is petering out, as the prospect of a further slowdown looms. The lurch back into recession that is now taking place in the UK's biggest market, the eurozone, including in its powerhouse Germany will further aggravate the crisis here.

Even during the formal 'recovery' wages have shown no sign of recovering. The Bank of England has declared that, in real terms, wages will continue to contract again this year. The Deputy Governor of the Bank of England, Ben Broadbent, has even speculated that years of austerity may have permanently 'lowered workers' wage demands'! On the contrary, at a certain stage the working class will demand its share, which is a factor in the autumn's public sector coordinated action.

A Labour government will have no solution to the economic crisis. Throughout the time New Labour was in power the profits of British capitalism became increasingly reliant on the growing finance sector, huge credit bubbles and privatising public services. New Labour welcomed all of this, with Gordon Brown even declaring that 'boom and bust' had been abolished. That, however, was in a time of boom. Now British capitalism is using the same old methods in order to restore its profits.

The economy a Labour government would inherit would be an infinitely sicker version of what they presided over before. The prospect of a new financial crisis - for which Labour would again take the blame - is posed. In that situation Miliband would beat even Hollande in the records of unpopular prime ministers. Labour, like Pasok in Greece, could shatter.

The shaky situation on all fronts - social, economic and political - means that we cannot predict the outcome of the general election with any certainty. It is possible however, to be certain that the next government will be unstable and crisis-ridden. It is also possible to be certain that it will face massive opposition from the working class and that the idea of a new mass party of the working class will have opportunities to become reality.

The last five years have been a brutal school for workers - as they have experienced first-hand what 21st century capitalism means.

Many, particularly from the younger generation, can very quickly draw the conclusions that there is no choice but to launch a determined, mass struggle against austerity, but also that the only way to end austerity is to fight for the socialist transformation of society.

Rotherham: Council and police cover up abuse

Kim Hendry

There has been widespread revulsion and outrage at the findings of the report by Professor Alexis Jay into the horrendous abuse of children and young people in Rotherham, published on 26 August. It concludes that organised child sexual exploitation (CSE) is endemic in the South Yorkshire town.

Jay found evidence of at least 1,400 cases of brutal rape, assault and exploitation between 1997 and 2013. Some of the vulnerable young girls attacked were aged just eleven or 12. It is thought that the perpetrators in this instance were mainly men of British-Pakistani origin.

Jay's report highlights the shocking brutality that these vulnerable young girls were subjected to. "They were raped by multiple perpetrators, trafficked to other towns and cities ... [Some were] doused in petrol and threatened with being set alight, threatened with guns, made to witness brutally violent rapes and threatened they would be next if they told anyone."

Victims finally heard

Her report should be welcomed. These girls are finally being heard, and their stories are being accepted as true. Jay told journalists: "I understand ... how much it means to child victims to have their story told. And to be believed."

A recent separate report by the Police Inspectorate into the South Yorkshire force says that in relation to public protection including rape and sexual assaults they spend "a great deal of time trying to disprove" victims' allegations, failing to record possible crimes and incorrectly categorising many as 'no crime'.

Victims in Rotherham have complained that the police were not interested because they were seen as poor and working class.

Simplified and distorted

Jay's complex findings have been simplified and distorted by media and politicians eager for sensationalist stories and attention-grabbing headlines.

The crude and often lurid treatment of the Jay report focuses exclusively on a narrative of predatory Asian or Muslim men abusing vulnerable white girls, to the near exclusion of anything that doesn't fit the right-wing media picture of non-white men preying on white girls. Such slurs not only demonise all members of the given community, but distract from the real source of the problem and the cries of the victims.

As the recent Children's Commissioner Report into child sexual exploitation made clear, this horrific crime is a national phenomenon, and not in any way specific to one racial group. Jay endorses this, stating "across the UK the greatest numbers of perpetrators of CSE are white men."

There have been many trials of white men in other parts of the country convicted of similar offences which have not been so widely reported. It is also under-reported that a number of the abused girls were from the local Pakistani-heritage community.

Of course newspapers now indignantly champion these abused young girls, the same newspapers which usually demonise working class women and children as 'chavs' or 'benefit street' scroungers.

Racism

The story is made more toxic by the 'political correctness gone mad' allegation that police and social services failed to act due to fears of being called racist.

According to Jay's findings the reasons for the criminal inaction on behalf of both police and service managers, if contradictory in places, are more complex. "Concern about the resources CSE could consume; greater priority given to the protection of younger children; professional jealousies, and personal attitudes of some council staff and the Police towards the girls involved have all been cited as reasons for the failure to address the seriousness and scale of the problem."

She also finds that: "The prevailing culture at the most senior level of the council, until 2009 ... was bullying and 'macho', and not an appropriate climate in which to discuss the rape and sexual exploitation of young people."

This has been translated by lazy journalists and reactionary politicians into a simple tale of 'multiculturalism gone wrong'.

Widespread exploitation

What the coverage of this story has singularly failed to do is contextualise the findings. Child sexual abuse and exploitation are widespread within British capitalist society. The undisputed fact is that the majority of abuse occurs within the home, and most perpetrators are relatives of their victims.

As socialists we support the victims and survivors of abuse. We fight for proper funding for all required services - and therapy for survivors.

One of the failings of the Rotherham authorities was to focus exclusively on building relationships with "community leaders". This layer is largely conservative, male and better-off. Such a strategy further undermines the voice and power of women, and working class people, women and young people in particular.

Socialist analysis

Socialists must insist upon a comprehensive analysis of child sexual exploitation and abuse which recognises they are widespread social problems affecting all communities. The interaction of race, gender and class - and the entrenched power relations of the council, police and alleged perpetrators - is complex.

The cuts in public services resulting from government policies are making it more difficult to protect vulnerable groups (see box below), so we have to link the issues to an alternative to austerity.

As numerous recent revelations have shown, rape, sexual assault and child sexual exploitation are prevalent in capitalist society; they are rooted in oppression and inequality. The cover-ups we have seen in a number of organisations, in this case the police and the council, reflect the way they are structured to represent the interests of the system.

This is why the immediate need to protect children and oppose sexual violence has also to be linked to the struggle for a socialist society free of that oppression and inequality.

