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Osborne's budget cuts will devastate low-income households

Socialist Party member Mary Jackson contested the last general election as a Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition candidate in Doncaster North and is a well-known community activist.

Mary comments on the Tory Chancellor's budget of £12 billion extra welfare spending cuts and its expected impact on low income households.

By the time you read this the budget cuts may already have been announced - but Osborne had already let it be known that in-work benefits will be cut. These are in addition to cuts and caps on all welfare benefits.

If the government was serious about cutting the benefit bill it would immediately raise the minimum wage to £10 an hour. This would cut working tax credit at a stroke.

Around £11 billion in benefits are claimed by low-paid shop-workers - it's a supplement to employers of £2,087 per employee. Tesco alone costs taxpayers £364 million in benefits!

Bring in rent control, instead of housing benefit caps, to stop the sky high rents that are being used to drive workers out of major cities.

That of course will not happen under this super-rich friendly government. Instead it will take money from people who work but do not earn enough to live. There's talk of every household losing between £20 and £30 a week. Workers on tax credits and housing benefit haven't enough to live on now!

In our local community run food bank, we see people who struggle to have enough money to keep the lights on. Gas for heating is a luxury that they simply manage without. £20 a week cut will mean electricity becoming an unaffordable luxury.

Some food banks already have different food parcels for people who have no method of cooking. It is outrageous that this is already the 'norm' before these new savage cuts come in.

We're coming up to the long school holiday, already a very difficult time for parents because of a lack of free school meals. £20 less a week means many more children will go to bed hungry.

An extra million children fell below the poverty line in the five years of the Con-Dem government how many more will follow if we let them get away with this?

Many groups of workers are having to consider strike action or are balloting for strikes to address the cost of living crisis. The Trades Union Congress has called for a lobby of the Tory Party conference to protest against austerity.

We need a one-day general strike as a starting point to reverse the whole austerity package.

The Great Money Trick: Another World Is Possible

by **Mary Jackson**

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The corporate welfare state

Chancellor Osborne's savage attack on welfare benefits has been accompanied by Tory propaganda in the right-wing media, accusing low-income families of being part a 'something-for-nothing' culture holding back the country's economic recovery.

But how then does the government explain the 'corporate welfare bill'? Research by Kevin Farnsworth at York University calculates that the grants and subsidies paid directly to companies in 2011-12 amounted to over £14 billion - nearly three times the £5 billion paid out that year in Jobseeker's Allowance.

When other businesses' 'in-work' benefits are included (such as tax benefits, quantitative easing, export guarantees, public procurement from private companies) then direct corporate welfare amounts to a minimum £85 billion a year - a large proportion of the government's total budget deficit.

Unsurprisingly, the super-rich friendly Chancellor has remained tight-lipped about this corporate welfare bill.

Between 2005 and 2011, of 44 companies that received government grants, 13 didn't pay any corporation tax; another 17 didn't pay any corporation tax either the year before or the year of getting their public benefit.

In 2013 Facebook only paid £3,169 in corporation tax; Amazon £10 million (over ten years!); Apple £11 million; Google £11.6 million. At the same time, total UK revenues of the four companies were over £17 billion.

Between 2009 and 2012 Starbucks paid no corporation tax, claiming it had made a loss in these years. In 2011, Starbucks' UK sales amounted to £400 million.

Them & Us

Where's our recovery?

While the UK's richest 1,000 people have doubled their collective wealth to £547 billion over the last decade, most people are poorer than before the recession started.

The Office for National Statistics (ONS) says that median disposable income is £500 a year lower than in 2007-08.

The ONS figures also show that the poorest fifth of households are paying disproportionately more of their income in taxes than the richest fifth, ie 37.8% compared to 34.8%.

Despite this growing inequality, rich Tory MPs and Lords have urged George Osborne to reduce further the 45p top rate of income tax.

Red White House

People in the USA are usually portrayed in the mass media as politically anti-socialist. However, a Gallup poll in the USA says 47% of Americans would consider voting for a socialist to be President, if the candidate were nominated by their own party. 59% of Democrat voters thought that, as did 26% of Republican party voters! Among young people over 70% back this view.

Another poll showed that 52% now agree that the US government should redistribute wealth by putting higher taxes on the rich. There has not been this level of support for such policies since the 1940s.

Kshama Sawant of the Socialist Party's co-thinkers, Socialist Alternative, was elected onto Seattle city council in 2013 with nearly 100,000 votes on clear socialist policies. This poll now gives support to fielding an independent presidential candidate with a clear socialist programme.

No compensation

Low income families' tax credit lifeline is being slashed by the Tory government. Nothing to worry about though as millionaire PM David Cameron has generously agreed to ask companies to pay their employees higher wages!

More realistically, Cameron wants to raise the starting threshold on income tax as compensation.

However, the Resolution Foundation reckons the increase in the starting threshold from £6,475 in 2010-11 to £10,500 in 2015-16 helped the better off more than those on lower incomes.

'Cut the NHS'

Gary Porter, the top Tory in Local government, has described Cameron's dubious election pledge to increase spending on the NHS as "bizarre", and called on the government to end the health service's ringfenced or 'protected' status from the cuts. "I wouldn't protect the National Health Service. I just think it's a bizarre policy", he said.

Mr Porter shouldn't worry. The government is ramming through £30 billion worth of cuts dressed up as "efficiency savings". And its PFI privatisation policy is driving many NHS Trusts into bankruptcy.

Severely disabled funding hit by Tories

Disability rights campaigners, furious at the government's spending cuts, took their protest into the House of Commons on 24 June during Prime Minister's Questions. They were stopped from entering the chamber by police.

The protesters (Members of the Save the ILF and Disabled People Against Cuts) were highlighting the ending on 30 June of the Independence Living Fund (ILF).

This pays for carers to assist 18,000 severely disabled people to live at home rather than in a nursing home. Its abolition will result in disabled people being segregated from wider society.

This backward step comes at a time when the increasingly privatised care home sector is reeling from numerous exposes of abusing residents.

The previous Tory-Lib Dem government decided in 2012 to end the fund and pass responsibility to local authorities,

with funding no longer 'ring-fenced' ie subject to cuts.

The decision was successfully legally challenged by disabled recipients of ILF in May 2014. However, this was a stay of execution as the court judgment meant only that the government had to reconsider its closure decision. The government then announced it would close the ILF in June this year.

Government reneges on rail modernisation pledge

Mark Pickersgill, Stevenage Socialist Party

Last week transport secretary Patrick McLoughlin announced that Network Rail's £38.5 billion modernisation plan for Britain's railways has been postponed. This underscores the government's intentions of yet more savage cuts in public spending.

Electrification of the Midland main line north of Bedford towards Sheffield and the Leeds to Manchester line has been put on hold. Prestige projects such as HS2 and Crossrail have been given priority over other necessary improvements to the railways.

Richard Parry-Jones, chairman of Network Rail, who is paid £250,000 a year and works just two days a week, is stepping down.

He is being replaced by Peter Hendy who currently earns £650,000 a year as commissioner of transport at TfL (Transport for London). He also made £4.8 million in a management buy-out of a subsidiary of London buses.

Hendy will be working four days a week as chairman of Network Rail. His salary will be £500,000. These figures also show the huge disparity in salaries between Network Rail and TfL management and their workforces.

Both Network Rail and TfL are funded with public money. Network Rail which runs the tracks and signalling, the most expensive part of the railway system, was created from the privatised group of companies called Railtrack. The Labour government in 2002 was forced to rescue these companies due to their poor record on safety and maintenance. Proof that privatisation of the railways has failed.

The huge infrastructure projects that are required to modernise Britain's Victorian-era based railways are being undertaken with public money.

Subsidy

The private train operating companies (TOCs), such as Virgin and Stagecoach, received over £2 billion in government subsidies last year, money that could've been spent on improvements.

Between 1997 and 2012 Virgin received £2.5 billion of government money to run the west coast line but paid out £500 million in dividends to its shareholders.

The TOCs also received over £140 million in compensation last year from Network Rail for delays and cancellations.

