

Living wage lie

Fight for £10 an hour now!

Claire Laker-Mansfield

When Iain Duncan Smith cheers the budget speech, we know it's bad news for working class people. Cold, cruel, callous cuts: the Tories are on a high after winning the election and want to get away with murder. Osborne's emergency budget was laced with political cynicism designed to confuse and distort.

Take the pledge to create a so-called 'living wage' to replace the current minimum. It will be £7.20 next year and he claims it will reach £9 by 2020.

Socialists welcome measures which improve the lives of working class people. But this minimum wage increase is inadequate. As well as failing to come close to reflecting the real cost of living, for those on tax credits its effect will be more than eliminated by swingeing welfare cuts.

But that's not all. In an act of sheer viciousness, Osborne has said that employers will have a special licence to super-exploit young workers.

Under-25s will be exempt from the so-called living wage. This, combined with the abolition of student grants and the removal of housing benefit for almost all those under 21, represents a declaration of war by the Tories on youth.

No wonder young people have been among the most furious and energetic in taking to the streets since the budget.

As well as opposing all welfare cuts, we fight for a minimum wage of £10 now for all. Working class people deserve the basic dignity and security of a wage we can live on. One in which we have a secure job, not a zero-hour contract.

The Tories are turning the screw on workers, the young, the poor and vulnerable people. And Labour backs them up on welfare! It's clear we need to organise. So join the Socialist Party, get involved and help build the fightback today.

Fightback essential following Osborne's hatchet budget

For the millionaire Tory cabinet ministers sitting in their ivory towers the plight of working class people is off their radar and concern. What do they care if a whole generation of young people is condemned to a desperate struggle for the basic necessities of life?

Since the Tories' unexpected election break in May - scraping back into power with the votes of 24% of the electorate - hatchet chancellor George Osborne has been licking his lips in anticipation of the further destruction he can inflict on the welfare state.

In today's budget he triumphantly announced measures that will worsen the struggle to get by of many working class and middle class people, by slashing tax credits and housing benefit, and maintaining public sector wage increases at just 1%. He did this while repeating his brazen lie that "we are all in this together". Especially worse off after Osborne's budget will be future parents who have more than two children; as a result of his vindictive cuts, many children in larger families will be condemned to greater poverty than those in smaller families.

The justification he resorted to for cutting in-work benefits - to disguise an ideological war on welfare - was that they

are effectively subsidising employers. But apart from his introduction of a new "national living wage" of £7-20 an hour from next April, which is in reality far less than a real 'living' wage, he leaves low paid workers (who are having their benefits reduced) at the mercy of the goodwill of their bosses, and we all know the likely result of that.

For Osborne, it's not enough that the top companies already amass vast profits while paying poverty wages. He has given the Tories' big business friends an enormous tax handout with corporation tax to be reduced to 19% in 2017 and 18% in 2020.

Raising the annual income threshold at which tax starts to £11,000 will be generally welcomed, but this isn't a measure that gives more to the lowest paid workers; it puts the same tax-free earnings sum into the pockets of all earners, including the richest. That measure, and the increase in the re-named minimum wage (which will be an additional 50p an hour after the increase of 20p due in October) puts some much-needed extra money into workers' pockets. However, on the other hand, most or all of it will be taken away for many by the slashing of in-work benefits, not to mention the effect of public sector wages being held at low levels.

Housing crisis

The massive and acute lack of affordable housing will grow even greater with the Tory budget's inclusion of a sell-off of Housing Association stock via the forewarned "right to buy" announcement. Much of this housing stock will end up in the hands of buy-to-let landlords charging astronomical 'market' rents.

Local authorities have had an indirect funding cut by being forced to reduce council property rents by 1% a year for four years, along with housing associations, a very small welcome measure for a layer of tenants, but one designed to cut the government's housing benefit bill rather than being of significant benefit to tenants.