Rotherham youth service cuts

- The Integrated Youth Support Service (IYSS) in Rotherham works with other agencies to engage with vulnerable young people.
 - As part of the Labour council's £23 million cuts this year, its youth services budget was slashed by nearly £1 million.
 - Out of 198 youth service staff, 86 lost their jobs.
 - On top of that, ten out of 22 of the town's children centres will close (the council had wanted to shut 13 but three were saved after a Unison campaign) as part of £3 million cuts to Children's and Young Peoples Services.
 - Rotherham borough has lost over a third of its budget funding since 2011.
 - While the cuts aren't the cause of the sexual exploitation and cover-up in Rotherham, Jay's damning report (see main article) acknowledges their effects.
 - She says dramatic funding cuts to Rotherham council have put the authority under extreme pressure at a time when it is faced with high demands to support vulnerable children and families.
 - The report says Rotherham is faced with high demands for children's services because of significant levels of poverty.
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Government attacks democratic rights under guise of 'fighting terror'

Steve Score

The government has raised the terror alert level from 'severe' to 'substantial'. The main threat now, they say, is the Islamic State (IS) organisation and British Muslim fighters returning from Iraq and Syria

After 13 years of the so-called 'war against terror' initiated by George Bush and Tony Blair following the 9/11 attacks, and the wars and occupations in Afghanistan and Iraq this threat is now apparently "greater and deeper" than ever.

Clearly, as the Socialist predicted at the time, these wars for the benefit of imperialism have in fact increased instability across large areas of the world and created more 'terrorism'. A new Frankenstein's monster, the IS, has emerged to overtake the previous ones such as al-Qa'ida.

Failed policies

The policies of Bush and Blair, and today of Obama and Cameron, have not only failed in the Middle East, but have succeeded in further increasing the sense of grievance and anger among young Muslims in the West. A tiny section of those, estimated at around 500 in the case of Britain, have gone to Syria and Iraq to fight.

The government response is to introduce measures to 'deal' with this, including giving police more power to withdraw passports from 'suspects' to prevent them leaving the country and making it easier to bar them from returning. It also includes increasing the information provided by airline companies to the security services and increased powers to monitor suspects.

However, these measures won't prevent terrorism, and they will further threaten basic civil rights. A series of anti-terrorism laws have been used in recent years in cases that do not involve terrorism, for example against arms fair protesters and others.

Blair's Labour government introduced 'control orders' which could be used to hold suspects without charge on virtual house arrest, restrict their rights to communications and internet connection, and even who they can meet for example.

The Tories replaced this with 'terrorism prevention and investigation measures' (Tpims) which were in reality very similar. But now it appears they want to expand them further including the ability to relocate suspects away from their home towns.

Home Secretary, Theresa May, has also suggested adopting proposals from last year's 'extremism' task force made in the wake of the killing of soldier Lee Rigby. These include 'banning orders for extremist groups' to target those who "radicalise others" and who may not break the law themselves but are deemed to support organisations or individuals who are terrorists.

Infringing rights

But who is to define 'extremist' in the future? Could the anti-Apartheid movement in Britain have been banned on that basis for supporting the African National Congress in South Africa for example?

Given that the attacks on the living standards of working class people will continue to escalate, mass action and political opposition will increase in the future.

The police and justice system already has plenty of powers to arrest and place on trial anyone suspected of terrorism. Rather than deterring acts of terror, the latest government measures will infringe the civil liberties of many innocent people and can potentially be used against trade unionists, anti-cuts activists and other protesters, unless we can stop them.

Cameron dismissed Boris Johnson's suggestion that the law principle of 'innocent until proved guilty' be ditched for British people who travel to Syria or Iraq. Cameron felt he couldn't get away with that. But all the time the government is testing the boundaries of what it can do, and terrorism gives it the perfect excuse.

Clacton Tory MP defects to Ukip

A new Punch and Judy show

Dave Murray

Once upon a time a visit to any seaside town in Britain would probably involve an encounter with a Punch and Judy show. This traditional puppet show has seen something of a decline in popularity, perhaps because its themes - domestic violence, child abuse and murder - are no longer seen as a suitable basis for comedy.

Visitors to Clacton-on-Sea in the next few months, however, will be treated to something of a revival of the form. This is because the Conservative MP for the area, Douglas Carswell, has left the Tory party and joined Ukip, in the process resigning from parliament in order to trigger a by-election which he will fight as the Ukip candidate.

The polls suggest that Mr Carswell will sail back into parliament with 64% of the vote, giving Ukip its first Westminster MP, raising the possibility of a breakthrough for the party in the general election in May 2015.

This is a big deal given that the UK's voting system is so bent that even with vast sums of money from its wealthy backers, relentless promotion of the party by all major media outlets, and an estimated 16% share of the vote, it was far from sure that Ukip would get any MPs at all.

Ukip's claims to be an 'anti-establishment' party are pretty thin. Even so, Carswell is an unlikely leader of the people's revolt. Before entering parliament he was employed first by Prince Khalid Ibn Abdullah of Saudi Arabia who owns Orbit TV, the company for which Carswell was corporate affairs manager, and then by Invesco Asset Management, a US owned, UK based investment house.

One year before Carswell entered parliament, the US arm of the company was forced to settle a number of lawsuits from investors who felt they had been short-changed by the firm - to the tune of \$450 million. Invesco's registered office is now in Bermuda for some reason.

When Carswell says that "our democracy is being undermined, with remote and unaccountable elites making the key decisions that affect our lives" you'd better believe it!

On entering parliament in 2005, Carswell stated that he was "embarrassed" to be an MP. Perhaps this was because he was one of those who "flipped" his £1 million London home to allow himself to claim £1,250 monthly rent in his constituency. He also claimed £655 for a "love seat", 74p for a washing line and other expenses to the tune of £10,869. In 2011-12 he got £39,442.86 - there is a learning curve to any job.

At the other end of Essex Ukip claimed a major coup in the 2014 local elections in my home town of Basildon - taking eleven of the 12 seats up for grabs, laying waste to Tories, Liberals and Labour alike and rather ironically claiming the scalp of Tony Ball, council leader and architect of the assault on travellers' rights at Dale Farm. By all accounts this left Mr Ball in tears on election night. It is an ill wind that blows no good.

Ukip's success cost the Basildon conservatives their majority on the council - in theory. In a sneak preview of the role that a group of Ukip MPs at Westminster might play, I can report that two of Ukip's leading councillors have been given seats in the minority Tory

administration's "cabinet". Do not mention the "c" word though - Ukip (and the Conservatives) are adamant that there is no coalition.

This is the serious side of Douglas Carswell's defection from the Conservative Party and his likely installation as Ukip's first MP. It is unlikely that Ukip will be able to repeat its stunning success in Basildon across the country, but a phalanx of Ukip MPs could do a good service for the ruling class - especially its eurosceptic wing - in the next parliament. The next parliament will see economic and political turmoil no matter which party (if any) gets a majority of seats.

Fringe elements of the Conservative party are talking about an informal deal with Ukip which would involve a 'non-aggression' pact in certain key seats - Ukip did not stand in Clacton in the 2010 election.

The Clacton by-election is intended to solidify Ukip's role as the acceptable channel for the seething anger which is bubbling under the surface of British society - focussing it on the issue of immigration.