TOCs pass on any shortfall in government subsidies to passengers. Walk-on rail fares for instance have increased on average 240% since the railways were privatised back in 1993.

The privatised railway system costs the government twice as much than it did under the nationalised British Rail, but both Tory and Labour governments have insisted that the railways stay privatised.

But private enterprise is unwilling to take on the huge capital outlay that is required to operate the railway system.

The Socialist Party fights for a nationalised, fully integrated public transport system, run under democratic workers' control and management, to benefit people, and not for profit.

Warrington TUSC councillor slams 'undemocratic' Labour administration

Councillor Kevin Bennett

The Labour administration at Warrington Council has tried to stifle democratic debate. I was stopped from speaking and laughed at during a recent full council meeting. Democracy seems to be a 'dirty word' with them.

Two of the councillors actually lied in the chamber at the same time as voting through an increase in the councillors' budget allowance. This from the Labour group, I was disgusted!

The people of Warrington need to know that the current leadership are a bunch of 'undemocratic thugs' and deserve a leadership accountable to and prepared to fight for the interests of working class people.

Solidarity with Greek workers

Reject EU austerity!

Oxi, oxi, oxi!" (no, no, no) chanted tens of thousands of Greek workers in Athens on 29 June. Solidarity rallies around the world, including in London, sent support and hope for a 'no' vote in the upcoming Greek referendum - a vote against the austerity demanded by the European Union elite.

The cuts and privatisation imposed in Greece have already devastated living standards. Unemployment officially stands at 26% (50% for, young people) and suicides are up 35% in two years.

In Britain as well, where another Tory cuts, budget is approaching, working class and young people will await the result of the referendum with baited breath. If Greece rejects the latest 'deal' of more austerity measures demanded by its creditors, it could unleash a powerful wave of anti-austerity movements across Europe. But this movement needs clear socialist policies to deal with the crisis.

Greece: No to Troika tyranny

Andreas Payiatsos and Niall Mulholland

Events in Greece have thrown the entire eurozone into crisis and threaten its very existence. Greek banks were closed on 29 June after the European Central Bank (ECB) stopped the liquidity lifeline that kept Greek banks afloat. It seems likely that the debt payment due to the IMF on 30 June will be missed, making it more likely that Greece is heading for a default.

This came 48 hours after Greek Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras, on behalf of the Greek cabinet, called a referendum for 5 July proposing a 'no' vote - against the demands of the creditors (the Troika: ECB, European Commission and IMF).

The referendum shocked the Troika, which had expected Tsipras to give even more concessions and to capitulate to its latest draconian austerity demands. It wanted to humiliate Syriza and the Greek people and to send a clear message that

anti-austerity movements will not be tolerated by the EU elite.

But the arrogant, autocratic Troika overplayed its hand. Tsipras was under enormous pressure from the Greek working class and the left wing of Syriza not to make more u-turns or cave in to the Troika. If Tsipras had agreed to the Troika's terms it could have led to a split in Syriza and the fall of the government.

Announcing the referendum, Tsipras said: "The proposal of the institutions includes: measures leading to further deregulation of the labour market, pension cuts, further reductions in public sector wages and an increase in VAT on food, dining and tourism, while eliminating tax breaks for the Greek islands."

Reasons

The Troika was incensed by Syriza's proposal to increase taxes on the richest in Greece and to raise corporation taxes. Even these relatively mild taxes were too much for the bosses' eurozone to stomach.

Some Troika spokespeople threatened that the referendum means the end, in effect, of Greece's eurozone membership. But EU governments are fearful that despite their much vaunted 'firewall' preparation for a 'Grexit', a forced departure of Greece, will have incalculable financial, economic and political repercussions.

Which country would be next to potentially follow Greece out of the euro - Portugal, Spain, Ireland, or even Italy?

On top of that, the Obama administration is concerned about the economic and geo-strategic fall out of a Grexit. The White House is calling on Brussels to compromise to keep Greece, a Nato member, in the eurozone, lest the Putin regime takes advantage of the situation.

Since Syriza was elected, Xekinima (sister organisation in Greece of the Socialist Party) has called on it to consistently carry out the anti-austerity mandate given to it by Greek voters.

This means refusing to pay the debt, imposing capital controls against the markets, and nationalising the key sectors of the economy under democratic workers' control and management. In light of the new crisis, the Syriza government should stop capital flight by seizing the property and assets of the big capitalists and companies.

Instead Tsipras engaged in months of fruitless 'talks' with the Troika, which only wants to impose more of its anti-working class, austerity programme. This policy ended in failure.

Xekinima called on Tsipras to walk away from the latest round of 'negotiations' and appeal to the Greek people by telling the truth about what is taking place in Brussels.

He should have explained that the 'institutions' (Troika) are blackmailing the government to either accept a new memorandum of massive austerity or be kicked out of the euro.

On that basis Syriza should take a clear-cut position of leaving the eurozone and link this to a socialist programme to put the economy back on the path of growth, in the interests of working people. Xekinima explained that by taking such a bold, fighting position, Syriza would be able to win huge support.

Limitations

Unfortunately Tsipras once again refused to totally reject austerity and neo-liberal policies. He called a referendum on the latest Troika austerity package 'offer' and made clear that Syriza supports a 'no' vote.

However, he made no positive proposal to the Greek people about what could replace the Troika's proposals. On the contrary, he never tires of explaining that a 'no' vote is only a bargaining tool to force the Troika to make more sensitive proposals to the Greek government.

Capital controls should have been introduced in February and the banks immediately nationalised.

While many Greeks see the vote as a way of allowing them a democratic say in events and a chance to hit back at the Troika, the referendum holds real dangers.

The right-wing and mass media will try to cajole, blackmail and terrify people away from voting 'no'. 'Better to stick with the devil you know' (another Troika cuts package), they will threaten, 'rather than the devil you don't' (default and be kicked out of the eurozone and possibly the EU, followed by further impoverishment).

This can influence some Greeks but can also repel others even more.

After the referendum

The Syriza leadership's policy is still one of negotiating with the Troika, rather than making a clear breach with the endless cuts. Tsipras hopes he can return to Brussels with a massive 'no' mandate and, with a stronger negotiating position, win more concessions from the Troika, including a debt write-down.

But even assuming the Troika is still prepared to negotiate with Syriza after the referendum, any deal will still mean more austerity in Greece. There is already a mass scare campaign underway. The mass media, controlled by the Greek ship owners, bankers and industrialists, claim that there will be no money for pensions and wages at the end of the month. If Syriza continues not to present a clear plan of action and struggle there is the threat that the campaign of fear could result in the 'no' vote being defeated.

Notwithstanding these criticisms, Xekinima has entered into a fully-fledged campaign for a 'no' vote on Sunday. It has printed 150,000 leaflets and 3,500 copies of a new edition of its paper for the week leading up to the referendum.

At the same time Xekinima is heavily involved in the attempt to build rank-and-file 'no' committees in the neighbourhoods. Interestingly, Antarsya (Anti-capitalist Left Alliance) which traditionally has a sectarian approach towards Syriza and the rest of the left, is now energetically involved in this attempt too.

Unfortunately this is not the case with the KKE (Greek Communist Party). It has taken an absolutely sectarian approach, calling on voters to spoil their ballots. Given that the KKE still commands significant support among workers, this could help pave the way to a 'yes' majority if the vote is close.

A 'yes' victory would probably see the Syriza government fall and a new right wing-dominated coalition emerge that would be willing to make a brutal austerity deal with the Troika.

But a 'no' vote on its own is not enough. A mass campaign on the streets and in the workplaces is needed to actively involve the working class in opposing the Troika. The huge Athens demonstrations called on 29 June by Syriza shows the potential for mass resistance. Committees of action in communities and workplaces can lead the struggle against the Troika.

A decisive rupture with the Troika, and a programme of socialist policies would win enormous support from the long-suffering Greek working and middle classes. An appeal to the working class of other indebted eurozone countries to show solidarity, including by holding mass protests in their own countries, would get an immediate and powerful response. The only real alternative to austerity and the bosses' EU is a socialist confederation of Europe, on a free and equal basis.

