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Greece: Mighty class-based 'NO' shakes bosses' EU

"Austerity: Game over!" read the banner of the Socialist Party's Greek sister organisation on one of the victory rallies for the 'No' campaign in the recent referendum.

The resounding 61.5% vote against accepting the latest crummy 'deal' from the EU institutions was celebrated not just around Greece but by working class and young people around the world.

Many will have felt that at last a major blow was struck against the consensus of the capitalist elites.

They want working class people to pay for the crisis of the bankers and the speculators.

The Syriza government campaigned for a No vote and received a huge mandate to refuse to back down to the Troika's threats.

But further mass action in Greece will be necessary to secure a lasting and decisive victory.

Referendum earthquake sees working class boldly defy Troika and Greece's servile ruling class!

From www.socialistworld.net, 06/07/2015, website of the committee for a workers' international, CWI

Sunday's Greek referendum saw the working class give a powerful reply to the attempts of the Troika/Institutions to blackmail them into accepting more austerity in order to stay within the Eurozone.

The referendum on Sunday 5 July produced a tremendous 61.5% in favour of NO (to the demands of the Eurozone leaders) and only 38.5% in favour of a YES vote. The Yes vote was campaigned for by the Greek ruling class, the mass media, the EU institutions and the ruling classes internationally. But the No vote won by a landslide.

The results show that all areas of Greece and the overwhelming majority of society voted No. According to pollsters (<http://www.publicissue.gr/en/2837/>) 85% of youth under 24 years voted No, 71% of workers in the private and public sector, 72% of the unemployed and 87.3% of Syriza voters.

Significantly 86.9% of KKE voters voted No. This was despite the sectarian position taken by the KKE (the Greek Communist Party) leadership, which decided to abstain in the historical battle by the Greek working class against the Greek ruling class and the Brussels-based EU elite. Important numbers of small business people and other 'middle layers' in society also voted No.

The propaganda campaign for a Yes vote by the Greek media was unprecedented. It was helped by the terrible mistakes made by the Greek government in the so-called "negotiations" over recent weeks, which led to the closure of Greek banks at the time of the referendum.

This was made full use of by the ruling class and the EU in their attempt to terrify Greek workers and youth from voting No. But their actions were to no avail.

Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras was given an immensely powerful mandate by the scale of the No vote. However the manner in which Tsipras has used this outcome, so far, can only cause great concern. The first measure by Tsipras was to ask the Greek President to convene a 'national council' of the leaders of the main political parties (except Golden Dawn), in the name of 'national unity'.

The second was to ask Giannis Varoufakis, the Finance Minister, to step down from his position as Finance Minister, in order to appease the Troika lenders. These measures were not what the Greek masses mandated and expected from Tsipras and Syriza.

Xekinima (CWI Greece) understood the historic significance of this referendum and fought a tremendous battle in favour of No. Xekinima distributed 100,000 leaflets in just five days and sold 2,700 copies of a special newspaper produced for the referendum. Xekinima made dozens of banners for the pro-No demonstrations and ran a major social media campaign.

The text that follows is an editorial statement posted on the Xekinima website, alongside articles looking at the many aspects of the referendum No vote.

On the one hand, were lined up workers, the unemployed, the poor and the youth. On the other hand, the Greek ruling class and its mass media, together with Troika representatives Schauble, Deisenbloom, Sultz etc.

The pro-Yes side went beyond all its former excesses of reactionary and lying propaganda, of scaremongering, of blatant lies and cynicism. They provocatively broke every pre-election media law, projecting their own positions without any attempt to show any kind of objectivity last week leading up to the referendum. Ruling classes around the world also joined the attempt to terrorize the Greek working class into voting Yes.

But Greek workers, the unemployed and the poor replied with an earth-shattering message: we're not afraid of you and we will not bow our heads!

A class "No"

This "No" was a clear, class-based No. It is not a No of all the Greeks but a No of the Greek workers and poor and sections of the middle classes against the "Yes" of the Greek rich and the capitalists.

It was an overwhelming vote against the Yes of the President of the Greek Republic, P. Pavlopoulos, against the 'fashionable' River party, against the Yes of assorted 'experts', 'specialists', 'economists' and 'professors'.

It was also a vote against the Yes of the right wing, pro-establishment journalists, some of whom were filmed crying by Austrian TV cameras over the perils of finding ourselves outside the Eurozone. But we have not seen any of these journalists cry for the livelihoods that have been lost in Greece over the last few years of deep austerity, for those working eight or ten hours a day and only getting paid for three or five of those hours, or for the pensioners who receive a paltry 300 or 400 euros a month.

An 'internationalist' No

The powerful No vote also echoed the views and hopes of millions of workers across Europe who gave strength to and received inspiration from the struggle of the Greek workers. Many of them are also resisting their own ruling classes. There were 250 demonstrations and rallies across Europe in solidarity with the Greek workers in the three days around the referendum. There is simply no precedent in contemporary history for this, either in Greece or anywhere in Europe.

Once again it becomes absolutely clear that there exist two 'Europes'. On the one hand, that of the rich, of the multinationals and of Eurogroup. On the other hand, that of the workers, of the unemployed, of the poor and the youth! "Our" Europe is the latter - and only this one!

Speeding up processes

The Greek working class No vote sends a very strong message of resistance across Europe and the whole world, as was

the case in previous years with the Venezuelan workers, the Bolivian people and the rest of the peoples of Central and Latin America.

And the mighty No vote is linked to major political developments - a process of radicalisation of the working class and youth - that we have had in a number of industrialised countries in the recent past, particularly in Spain, Ireland and even the USA.

The No vote is a victory that opens up new processes and pushes forward the struggle of workers in Europe and internationally and towards new class battles. Sunday's vote also assists the process of the creation of new left formations.

Sharp rebuke to 'compromise' and 'realism'

The No victory also shows how false, unhistorical and unrealistic is the oft repeated argument of some Lefts, who insist that the policies of "rupture" with the Troika and determined mass struggle will "isolate" the Left from the rest of society. Sunday showed precisely the opposite.

The greatest support that SYRIZA ever received, before and since entering government, was during the referendum. At last, it left the pantomime, so-called "negotiations" in order to fight the Troika "beasts" out in the open. Let this be remembered by all the various stripes of "realists" who will undoubtedly come to the surface again to lecture us about what is to be done.

SYRIZA government take note

But the SYRIZA government must also take note of Sunday's results. They made unacceptable concessions to the Troika before the referendum. They agreed to cuts worth 8 billion euro (over 18 months) in order to come to a compromise with the determined enemies of the Greek people and the peoples of Europe.

Going from retreat after retreat, the Greek government, in the end, was trapped and only at the last minute realized that the real aim of the Troika/Institutions was to ridicule and humiliate SYRIZA and to cause the Greek government's fall. Only then did the Greek government decide to turn to the Greek people and ask for support.

And, of course, Greek workers defended the government in this battle. The Greek masses did it in such a magnificent way that neither right wing German Finance Minister Schauble nor the rest of the lenders gang of the Troika, and not even the Greek government itself, could have imagined.