However, like a Punch and Judy show, the electoral battle between Labour, the Conservatives and UKIP is a crude and flimsy diversion. It owes its current character to the abject failure of the majority of the trade union leaders to combat grinding austerity and the sustained erosion of the working class's share of society's wealth.

A violent storm could easily blow the whole show away - and such storms are inevitable.

Them & Us

Gas bubble

Despite wholesale gas prices falling 50% in the last six months, British Gas - one of the 'big six' UK energy companies - is charging its customers at least three times more than what it pays for gas.

In the first six months of the current financial year British Gas's parent company, Centrica, made £900 million profits.

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On average a CEO in Britain will take home more in three days than one of their employees can earn in one year.

Toxic combo

Rickets and gout - diseases associated with poor diets in Victorian times - are on the increase in Britain due to poverty, according to the Faculty of Public Health (FPH).

Dr John Middleton from FPH said: "Food prices up 12%, fuel prices up double-figure percentages and wages down is a toxic combination, forcing more people to eat unhealthily."

Taxing poverty

In June, the Socialist reported that low income families, whose tax credits had been incorrectly calculated by HM Revenue and Customs, were being hounded for overpayments (stretching back ten years) by government-contracted debt collection agencies.

Now, the scale of this harassment has been revealed by campaign group False Economy. It found that the government plans to seize money from around 3,000 people's bank accounts a year for overpaid tax credits. Over 500,000 of the 4.7 million families being chased for debts have a taxable household income of less than £20,000.

Previously, households were allowed to earn an extra £25,000 before they had to pay money back. But in 2010 this threshold was gradually reduced to £5,000 by the Con-Dems.

Meanwhile, the super-rich and giant corporations continue to avoid paying taxes using legal loopholes left open by millionaire Tory Chancellor George Osborne.

Old boy network

The idea that an 'old boys' public school network dominates the establishment is just Bolshie propaganda - as the following figures from the government's Social Mobility and Child Poverty Commission prove.

The old school tie brigade make up:

- 71% of senior judges
- 62% of senior armed forces officers
- 55% of Whitehall permanent secretaries (the 'Sir Humphries')
- 50% of House of Lords members
- 36% of the Cabinet (22% of the Shadow Cabinet)
- 33% of MPs
- 26% of BBC executives

No holiday

While Prime Minister David Cameron soaked up the sun in Portugal on his summer hols (no doubt dreaming about further austerity measures) the children's charity Barnardo's reckons that a day trip to the seaside is beyond the reach of the poorest 20% of families.

Barnardo's says a traditional Bank Holiday day out for a family with two children could cost more than £170 - while the minimum disposable income for low income families is only £39 a week.

The charity blames "a toxic mix of rising living costs as well as working and non-working benefits cuts".

Thanks to Ronnie Job and Derek McMillan

What we saw

On the Socialist Party Scotland website

www.socialistpartyscotland.org.uk

Big swing to Yes leaves referendum vote on a knife edge

"In the final campaign fortnight, the polls for the Scottish independence referendum are tightening, with support for independence increasing to its highest level yet..."

Fourfold rise in youth on poverty pay

Fight for £10 an hour now!

James Ivens

Don't be young. Not if you want a house or enough to live on. A new study out this month details the continuing decay of youth wages and home ownership.

Research by the Resolution Foundation has found the proportion of young people on low pay has nearly quadrupled since 1975. Numbers aged 21 to 30 earning less than £7.71 an hour - two thirds of the national median - have soared.

Only 8% four decades ago, but 29% today. The think-tank describes a "structural shift" towards permanent poverty pay for the young.

At the same time, the number of under-30s buying a house fell to 3% - one of its lowest ever levels. For most young people the very idea is charmingly quaint. Something-for-nothing slumlords demand nearly half our income - sometimes more - for creaking cots in sheds and cupboards.

The establishment parties and defenders of capitalism have no solutions to these hateful conditions.

The Tories' answer is 'Help to Buy': state backed mortgages to get young people onto the property ladder. But this has simply helped to fuel the housing price bubble - putting homes beyond the reach of most people.

New Labour? They'll consider limiting how much your landlord can hike your rent in one go. Why not licence them and force them to charge fair rents?

Fundamentally, we need to build more council housing. Cheap, secure, publicly owned accommodation is the only antidote to market misery.

As for pay - the employment figures are going up, aren't they? Well, yes. But only because traditional full time posts have been divvied up into zero-hour microjobs and 'self-employment'.

A £10 an hour minimum wage could start to solve low pay. Recent strikes have proved that even precarious workers can fight and win improved offers through trade unions.

And in Seattle, a movement of workers and socialists has more than doubled the minimum wage. The \$15 an hour rate will transfer \$3 billion of wealth from the richest to the lowest paid.

When we organise, we can win.

Fast Food Rights: 'Get the lady in the pink T-shirt out of here!'

On 28 August, activists from groups including the BFAWU union and Youth Fight for Jobs took part in a Fast Food Rights day of action. Here are reports from the day.

Newcastle

"Can someone get the lady in the pink T-shirt out of here!" was the response of the McDonald's supervisor as we handed out Fast Food Rights leaflets encouraging their staff to join the Bakers Food and Allied Workers Union (BFAWU).

Our bright pink T-shirts emblazoned with "Raise the minimum wage to £10 Now!" were certainly distinctive.

As we were ushered out the supervisor told surrounding staff they were not allowed to join a union. I stopped in my tracks and politely, but loudly, told the surrounding workers that they were legally entitled to join a union!

On our Fast Food Rights stall outside McDonald's we also received a lot of attention. Loads of workers, young and old, approached us.

Many of them were on zero hours themselves and told how it was impossible to budget when you didn't know how much was coming in week by week.

One woman asked: "How have they been able to get away with this?" Almost every worker she knew was on a zero-hour contract.

Others told how they'd been forced to give up jobs, and go back onto benefits, because they were being offered so few hours.

Even those who worked plenty of hours found zero-hour contracts extremely difficult when it came to holidays or if they were ill, as they then received no wages.

Once the stall was finished I had some shopping to do. In two stores I was stopped by staff who liked my T-shirt and agreed that they should be getting £10 an hour and that zero-hour contracts should be banned.

Elaine Brunskill

Bradford

A Fast Food Rights stall was held in Bradford on Thursday 28 August as part of a national campaign. It was a good vibrant stall, nothing unusual in that maybe.

However, what was unusual is that we were joined by both a manager and a deputy manager from shops in the same street.

I cannot remember a manager ever coming out on his lunch break and selling the Socialist paper on the stall, leafleting people and generally being terrific help, taking a paper back into his shop. But these two young managers certainly did!