Below is an extract from a statement published by Xekinima on 29 June. See full version at www.socialistworld.net:

The government of Syriza has finally taken the right decision! It will appeal to the will of the Greek people on the question of the 'deal' with the lenders and propose its rejection through a referendum.

The initial retreats by the government led the 'institutions' to become arrogant beyond all proportions. They wanted to transform the new government into a replica of past ones and force it to apply the exact same policies.

They sought to force Syriza to its knees, to ridicule it and to ridicule and subjugate the whole of the Greek people. In this way, they seek to make an example out of Greece and threaten any other peoples in Europe who might dare to question their dictates.

The Greek people - workers, unemployed, poor, small businesses, and all those destroyed by the capitalist crisis - must fight for a 'no' vote with all their strength.

On the opposite side, the bankers, ship owners, industrialists, big constructors, mass media, EU establishment, international organisations and multinationals, will try to convince us that we will be faced with catastrophe.

Real catastrophe would be to vote 'yes' to the measures that the lenders want to impose. These measures would mean the continuation of the same policies applied for the past five years, which have destroyed the economy and caused a social catastrophe.

These same liars from the very beginning claimed that their policies would bring growth and development. On top of this, they humiliated and scorned us by calling us 'lazy' and 'corrupt'.

At the same time, we have to be clear that voting 'no' to the lenders will mean exit from the eurozone.

The transition from a strong, international currency like the euro to the drachma, the currency of a small economy, contains dangers. But these dangers can be met if the correct policies are applied. The propaganda that a return to the drachma equals 'entry into hell' is a huge lie.

Through a series of measures the Greek economy can stand back up on its feet, grow and begin to serve the interests of society instead of the profits of the plutocracy. Capital controls must be immediately imposed to stop big capital exporting its money and profits abroad. There must be a limit put on weekly bank withdrawals, sufficient to cover the needs of working class families and small businesses, but to prevent the capitalists emptying bank reserves.

On 30 June, when we're supposed to pay the IMF an additional €1.5 billion, we must say we have paid enough, this debt is not ours, we will not pay!

There is no doubt that big capital will sabotage every attempt to put the economy back on its feet. Therefore it's absolutely essential and urgent to nationalise the banking system and the commanding heights of the economy under democratic workers' control and management. In this way, we could plan production and distribution for the needs of the working class.

With such bold socialist measures, we can bring back hope. We can become a catalyst for the peoples of Europe and the whole world.

The 'institutions' want regime change in Greece. They correctly fear that resistance in Greece will inspire similar movements throughout Europe. That is why the Irish, Portuguese and Spanish governments are so especially hostile to the Greek people: they fear for their own futures.

NSSN conference, Saturday 4th July 2015, London

<http://www.socialistparty.org.uk/txt/369.pdf>

Special guest: Greek trade union activist Harris Sideris, a member of the trade union rank and file committee of the contract workers, sacked by Vodafone.

An earlier version of this article was first posted on the Socialist Party website on 30 June 2015 and may vary slightly from the version subsequently printed in The Socialist.

Terrorist attacks: working class people pay the price

Build unity against terrorism, racism, war and austerity

The cold-blooded slaughter of 39 tourists - mostly British - who were relaxing in a Tunisian beach resort, was carried out in the run-up to the tenth anniversary of the 7/7 terrorist bombings in London that killed 52 people.

The shocking atrocity in Tunisia came on the same day as the beheading of a company boss in France and 27 were killed in an attack on a Shia mosque in Kuwait.

These three terror acts were claimed by Isis, the Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham, who also - on that same Friday - were reported to have killed 140 civilians in and around Kobani in north Syria.

Following the Tunisia outrage, Tory Prime Minister David Cameron made remarks, redolent of Margaret Thatcher's 'enemy within' attacks on trade unionists in the 1980s, warning Muslim communities to act to stop terrorist recruits.

But who laid the basis for the hornets' nest of bloody sectarian conflict in parts of the Middle East, within which Isis has carved out territory?

'Regime change'

US administrations, with UK Labour and Tory governments willing partners, pursued a policy of 'regime change' in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Libya, and are intervening in other countries including Syria and Yemen.

Their military onslaughts have inflicted massive death and destruction and their sponsorship of sectarian forces - along with reactionary oil-rich states like Saudi Arabia and Qatar - has helped to fuel brutal territorial conflicts on the ground.

One of the outcomes has been the growth of Isis, which is now instigating terror in countries way beyond its base.

Typically it is not capitalist politicians who are being killed. Instead, as explained in the two following articles - on the Tunisia shootings and the 7/7 al-Qa'ida inspired bombings - it is ordinary people in the west and many more in the Middle East who are paying the price of the imperialist interventions.

Tunisia: terrorist atrocity in Sousse

For a renewed mass movement against poverty and terror

Statement by Al-Badil al-Ishtiraki (Socialist Alternative, CWI in Tunisia)

Socialist Alternative (Al-Badil al-Ishtiraki - CWI in Tunisia) strongly condemns the barbaric terrorist attack at Sousse, which at the last count has led to the death of 39 innocent people. This is the worst terrorist attack that Tunisia has ever experienced, and the second major terrorist attack targeting tourists in less than four months.

The victims, beyond the tourists massacred while on holiday and the unbearable pain caused to their relatives and

friends, will also be the many Tunisians who depend in various ways on the tourist industry for their livelihoods. Thousands of tourists have already left the country or are waiting to do so.

Isis, which has claimed responsibility for the attack, might well denounce the foreign tourists as 'infidels', but in reality countless poor Muslim families are among those who will bear the brunt of its poisonous actions. Horrified at the terror attack, hotel workers and other local people - many of them Muslim - heroically formed a human barricade to protect as many tourists as they could.

The perpetrator, Seifeddine Rezgui Yacoubi, used a Kalashnikov to kill 39 people in 17 minutes. This clearly suggests that he was trained to use his weapon.

An increasing number of Tunisians are being trained or armed through the expanding terrains of war in Syria, Iraq and neighbouring Libya. The latter has become, since the Nato-led military intervention, a hub for traffic of all sorts by numerous jihadist and armed groups.

Causes

Since the major terrorist operation in the Bardo museum in March, the conditions which underlie this kind of horror have remained unchanged.

Rezgui was himself denied the right to be accommodated in the university dormitories in Kairouan and pushed to live in a neighbourhood where many Salafists operate and indoctrinate young people.

Mass unemployment, social and political marginalisation, the lack of basic facilities in many neighbourhoods, the lack of access to a decent education and public investment in means of cultural and artistic expression, all of this has created a deep sense of alienation among hundreds of thousands of Tunisian youth.

Radical preachers and Salafist networks, aided by floods of money from rich donors in the Gulf, are taking advantage of this for their divisive enterprises.

After this new carnage in Sousse, the terrorists could almost make us forget that four years ago, under the regime of Ben Ali, it was the state apparatus itself which was 'shooting to kill' in Tunisia, killing hundreds to protect the interests of the clique of thieves in power. While a few heads have been removed, the backbone and functioning of this state has fundamentally remained the same.

This can be judged for example by the number of deaths under torture in police custody in the recent months. The ruling party Nidaa Tounes is in direct political lineage with those who exploited and oppressed us for so many years.

That is why we cannot trust this state and this government to deal with the terrorist danger. All they are interested in is to step up repression and criminalise the freedoms we have won - a 'solution' which will inevitably fail, as it does not address the root causes of the problem.

Quite the contrary, the government's neoliberal policies and its collaboration with imperialist countries that are nourishing the wars in the Middle East and selling weapons to Sunni theocracies, will only make matters worse.

Mass political voice

The best way to honour all the victims of terror: the victims of the jihadists but also the hundreds of victims of state terror who are still demanding justice, is to pursue the struggle for genuine revolutionary change and the development of a mass political voice representing working people and youth.

Without this, the Tunisian people will be caught between the fires of one handful of murdering criminals and another.

Social and trade union movements have revealed on many occasions the potential to attract thousands of young people

into mass collective struggle to demand jobs and a dignified life. Many of the youth who are today falling prey to religious extremists were in the past fighting against Ben Ali's regime, for a better future.