No more illusions in capitalism and bosses's Eurozone

Following the landslide No vote, will the Greek government respond to the expectations of the Greek people? Or will it continue to have illusions in its so-called "partners" and the various Institutions? Will it stand by the clear No mandate of the Greek people, refusing to retreat from its pre-election promises (i.e. the 'Salonica Programme')? Or will the SYRIZA government accept a new Memorandum and more austerity (albeit a bit milder than that of the previous government of the right wing New Democracy and 'social democratic' PASOK) in the cause of remaining within the Eurozone?

The truth is that it is not possible within the confines of the capitalist system and the bosses' Eurozone for SYRIZA to be consistent with its declarations and pre-election promises to the Greek people.

In the run up to the referendum the various European "partners" (i.e. those of the Greek ship owners and big bankers) had shown their real, ruthless, inhuman and cynical character. Does the leadership of SYRIZA and the government think that these EU 'partners' can suddenly change and become socially sensitive to the plight of the Greek people?

Does Tsipras think that by convening a national council of the main political leaders and that by sacking Varoufakis (because the Troika lenders demand so, immediately after the fantastic No victory) he can appease the Troika/Institutions?

No, the Troika lenders will not be satisfied! With such actions the only thing that Tsipras can achieve is to send out negative, confusing messages and to disappoint many Greeks who campaigned hard for a No vote. These workers and youth fought against the lenders and austerity and not in favour of the euro, as the ruling class and big sections of the SYRIZA leadership claim.

If the Greek government attempts to come to a new agreement with the Troika, on the basis of a new Memorandum to satisfy their demands, it will have turned its back on the mighty No declaration of the Greek people. It has no right or mandate to take such action!

Xekinima (CWI Greece) calls for SYRIZA to be consistent with its pre-election anti-cuts pledges, to break with austerity and to adopt a socialist programme.

This includes refusal to pay the debt; controls on capital flows; for the state monopoly of foreign trade; the nationalisation of the banks and the commanding heights of the economy, under democratic workers' control and management; reversal of austerity; jobs for all, with a living wage, and free, quality health, education and welfare.

Planning the economy for the needs of the people and not the profits of the capitalists - the socialist re-organisation of society - would see an end to economic crises, poverty, joblessness and forced emigration.

To achieve this it is essential to build independent class politics, inside and outside of SYRIZA. Following the enormous No rallies last week across Greece, continue, deepen and expand the active participation of the working class and youth in the struggle against the Troika and for a socialist alternative. This means the creation of popular assemblies and action committees of the rank and file in workplaces and communities.

Appeal to workers and youth across Europe to fight austerity and for a socialist Europe.

This version of this article was first posted on the Socialist Party website on 7 July 2015 and may vary slightly from the version subsequently printed in The Socialist.

Cuts for us, handouts for rich

Fight the Tories' 'Them & Us' budget

Matt Dobson

Wednesday 8 July will be remembered as a day of horror for millions of households across Britain. £12 billion welfare cuts will mean many families having thousands of pounds cut from their income every year.

Young people face being taken out of the benefit system altogether. Charities and voluntary sector organisations point to the catastrophic consequences, estimating that two million more children will be dragged into poverty.

It's a budget for the billionaires and the millionaires, with inheritance tax being cut. Rather than taxing the wealth of property speculators who litter cities with unaffordable empty luxury flats, council house and housing association tenants who earn a reasonable wage will be hit with full market rents.

For the greedy city financiers and their political lackeys, even this banquet budget for the rich at the expense of the poor, is not enough. Osborne is being urged to remove the measly levy on the biggest banks and Tory party leadership contender Boris Johnson is lobbying for another reduction of the top rate of income tax, from 45p to 40p.

Austerity for the working and middle classes helps to finance the profits, tax breaks, bonuses and opulent lifestyles of the super-rich and the bosses. It is also to foot the bailout bill for the economic crisis which they and their capitalist system caused. Osborne's devastating austerity is being repeated by the capitalist class internationally.

Fightback

In Britain we have seen the recent large and inspiring marches against the Tories' cuts agenda. But the most effective form of mobilisation of working people must be utilised - national coordinated strike action, including a 24-hour general strike.

Over 300 shop stewards and workplace reps met at the National Shop Stewards Network Conference on 4 July and voted to build a campaign for the trade unions to take this necessary strike action.

We also need a political challenge to the establishment parties that fight tooth and nail for the interests of big business and the super-rich. We need a mass, independent working class based, fighting left-wing party - a party to articulate the struggles of workers and youth, and put forward a socialist alternative to endless austerity.

The Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition which stood hundreds of candidates in the recent council and general elections, in which the Socialist Party plays a key role, is a start in this process.

Terrorism and classroom spying

Mike Whale

The Tunisian massacre of tourists has led, unfortunately, to a knee-jerk reaction from the Tory government to try and stop 'the radicalisation of young Muslims'.

Already, under the Counter Terrorism and Security Act 2015, the Tories have decided that every teacher has to report on anything that might suggest "radicalisation" of the students they teach. Teachers are, in effect, being asked to spy on their students. Not to report a suspicion is potentially a criminal offence.

No teacher supports the divisive anti-working class policies of Islamic State or any related group or individual, but we will resist what is a counterproductive government policy.

Irrespective of this legislation, teachers have a responsibility to safeguard their students. This includes picking up signs of abuse. One of the most important ways of doing this is through building relationships of trust.

However, students won't feel comfortable talking to a teacher about an issue if they feel that their conversation will be reported to the police or security services.

The Tories are also promoting so-called "British" values of "democracy", "reasonableness" and "fair play" as part of the schools' curriculum. But for a significant number of young people, life in Tory Britain is anything but fair and reasonable!

Students and teachers have to feel confident in expressing their views. If they feel that a challenge to something "British" might be interpreted as support for Islamic fundamentalism, they will keep quiet. This is likely to lead to more young people actively looking for 'radical' solutions, including the false ideology of Islamic State and the far-right.

Also, as the majority of Muslims are of African, Asian or of Middle Eastern origin, teachers will have to view black and Asian students differently from white pupils. In effect, this is a racist policy.

The new law is presented as a measure to stop Islamic extremism and the far right. But, in Hull, the police made a point of interviewing the young students who organised an anti-austerity protest on 20 June. They found out which college they attended and without a formal appointment turned up to investigate the students' intentions.

Will teachers be expected to report young people who go on the Youth Fight for Jobs budget protests on 8 July? Is the next step for pupils to report on their teachers for holding radical views?

This is a dangerous piece of legislation which the teacher unions must fight.

Janner case: another example of establishment child abuse cover up

Heather Rawling

The news that allegations of child sexual abuse committed by Lord Greville Janner are to be heard in court is to be welcomed. They should have been heard in a proper trial at least 25 years ago when public accusations were first made. Now there is to be a 'trial of the facts', where victims of alleged abuse can give evidence.

However, because the Director of Public Prosecutions, Alison Saunders, decided that former Labour MP Lord Janner was not fit to stand trial due to dementia, he will not be required to attend to defend himself. There can be no guilty verdict made and no sentence.

Battle to be heard

Despite Janner's dementia, he still visited the House of Lords on official business! Since his first diagnosis in 2009, he voted 203 times, attended 634 days and claimed £100,000 in expenses and allowances.

The victims and their supporters were determined to fight and have their voices heard. This undoubtedly had an effect on finally getting a trial of any kind.

Child sexual abuse takes place among all classes and cultures in the UK. The capitalist media and far right have emphasised the role of Asian men in the systematic rape and exploitation of girls in places like Rotherham and Luton.