Peter Robson

Yorkshire

On 28 August, there were protests in eight towns and cities across Yorkshire, coinciding with a US fast food workers' strike for secure jobs, decent conditions and a \$15 an hour minimum wage.

Where we ran stalls, they were often mobbed by people agreeing with our demands to scrap zero-hour contracts and to raise the UK minimum wage to £10 an hour.

Five local radio stations interviewed Youth Fight for Jobs and BFAWU bakers' union activist. Several local newspapers covered the protests, including in Huddersfield, Pontefract and York.

In Grimsby, in the town's first Fast Food Rights action, activists split up and went in cars to leaflet outlying McDonald's stores, before heading back into the city centre to leaflet McDonald's there.

Sheffield Fast Food Rights activists heard about zero-hour horror stories, including one lift engineer doing 60 hour weeks with no overtime. A woman told them her son was on a zero-hour contract and hadn't had any work in four weeks!

In Leeds, Bradford and Wakefield, activists had several conversations with McDonald's staff, as well as other nearby fast food workplaces including KFC and Costa Coffee.

Iain Dalton, Yorkshire YFJ

Mansfield

People told us how they and their families were struggling to make ends meet, some doing more than one job, others being paid barely above the minimum wage. Our call for £10.00 per hour really struck a chord.

Karen Seymour

London

On 20 August, three of us leafleted near Brixton tube station in south west London. What has historically been a working class part of London is now seeing up market stores move in. But these stores don't pay wages that meant the workers could afford their luxury products!

We went into several fast food restaurants including McDonald's and KFC. Several workers responded to our call for a £10 an hour minimum wage as well as fighting against zero-hour contracts.

We went into several stores. Employees at the Body Shop expressed interest and agreed with the need to fight for a £10 minimum wage.

Walking around one of the stores, we could see several employees reading our leaflets. Getting the word out there and making workers aware that there is a group out there they can join to really fight for their interests is the first step in building a mass movement.

Hannah Zucherman

This version of this article was first posted on the Socialist Party website on 29 August 2014 and may vary slightly from the version subsequently printed in The Socialist.

Join the fight for the return of free education and student grants!

Non Frenguelli, Coventry Socialist Party and sixth-former

We now have to stay in compulsory education until we're 18, without EMA (Education Maintenance Allowance). There was a time when students were supported with a grant of £10 to £30 a week, depending on their parents' income, to help pay for school supplies and travel. This helped children from poorer families.

There are now apprenticeships that let students "earn while they learn", but usually way below the minimum wage. They aren't available widely enough to be a real option to many students.

When we finish sixth form or college, we face up to £9,000 a year in tuition fees if we go on to university and a possible debt of up to £53,000 at the end. We won't start paying this back until we're earning above £21,000 a year, but no one wants to start their adult life with that much debt hanging over them.

This will be a massive disincentive for poorer students. University is not the only option, but it should be a choice equally available to all.

Widening gap

The government's blatant discouragement of poorer students, will only lead to a widening of the gap between the rich and poor both in terms of wealth and education.

And what are our options after university? Housing benefit for under-25s has been slashed, so unless we can find a job that will cover rent (and no, a zero-hour contract will not do that) moving back in with our parents could be the only option.

How can we fight this? By joining opposition groups, through mass demonstrations and strikes, with continued resistance to what this government is trying to do to us.

The Socialist Party offers a real alternative to the current system and meets weekly throughout Coventry and in towns and cities across England and Wales.

We are continuously campaigning for a society built on the needs of the masses, not the wants of a rich few, for a socialist future.

If you're sick of the Con-Dems (and Labour's lack of an alternative) and want an alternative - you should think of getting in touch.

- 020 8988 8777
- join@socialistparty.org.uk

Wales: Save the Financial Contingency Fund

Claudia Cannon

The Welsh Government announced on 20 August 2014 it had abolished the Financial Contingency Fund (FCF) for universities in Wales this academic year.

The FCF is a hardship fund aimed at helping students who are finding it hard to make ends meet during their time in further or higher education. It is a grant that students don't have to repay.

This fund is essential and considered a lifeline for many students in order to complete their course.

The removal of it will marginalise those who can't afford to access further and higher education in Wales.

The Welsh Government has disregarded its own research conducted in 2013 which states that "the funds do impact positively upon student participation and retention".

This decision by the Labour-led Welsh Government is just yet another attack on students, and hits the poorest in Wales.

Socialist Students demands living grants for all students in the UK!

- www.socialiststudents.org.uk

Ukraine conflict ratchets up the international crisis

Niall Mulholland

Fighting in Ukraine escalated sharply over the last week as anti-government forces carried out a successful counter-attack, gaining territory in the south and east. This has led to a serious escalation of international tensions.

The Kiev regime and its western backers reacted furiously to the government forces' losses. President Poroshenko, facing nationalist parties in parliamentary elections in October, threatened even more brutal military action against the east.

Without a hint of irony, the US and Britain accuse President Putin of making a "land grab" in Ukraine. These same imperialist powers invaded and occupied Afghanistan and Iraq and have no word of criticism over the Israeli regime's announcement this week that it will annex more Palestinian land.

Putin, however, is no real friend of national minorities - the capital of Chechnya, Grozny, was mercilessly pummelled by Russian forces under his rule.

The western powers accuse President Putin of sending regular Russian army units over the border to bolster the rebels, who were facing defeat, they claim. The Russian regime strongly

denies its forces are in Ukraine and claims only volunteers and soldiers "on holidays" are joining the rebels.

Certainly the earlier gains made by the Ukrainian army offensive are now under threat from rebel forces, strengthened by resources from Russia.

This is not only due to the bolstering of rebel forces. The Ukrainian army is badly trained and organised. There are also reports of poor morale amongst soldiers, many of whom may well be reluctant to fight a section of their country's population.

The Kiev regime has conducted a brutal offensive in the east of Ukraine for months, shelling residential areas indiscriminately, destroying infrastructure and killing many civilians. This has only deepened opposition to the Kiev regime amongst the majority Russian-speaking population.

Despite the reactionary nationalist character of much of the rebel leadership, the majority of Russian speakers strongly oppose the Kiev regime.

This is no surprise given that protests against the former authoritarian president, Viktor Yanukovich, during late 2013 and early 2014, were successfully channelled by anti-Russian right-wing forces, including ultra-Ukrainian nationalists and outright fascists, with western support.

They installed a new pro-western regime over the heads of the population, which quickly alienated the country's minority Russian speakers. The regime tried to impose anti-Russian language measures and later banned the Communist Party, which is regarded as pro-Russian. The formation of the self-declared "People's Republic of Donetsk", following the breaking away of majority Russian-speaking Crimea from Ukraine, was met with a brutal military operation by Kiev.