The latter struggle is the type of mass revolutionary movement that we need to rebuild, to give hope to the young generation and take back our youth - out of the claws of terrorist and smuggling gangs.

If the left does not provide clear answers on how to change society and a channel for radical, mass political action, and instead disappoints those who put their hopes in it, sectarians will fill the vacuum.

They will exploit the despair that exists, diverting it into destructive individual actions which mainly workers and the poor, Tunisian and foreigners alike, will pay the price for.

Way forward

Therefore, we call on all trade unions, the left and the revolutionary youth to not be misled by the propaganda of the ruling class and the media.

They are trying to create a climate of intimidation, ordering people to stand behind the government and asking for a "break" in social demands and movements. This is exactly the road for further misery and for the multiplication of the type of mayhem shown in Friday's atrocity.

Instead, we call on the Tunisian masses, trade unionists of the UGTT, left-wing parties and social organisations, to fill up the streets and attract the largest possible number of people out to say no to terror, to renew the struggle on the ground to demand jobs and a decent life for all, and to defend democratic rights against threats from any quarter.

No to terrorism, no to capitalism, no to imperialism - for a socialist alternative to war, poverty and terror!

See also:

[Ten years since the London 7/7 bombings](#)

How to fight the anti-union laws

Rob Williams, Chair, National Shop Stewards Network (NSSN)

On 12 June, the Independent Police Complaints Commission (IPCC) ruled that there would be no investigation into police actions at Orgreave during the 1984-85 Miners' strike. In the ultimate self-fulfilling prophesy, after 30 years of conspiracy, lying, cover-up and delay, the IPCC say it's now too late!

This is a stark reminder of the cruel class outlook of British capitalism that governed their approach during the strike when, in today's terms, between £6 - £17 billion was spent to defeat the most militant section of the trade union movement and devastate these working-class communities in what are now high-unemployment blackspots.

But they had another motive. To open the door to a counter-revolution by successive neo-liberal governments and employers that has sought to sweep away all the gains made by the working-class in the post-war period.

On one hand public services have been privatised and outsourced, while on the other collective bargaining agreements - where unions are able to negotiate on behalf of their members - are at an all-time low. This is the backdrop to the culture of zero-hour contracts, agencies and umbrella companies.

The victory of the Tories in the general election has, they believe, given them a mandate to roll out their full anti-working-class programme. On 8 July, Osborne intends to announce a further £13 billion welfare cuts on the back of the £80 billion public sector austerity offensive already carried out in the last five years of Con-Dem rule.

It is no accident that the Queen's Speech on 27 May set out new anti-union laws. Despite the continuous propaganda from the Tory press, the ruling class fully understands the potential power of the unions - with 6.5 million members.

During the Con-Dem years, Cameron increasingly looked to attack democratic union rights, particularly in terms of facilities for union reps and shop stewards. Scandalously, this has been copied by Labour controlled councils, especially where those representatives, some of whom are Socialist Party members, are seen as militant. Cameron also used his first term to bring in £1,200 fees for employment tribunals which has led directly to a 70% fall in employees' claims.

PCS

The Tories have particularly looked to attack civil service union PCS, in which Socialist Party members have key leadership positions. PCS has been at the forefront in building co-ordinated strike action against the Con-Dem cuts, which peaked in the two million-strong pensions strike of November 2011.

This year the government cancelled the past agreement to deduct union subs from members' wages - 'check-off' - in the two departments where PCS has its biggest membership. This was a deliberate attempt to bankrupt the union, but in an incredible campaign, PCS has re-recruited 80% of its members in Department for Work and Pensions and HMRC (revenue and customs) so far.

The Tory Trade Union Bill includes voting thresholds for future industrial action ballots where at least 50% of members have to vote for the result to be valid. In undefined 'essential' services it will be worse - 40% of the total membership, whether they vote or not, have to vote for action for it to be legal. Those who don't vote are effectively counted as against. What incredible hypocrisy - this is from a government that only 24% of the electorate voted for!

The Tories are making plans for an expected strike wave, including using the emergency Cobra committee. The Sunday Times reports that Matthew Hancock, Cabinet Office minister, has a "team of 73 officials working on contingency plans with employers to ensure there were staff prepared to cross picket lines and keep services operating." In other words - along with allowing agency workers to cover strikers' work - organised scabbing.

This isn't the first time that British capitalism, through its political representatives, has tried to attack the unions. For example, the Tory government of Ted Heath brought in the Industrial Relations Bill after its election in 1970.

The first of Thatcher's draconian anti-union laws was introduced in 1980. She and the subsequent Tory prime minister, John Major, introduced six Acts of Parliament, which are the foundation for what Tony Blair boasted are the most restrictive labour laws in Western Europe. Disgracefully, he and Gordon Brown, the following Labour prime minister, left them on the statue book.

Both Tory attacks were brought in to restrict the unions at a key time for British capitalism. The post-war boom was petering out by the early 1970s but the attempts by industry to restore its profitability by squeezing the living standards of workers foundered on the rocks of a powerful trade union movement, with a strong shop stewards' movement at its base.

1970s

In reality, many of Heath's laws were outlined in the failed 'In Place of Strife' legislation of the previous Labour government. That had been defeated by the unions merely flexing their muscles at a time when they had a much greater influence, in a much different Labour Party to now.

The scene was set for one of the most volatile periods in modern history in terms of industrial struggle. One of the high points was when, in 1972, five London dockers were jailed for leading unofficial strike action. This resulted in

widespread mass walkouts well beyond the docks, flouting Heath's legislation. Under pressure, the TUC threatened a general strike, but only when they knew the government were going to release the 'Pentonville Five'.

In 1974, the miners' union the NUM, held their second strike in three years and forced Heath to call a snap general election asking: "Who rules - Heath or the miners?" As one miner remembered in the recent film 'Still the Enemy Within': "It wasn't ****ing him!"

The Tories and their class, recognising the particular role of the miners in the defeat of Heath's government, later looked to avenge it. The 'Ridley Plan' named after one of Thatcher's lieutenants, went into great detail on how the miners could be taken on and defeated. A big part of this would be to place legal restrictions on the ability of unions to take solidarity action, so-called 'secondary picketing'.

The miners' strike of 1984/85 was a heroic struggle. It laid bare all the class realities of British society, so well hidden in 'normal' times. But its defeat wasn't inevitable. Neither was the ability of Thatcher to bring in her anti-union laws. One of the first tests was the dispute by printers at the Stockport Messenger newspaper in 1983, when their union had its funds sequestered by the courts for its members taking solidarity action.

The unwillingness of the TUC and the rest of the unions to take mass action, such as a 24-hour general strike, emboldened the Tories who turned their attention to the NUM, confident that they would be left largely isolated. The same tactics were used against the printers sacked by Murdoch at Wapping in 1986.

The confrontations of the early 1970s and the mid-1980s are rich in lessons for trade unionists today as we face up to the Tories' new anti-union laws. The lesson from both periods is that these attacks must be met with massive resistance by the unions on the scale of a 24-hour general strike. They cannot be merely negotiated away by slick union officials.

The halting of the pensions dispute after the November strike showed that many of the union leaders have not understood that the era of austerity is a totally different period from the recent past. Indeed two of the union leaders who sold out the strike have now been knighted!

There was the potential to extend that action and escalate it to push Cameron back and even inflict a terminal defeat on the Tory-led Coalition. But instead it was the Con-Dems who grew in confidence to roll out the most brutal austerity offensive for 90 years. And now the Tories, ruling alone, want to go much further.

Now

Over the last two years, there have been some notable disputes where the power of the working-class has been displayed, often resulting in major concessions being won or in outright victories.

In London, first tube workers and then bus drivers have brought the capital to a shuddering halt. Then earlier this year, Network Rail workers forced the government to break its 1% pay ceiling at the prospect of a national strike.

Now 17,000 steelworkers have forced Tata to the negotiating table before a first national steel strike for 35 years. They are an uncomfortable reminder to the ruling class of the decisive power, often latent, that the working-class possesses. But they are also proof of the need for them to act to muffle that power. These workers would certainly come under the category of 'essential services'!