However they are less vitriolic about the sexual abuse carried out and systematically covered up in the most powerful sections of society - parliament, the judiciary, the police and other institutions.

The death of Jimmy Savile and the glowing obituaries to the 'charity fund raiser' prompted some of his victims to speak out, which unleashed a wave of revelations about him, other celebrities and people in positions of authority including MPs.

Savile was regarded as an 'important person' close to Thatcher. He assisted the government with privatisation and attempts to break the unions (see the Socialist issue 819).

A Tory Party activist, Anthony Gilberthorpe, also alleges that he helped procure young boys for several cabinet ministers including former Tory Home Secretary Leon Brittan.

Thatcher and other members of her cabinet defended Brittan against rumours and accusations that he was a paedophile. During the miners' strike he played a crucial role in setting up the National Reporting Centre to collect intelligence on miners and coordinate the national deployment of police to defeat them.

Serious accusations of child abuse committed by the Home Secretary in Thatcher's cabinet would have been toxic to the

establishment.

Inquiry

Now, current Home Secretary Theresa May is desperately trying to kick the revelations about cover-ups into long grass by launching an independent inquiry. She wanted to put it in a safe pair of hands.

First Baroness Butler-Sloss, sister to Michael Havers Attorney General from 1979 until 1987, was appointed to lead it.

Havers was alleged by Gilberthorpe to have attended parties where Savile had procured young boys. It was on his watch that a dossier alleging a paedophile ring at Westminster including Leon Brittan 'disappeared'. Sloss was forced to go.

Her replacement, Dame Fiona Woolf, resigned following criticism over her establishment links, most notably in relation to Brittan.

A New Zealand high court judge, Justice Lowell Goddard, is the latest to be appointed, but does not have the confidence of the abuse victims who are not allowed to sit on the panel because of their 'inability to be objective'.

On top of the establishment cover -ups, in recent years social services and the police have had their funding drastically cut due to austerity. Their ability to investigate and protect children from abuse has therefore been compromised.

Child sexual abuse has a massive impact on victims. It reveals in a horrific way, the extent to which the ruling capitalist class will go to protect and defend its privilege and power.

The White Flowers Campaign, which includes survivors of abuse and campaigners, organised a meeting recently at the House of Commons with Michael Mansfield QC and others, to discuss various cover-ups and their dissatisfaction with the independent inquiry into child sexual abuse.

Whistle blowers who have revealed attempts to cover up child sexual abuse also attended. Some have been blacklisted, making the campaign also a trade union issue. There were calls at the meeting for the lifting of the Official Secrets Act in relation to the state cover-up of abuse.

Workers who suspect child abuse is taking place should be able to report their suspicions without fear of reprisals from their employers.

Stop hammering the low-paid - £10 an hour now!

Ian Hodson, National President, Bakers Food and Allied Workers Union (BFAWU)

"David Cameron claims that he wants a high wage, low tax economy. If that's the case, he has a funny way of showing it. Over the last five years, he has overseen exploitation and a devaluing of labour on an industrial scale, the likes of which haven't been seen since Victorian times.

Don't just take my word for it; look at the jobs websites for proof. Zero-hour contracts, workfare, part-time roles, temporary contracts and apprenticeships offering full-time responsibilities and duties for as little as £2.60 an hour.

If this wasn't enough, Cameron's government wants to further punish those on poverty wages by cutting the benefits that they have to claim as a result of the poor pay they receive. This is all hammered home by the sneering Work and Pensions sociopath, Iain Duncan Smith; a man who has already contributed to a number of people being driven to commit suicide.

The BFAWU believes that workers shouldn't have to rely on benefits. They should be able to plan their lives without

constant form filling, in order to prove that they are living in poverty. Cameron could make good on his constant spin by announcing the move from a minimum wage, to a living wage of at least £10 an hour.

This would remove the need for people to claim in-work benefits, give the economy a good shot in the arm and show him making good on his up to now laughable claims that the Conservatives are 'the party of working people!'

ESA under the cosh

The Tories intend to slash Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) by almost £30 a week. ESA, which replaced incapacity benefit in 2008, is paid to disabled people or those too ill to work who have extra needs.

ESA claimants in the Work Related Activity Group (Wrag) currently get £28.75 a week more than Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA). The government will reduce this to just 50p a week more.

To qualify for ESA, claimants must go through a work assessment interview, previously carried out by the disgraced Atos company. There can be three outcomes: You could be found fit for work and told to claim JSA. You could be found to have limited capability for work and put in Wrag. Or you could be put in the support group.

Thousands either denied benefit or put in the wrong group have had their decisions overturned on appeal.

However, you can't claim benefit while the Mandatory Reconsideration is being made, so claimants are driven into absolute poverty, forced to go to charities just to get vouchers for food.

Additionally, someone on ESA or JSA can also receive housing benefit. However, if it is stopped, housing benefit also stops, with the threat of homelessness.

The Department for Work and Pensions advice is to claim JSA in the meantime. However, to claim JSA means that the claimant is admitting that they are looking for and capable of work - and therefore ineligible for ESA!

Osborne's welfare axe:

- Massively cut working tax credits to millions of families
 - Slash Employment and Support Allowance for sick and disabled people
 - Freeze benefit rates for the next two years
 - Reduce the benefits cap by thousands of pounds a year
 - Charge market rents to tenants in social housing earning above the average salary
 - End full housing benefit for low income households
 - Axe entirely the limited housing benefit to unemployed 18 to 21-year olds
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Low-income tenants face rent hikes

The Tory government intends to slash housing benefit (HB) for low income households. And because rent controls have long been abolished, it will mean a substantial cut in people's living standards, already struggling to pay household bills. It will also increase evictions and homelessness for tenants unable to pay their rent.

This vicious measure will destroy people's lives. It was drawn up by millionaire welfare minister Iain Duncan Smith - who lives rent free in a country mansion and claims thousands of pounds in expenses. IDS had also introduced the hated 'bedroom tax' and slashed council tax benefit to millions of people.

The Tories, while beating up on the poor, keep quiet about the real beneficiaries of housing benefit - private landlords. The overall HB bill has doubled over the last 20 years but the number of claimants has remained fairly constant indicating that it's private landlords, by charging excessive rents, who have grown rich on this benefit.

One in four private sector tenants in England have to claim HB - a rise of 90% in the last six years. Private landlords scoop a whopping £9.3 billion in HB, 38% of the total. In addition they get huge tax breaks and grants amounting to a staggering £27 billion a year in public subsidies - the equivalent of £1,000 for every household.

If this money was instead invested in social housing then the acute shortage of affordable housing could easily be solved. But with this mob in power it's clear that the interests of private landlords comes first and those of low-income tenants last.

'Housing subsidy' hypocrisy

Osborne also intends to make social housing tenants earning £30,000 a year (£40,000 in London) to pay market rates for their rent.

The 'welfare butcher' argues that he is simply "ending the housing subsidy" paid to better off workers.

Hypocritically, Osborne fails to mention the massive public subsidy paid to private landlords, or the subsidy for further privatisation of council housing under the 'help to buy' (ie 'buy to let') scheme. He is also tight-lipped about MPs claiming up to £28,000 a year housing allowance.

The extra rent generated by this 'housing tax' won't, however, be invested in new social housing but instead will go directly to the Treasury to reduce the government deficit - caused by bailing out failed banks and the capitalist system.