Sanctions

In response to the recent rebel advances in Ukraine, the European Union (EU) threatens to step up its sanctions against Russia. But EU member states remain divided on the issue.

Some governments fear it will badly hit western companies and worsen Europe's already gloomy economic situation. Previous sanctions against Russia have already backfired on Germany and the EU. As winter approaches, Putin could, in retaliation, squeeze Russia's gas supplies to Ukraine and parts of western Europe.

A Nato summit taking place this week in Wales will discuss stepping up its material aid to the Kiev regime and speeding up the process of enlarging Nato eastwards. The idea of establishing a 'rapid reaction force' to "guard against Russian aggression" is planned.

This dangerous escalation will worsen tensions still further with the Russian regime, which has long opposed Nato's aggressive encroaching on its sphere of influence and which regards Ukraine as its strategically vital "near abroad".

Since the collapse of the former Soviet Union and East European Stalinist regimes, US imperialism has sought to increase its power and influence in the region, alongside European

capitalism to dominate the new markets at the expense of the emerging capitalist regimes, Russia in particular.

US President Obama rules out direct confrontation between Nato and Russia. The reality facing western powers was highlighted by Putin's blunt reminder that Russia is a nuclear power and "it's better not to mess with us".

There are limits to Nato's ability to respond but a new 'Cold War' is developing, albeit on the basis of opposing capitalist regimes this time.

Ahead of talks between all sides in Minsk, that have little chance of success, Putin called for a ceasefire and rebel leaders put forward a series of demands on regional self-determination and Russian language status.

Although Putin may be compelled to annex parts of eastern Ukraine in the future, it is not his intention to do so now. It would be much more costly for Russia to maintain than Crimea.

By utilising the rebels' recent advances, Putin may want a negotiated solution that would see Russia holding sway over large parts of Ukraine (in effect, a Russian protectorate within a 'federal' Ukraine) and thwarting Nato plans for Ukraine.

If the fighting is to continue, however, another "frozen conflict" is also a possible eventuality - the de-facto partition of Ukraine into pro-Western and pro-Russian territories.

None of this is a solution whatsoever for the working people of Ukraine. Competing right-wing nationalist forces and their outside power backers can only bring destruction and misery.

The Ukrainian economy is due to contract by at least 6.5% this year, according to the International Monetary Fund (IMF). The currency, the hryvnia, fell over 60% against the dollar this year.

The war in the east has had a devastating effect on the economy - the Donbas region accounts for 16% of GDP (total output) and 27% of industrial production.

The IMF is still discussing when to make a second loan of \$1.4 billion to Kiev, part of a \$17 billion loan, with strings attached, of course, that will see more attacks on workers' living standards.

Only a workers' alternative can achieve a long lasting solution to Ukraine's ethnic divisions and chronic economic problems.

This requires building an independent political alternative in the interests of all working people in opposition to right wing nationalist and pro-capitalist forces and outside powers.

A socialist alternative would guarantee full rights for all minorities, including language rights and the right of self-determination.

It would strive for the utmost unity of the working class in Ukraine and across the region in the struggle for a socialist society where the needs of the vast majority are satisfied.

Tamil Solidarity Day - building unity to fight oppression

Isai Priya, Tamil Solidarity

Tamil Solidarity is holding its annual "Solidarity Day" with Day-Mer, Turkish and Kurdish Community, on 6 September.

All who stand for the rights of Tamil-speaking people, opposition to continuing repression in Sri Lanka by the Rajapaksa regime and for international workers' solidarity, are urged to participate in this very important initiative.

Various campaigners and activists, including leading trade unionists, Youth Fight for Jobs and Rape is No Joke, will be attending.

As well as being a forum for political debate and discussion, there will also be entertainment, with music and dance from Tamil, Turkish and Kurdish communities. Traditional Tamil food will also be provided.

A 'rally for solidarity' will also take place with speakers from trade unions and campaigners including NUT executive member Martin Powell-Davies, Unite Housing 1111 branch chair Paul Kershaw, and Socialist Party deputy general secretary Hannah Sell.

Tamil Solidarity Day is a day to build bridges between different communities and their struggles. Bringing these communities together and understanding each other struggles is essential to build a united fight and win the rights of all.

Tamil Solidarity stands for all those oppressed by dictatorial regimes and capitalism, and it's the only organisation within Tamil communities that links up the Tamil people's struggle with the working class movement and other struggles.

Though it's at early stage, Solidarity Day is beginning to attract significant sections of the Tamil community and we need all the support that we can get from everyone to make this even more successful.

Confirm your attendance now by mailing to info@tamilsolidarity.org or visit www.tamilsolidarity.org and click on "Solidarity Day" for more details.

- Venue: Day-Mer Community Centre, 22 Moorefield Road, Tottenham, London N17 6PY.

Strike to save the NHS

Health workers balloted to join 14 October public sector action

While NHS bosses hold secret meetings with private health companies looking to get their greasy hands on £1 billion worth of public money, NHS workers have seen their pay fall by 15% in real terms since 2010.

Health workers in Unison, GMB, Unite and Royal College of Midwives are now being balloted for strike action over pay in England, where a 1% pay 'increase' was imposed in April, and over terms and conditions in Wales.

Steve Bell, a Unison branch secretary in Buckinghamshire (writing in a personal capacity) says why he is voting for strike action.

"I am voting 'yes' in the ballot because I can see what this and previous governments are doing to the NHS.

They are destroying it with market reforms. Healthcare will come down to costs rather than needs.

Finance that should be going into healthcare is going into big business pockets at the expense of both patients and staff.

Patients suffer from reduction in services, often moving them away from where they live and staff suffer from the stress of not being able to do their job as they would wish.

I have worked in the NHS for over 20 years. Although I don't do the job for the pay, over the past five years I have seen my pay eroded for what? We have worse pensions, worse services, fewer staff and an increased workload. We suffer continuous attacks in the press on the NHS.

As a branch secretary of Unison, I know what private sector health care looks like and that is the way we are heading.

I am voting 'yes' because I can't afford not to, having seen my pay cut for the past five years. But I am also voting yes so that health workers will have their voice heard for a change.

I am urging all health workers to stand up to defend the NHS and vote yes in the ballots.

Then we can join other public sector workers on strike on 14 October in what should be the biggest walkout since the pensions strike of over 1.5 million workers on 30 November 2011."

NSSN rally and lobby of the TUC Congress in Liverpool:

'Keep striking together for a pay rise'

Speakers include Mark Serwotka, PCS general secretary

2pm, Sunday 7 September

Jurys Hotel, opposite Echo Arena Conference Centre in Albert Dock

See www.shopstewards.net for more - email info@shopstewards.net

Kirklees: Council proposes worst cuts in living memory

Mike Forster, Kirklees Unison (personal capacity)

Last week, the Labour Cabinet in Kirklees introduced a cuts package of £70 million for so-called public consultation. In reality it will be asking the public to choose how they want to slash services off the budget.