The National Shop Stewards Network (NSSN) conference on 4 July is a key forum for rank and file union activists to discuss how Cameron's laws and cuts can be resisted. The NSSN steering committee will move a statement that calls on the TUC and the unions to organise a national midweek demonstration on the day that the Tories bring the Trade Union Bill to Parliament, possibly this autumn.

Such a protest would need to be linked to the tranche of cuts set out on Osborne's 8 July budget. It would attract all those facing these vicious cuts. Unions could co-ordinate existing disputes to allow a number of strikes to take place together. As we go to press, four unions on the London Underground are planning action on 8 July for example.

An injury to all

If any union is attacked for defying the anti-union laws, or is fined for refusing to call off a strike if it hadn't met the new voting thresholds, the response must be 'an injury to one is an injury to all'. The main demand should be for a 24-hour general strike.

But the unions would need to prepare the ground for such mass joint action. Rallies and public meetings on the theme of 'stop the Tory union-busters! Fight the cuts together!' should be organised by the unions in every town and city, spelling out why workers need to strike together and why union rights are essential to defeat yet more cuts.

Inevitably, such a campaign would raise the need for real political representation for workers, their families and communities, especially with Labour councils preparing to pass on yet more Tory cuts. That is why the Socialist Party takes part in the Trades Unionist and Socialist Coalition, and campaigns for a new mass working class party.

The next few months and years will be a huge test for the unions. We must develop a strategy to defeat the attacks on the working class and its movement. The NSSN can play a key role in that.

National Shop Stewards Network

9TH ANNUAL CONFERENCE: Stop the Tory union busters!

Saturday 4 July 11am to 4.30pm

Conway Hall, Holborn, London WC1R 4RL

www.shopstewards.net

Speakers include

- Special guest: Greek trade union activist Harris Sideris, a member of the trade union rank and file committee of the contract workers, sacked by Vodafone.
 - PCS general secretary Mark Serwotka
 - BFAWU general secretary Ronnie Draper
 - FBU general secretary Matt Wrack
 - RMT president Peter Pinkney
 - POA general secretary Steve Gillan
 - Youth Fight for Jobs organiser Helen Pattison
 - Anti-blacklisting campaigner Dave Smith
 - Tamil Solidarity trade union coordinator Isai Priya
 - NSSN chair Rob Williams
-

Ten years since the London 7/7 bombings

Government shows profit comes before lives

Paula Mitchell

7/7, in 2005, was a terrible nightmare. In rush hour traffic in London, suicide bombers attacked three underground tube

trains and a bus. 52 people were killed and over 700 injured - ordinary working class people of all ages and ethnic groups.

The Socialist Party utterly condemned the bombings, as we did 9/11 and other terrorist attacks such as the killing of Lee Rigby in Woolwich in 2013 and the horrific attacks in Tunisia, Kuwait and Lyon in recent days.

On 14 July 2005, the Socialist said: "Those who carried this out deserve unequivocal and unqualified condemnation. But so do those who have created the conditions for the growth of terrorism."

This attack took place just two years after two million people marched on the streets of London to try to prevent the invasion of Iraq by the US and Britain.

War in Iraq

The majority of the population opposed US President George Bush and UK Labour Prime Minister Tony Blair's war. Between then and the summer of 2005, 100,000 Iraqi civilians were killed (added to by a further 50,000 since).

The invasion and occupation of Iraq was allegedly a "war on terror" after the dreadful Al-Qa'ida attacks on the Twin Towers in New York, 9/11. In reality Al-Qa'ida was a consequence of the US intervention in Afghanistan, where right-wing Islamists had been trained and armed by the CIA.

As we explained at the time, its war against the west was a product of the subjugation of the Middle East and other regions by western powers for decades, and the appalling treatment of Palestinians by Israel's rulers, backed by the US. Al-Qa'ida did not exist in Iraq before the invasion.

But this bomb attack did not hit the warmongers, but working class people, many who likely opposed the war in Iraq. And it was ordinary working class people who strove to help the victims.

Firefighters, tube workers, bus drivers and hospital workers worked miracles. Nearby people did what they could to assist. What a contrast with some of the grasping big hotel owners who, while the tube and bus network was shut down and millions of people were stranded, took the opportunity to triple their prices.

Tony Blair denied the link with the Iraq war then and still tries to deny now that the rise of Isis and the nightmare in Iraq and Syria has anything to do with it.

Jack Straw, then Labour home secretary, incredibly tried to suggest that the bombings came "out of the blue". However, the government's own Joint Intelligence Committee had stated that the terrorist threat "would be heightened by military action against Iraq".

In reality, ordinary working class people paid the price for Blair's war, above all in Iraq. That war is today swept under the carpet by most of the Labour leadership contenders, with the exception of Jeremy Corbyn, but it was one of main reasons for Labour losing five million votes between 1997 and 2010 - along with Labour's wholesale adoption of cuts and privatisation.

Anti-democratic

The Tories will use the memory of 7/7 - along with Tunisia - to justify their proposed anti-democratic legislation against 'extremism'.

No amount of anti-terror legislation has made - or will make - the threat of attack go away. New anti-terrorism laws were introduced in 2000 which did not stop 7/7.

The so-called 'war on terror' brought terrorism to Iraq. Isis is western imperialism's Frankenstein's monster, a vicious reactionary force that has surpassed Al-Qa'ida in wreaking horrific brutality.

Imperialist interventions have created a daily nightmare, such as in Libya, from where desperate people flee only to drown in the Mediterranean while the same western governments that created the hell-hole turn their backs.

Posing as our defenders they want to force through a 'snoopers charter' and, effectively, surveillance of Muslims from nurseries to schools and colleges. Teachers will be expected to monitor for signs of radicalisation. This is at the same time as the proposed scrapping of the Human Rights Act.

With rank hypocrisy, the Tories say they want to crack down on those who cause "harassment, alarm or distress" (what about the distress caused by scrapping the Independent Living Fund, for example?).

Anti-terror legislation has been used to 'kettle' and stop and search peaceful protesters. Increased surveillance and limits on activities they deem a "threat to the function of democracy", could be used against any form of protest, including a mass movement against austerity.

The truth is that capitalist politicians and the big business interests they represent are not bothered about our best interests at all. The heroes of 7/7 are now facing not only cuts and privatisation, but are also having their trade union rights curtailed.

On the Underground, Tory Mayor Boris Johnson is shutting down ticket offices and culling station staff, which has huge safety implications. In 2005 the RMT protested about the lack of guards on trains - now tube bosses even propose driverless trains!

Ten fire stations have been shut in London and many more fire engines removed. A&Es all over the city are under threat. London bus drivers have had to strike to fight for decent pay and now tube workers are preparing for action on pay and night working. Profit comes before lives.

Divisive politics

In 2005 the Sun's inflammatory editorial on 8 July said: "Britain is crawling with suspected terrorists and those who give them succour". Ten years after 7/7, the "anti-Muslim drumbeat", in the words of Guardian journalist Seamus Milne, is pounding even louder. David Cameron recently accused "too many" Muslims of "quietly condoning" an ideology that drives Isis, "normalising hatred of British values".

This increases division and racism, and encourages Ukip and Nigel Farage - who spoke after the Charlie Hebdo attack in Paris last year of "a fifth column within our countries".

Racist attacks increased 600% after 7/7, with 269 hate crimes in London in just three weeks. The day after the attacks, the Muslim Council of Britain reported that 30,000 threatening emails had been received by Muslim organisations.

This rhetoric runs the risk of further alienating black, Asian and Arab youth, who already face increased prejudice and disproportionate levels of poverty and unemployment.

The tiny number of young people who do look to Isis as an apparent stand against western imperialism (an estimated 100 British people are fighting with Isis in Syria) could be fuelled.

The vast majority of Muslims abhor terrorism, and in fact the majority of victims globally are Muslim - in Iraq, Pakistan, Nigeria and elsewhere.