Them & Us

Regarde Lagarde

Having screwed Greek workers into the dirt with austerity, it transpires that International Monetary Fund boss Christine Lagarde pays no taxes on her £300,000 annual salary. She also pays no tax on her £54,000 allowance. Lagarde, helpfully, told impoverished Greek workers to pay their taxes!

Elderly cuts

Over one million elderly people struggling to cope at home on their own get no help from the national or local government because of funding cuts. Age UK charity estimates that this figure represents an increase of 100,000 since last year.

This lack of care has led to a large increase in unplanned emergency admissions of patients aged over 65 into the NHS - adding to the pressures of a struggling health service.

Over the last decade spending on social care services for older people has plunged by nearly 33% from £8.1 billion in 2005-06 to £5.46 billion in 2014-15.

Community care services have been hardest hit with a massive 25% cut (£560 million) since 2010-11.

Holy shit

Bottled water can be expensive especially if its 'holy water' flown from Jordan and used in the christening of the latest royal sprog. How much this has cost is undisclosed.

However, users of this 'holy water' should beware. The river Jordan is polluted by sewage and industrial effluent!

Over the limit

We've all done it - hit our credit card limit. But not everyone is a rich MP. According to a Freedom of Information act request, 19 MPs had their official credit cards blocked for failing to show that their claimed expenses were valid.

One of the MPs was none other than welfare (cuts) minister, Iain Duncan Smith. Apparently it was all a mistake. So now the Tory millionaire can resume getting into debt while heading the government department which harshly sanctions unemployed claimants' benefits for often the most trivial of reasons.

Energy rip-off

The latest report by the Competitions and Markets Authority (CMA) has found, surprise, surprise, customers are being ripped off by the big six energy giants.

Examining energy prices between 2009 and 2013 the CMA found that householders were being fleeced £1.2 billion more a year for their energy, while small firms are forking out around £500 million too much a year. No wonder then that millions of people find themselves in 'fuel poverty'.

As usual the banal conclusion of this report is 'customers should shop around' to get a better deal. Here's an alternative, nationalise these money-grubbing companies and lower prices!

NSSN conference 2015

"We could stop austerity in its tracks"

Dave Gorton, Unite LE/372 branch

As the standing ovation for sacked Greek Vodafone worker, Harris Sedaris, died away, the audience at the ninth annual National Shop Stewards Network (NSSN) conference broke into an impromptu rendition of traditional socialist song 'the Internationale'. It was a fitting end to a day full of hope and confidence - one that laid the foundations for the next few months of crucial struggle.

This was the first NSSN conference since the Tories' shock election victory and no delegate was in any doubt as to the challenges we face. But they also recognised there is no time for mourning.

Activists spoke of the necessity of moving swiftly into action and displayed a confidence that a government supported by just 24% of the population could be defeated if the unions adopted a bold, radical and fighting agenda.

The morning session - Stop the Tory Union-Busters - was addressed by five union general secretaries or presidents, as well as leading activists from the floor. The common thread between almost all speakers was that the left trade unions - those affiliated to the NSSN - have to make the running in the coming months.

Matt Wrack, general secretary of firefighters' union FBU (the NSSN's newest affiliate), said: "Imagine if the TUC leaders began to go out city by city and town by town making the case against austerity and the case for organising and then called for a general strike - then I think that could receive a huge echo."

Thanks

Civil servants union PCS general secretary Mark Serwotka paid tribute to the NSSN for being first on the scene whenever there is a dispute. The NSSN's ability to mobilise was echoed by other speakers involved in disputes. Candy Udwin, sacked PCS National Gallery activist thanked the NSSN for its consistent support.

Mick Joyce from the Kone dispute in the north east said they would have lost if they'd been left to stand alone, but thanks to the Socialist Party "we beat them". Mick recently joined the Socialist Party.

Mark was adamant "we could stop austerity in its tracks" if the TUC united against our class enemies. It was a message echoed by the bakers' union's Ronnie Draper, the RMT's Peter Pinkney and the prison officers' Steve Gillan. Ronnie went back to the tremendous Hovis dispute in 2013 that achieved victory supported by the NSSN and others.

Martin Powell-Davies, NUT national executive member, detailed the action taken this year by teachers, school students and community activists which has seen the attempts to convert five Lewisham schools to academies all fail.

Conference gave a rousing welcome to Marie and Christine from the Glasgow homelessness workers' dispute who reported on the Labour city council's attempts to organise a scab workforce to break their 15 week dispute. They brought news of the success of the Dundee hospital porters' strike, and the determination it had given them: "We're not going back until we get what we came out for."

The author of 'Blacklisted - The Secret War between Big Business and Union Activists', Dave Smith, was well received by conference as he was able to give a very serious subject the attention it deserved while making everyone laugh. 18 copies of the book were sold during the day.

Tube strike

The loudest response of the morning was reserved for the RMT's Jared Wood, speaking from the floor on the London Underground strikes planned for 8 and 9 July - a historic dispute with all four tube unions involved in closing down the complete network.

There are also other strikes (for example in Bromley council and the National Gallery) being coordinated on 8 July - the day Osborne announces his latest austerity budget - showing what could be possible if the TUC grasped the historic role it should be playing.

Newly elected Unite national executive member, Suzanne Muna, asked what we would do if the TUC fails to act. She was in no doubt that the left unions needed to be bold and, if necessary, go it alone.

Next steps

This was reflected in the statement carried unanimously which called for the left unions, if the TUC refuses, to organise a mass demonstration in London on the day the Trade Union Bill is debated in parliament.

The afternoon session on fighting austerity featured some excellent reports including from Isai Priya of Tamil Solidarity, Helen Pattison of Youth Fight for Jobs and Oktay Sahbaz from the Turkish and Kurdish community organisation Day-Mer.

The NSSN has demonstrated for a number of years that it is a key component in the workers' movement. It has supporters who hold key positions in many unions and who consistently call for support for all workers' struggles and for coordinated action.

This conference saw the NSSN beginning to take the next steps - putting itself centre stage and taking the movement forward whether or not the official bodies fail to respond.

Sacked Greek worker brings solidarity

Tessa Warrington

A highlight of the conference was hearing from sacked Greek worker Harris Sideris, a member of Xekinima (sister party of the Socialist Party in Greece).

He said he did not want to talk about the difficulties facing Greek workers, but rather their determination. Up until recently an employee of Vodafone, Harris was dismissed on 2 June along with fellow organiser Vicky, for their activities trying to gain union recognition for call centre staff in Athens.

The Vodafone bosses have been trying to divide workers, splitting them along the lines of permanent, contracted and outsourced staff. They imposed unattainable personal targets and placed under-25s on lower wages of a shocking €90 a month (less than £350).

In February Harris and others began signing their colleagues up to the National Union of Vodafone Workers. Despite this being deemed illegal, their success led to the setting up of workplace committees.

After being sacked on spurious grounds, public meetings of almost 200 workers voted to take strike action over the sackings, which they did twice.

The union is now in legal discussions with Vodafone, and Vicky and Harris expect to be taking their case to court in the near future.

International pressure

Harris welcomed the exposing of the Vodafone brand internationally, which has piled on the pressure back home in Greece. He made the point that the bosses are organised internationally so workers must be too, linking up struggles across Europe.