The council leader has asked the public to 'think the unthinkable' and went on to say that services 'we have taken for granted for 100 years may have to go'. He told the press that he could be riding his motor bike round Europe but has chosen instead to face up to hard choices and introduce an austerity budget that even the Tories have criticised!

These cuts include:

- The closure of all libraries apart from two or four; we get to choose!
- Axing three museums
- Asking parents to pay for their special needs children to be escorted to school
- Closing two of the markets
- Removing funding for public parks
- Reducing bin collections and street cleansing

The list goes on ... and council staff have been told that 1,400 compulsory redundancies are also wanted. Departments have been warned to expect job cuts, closures or privatisation. These are the worst cuts in living memory.

In addition, they want to impose new staff conditions to pave the way for mass redundancies.

Unison has resisted all compulsory redundancies and has so far held them at bay. However, another part of the proposals is to slash redundancy pay, reduce the time staff have on deployment, and to use sickness absence as a way of choosing those for the chop. The unions quite rightly have said no, so the council then insisted it would send out dismissal letters to ALL staff and would re-engage them on their new terms. Its plan was to send out the notices in September!

Our union, Unison, which is the largest in Kirklees local authority, had no choice but to ballot the members once again - but over the summer period.

This meant a huge effort during the traditionally quiet holiday time to get to all the members. Special workplace meetings were held and letters were sent to home addresses, urging everyone to vote in the ballot and to vote no to the council. Coming hot on the heels of the

14th July strike, this was a big 'ask', but members have been incensed by the council's disgraceful proposals.

In the middle of August, the ballot result confirmed that 73% were ready to strike on a turnout of just under 30%. This was a clear message and not one the council has expected.

It now appears that the council has backed off from its redundancy proposal in the latest talks and has asked for more negotiations. Round One has been won which is vital in the huge task that now confronts the wider community in holding off the cuts.

On campaign stalls, people are rightly incensed and can hardly believe that a Labour council could treat services and its workforce in this way.

The latest figures show that it is in fact cash rich! Last year, it underspent by £12 million; it has balances (unspent earmarked money) of £44 million and reserves of £89 million. The Cabinet could impose all its cuts and still have over £70 million left in its back pocket!

"So why have a Labour council?" people are demanding to know, if this is what it does! TUSC (Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition) has swung into action with a public meeting in a few weeks' time and already five meetings to defend libraries have taken place.

There will be a huge swell of anger as the realisation of the details of these cuts becomes public knowledge. Together with a defiant mood of union opposition, the Labour leader may well wish he had stayed on his bike!

This version of this article was first posted on the Socialist Party website on 1 September 2014 and may vary slightly from the version subsequently printed in The Socialist.

Construction walkout in Romford following sackings of newly elected union reps

Update on 2.9.14:

All protests have been called off today at Romford and around the country because victory has been achieved! The workers have been offered direct employment and those sacked will be reinstated. However the workers are still fighting for their newly-elected union stewards to be recognised by the company.

At a Romford rail station site in east London last week, 15 agency construction workers who were suffering being paid via the umbrella company scam called a Unite official to the site. They were seeking help in putting forward their demand that they be employed directly by the building services contractor company T. Clarke.

In a meeting between Unite reps and Clarke's management it was agreed that Clarke would consider the request for the 15 to be directly employed.

A Unite steward and deputy steward were elected by the workers. However on Friday morning these two stewards and one other worker were sacked by Clarke.

In response to this blatant attack on union organising, the workers walked off the job and 'cabined up'. Unite met with Clarke again, but had no progress in getting the sackings withdrawn.

On Monday morning (1st September) a protest took place outside the site from 6.30am: see the NSSN video below.

Text of Socialist Party leaflet, 1.9.14:

Reinstate Tommy Clarke stewards

End the 'umbrella company' scam

Today's protests at Tommy Clarke's office are a new turn in the battle against 'umbrella companies' in the building trade. Events have moved quickly since sparks on the Volker Fitzgerald site in Romford first began organising.

On Wednesday Unite the union were called to the site by 15 electricians 'employed' by umbrella company First Stage Recruitment.

The sparks demanded direct employment by Tommy Clarke, the electrical contractor on site. They elected two stewards to represent them in negotiations with the employers.

On Friday the two stewards were laid off. By a strange coincidence there was no more work for them right after they were elected! The electricians on site don't believe in coincidences. They refused to go into work that day.

If Tommy Clarke thought the protest would fizzle out over the weekend they were mistaken as the morning shift was greeted by a mass picket of sparks and supporters. The 15 again refused to go into work and were joined by directly employed electricians from Tommy Clarke. No deliveries were made to the site.

The protests today at Tommy Clarke's offices around the country are delivering the message that the sparks' demand cannot be ignored.

They want the stewards reinstated, direct employment with the contractor, proper expenses and holiday pay.

Sparks want nothing to do with umbrella companies, a scam by the contractors to dump payment of PAYE and National Insurance on to the worker. They are organising to get direct employment.

Contractors like Tommy Clarke should be clear that victimising reps to stop this organising will be met with more pickets on the sites and more protests at their offices.

This version of this article was first posted on the Socialist Party website on 1 September 2014 and may vary slightly from the version subsequently printed in *The Socialist*.

Teachers want action from their trade union

Nicky Downes

At my school in Coventry a number of staff have been out on strike, picketed, attended marches and rallies each time the National Union of Teachers (NUT) have been on strike.

Although the concessions we have won so far have been relatively small, the understanding is still there that we must continue the action until we win improvements in pay and pensions, an end to Performance Related Pay and improvements to workload.

The local NUT executive in Coventry has, before each strike, lobbied the union's national executive to make sure the action is continued and escalated. This important action has been mentioned at national executive meetings. Other local associations should do the same.

Continuing with the odd day's strike will not win. There is a mood for escalating to two days of action or more if necessary. This does, however, need to be built for.

The NUT will be surveying its members over the next few weeks to judge the mood. This is after a break when struggling to work 60 hour weeks has not been an issue. During this time the only communications from the union have been adverts for a week's break at the union owned Stoke Rochford Hall, and for insurance. It would have been a good time to take stock of what we have achieved so far and to build for action in October.

Teachers in my school and across the country will be both angry and surprised if we do not strike with other public sector workers on 14 October. It's interesting that the survey won't be finished by then. I hope this means that the union already feels committed to striking on that date and the survey will merely be to confirm the necessity for further, and likely escalating, action in the future.

Care UK workers continue fight for decent pay

Alistair Tice

As we go to press, having already taken 48 days of strike action, Doncaster Care UK workers are in the second week of their current three week strike.