In 2005 the Socialist Party campaigned for the unity of all working class people in London. We called for demonstrations to oppose war, terrorism, racism and oppressive legislation.

An alternative

The only way to rid our world of the threat of terror attacks is to eradicate the conditions that breed them: poverty, war,

oppression and exploitation.

As austerity rains down in Britain, as more people are driven into poverty while those at the top enrich themselves, and as the capitalist parties try to divide us against each other, the need for a mass movement against the government and its austerity and racism is greater than ever.

On 20 June the massive End Austerity Now demonstration took place just six weeks after the Tories' election victory. This was a foretaste of the movement that can be built, not only to end austerity, but also to fight for a socialist alternative to poverty, war and terror the world over.

RMT: national conference and tube dispute

Union plans transport shutdowns

James Ivens

Transport union RMT prepared for London shutdowns and First Great Western railway strikes at its national conference, the 'annual general meeting' (AGM), on 21 to 26 June. After workplace victories and a reaffirmed political strategy, the union faces major clashes on the tube and new anti-union laws.

Underground strikes loom

London Underground bosses are trying to rush through 24-hour service on Fridays and Saturdays, starting September, without negotiating. Unions want to ensure work-life balance and extra pay for working unsocial hours.

The RMT is also fighting for an improved pay deal, after bosses offered an 'increase' below RPI inflation. And station staff are challenging restructuring that could threaten passenger safety, and includes pay cuts for new employees.

After the conference, RMT ballot results on 30 June had 91% for strike action over night tubes and the pay deal. In addition, 94% backed walkouts over restructuring. Second transport union TSSA published 77% for strikes the same day. This follows 98% in favour from drivers' union Aslef.

These resounding strike mandates come ahead of ballot results for the remaining tube union, Unite. If the four come out together, a likely stoppage on 8 to 9 July could be the most thoroughgoing in years.

Anti-union laws

Proposed new strike restrictions would hit the RMT particularly hard. Transport could be declared an "essential service", making action illegal if less than 40% of members vote in favour. This number includes members who do not return postal ballots. In effect, they would be counted as voting against action, instead of just not voting. This would be on top of a 50% minimum turnout rule.

Steve Hedley, the union's assistant general secretary, prepared members to defy legal constraints. He said that if the union could not struggle within the law, it may have to do so outside it. The AGM also discussed building towards a general strike.

Delegates called for closer cooperation between the RMT and other transport unions to head off attacks. General secretary Mick Cash agreed. He said the National Shop Stewards Network, which connects ordinary trade unionists in all sectors, was important for this.

Industrial victories

Members in Network Rail, which runs most of Britain's railway infrastructure, have already won an enhanced pay offer. A strong mandate for strikes forced bosses to give more. Members voted to accept the improvement by 82%.

Train conductors on TransPennine Express were also celebrating. Their latest strikes - backing a member sacked for protecting a child's life - have been called off. The matter has apparently been resolved to the heroic guard's satisfaction. Bosses aim to abolish conductors on the line.

TUSC

The union remains a central player in the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC), which includes the Socialist Party. Conference endorsed the political report made by the union's leading body, the council of executives. This allows the union to continue backing any anti-austerity candidates - including from TUSC. The RMT is represented on the TUSC national steering committee.

The AGM also resolved unanimously to support Jeremy Corbyn's campaign for Labour leadership.

35 attended a TUSC fringe meeting - over a third of conference numbers. Over 20 copies of the Socialist were sold during the week.

Unite rules conference

Britain's biggest union to discuss leaving Labour

Kevin Parslow, Secretary, Unite Waltham Forest LE/1228 (personal capacity)

Britain's largest trade union, Unite, will discuss making major changes to political strategy on 6 to 10 July. Key debates include permitting illegal industrial action, giving members in Scotland greater autonomy - and withdrawing support for Labour.

The 1.4 million-member general union holds a 'rules conference' every four years. Delegates decide on changes to the rule book which sets the framework for all other union policies.

Current and planned anti-union laws are an obstacle - at least in perception - to Unite's response to austerity attacks. The union's leading body, the executive council, will propose deleting the words "so far as may be lawful" from the rules.

The Socialist Party backs the proposal. New restrictions on balloting for strikes may cause an increase in unofficial action. The union should not feel constrained in supporting this.

Unite is also facing political challenges. Scotland's regional committee is proposing it become a "Scottish executive council", giving it independence on industrial and political decisions.

Over half of Unite members in Scotland who voted in the general election opted for the Scottish National Party (SNP). Scotland's disillusionment with Labour has very good cause - but should not be channelled into supporting nationalist, pro-austerity parties like the SNP.

In Ireland, Unite has disaffiliated from Labour and backs radical and socialist candidates. If this amendment is passed, so should a future Scottish executive.

Labour affiliation

Undoubtedly, the amendments causing most interest are those opposing Unite's affiliation to Labour.

Last year's special Labour conference further curtailed unions' diminishing influence within the party. Unite consequently reduced its £3 million affiliation fees by half. But it then spent £3.5 million from December to May in extra donations to Labour's election funds!

Many members feel this was throwing good money after bad. Labour was not proposing to repeal anti-union laws, or seriously challenge austerity. Now we see the further rightward drift of most of the candidates for leader and deputy leader.

Even with the deadline for amendments falling before the general election, 15 branches and committees proposed deleting affiliation to Labour.

Some suggested the union back candidates in line with Unite policy, which Socialist Party delegates will support. Another four want membership of political committees to be open to all, not just Labour Party members. One proposes splitting the political fund into 'affiliated' and 'general' funds - allowing individuals to opt out of paying towards Labour, like public sector union Unison.

However, the executive council recently passed a statement to put to the rules conference. If carried, it will prevent a vote - although not discussion - on these amendments.

The statement asks delegates to put off deciding on disaffiliating from Labour until the national and Scottish leaders, and London mayoral candidate, have been selected. Only two executive members, including the Socialist Party's Suzanne Muna, voted against it.

Although the executive assures members the rules conference can be recalled, delegates should reject this statement.

We understand the desire for one more 'last chance' for Labour affiliation. But the union's political strategy is blocked by the party's machine and has no future.

Unite could be making its recommendation for the Labour leadership soon. Many hope the executive will support Jeremy Corbyn's left challenge. But even this is not guaranteed.

The sooner Unite breaks with Labour, and starts work towards a new mass party for working class people, the better.

Escalate strikes to fight council's 90% sell-off

Paul Callanan, London Socialist Party

On the back of their shock general election win, the Tories think they are untouchable. In one borough in south-east London, they plan to outsource more than 90% of staff.

Bromley council is a template for Conservative austerity plans. But the heroic stand of Bromley council employees is a foretaste of the colossal struggles to come.

Since January, members of general union Unite have taken over 25 days of strike action. The union has called more strikes on 7 and 8 July to coincide with Osborne's budget statement.

Privatisation

Bromley's Tory administration wants to privatise almost all services, reducing in-house staff from 4,000 to 300. It has slashed union facility time to prepare for this (see issue 859).

It claims to need £50 million worth of "savings" - namely cuts - this year. But it has £130 million reserves. And it has somehow found the money to buy a Holiday Inn on the Isle of Wight!

If Tory plans are successful, Bromley will become a 'commissioning council' whose only role is to contract-out services to private vultures. Immediate plans are to privatise all libraries and the Astley Centre, which provides day care for adults with learning disabilities. If sold, Unite says the centre will close by the end of 2016.

Already strikes have been complemented by fantastic support from the public. When library workers held stalls across the borough, service users queued up to sign the union petition. A demonstration on 13 June included over 300 trade unionists and local people. This shows what a well-organised, fighting union branch can do to mobilise strong feeling in the community to defend services.

Attacks on the union

Hence the council's attacks on unions organising its workers. The secretaries of the two main council union branches, Unite and Unison, are Kathy Smith and Glenn Kelly. They had been working full-time for members. Their union facility time has now been withdrawn, and they have been sent back to their original council roles.

Kathy and Glenn are now forced to work until all hours of the night just to keep their branches running. The council claims this is merely a money-saving measure.