On the looming referendum (speaking the day before it took place), Harris paraphrased the famous opening of the Communist Manifesto, saying "A spectre is haunting Europe, the spectre of 'No! OXI!'"

He addressed the Troika, saying: "We are not just unwilling to pay back the debt, we want paying for the debt! They are not your banks, they are our banks, and we should take them back under workers' control, that is to say, we should take our lives into our own hands."

Rushing to catch his return flight to Greece in time to vote, I asked Harris what he would say to UK workers soon to be facing an EU referendum of their own. He said that the EU represents the internationalism of the bosses, of capitalism. It is no friend to European workers.

But the campaign for a 'no' vote must be drawn along clearly socialist lines, of opposition to austerity and control of the rich, for true internationalism of the European working class.

Otherwise the debate is open to those on the right, like Ukip, whose only basis for leaving the EU is the financial gain of their own rich chums, while sowing division and racism between workers in Britain.

- Send solidarity messages to info@pasevodafone.gr

Migrants flee horrors created by capitalism

Got a spare £1 million you'd like to invest in a company in Britain? In that case the government welcomes you to Britain as a 'high-value migrant'. No need for you to risk your life crossing the Med in a leaky boat, or spend months camped at Calais on starvation rations before hiding in a lorry. No need even to meet the visa guidelines about speaking English.

You can fly in without too many questions being asked - including about how you got your spare million. A history of dictatorship, warmongering, corruption or plain old-fashioned thieving are not necessarily obstacles. If you are a bit flusher again and can spare £10 million you will get automatic indefinite leave to remain after two years.

So for the rich there are very few obstacles to migrating to Britain. It is altogether another story for the majority of those currently fleeing war, dictatorship and conflict in the Middle East and Africa. Most are left dispossessed and hungry within their own countries or in neighbouring ones. A minority - able to scrape together a few more resources - end up in the hands of the people smugglers, risking their lives to cross the Mediterranean.

Last year 219,000 people arrived in Europe by these means. This year the figure is set to be higher, with 137,000 arriving by the end of June. Countless thousands more have died in the attempt. The majority of those risking their lives are refugees fleeing conflict. Of those who arrive first in Greece (about half of the total) more than 85% have come from Syria, Afghanistan, Iraq and Somalia. All of these are countries where Western military intervention has helped to create the nightmare situations from which people are now being forced to run.

Fears

Working class people across Europe are shaken and moved by the human tragedy developing on their TV screens. There have been numerous incidents of workers in Greece and Italy heroically trying to rescue - and then to care for - the refugees that have arrived on their shores. The Red Cross spokesperson for Southern Italy summed up the response of Italian workers who are giving food, clothing and shelter to the refugees when she said: "The poorer people are the more they give."

At the same time, with austerity biting and living standards falling, there is an understandable fear among many that it will not be possible to cope with the number of migrants arriving without it having a detrimental effect on wages and public services. This is fuelled by the avalanche of anti-migrant propaganda from the right-wing capitalist media and politicians, who are falsely trying to offload responsibility for endless austerity onto refugees and migrants.

The infamous 'cold cruelty' of Britain's ruling elite is clearly revealed with the Tories' preparedness to let refugees drown in order to try and make political capital. Last year - competing to outdo Ukip by being 'tough' on immigration - Theresa May actually argued that there should be an end to rescuing migrants drowning in the Mediterranean in order to discourage them from coming!

European Union

However, no-one should be under any illusion that the institutions of the European Union have a more humane approach. After the sinking of a Libyan ship in October 2013 in which 366 people died, the Italian government launched a sea rescue operation called Mare Nostrum (Our Sea) which, despite its limits, saved thousands of lives in the fifteen months it was in operation.

But, largely because of claims it was encouraging people to cross the Mediterranean, it was cut and replaced with an EU-run operation which was a third of the size and focused primarily on border control rather than stopping people drowning. The result was the horrific number of deaths in the first part of 2015. In April 2015 1,308 migrants are believed to have drowned compared to 42 in April the previous year (while Mare Nostrum was still operating). Only the outcry this sparked led to an increase in the funding of the EU 'rescue' operation.

These tragic events show, yet again, that no matter how high the walls are built around 'Fortress Europe', it will not prevent refugees trying to reach it, even at huge risk to their lives. The reason so many people are crossing by sea in the

first place is because of the building of gigantic walls that block the land crossing that previously existed between Turkey and Greece.

So the ending of the Mare Nostrum sea rescue operation did not stop people trying to cross the Med; on the contrary numbers increased, mainly as a consequence of the complete disintegration of Libya. Western intervention into Libya was not motivated by bringing democracy to the country but by defending the interests of imperialism in the region following the mass revolutionary movement that swept the Middle East and North Africa in 2011.

The result is the nightmare that exists in Libya today. Capitalism - including military intervention by British governments - has created such horror for some that they will risk anything to escape.

Myths

Yet, while the Tories are considering stepping up Britain's military intervention in the Middle East, Cameron has used Britain's EU opt-out clause in order to refuse to take any of the 40,000 of the refugees currently in Greece and Italy which the EU was attempting to 'share out' across Europe. Once again, Cameron's argument was that to give shelter to any of the people who have fled across the Mediterranean would be to encourage more to come. He would prefer them to be camped, hungry and desperate, at Calais.

Contrary to the tabloid propaganda, Britain is not the most popular destination for refugees. According to the UN Refugee Agency, far more aim to reach Germany or Sweden. Nonetheless, a minority of those who successfully cross the Mediterranean end up at Calais trying to get into Britain and risking their lives again, using increasingly desperate methods to try and cross the Channel.

It is not true - as the Tories claim - that it is our supposedly 'generous' benefits that attract workers to Britain. Our benefits are among the lowest in Western Europe. It is the possibility of working in Britain's unregulated, low-wage labour market which acts as a pull factor, along with language and, in some cases, wanting to be reunited with family members already living in Britain.

What is the solution? We understand the fears of workers in Britain that public services which are already being cut to the bone cannot cope with any more people. However, it is not migration but austerity that is responsible for the strain on our public services.

Under the previous Con-Dem government £80 billion was cut from public spending, coincidentally the same amount as the bankers have received in bonuses since the economic crisis began. If we allow the government to falsely lay the blame for austerity with migrants instead of with the crisis-ridden capitalist system and the bankers and billionaires who benefit from it, then the Tories will succeed in grinding our living conditions into the dirt.

Solidarity

The answer to Britain's bosses using super-exploited low paid migrant labour is not to build walls so high that migrants can't get in - the crisis in the Mediterranean in any case shows this doesn't work - but to fight for a £10 an hour minimum wage for all workers in Britain regardless of their country of origin.

The best traditions of the workers' movement include international solidarity with workers and the oppressed fighting to improve their living conditions in their own countries. We have more in common with workers fighting low pay and exploitation in Asia and Africa than we do with the bosses of the multinational companies who are exploiting us all.

One aspect of international solidarity is to fight for the right to asylum for those fleeing war, sectarian conflict and dictatorship. This should be combined with supporting the right for families to be reunited and calling for an end to asylum seekers being treated like criminals and locked up in detention centres which are no different to prisons.

It is a lie that there are no resources available. British governments have spent vast sums on going to war. The costs of replacing Trident are estimated at £100 billion over its lifetime. The cost of the wars and occupations of Iraq and

Afghanistan has reached £30 billion, £1,000 for every tax payer in Britain.