Since February, Unison members have taken strike action against imposed 35% pay cuts after their jobs were transferred from the NHS, and now for a decent pay rise.

Their determination to fight NHS privatisation and pay cuts has been an inspiration to health workers and trade unionists around the country.

More Care UK staff have joined this round of action because of their treatment from management, refusing their days off and holidays to be used to cover for strikers.

Strikers are keeping the pressure on Care UK's owners, private equity firm Bridgepoint, by bringing a coachful down to its London offices every week.

The tour of protests and meetings has visited Sheffield to join the People's March for the NHS and will join the lobby of the TUC conference in Liverpool called by the National Shop Stewards Network (see page 12).

On a visit to Newcastle, strikers were met and supported by former miner and care worker, Dave Anderson, Labour MP for Blaydon.

This prompted Roger Hutt, strike committee chair to say: "Bit of a bugger when you have to travel 120 miles for a Labour MP to show solidarity to the care UK strikers, when you've got three on the doorstep, who have yet to show their faces on the picket line. Shame on them."

The three on the doorstep includes Labour leader Ed Miliband, who supposedly wants to put the NHS at the centre of his general election campaign.

Ritzy cinema workers vote to continue struggle for living wage

Laurence Maples

Workers at the Ritzy cinema in Brixton, south London, have been involved in a long, bold campaign for the London Living Wage of £8.80 an hour.

They took 11 days of very well supported strike action, maintained lively pickets, marched round London, linked up with other cinema workers, reached out to the local community and

encouraged supporters to boycott the Picturehouse chain of cinemas which the Ritzy is part of.

The most recent strike day in July saw management open the cinema with a scab operation, having previously closed the cinema during every strike.

A noisy, vibrant mass picket highlighted the hypocrisy of cinema bosses who raked in £31 million profits yet won't pay their staff a living wage!

Many potential customers turned away when the strikers explained the dispute, even though the miserly bosses refused to refund pre-booked tickets.

The strikes forced Picturehouse management to offer a pay rise to £8.80 an hour, phased in incrementally by September 2015, with an immediate increase to £8 an hour backdated to October 2013.

That this offer was made at all is a testament to the strikers' hard work and disciplined approach to the dispute.

It represents an excellent achievement at a time when most workers are faced with austerity and having their pay cut in real terms, and shows that striking works.

However, it falls short of the London Living Wage, which is likely to increase by September 2015, and the Ritzy staff have marginally voted to reject it.

If they are unable to reach an agreement with management and wish to wage further action, it is important to persuade all those who voted for the offer to support more strikes, while continuing to recruit Picturehouse workers at other cinemas to their union BECTU.

Workplace news in brief

London bus pay demo

On 11 September, London bus drivers are demonstrating for unified pay rates across the several bus firms.

Without us London would grind to a halt. We showed that in our 2012 fight for a £500 Olympic bonus. Remember the bosses saying they'd love to help but the money just wasn't there? They suddenly paid up following a one day strike.

The demonstration is a good step in building Unite's campaign for sector-wide negotiation. All London bus drivers do the same job. Why should we suffer different pay scales, terms and conditions?

So join the demo! Meet 11am, Thursday 11 September at Bressenden Place, SW1.

A London bus driver

NAPO elections

After a turbulent year in NAPO probation officers' union which saw both national chairs resign, a new team of officers will now hopefully provide stability at this crucial stage of our campaign against privatisation.

In the election of two NAPO national vice-chairs, Socialist Party member Chas Berry was defeated by just one vote! On an openly socialist programme, he secured 415 votes.

London Underground

RMT union members working on London Underground stations are implementing an overtime ban from 3 September as 900 jobs are under threat.

Meanwhile, Aslef train drivers on London Underground Central and Waterloo and City lines took strike action against bullying management on 22 August.

More action is now planned for 17 September unless the dispute is resolved. RMT is now also balloting on the Central and Piccadilly lines.

Unison Bureaucracy Unmasked

The Defend the Four Story

How four Socialist Party members defeated victimisation within their own union

Available for £5 (plus p&p) from www.leftbooks.co.uk

020 8988 8789

Victory for disabled transport campaign

Salford Against the Cuts

Salford Against the Cuts is delighted by the recent judgement in the High Court which obliges Salford City Council to continue, for the time being, to provide transport for adults with disabilities.

We are very pleased for Michael Robson and Mary his mother, and all the other service users and carers who have been given hope.

The council had previously tried to cut the specialist service that took severely disabled adults to day centres.

If the council's own processes of call in and scrutiny had revealed a shred of humanity it would not have been necessary to take the council to court. Unfortunately the council ignored all protests and ploughed ahead.

Now they will have incurred further expense in their determination to make so-called savings whatever the cost to vulnerable residents.

We urge our supporters to attend Manchester civil justice centre on Bridge Street West on Thursday 4 September at 10.30am to support the families. We hope then to achieve a full judicial review of the case.

New member thirsts for knowledge

Ben Dixon, Leeds Socialist Party

As someone who has only been a member of the party for just over a year and a half, I always seek opportunities to gain knowledge and experience from fellow comrades.

The Yorkshire cadre school, which took place on 30 and 31 August in Leeds, was a perfect chance for me to do this. Talks, debates and discussions centred on the subjects of imperialism, socialism and war.

I was able to revise and learn a gargantuan amount surrounding current world issues while discussing how we, as the largest party on the left, should respond to them.

Iain Dalton, in one of the talks, spoke to comrades regarding the CWI. He covered its inception, history, and how vital this international Trotskyist organisation is today.

Following this, as he had recently returned from the USA, Ian Pattison spoke of the fight and subsequent victory for the \$15 minimum wage in Seattle, through our sister organisation Socialist Alternative.

I for one am extremely proud of Ian's handiwork in this, as we strive for a £10 minimum wage here.

Protesting against police racism

Marvin Hay, Waltham Forest Socialist Party

The bank holiday weekend saw the Notting Hill Carnival. Our successful campaign work focussed on the continued unrest in Ferguson, Missouri. This follows on from the death of Michael Brown, and more specifically the militarisation of police in America and worldwide.

Our demands were simple. Stop targeting the black working class here and in the US. An immediate end to harassment and militarised response to peaceful protests. Independent inquiries into deaths at hands of police by community organisations and trade unions.

We brought our perspectives and analysis of the situation in Ferguson to the carnival revellers, making the point that it is social and economic conditions that breed racism. What was interesting was that people were drawing these conclusions independently and making the link between policing in the US, the UK and worldwide. We had people flocking to sign our petitions and make donations, even in the rain.