"The best way to help working people is to let them keep more of the money they earn" argued Osborne just minutes after he had announced a major blow to social housing tenants who earn more than £30,000 a year (or £40,000 in London). They will be penalised with 'market' level rents or will have to uproot themselves and move elsewhere. Yet the Rowntree foundation has calculated that a couple with two children need an income of £40,000 if they are to have an acceptable standard of living.

Youth and students

For young people, there is no respite. Students from low waged households have had their small lifeline of a means-tested grant removed, turned into more loans to weigh them down with ever more frightening levels of debt. Young people shouldn't go straight from school to the dole decreed Osborne, so he abolished housing benefit for 18 to 21 year olds, ensuring that instead they can go from school to sleeping on the street. For some though, there will be more slave labour 'apprenticeships'. And no one under 25 will be entitled to the national living wage.

Overall, this budget cuts nearly £13 billion a year from welfare, which will add to the existing terrible levels of deprivation and hardship. Pressure on claimants and job-seekers, already causing suicides when faced with benefits sanctions, will remain and in some cases be stepped up - parents of children over the age of three are now on the list of those to be hit.

Osborne and Cameron's measures will certainly not reduce the massive and escalating inequality in society, which of course is the expected outcome from this pro-big business capitalist government that looks after the interests of the rich and powerful. Neither will it alter the precariousness of the economy recovery, which is inherently weak and highly exposed to impending shocks from the eurozone and world economy.

The urgency of the measures agreed at the conference of the National Shop Stewards Conference on 4th July are ever more clear: Calling for the TUC to organise a national campaign of public meetings and rallies to build for coordinated strike action against austerity, including to prepare for a 24 hour general strike.

The Greek workers are saying no to austerity; so must we!

Judy Beishon

For a £10 an hour minimum wage now!

Chancellor George Osborne boasted in his budget speech of creating a "living wage" of £9 an hour by 2020. Although this is higher than the £8 an hour minimum wage by 2020 pledged by Labour in the general election, it will definitely not be a 'living wage'.

The current UK 'living wage' levels according to the Living Wage Foundation are £7.85 an hour and £9.15 an hour in London. The Socialist Party, along with most trade unions, campaigns for the immediate implementation of a £10 an hour minimum wage as a step toward a real living wage.

Dave Carr

Tax credits slashed

Osborne has tried to claim that the Tories are looking after working people. But the small promised increase in the minimum wage will not come close to compensating for the savaging of in-work benefits.

It is estimated that 45% of 'hardworking families' will be worse off as a result of the cuts to Working Tax Credit.

Previously, to qualify for maximum Working Tax Credit you had to earn less than £6,420 a year; now it is nearly half that at £3,850. The rate at which the benefit tapers off once you earn over that has also been increased. Seumas Milne, writing in the Guardian, says a family with one earner on average earnings will lose over £2,000 a year in tax credits. A family with one earner on the minimum wage would lose considerably more.

The promised 70p increase in the minimum wage (20p in October and 50p next April) would provide £1,092 extra a year for someone working a 30 hour week; nowhere near enough to compensate for the slashing of Working Tax Credits.

Hannah Sell

The losers:

- 13 million families will lose an average of £260 a year due to a freeze in working age benefits, tax credits and local housing allowance up to 2020
- Three million families will lose an average of £1,000 a year due to cuts in Universal Credit.
- The working tax credit threshold to receive the maximum has been reduced from £6,420 a year to just £3,850
- Tax credits and family benefits under Universal Credit will be limited to the first two children only
- Benefit cap reduced to £20,000 (£23,000 in London)
- Employment and Support Allowance to severely disabled people and the long term sick cut by £30 a week
- Under-25s denied the "national living wage"
- Public sector wages (effectively frozen between 2010 and 2015) will be further pegged to a 1% annual rise, ie below price inflation
- Students from low-waged households will have means-tested grants removed and turned into more debt-laden loans
- Housing benefit abolished for 18 to 21 year-olds

More slave labour 'apprenticeships'

...and the winners:

- Big business will enjoy yet another cut in corporation tax - down to 18% by 2020
 - National insurance bill for companies will also be cut
 - Raising the annual income threshold at which income tax starts to £11,000 will benefit higher earners the most
 - Defence spending will rise to 2% of GDP (total output), £47.7 billion, by 2020 - benefiting private armaments companies
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Labour's austerity 'me too-ism' continues

Sarah Sachs-Eldridge

"Slaughter of first-borns could save £50 billion in Child Benefit, pledges Cameron," read a headline following the budget when the Tories stopped child benefit to parents after two children. It was only on reading the full article that it became clear it was a wind-up - because there was no mention of Labour backing for the policy!

That's what Labour did in reality. Shadow leader Harriet Harman stepped forward and said 'me too' on behalf of her party. Really there was nothing newsworthy in this. In January, only five Labour MPs voted against £35 billion of spending cuts that includes this budget.

Labour's manifesto actually included support for the welfare cap. So far from 'taking on the party' as has been reported, Harman represents 'Continuity Labour'.

But her actions have sparked a response among the Labour leadership hopefuls. One, (who some describe as 'David Cameron incarnate') Liz Kendall, has backed Harman. The other three, Jeremy Corbyn, Andy Burnham and Yvette Cooper have all registered some degree of opposition to the cut.

From Burnham this is somewhat surprising considering his own campaign manager, Rachel Reeves, was the one who said that Labour must not be seen as the party of benefit claimants.

Maybe he's motivated by the boos at GMB conference his support for benefit cuts earned him or the threat posed by Corbyn's anti-austerity stance.

A Corbyn win can't be ruled out. But it would lead to a Battle Royale with Labour's apparatus over control of the party.

Harman, in defending her stance to the backbenchers, said that now is not a good time to "campaign against the public". But the opinions of the 'public' were not expressed in the Tory victory - only 24% of the electorate voted for them. They have no mandate. The 'public', the working class that is, expresses itself daily in acts of solidarity.

Resistance

The PCS civil service union has voted for strike action against the implementation of the vicious Universal Credit in Glasgow and Bolton.

Every day there are picket lines where workers support each other, teams of bailiff busters defending homes, and other solidarity actions. Labour is not there - such action is a closed room to them. Working class solidarity has no mass political voice.

The Scottish National Party (SNP) says it will lodge an amendment opposing the welfare bill and has called on Labour

opponents of the bill to vote against Tory plans to cut tax credits. This is just posturing. The SNP has passed on Tory austerity in Scotland. When the SNP scrapped the bedroom tax it was under immense pressure from a developing opposition movement.

Solidarity and 100% opposition to austerity are the hallmarks of the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC), in which the Socialist Party plays a leading role.

TUSC is an important step towards building an independent, mass political voice for the working class. Its starting point is to reject the lie that is austerity - cuts are not necessary - and to fight them.

Them & Us

92,820

Council workers who earn less than next April's £7.20 an hour "living wage"

Widening pay gap

An extra 50p an hour annual increment on the "living wage" announced in the recent budget will amount to diddly squat on reducing income inequality in the UK.

According to the High Pay Centre (what?) top company bosses receive on average 149 times more in pay alone than their workers. This is higher than at the start of the capitalist recession in 2009 when the fat cat/worker pay gap was 120 times.

The widest gap is between advertising agency boss Sir Martin Sorrell and his workforce. His £42,900,000 salary is 810 times greater than his average worker's.

Bedroom tax cruelty

How cruel is the Tories' bedroom tax? Newport widow Julie Glover, whose husband and disabled son died within months of each other in 2012 and who cares full time for her remaining son affected by cerebral palsy, is being hammered by extra rent under the bedroom tax.

Julie is even prepared to give up her family home of 30 years in South Wales and downsize, but Labour-run Newport council says the cost of adapting a smaller home for her disabled son is too expensive.