But while vast sums can be found for war, there are barely pennies for asylum seekers fleeing the consequences of those wars. Control of decisions whether to grant asylum cannot be left in the hands of this callous government. We demand that elected committees of ordinary working people, including representatives of migrants' organisations, have the right to review asylum cases and grant asylum.

The only way to permanently end the refugee crisis is to fight for a democratic socialist world. On the basis of capitalism, there will always be people forced to flee their country, not by choice, but out of desperation as a result of war, environmental catastrophe and starvation. A socialist society would harness the wealth, science and technique created by capitalism in order to meet the needs of the majority worldwide. Only on that basis would it be possible to have a world where people are free to move if they wish to, but are not forced to do so by the nightmare they face at home.

Hospital porters mop up in NHS pay battle triumph

Philip Stott, Socialist Party Scotland

After more than three months of all-out action, 117 hospital porters in Dundee have beaten the bosses.

Strikers won a higher pay grade, 14 new permanent jobs, and cash for lost income and holiday during the stoppage. The victory also exposes the failed 'partnership model' - union leaders effectively acting as deputies to management.

The members of general union Unite had been stuck at bottom-rung pay band one for over a decade. Bosses at NHS Tayside ignored multiple findings they should be in band two. So porters at the Ninewells and Royal Victoria hospitals took four months of industrial action, including 13 weeks of indefinite strike.

Gains

Workers secured regrading and immediate pay rises of 6-7%. The majority will also see year-on-year rises as they work their way to the top of band two. Unite says this will mean an overall 20% raise by 2018. The union also won £1,800 cash payments for every striker.

Finally, 14 porters on six-month contracts have been made permanent. In spite of their contracts ending in early May, 13 of the temps heroically joined the action and struck solidly throughout.

Their victory is one for resolute, militant trade unionism. NHS Tayside's chief executive exclaimed that Unite was "acting contrary to what we would consider to be the normal actions of a reasonable trade union." By this she meant fighting for members' interests, instead of sticking cosily to so-called partnership working.

The strike had a major impact on other hospital unions whose right-wing leaders back partnership. A Scottish official for public sector union Unison wrote to local branches at the start of the action, urging them to "think twice before supporting the strike".

However, this criminal advice was ignored by the majority of Unison members, who gave the porters 100% backing. Many bureaucrats were openly hoping for the defeat of a strike that threatened their modus operandi: avoid industrial action at all costs.

'New normal'

The strike has forged a 'new normal' for how unions should defend workers in the NHS.

Management's response was not to negotiate, but to try and tough it out with 'volunteers'. Senior managers, often band seven and above, tried to cover portering.

But it was clear from early on this was not a viable strategy when faced with a prolonged all-out strike. Regular reports emerged from Ninewells - including photographs of refuse piling up, and non-emergency procedures being cancelled - which exposed the major impact of the strike.

The strike took place in the run-up to Westminster elections, so pickets could test the mettle of competing parties. Political support came overwhelmingly from Socialist Party Scotland and other supporters of the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC). Most porters duly voted TUSC.

TUSC

Senior shop steward Ronnie Heeney said: "Not one Labour, SNP or any other candidate - apart from TUSC - have taken the time and effort to visit our picket lines. Why would I support someone who can't show any support for me? My X went proudly in the TUSC box."

Stewards also described the support of Socialist Party Scotland members as an "inspiration" to them, which is humbling. We would say the porters have been an inspiration to socialists and working class people in Dundee and beyond.

Graham Nelson, another senior steward, said: "If 117 men and women in Dundee can have the impact we have had, imagine what could be achieved if the entire trade union movement took action together, in a coordinated campaign of industrial action - a general strike - against austerity."

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

Tube union: why we're striking

Transport workers on London Underground were preparing to shut down the capital on 8 and 9 July. Members of all tube unions - RMT, Aslef, TSSA and Unite - will strike together for the first time in years. Bosses want to railroad through 24-hour weekend service, pay cuts and shift changes.

As we go to press, unions have rejected a new offer from management. The latest proposals resolve none of the disagreements. They also try to play off different grades of the workforce against each other with higher one-off bonuses.

Buy the next Socialist for reports from picket lines and the latest developments.

Below is an edited statement from the RMT, which represents staff from every line of work on London Underground.

On 9 July, the underground will be at a standstill. Workers on First Great Western railway will strike on the same day in a dispute over jobs and safety.

The tube strike is in response to £4.2 billion of cuts imposed by the government and mayor of London. We are opposing London Underground demands that we accept additional work at nights and weekends without negotiation, or face a two-year pay freeze.

London Underground is ignoring pre-existing agreements with the unions - and conducting sham talks, which it refuses to even call negotiations.

We do not oppose night running. But we insist enough staff are employed so that the extra burden does not fall on those already working unsociable hours. For example, the proposed roster for South Kensington station only gives staff one long weekend off every 27 weeks.

RMT members on the underground already work seven-day, 24-hour shift patterns. All we are asking for is a fair pay increase that recognises the record number of passengers and massive productivity gains we've already delivered.

Management's originally proposed two-year 'pay rise' was below RPI inflation: in real terms, a pay cut. Its 0.75% offer would have meant only £225 a year for the lowest paid - £450 for the highest. Compare this to the £7,000 accepted by MPs.

Safety

We have a separate but associated dispute over station staffing. Management is cutting 850 jobs, leaving many stations dangerously under-staffed.

London Underground is lying to the public, claiming there will be more staff in ticket halls. This is plainly untrue. Ticket office workers are not coming out from behind glass. The jobs in ticket offices have been cut, and passengers will have to rely on self-service machines.

Many stations will have staffing halved. In reality, many will be left unstaffed. There will not be enough to cover training, annual leave and sickness.

Safety will be an issue. Already assaults on workers are up 44%. With less staff there will be a reduced service of care for disabled passengers. Unstaffed stations will mean many women will feel unsafe at night; already sexual assaults have increased.

Our members will be expected to work anywhere on a line. With just 24 hours' notice, we could be told our duty has moved - and we will need to leave for work at 2 or 3am. This will make it impossible to plan a life outside work. Staff are calling management's plans a "Martini workforce": anytime, anyplace, anywhere!

Management wants to take staff from one under-staffed station to plug gaps in another, rather than simply employ enough in each area.

Train maintenance workers are also striking in protest at management's refusal to increase numbers on duty. Less maintenance time due to night running can potentially increase breakdowns and accidents.

All four unions are united. Our members voted overwhelmingly for strike action. Over 90% voted yes, on turnouts of over 50%. This is markedly better than the Tory government's 24% share of eligible voters.

Unite rules conference

Britain's biggest union could reconsider funding Labour after leadership elections

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

As we go to press, members of general union Unite are discussing major political changes at our four-yearly rules conference. Although the union's leadership has headed off calls to leave Labour, it was pressured to promise a new

conference if the situation changes.

The union's leading body, the executive council, tried to avoid votes on a number of anti-Labour motions. To do this it produced what many members will see as a bland holding statement. This delays deciding on Labour affiliation until after the races for the party's London mayoral candidate, and its national and Scottish leaders, conclude.

A number of Socialist Party members took part in the debate to speak against the statement. But left-winger Jeremy Corbyn's leadership stand helped the executive convince conference to give Labour one more chance.