On Wednesday there was a protest outside the United States embassy attended by about 70 people. Unfortunately those speaking from the official platform, including Labour MP Diane Abbott, didn't make any real demands. At times it just felt like a publicity event for Abbott and the organisers!

Our contribution to events was well received. Although the organisers didn't allow us to address the crowd, we were able to raise our demands in discussions and build for a public meeting that was organised for the next day.

Solidarity Street

Sue Atkins, Southampton Socialist Party

Due to local hostility, misnamed film company "Love Productions" has not been seen in public recently.

This follows the public meeting that angrily opposed the filming of Channel 4's "Immigration Street" in Southampton.

The programme is their latest 'reality' TV attack on the poor and downtrodden after the vile "Benefit Street".

The Socialist Party and TUSC have put forward the alternative "Solidarity Street" campaign (see previous issue). Our campaign has been well received, and has made important links with community activists.

One local resident said, "We have lived together peacefully for many years, so why are they doing this now?"

The programme will be televised shortly before the general election. Could this have something to do with it?

Fighting Huddersfield library cuts

Socialist Party members in Huddersfield sold 24 copies of the Socialist and raised over thirty pounds for the fighting fund when campaigning against library closures last Tuesday lunchtime.

Kirklees council plans on closing all but two libraries in the district alongside other savage cuts in a recently announced package.

Iain Dalton

Anti-racist day of action: 18 September

An anti-racist day of action has been called on 18 September to mark the first anniversary of the murder of Greek left-wing hip hop activist Pavlos Fyssas by the neo-fascist Golden Dawn.

We are now also witnessing the horrendous racism of police and the state in the US, but also the resistance of young people in Ferguson and other areas.

Across Europe the message will be NO PASARAN! Youth Fight for Jobs will take this campaign to young people in colleges and workplaces. There will be actions in a number of countries including Greece, Sweden, Austria and Belgium.

- To get involved call 020 8558 7947 or email youthfightforjobs@gmail.com
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Rally for history's longest strike

In April 1914 Kitty and Tom Higdon, teachers at Burston Village School in Norfolk, were sacked for their socialist and trade unionist activities.

Their pupils walked out in support, and the Higdons and villagers ran lessons on the village green instead. The Burston "Strike School" continued to educate local children until 1939 - the longest strike in history.

Times change, but the struggle for economic and social justice continues.

Join socialists and trade unionists from around the country for the Burston Strike School centenary rally! There will be food, beer, and community and campaign stalls. Sunday 7 September from 10.55am to 3.30pm on the Church Green in Burston, near Diss, Norfolk.

Planning, not competition, to meet our transport needs

Apparently, outside London where bus use is expanding, fewer people than ever are using buses because of rising prices. A 'centre-left' think tank has produced a report that criticises bus privatisation and deregulation. But it fails to call for public ownership.

High bus fares and infrequent services may make buses an unattractive option but the arguments for increasing 'competition' have been shown in practice to be a failure.

Competing companies try to undercut each other bidding for routes by attacking their workers' conditions and, from the quality of some buses I've travelled on recently, saving on cleaning and perhaps even maintenance.

Is this better for the passenger? No. There have to be concerns about safety when firms compete to undercut one another to secure contracts.

Are they making savings on maintenance, cleaning, over-working drivers? The bus on one leg of my journey to and from work didn't seem to get cleaned for about a fortnight, judging by the mud, twigs and leaves littering the floor.

Far from reducing prices, competition massively increased the cost of my daily travel. I have to catch two buses and one firm used to provide both services, making it possible to buy a single ticket for the whole journey. But they lost the contract with the council for one of them.

Neither firm now accepts each other's tickets, resulting in a near doubling of the price I pay to get to work and back.

I live in a Labour council under a Welsh Labour Government. Both pay lip-service to the idea of an integrated transport policy to provide a better, more environmentally friendly service to the public. Yet both slashed subsidies for buses as they passed on Con-Dem cuts.

It's not competition but planning that's needed for public transport. It has to be run as a public service not a profit opportunity for cowboy operators.

Public transport could be efficient, cost-effective and reduce massively our impact on the environment but for that to happen it needs to be publicly owned and democratically controlled.

Written on a bus to work by a Socialist Party Wales member

Challenging Ukip's lies

Gareth Shanks

Ukip's bandwagon is coming to town. This rotting carcass of bigotry and filth no longer presents itself as the friendly racist at the country pub. They are now trying to infect post-industrial towns with their one solution to all problems - blame the immigrants.

This poison sadly has fertile ground to taint. After decades of decline in many traditional industries in places like Doncaster, where Ukip's conference will be held, there is fear and distrust surrounding issues like wages and housing.

It becomes all too easy to kick the guy next to you, rather than the man at the top of the ladder. Racist groups such as the EDL and Britain First use anti-immigrant propaganda for their own ends. Publicity around Ukip's conference is only going to further damage local harmony.

Blaming immigrants for all your woes is an easy tactic to use - in my dim and distant political past I was a Ukip member. I allowed my personal lack of prospects to manifest into a simple excuse for blaming immigrants.

I now understand that Ukip is a racist, homophobic, sexist, anti-working class, elitist party. It has taken me three years to see the importance of patiently approaching people based on their class and that right wing ideas can be challenged and beaten on an individual level.

It is vital that we combat Ukip's threat. I am helping Stand Up To Ukip to organise the counter-protest, on the basis of fighting for jobs, homes and services, when they come to my home town of Doncaster.

- The counter protest will assemble at Sir Nigel Gresley Square, Doncaster at 12pm on 27 September. Rally speakers include Natalie Bennett and Dave Nellist

Football fans angry at prices

At a pre-season football fans' protest in London, Liverpool FC supporters held a banner saying 'Football is nothing without supporters'.

Groups supporting Chelsea, Arsenal, QPR, Stoke City, Sunderland, Newcastle United, Manchester United, Aston Villa, West Ham, Bradford City, Fulham, Crystal Palace, Southampton and others came along to march to the FA HQ.

Big money passes hands to owners of clubs promoted to the Premier League, some players argue for £25,000 a week in the bottom half of the Premier League. Some owners seem to use the money as a slush fund for their other businesses.

But these supporters saw themselves as getting a raw deal. A banner at the protest displayed costs of ticket prices. Online Arsenal tickets cost £65 while TV reports say West Ham are more expensive than Manchester City or Chelsea.

Yet in top European football, in the Bundesliga in Germany, tickets were on average £22. English fans could have a weekend holiday there and spend little more than they pay for a match in England.

Many loyal supporters are excluded from the game as wages in Britain don't even keep up with inflation.

TV deals are huge. One football supporter said: "Football clubs could pay supporters to watch the game while still having money to invest". Fans will have a lot to ponder this season in the less exciting periods of play.

Gooners supporter

<http://www.socialistparty.org.uk/articles/19146>