Yet Unite's offer to pay for Kathy's full-time release was flatly turned down. This demonstrates once and for all that the attack is political, in line with national Tory plans to shackle trade unions.

The assault on public services is also national. Our unions must do everything in their power to build a national fightback. Unfortunately, union leaders are yet to take the necessary steps.

The bureaucracy of Unison, the main union in local government, has been more intent on fighting socialists within the union than attacks on jobs and services. As part of a witch-hunt against Socialist Party members, Bromley Unison branch was effectively closed down.

It is a testament to their determination to fight that many workers joined Unite. When a suspension over trumped-up charges was finally lifted, Glenn was re-elected Unison branch secretary.

Unison is now set join Unite in the next round of strikes. The Socialist Party welcomes this.

General strike

On picket lines in Bromley and elsewhere, the Socialist Party demand for a 24-hour general strike has been very well received. This mood is reinforced by a number of recent union victories around the country. Still, union leaders doubt the resolve of working class people to struggle and win.

The Tories might think they can get away with anything. But in fact this government is weak. The struggle must be escalated - in Bromley, and nationally - if we are to stop the wholesale destruction of public sector jobs and services.

Scotland ferry 'lifeline' sell-off strike

Philip Stott, Socialist Party Scotland

West Scotland ferry workers struck on 25 June against privatisation and cuts to jobs, pay and pensions on their "lifeline" routes. Members of transport union RMT began action short of strike on 24 June to fight Scottish National Party (SNP) government attacks.

Publicly owned CalMac is competing with notorious privatising firm Serco for Scotland's Hebrides and west coast islands ferry contract. The SNP-led Scottish government has opened it up to tender ahead of renewal in 2016. It claims European law requires this.

The RMT is demanding no compulsory redundancies, and the same pension rights and terms and conditions as staff have now, regardless of who wins the new contract.

Complaints

Serco was recently given the Orkney and Shetland ferry contract. This led to complaints by passengers and unions as the firm raised fares, cut services and reduced crew levels to squeeze profits from passengers. The Scottish government also recently awarded Serco ScotRail sleeper services - plus a £60 million bonus to buy new trains.

Gordon Martin, RMT Scotland organiser, explained to us what is at stake: "We are not striking to get better pay or conditions, we are taking action in defence of what we currently enjoy.

"The whole tendering process is outrageous. We believe this SNP government should employ the position adopted in opposition - and oppose the tendering process. They should make a coherent legal argument to Brussels regarding the lifeline nature of many of the routes.

"Not for the first time we hear the Scottish government profess fairness for workers and portray themselves as left wing. In reality they have consistently given public contracts to their privateer of choice, Serco.

"This initial stage of industrial action will be followed by more if we do not receive the reasonable demands we have made."

- This is an edited version of the full report at www.socialistpartyscotland.org.uk

Workplace news in brief

Stop press

Striking hospital porters in Dundee have won a major victory.

Details and analysis to follow - see www.socialistpartyscotland.org.uk/.

Digger cameras

Workers at building equipment firm JCB returned to work on 26 May to find CCTV cameras on the shop floor. Management installed them without consulting staff or their union, GMB - which is against the law.

Angry workers demanded bosses take the cameras down. The union made clear at several meetings that it would ballot for action if not.

Even the threat of a ballot was enough to force management's hand. The cameras were removed on 25 June.

A JCB worker

Bus pay win

Bus drivers in south-west London have forced bosses to honour part of a pay agreement. Passenger firm Abellio tried to go back on the second half of a two-year deal. Members of general union Unite voted overwhelmingly for industrial action, and management made concessions.

A bus driver in Unite

Lawyers 'strike'

As we go to press, lawyers across the country are considering wildcat 'strikes' against cuts to legal aid. Lawyers in Liverpool are already refusing new cases. If other cities follow, courts could grind to a halt.

Gallery debate

MPs debated the National Gallery's privatisation plans on 25 June, in the middle of workers' latest ten-day strike. Public sector union PCS has called a string of actions against partial sell-off.

The central London institution's trustees want to hand all visitor services to a private firm. Victimised union rep Candy Udwin recently won interim relief - forcing bosses to pay her.

Languages cut

Teachers in Sussex struck on 25 June against cuts to jobs, hours and courses. The National Union of Teachers branch says Sussex Downs College will lose all modern language provision. The union plans further action on 2 and 7 July.

Pride: we need politics, not just a parade

Helen Pattison, East London Socialist Party

How different this year's Pride, on 27 June was to 30 years ago. Then, led by trade unions and Lesbians and Gays Support the Miners (LGSM), Pride was an explicitly political demonstration against the attacks that Thatcher was imposing on the working class and the gay community.

Over the last decade London Pride has shunned the political roots of the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Trans (LGBT) movement. Even though every year London Pride takes place on the anniversary of the Stonewall riots - when police in New York attacked an LGBT bar, dragging people into the street and smashing up the venue. The events sparked anger and a movement to fight back against discrimination.

Personal not political

Today's Pride, sponsored by Barclays, Boris Johnson, Asda etc. focuses on the commercial and personal, not the political. But big business backers weren't the only controversy at this year's Pride; LGSM had been offered the chance to lead the parade but declined as the organisers wouldn't allow the trade unions to march with them at the front. Next, the organisers gave permission to Ukup to march, but quickly withdrew the offer after a backlash.

Continued homophobia

And while legally, anti-discrimination laws are in place and same-sex marriage has been won, they don't abolish

homophobia. A political battle is still needed to fight against prejudice and austerity. One in four young homeless people are LGBT. This isn't a coincidence but proof that the continued homophobia in society, coupled with attacks on council housing, housing benefit and young people's access to welfare have hit young LGBT people hard.

To celebrate the Supreme Court ruling in America which overturned anti-gay marriage legislation, companies made their logos resemble rainbows. But what has big business ever done to fight homophobia? In workplaces it is trade unions that have fought against discrimination. In Ireland, for example, it was campaigners and socialists who organised for equal marriage. Angry at the big business backing on Saturday we chanted: "When pride is commercialised, we fight back and organise."

Our petition to kick big business out of Pride was very popular. Socialist and LGBT campaigners will continue to organise for a movement to fight for real equality, safe housing and against austerity.

The Socialist Party calls for:

- A mass movement against the cuts led by trade unions and involving community campaigns, minority groups and young people
- Rebuilding a militant LGBT movement to fight for equality and genuine liberation for all
- Pride not profit: keep big business out of Pride events
- A new mass workers' party to offer real political representation for ordinary people, including minorities

£9,000 tuition fees legacy - debt and slave labour

Students graduating from university this year will be the first generation that faced £9,000 a year tuition fees over their three years. The Socialist Party campaigns for all fees to be scrapped. Beth Sutcliffe, Lewisham Socialist Party, explains their impact.

Completing my A-levels and studying hard enough to get the grades for university were not my only concerns as I came to the end of school. Pressure was added by the announcement that tuition fees would triple to £9,000 a year, an amount quite incomprehensible to an 18 year old who hasn't left home.

Beginning my degree, one of the most obvious effects of the increase in tuition fees was to make students feel more like 'consumers' of education.

'Investment'

We have been constantly assured that our degree is an 'investment in our future'. This is a frequent reminder that our education amounts to little more than investment and return, not something to be passionate about.

In February 2013, Times Higher Education reported that UK universities increased spending on marketing by 22% as the introduction of higher fees took effect. So our £9,000 a year 'investment' seems to have been spent on advertising rather than teaching or facilities!

In reality there is no assurance that £50,000 of debt and three years of university will result in a reasonably paid job.

In fact it is now almost expected of us that we must first find an internship to be able to begin a career after we finish university. This amounts to working for free in the hope of an increased chance at getting a paid job.

Appetite for change

I was recently involved in an occupation at my university. We were calling for free education and protesting the

university's attempts to further reduce facilities for the most vulnerable students. There is an appetite for change amongst the student population, but to be truly effective this must link up with the larger battle against capitalism to put an end to the continuing marketisation of education.