The statement passed. However, the leadership was not immune to growing pressure to leave Labour and build a new mass workers' party. This May, 196 Unite members stood in the elections for the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC), which includes the Socialist Party.

Special conference

General secretary Len McCluskey promised the executive could call a special conference following Labour leadership elections. This alone would justify TUSC's stand.

Len did not give any specific criteria for this to happen. But Socialist Party members, along with many others in Unite, will be pushing for a recall conference should Jeremy lose.

Even many of those who voted in favour of the statement are questioning the Labour link. 30 attended a TUSC fringe meeting, including strikers from south London's Bromley council. Their branch secretary, Kathy Smith, addressed the meeting.

Increased sales of the Socialist at this year's conference also reflect growing interest in the Socialist Party's ideas.

Education under attack! Reports from the front line of the fightback

Stafford college wildcat strike against unfit bosses

Dan Smart, Stafford Socialist Party

100 staff members at Stafford College recently staged an unprecedented walk-out in protest at mismanagement and cuts. Earlier, a meeting of around 300 had voted their no-confidence in the college management.

Teachers and other staff members are demanding the resignation of principal Beverly Smith. As Univeristy and College Union rep Marina Bowler told the local Express & Star "Staff feel they are operating in a culture of fear and are being bullied. Workloads have gone up, stress levels have gone up. Staff are not being listened to and good staff have been made redundant."

The protest follows the announcement of cuts and redundancies. The college will face a funding drop from September, with workers and students taking the brunt. Ms. Smith is quoted as saying: "Our transformation will allow the college to be more efficient and gives the opportunity to continue to improve and meet the needs of our stakeholders".

At the same time last year 69 workers faced the axe. A 'consultation period' is currently underway with unions and staff. The main cuts and redundancies will likely fall on adult education. Beverly Smith and the management prove they are not capable of running Stafford College. By exercising their collective power, staff have shown that the management have lost their confidence, and are no longer fit to lead.

As a speaker at the protest put it, Beverly Smith must stand down. If she refuses, workers should argue for official strike action, as well as inviting students for their support. With united action we can build a quality college that serves the needs of workers and students and not the 'stakeholders'.

Community rallies behind striking Swansea tutors

Ronnie Job, Secretary, Swansea Trades Council

I attended a great meeting of Save Education Other Than At School recently, bringing support from Swansea Trades Council. Time and again the meeting heard how pupils had been able to successfully complete their school-age education and progress to college only with the assistance of dedicated staff.

It's a scandal that Swansea council officers and Labour councillors seem determined to press ahead with cuts which could see more than half the staff lose their jobs. Trade unionists have shown their determination to defend the service by more than once taking strike action, the last time for three days.

Sussex Downs strikes

Phil Clarke, Secretary, Lewes Eastbourne and Wealden NUT

NUT members were on strike again on 2 and 7 July at the Eastbourne Campus of Sussex Downs College against cuts that would severely undermine post 16 education provision in Sussex. Thank you for so many messages of support already, continue this by: signing the petition <http://tinyurl.com/sdcuts> and pass the link on.

Rally against cuts to further education in Leeds

Iain Dalton, Leeds Socialist Party

Around 150 staff and students joined a rally against cuts to Further Education colleges organised by UCU in Leeds on 1 July. At Bradford College, where 140 jobs are threatened as part of £8million worth of cuts, picket lines were solid. One striker told us: "There's real anger - we had 280 staff turn up to a union meeting recently to discuss this."

Speakers at the rally noted that adult education is under threat. Predominantly more working class students access this education. FE workers planned a further strike at Bradford College and balloting is underway in unions at Leeds City College.

Salford college faces redundancies

Andrew Sherratt, Salford Socialist Party

57 job losses have been announced at Salford City College following plans to 'streamline' their existing teacher centred programme with a £1million e-learning system. This system will effectively replace teachers and support staff with IT software.

Any cuts to staffing, or resources will result in a downward spiral in the excellent quality of education provided.

The Socialist Party found overwhelming support for the staff who face losing their jobs with students, teachers and the wider public wanting to sign our petition to reverse these cuts.

Yorkshire firefighters demonstrate against crew cuts

Iain Dalton

Firefighters and supporters demonstrated in Easingwold, Yorkshire on 24 June against £1.3 million cuts. The Fire Brigades Union is opposing proposed 'mixed crewing'. Instead of running fire engines with a full-time crew, bosses want to reduce crew sizes further to three plus one part-timer.

In rural Yorkshire there are big distances between full-time stations and small-town, part-time stations. This, alongside other proposals, will lead to much longer response times.

One firefighter commented: "In smaller fire brigades like North Yorkshire there's no fat to cut. Services are over-stretched now. Unfortunately, someone may have to die before those at the top see that."

Workplace news in brief

Bakery bully

Workers for Gunstones Bakery in North Lincolnshire, organised by bakers' union BFAWU, plan to strike again on 16 and 17 July. Bullying boss Ranjit Singh Boparan wants staff to accept a pay cut or attacks on terms and conditions.

Council sell-off

Council workers in Bromley, south London, staged their fourth wave of strikes against 90% privatisation on 7 and 8 July. General union Unite was joined by public service union Unison for the first time in the dispute.

As we go to press, members are due to join striking workers from north London's Barnet council in Parliament Square. The demonstration will take place on Tory Chancellor George Osborne's budget day.

Roger Shrives

Hospital cleaners

Cleaners at Epsom and St Helier hospitals in Surrey are balloting to strike over pay. The workers, outsourced to Mitie, demonstrated on 30 June.

Kieron Merrett, regional organiser for general union GMB, spoke to the Socialist. "They are paid close to the minimum wage, whereas others in exactly the same jobs are earning the NHS nationally agreed rates. What we are asking for is equality."

Paul Couchman

Probation problem

Probation workers organised by Unison will walk out for two hours on 14 July in an ongoing dispute over pay. The stoppage from 8 to 10am comes after previous action planned for 11 June was suspended to allow talks.

National Gallery

Workers at London's National Gallery have now taken 45 days of strike action. Members of public service union PCS are fighting guest services being sold to a private company.

Socialist Party LGBT group plans fightback against attacks and austerity

Michael Johnson, Socialist Party LGBT group convenor

The new budget has ushered in sweeping attacks on the working class as a whole in Britain but also disproportionately affects the LGBT community. Against this backdrop, the Socialist Party LGBT group met on 5 July.

We discussed the reality for LGBT people living under austerity in Britain, facing attacks on housing and healthcare, with Trans healthcare especially affected.

We heard about the loss of specialised homeless services for LGBT people in Southampton and specialist accommodation for LGBT youth and migrants in Manchester, removed so that they could be sold as luxury apartments!

The tasks for LGBT activists and the Socialist Party in fighting back against these attacks through our interventions in Pride events across the country were discussed.

Also, the importance of building our work in the more vulnerable sections of the LGBT movement such as the Trans community and LGBT asylum seekers who face massive struggles in fleeing persecution.

While Pride organisers were too busy inviting UKIP and bankers to lead their parades, the Socialist Party will be ready to help build campaigns to fight austerity that puts LGBT people at real risk. Socialist Party members interested in LGBT issues should get in touch and get involved!

Bitter fight to save Bitterne Walk-In Centre continues

Declan Clune, Southampton Socialist Party

Before the general election the main parties in Southampton were involved in a proposal to close an NHS facility in the Bitterne area of the city.