Block Osborne's Billionaire Budget

National day of action - 8 July

Youth Fight Austerity demands:

- End austerity - no to five more years of cuts to jobs, education and public services
- Stop welfare cuts - no compulsory workfare for 18-21 year olds, defend housing benefit
- Fight poverty pay - raise the minimum wage to £10 now, scrap zero-hour contracts
- Defend education - no to cuts and tuition fees
- Democratic rights - stop attacks on the right to strike, protest and other civil liberties. For votes at 16

GET INVOLVED: see www.youthfightforjobs.com

twitter: @youthfight4jobs

facebook: Youth Fight for Jobs

Youth Fight Austerity budget day protests around the country

Birmingham

Victoria Square at 6pm

Bradford

Centenary Square at 5:30pm

Bristol

The Fountains,

City Centre at 5:30pm

Coventry

Lady Godiva Statue, Broadgate Square at 5:30pm

Grimsby

St James' Square at 5pm

Glasgow

McDonalds, Corner of Union and Argyle Street at 5pm

Huddersfield

Market Cross at 12:30pm

Leeds

City Square at 5pm

Liverpool

McDonalds, Church Street at 12 noon

London

Downing Street at 5pm

Manchester

Queen Victoria Statue, Piccadilly Gardens at 12 noon

Nottingham

Brian Clough Statue,

Market Square at 5pm

Nuneaton

The George Eliot Statue, Newdigate Street at 12:30pm

Sheffield

Outside Town Hall at 4:30pm

Southampton

Bargate at 5:30pm

Hanley (Stoke)

The Clock Tower outside Potteries Shopping Centre at 4pm

Wolverhampton

The Man on the Horse Statue, Queen Square at 12:30pm

York

Exhibition Square at 5pm

Victory against disabled transport cuts in Derby

Charlie Taylor, Derby Socialist Party

Derby City Labour council has scrapped plans to change the school transport arrangements for children with special needs.

The existing system ensures that vulnerable children are taken to schools using taxis arranged by the council door-to-door. The council planned to cut this service and instead give parents an allowance to get children to school.

Angry parents protested outside the council offices. In some cases it would have meant parents who don't drive having to take eight buses a day in order to get their children to school.

Some said they would have to give up work if the changes were made. The words of one of the leading organisers of the campaign expressed the feelings of millions of people around the country faced with similar cuts to services when she said "the plan would turn people's lives upside down".

She went on to say: "The people who have drawn up these plans have no concept of what life is like for the parents of special needs children". The original proposals were aimed at making a saving of £220,000 from a budget of £3.5 million for school travel in Derby.

Consequences

These are the real consequences of cuts of £22 million announced earlier this year by the council. They were also forced to abandon the proposed closure of Moorways swimming pool planned for April this year.

The Labour leader of Derby council, Rangit Banwait, said he had been emotionally affected by the pleas of parents opposed to the changes.

If that is the case then the Labour-led council that saw an increase in its majority at the recent elections should use its reserves of £23 million to prevent any further cuts and build a campaign to get the money needed to maintain all services.

Derby TUSC campaigned against the closure of the swimming pool alongside workers and users. This forced the council to find the funds to keep the pool open. These campaigns show that cuts can be defeated.

It's clear that Labour will not fight the cuts as other services have been slashed. Only TUSC candidates stand on a programme of opposing all cuts and are prepared to do so, if elected.

Victory for anti-fracking movement

Dave Beale, Lancashire Socialist Party

Anti-fracking campaigners were celebrating after Lancashire County Council on 29 June voted down Cuadrilla's planning application to extract shale gas - 'fracking' - at Little Plumpton, between Preston and Blackpool.

Following its earlier rejection of Cuadrilla's other planning application for fracking in this area, this decision represents

a great victory for the anti-fracking movement. The Financial Times accurately called it "a huge setback" for the fracking lobby, which aims to profit from an environmentally damaging process.

Cuadrilla can be expected to appeal but undoubtedly the momentum is currently with the anti-fracking campaign.

The council should now adopt a policy position of opposing all fracking, and anti-fracking campaigners everywhere should push their local authorities to do the same.

Socialist Party and Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition members participated in the mass lobbies of Lancashire county council. We argued for nationalisation of the energy industry to end the perpetual corporate pressure to frack, and to free up the resources necessary to bring down people's fuel bills and move to a sustainable plan of energy generation.

"There's a euphoric atmosphere in Preston as Lancashire County Council have rejected both Cuadrilla's applications to frack. Working class people are becoming aware of the power of mass action," said Simon Roberts, TUSC town councillor in Fleetwood.

Simon is urging Fleetwood council to adopt an anti-fracking position, as does TUSC councillor Kevin Bennett in Warrington.

Shirebrook: united campaign against the danger of division

Jon Dale, Mansfield Socialist Party

A stabbing of a man walking his dog in Shirebrook, Derbyshire, the second in a month, has increased tensions in the ex-mining town. Since its pit closed over 20 years ago, Shirebrook has struggled. The main employer now is Sports Direct, whose headquarters and huge warehouse moved in with taxpayers' subsidies.

Sports Direct main shareholder and chief executive, billionaire Mike Ashley, has 90% of his workers on zero-hour contracts, mostly on minimum wage. Agencies deliberately recruited in Eastern Europe to get what they perceive as a more easily exploitable workforce.

Private landlords house many in overcrowded accommodation. The lack of available space to socialise and relax is one factor contributing to the drinking of alcohol in children's playgrounds and in the Market Place, which many find intimidating.

300 turned up at a protest rally called by a group of residents five days later. Councillors (all Labour locally) were criticised for staying away and blamed for many of the town's problems. The stabbing is believed to have been carried out by four eastern European migrant workers. In the past there have also been attacks on eastern Europeans.

Although some divisive comments were made at the rally, on the other hand the Trades Council Secretary was applauded for attacking Mike Ashley and exploitation, as well as Labour councillors' failures to oppose this or Tory cuts.

Sports Direct blockaded

A vote was taken to march to Sports Direct. The factory gate was blockaded for about 20 minutes. Vehicles could not enter or leave. It was like a miners' strike mass picket - but with only a couple of police present!

Mansfield Socialist Party branch quickly discussed the developing situation and saw the apparent vacuum of political

leadership could be filled by Ukip or other right-wing forces, but that this was not a foregone conclusion. We felt it was vital to propose a united campaign for demands that all workers could unite around. We invited Youth Fight for Jobs to hold a public meeting and printed 2,000 leaflets in English and Polish.

We believe the trade unions should play a leading role in this and asked Unite and GMB to send speakers (although neither was able to do so).

Leaflet

The leaflet called for the council to employ park attendants. Rent caps should be brought in and council houses built. Zero-hour contracts should be scrapped and a £10 an hour minimum wage introduced. A big increase in tax on the profits of Sports Direct and other large companies, and Mike Ashley's wealth (alongside other billionaires), could fund more council housing, schools and local services.

20 attended the meeting and agreed to put these proposals to the residents' meeting called for 3 July, which the organisers have said is open to all nationalities.

Why I joined

'I have now found the party where I belong'

Jordan Howard, Barking and Dagenham Socialist Party

Growing up in Barking I have experienced first-hand parties from the left and right. But I have now found the party where I belong - the Socialist Party.

Previously I would have described myself as right wing, with the emergence of the BNP in Barking and Dagenham I believed that they were the answer to the problems Britain faced.

I believed the propaganda mainly because there seemed no other party that was challenging the government.

After a few months of being a supporter of the BNP, I started to learn about the Russian revolution and the ideas of communism. To my surprise I shared many beliefs with communism, which made me want to look for a party which had Marxist beliefs.

During secondary school my interest in Marxism grew and so did my confidence to voice my opinion. This allowed me to get more involved in local politics and I realised that Labour is no longer the party for the working class.

TUSC

During the 2015 general election I came across the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC). After I found out they shared the same beliefs as me, I got in touch and then joined. Through that I met the Socialist Party.

Ever since I was six I have wanted to become a MP in order to change the country, I'm 16 now and the dream of changing things is stronger than ever, that's why I want to stand for TUSC.

<http://www.socialistparty.org.uk/articles/21009>