The local Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) proposed to close the centre 'temporarily' and attempted to hide it from the public. However a Socialist Party member in TUSC discovered and exposed the threat.

The 'Save Bitterne Walk-In Centre Campaign' was led by TUSC who informed the public with stalls and letters to local media. This galvanised an outraged public to mobilise and attend the final Health Overview Scrutiny Panel meeting where the CCG submitted its proposal.

People packed the meeting with standing room only. This pressured those on the panel to give a reprieve and keep the

centre open until after the election.

Reprieve

After much self-congratulating from the establishment parties with claims to have been the 'winners' of the reprieve, we in TUSC maintained it was the people who 'won'. Although happy with the result, we told people of the need to be ready to act when the attack returned after the election.

The CCG has now confirmed our warning and proposes complete closure of the centre, revealing their real intention all along.

A new public consultation process has begun with a survey being sent out to residents. The survey is loaded in the way it's presented, trying to get people to accept the closure.

Figures released from the CCG show a reduced number of people using the centre, but fail to say that the centre has had its services reduced drastically and that in the last 9 months the CCG has erased the Walk-In Centre as an available resource from its website and documentation.

Public meeting

TUSC went back to the streets with leaflets and petitions. The response has once again been overwhelming with outright condemnation and commitment to fight again.

On Saturday 27 June TUSC held a public meeting where 40 people attended a lively debate with passionate input from the floor showing a renewed commitment to defend our service.

We reached unanimous agreement to engage in the consultation period by attending the public meetings to let the CCG know we demand to keep our Walk-In Centre.

One resident involved in the campaign told me that she telephoned a local Labour Parliamentary Candidate and asked what they planned to do about the proposal. The reply was she did not plan to do anything as: "This is a done deal!" We beg to differ.

No other parties have said a word in protest, except TUSC!

Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition conferences

Scottish TUSC conference hears from the front line in the struggle against austerity

Matt Dobson

100 people attended the Scottish Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) conference on 27 June.

Shop stewards from Scotland's two all-out strikes, the Dundee hospital porters and the Glasgow homeless caseworkers spoke from the platform. Graham Nelson, senior Unite shop steward from the striking porters explained that he and many others had voted TUSC in the election because we need a party for the working class.

John McNally, PCS vice president and Socialist Party member, said that those who dismiss TUSC's relatively low votes should learn the lessons of how working people formed the Labour Party for political representation over 100 years ago.

Gordon Martin, Scottish Organiser of the transport union RMT reaffirmed the unions support for TUSC.

Philip Stott, a Socialist Party Scotland member, on the Scottish TUSC steering committee, said that despite winning an unprecedented election victory on an anti-austerity platform, the Scottish National Party seem intent on continuing to implement cuts in Scotland.

TUSC calls on the Scottish government and councils to refuse to carry through Tory cuts by setting no cuts budgets. We will continue to seek to work with all those who agree with the need for a widespread, united 100% anti-austerity and socialist election challenge in the May 2016 elections.

TUSC North-West conference keeps up the momentum

Hugh Caffrey

"It's like the Tories decided to usurp the tale of Robin Hood, except this time the Sheriff of Nottingham is the hero! And it seems Andy Burnham agrees!" said Kevin Bennett, TUSC councillor for Warrington. He was speaking at TUSC's North-West conference on 27 June, attended by 50 activists.

RMT regional organiser Daren Ireland outlined the essential organisational steps to take including building finance through standing orders for next year's local elections and then the 2020 general election. TUSC aims to win the unions to support a new mass working-class party.

We want to build local groups, welcoming individuals and organisations operating on an open and federal basis. We intend to stand candidates in the May 2016 local elections and re-electing Kevin Bennett next year will be a priority task.

Enthusiasm for building TUSC was shown by the collection, which over £260.

Noreen Bailey, Salford & Eccles TUSC candidate and local anti-cuts campaigner, said: "TUSC members gave me a sense of worth and a glimpse of a better future."

Why I joined

'The Socialist Party has given me political confidence'

Mayola Blagdon, Basingstoke Socialist Party

My story is different from most.

My mother was born in the house my grandfather was squatting. My uncle was involved in one of the biggest squatting campaigns in Europe in the 1980's. During the housing crisis in Amsterdam, tens of thousands occupied whole blocks at once. This resulted in it becoming legal for the next two decades.

As a teenager in the nineties, I decided to follow in their footsteps. I started squatting myself. It was hard to find anywhere to live being only 17 with no education or work.

At the time a lot of travellers came over from the UK, fleeing Thatcher's oppressive anti-traveller laws. Hundreds a year in the town where I lived needed a place to park up. Me and my comrades helped organise them, and spoke to the council and the police on their behalf.

I have now lived in the UK for a few years and decided to search for a party to vote for on the left. I soon found the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC), and the Socialist Party, two months before the election. I met other

members nearby but discovered I was the only one in my town.

TUSC candidate

I decided to stand in the council elections for TUSC. I leafleted a quarter of my ward and held about four campaign stalls.

I organised a successful public meeting just before the election, and now we are building a new branch. Before I stuck my neck out there was no clear anti-austerity party to vote for in Basingstoke. Now barely six months later, there is!

I experienced how collective direct action like squatting can force councils to listen and negotiate solutions.

The Socialist Party has given me the political confidence to back up my activism from the past, and to now look forward to contributing to a democratic socialist revolution.

TV review

Picasso - Portillo's peculiar perspective

Ian Pattison reviews Portillo on Picasso, an episode from the ITV series Perspectives.

A recent repeat of an ITV show Perspectives brought a rare shock. I was appalled to see my favourite artist Pablo Picasso being adored by one of my least favourite politicians, Michael Portillo. Portillo's father, Luis, and Picasso were both born in Spain, and were exiled during the years of fascist dictator Franco's vicious rule. Picasso would never return, he died before the dictatorship fell.

Luis Portillo was a stretcher bearer in the Republican forces in their battle with the fascist Franco during the Spanish Revolution. But his son Michael chose to join the same Conservative Party in the 1970s that had refused to give support to his father's struggle four decades earlier.

Portillo senior made a brave stand like hundreds of thousands around the globe against the sweep of the fascist tide in Spain, but Michael Portillo became a member of Thatcher's government, which at the time backed another far right dictator, Pinochet, in Chile.

Picasso's enormous collection of paintings and artwork are magnificent. He developed a revolutionary style, cubism, where scenes and objects are viewed simultaneously from multiple directions on a 2D canvas.

Russian revolutionary socialist Leon Trotsky (who wrote 'Art and Revolution') said "art should be judged first and foremost by the rules of art", but we can't ignore the influences on Picasso.

These included the revolutionary struggle in Spain, and his horror at witnessing the destruction extolled by fascism, capitalism, and war.

Picasso's most famous painting, Guernica, was commissioned to win support for the Republican cause.

Beautifully crafted to demonstrate the brutality of war, Guernica depicts the terrible blanket bombing of the Basque town of that name by the Nazis in 1937. Tory Portillo would like us to think Guernica is more about Picasso's love of bull-fighting than his sympathy for the Spanish revolution!

Exiled and living in France, Picasso was caught in the radical surge after World War Two. He joined the French Communist Party and remained a member until his death.

<http://www.socialistparty.org.uk/articles/21038>