EU revenge against Greek workers

Build the international fightback against austerity

Niall Mulholland

"Pure vindictiveness, complete destruction of national sovereignty, and no hope of relief." This is how economist Paul Krugman described the consequences for Greece of the 'deal' that the Syriza-led government made with the Troika (the EU, the European Central Bank and the International Monetary Fund).

In effect, Greece comes under the neo-colonial rule of the EU and Germany, its strongest economy. EU officials will dictate policy and expect the Greek parliament to rubber stamp draconian austerity measures.

All this suffering of Greek people will be imposed just so that Greece can pay back loans from the Troika. Of course none of that money went to the Greek people - just to the banks! The deal will force Greece deeper into recession, with no prospect of ever paying off its debts.

The Syriza government had no mandate to cave-in to the bosses' Troika. They were elected on an anti-austerity platform and in the 5 July referendum a big majority voted against further cuts.

What is needed is a clear socialist programme in the interests of the working class, to reverse austerity and to start transforming living standards. This must include refusing to pay the debt and democratic public ownership of the big banks and key parts of the economy.

Greek workers are stunned and disorientated and many feel betrayed. Yet they will have no choice but to resist, sooner or later.

Action needs to be built to effectively resist the cuts. And the bitter lessons of Syriza's failure in government shows that the Greek working class needs an independent political voice, a strong socialist challenge to Greek and European capitalism.

This is also the case in Britain, where pro-market, pro-cuts Labour is fundamentally no different to the Tories. The Socialist Party, which has played a key role in the development of the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition, will be to the fore in the anti-austerity struggles and building a new mass workers' party with socialist policies.

Greece: Tsipras crosses the Rubicon

Time for a new, mass revolutionary left to oppose all austerity!

On 13 July Greek Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras reached a deal with Eurozone leaders, securing a third bail out in return for pledging to implement huge austerity.

This comes after months of 'negotiations' following the election of Tsipras' party, Syriza, on an anti-austerity platform at the start of the year.

As described in the statement below, Tsipras first tried to concede on 9 July - but the harsh measures he signed up to then were not enough for the EU leaders, who demanded more again.

The 'deal' now agreed is the harshest that had been discussed. The Guardian quoted a senior EU official as saying that this was 'payback' for the Greek people's heroic 61.7% 'No' vote in the recent referendum on a previous austerity 'offer'.

Among the measures Syriza leaders signed up to:

- Sell off €50 billion of Greek public assets
- Undo measures carried out since they were elected in January - possibly including sacking the government cleaners they famously re-hired on coming to power
- Increase the retirement age and cut retirement benefits for the poor
- Increase sales tax on the Greek islands and apply the highest rate of sales tax to more items
- Implement automated spending cuts if spending deviates from the Troika's plan
- Review collective bargaining and industrial action laws
- Privatisise energy distribution

As this article was written (14 July) the situation is a moving picture. The Adedy civil servants union has called a 24-hour strike in response to the deal and other unions may join in.

- For updates see www.socialistworld.net

For international struggle against the austerity elite

The capitulation of Alexis Tsipras to the demands of the Troika is a massive blow to the Greek working class and to all forces, in Europe and internationally, that are fighting austerity.

The EU ministers are implementing regime change - not like they did in Iraq with guns and military 'shock and awe' but through the market - with banks not tanks. It is an act of colonialism by the EU.

The hard line taken has provoked hostility not just to the EU as a whole but to German capitalism and to its boot boy, finance minister Wolfgang Schäuble, in particular.

Schäuble suggested Greece should be forced to leave the Eurozone on a temporary basis and organise a parallel currency.

But there is no such thing as a temporary exit in this situation. Such a step would have been the beginning of the end of the single currency.

There are some on the left in Greece who see this as a solution in itself. But on the basis of capitalism there is no solution in or out of the Euro. For this reason it is necessary to appeal to the international working class.

The strength of such an approach has already been shown - in the run up to the referendum there were at least 250 demonstrations across Europe in solidarity with the Greek people.

Contagion

The capitalists are worried about contagion - that Spain, Italy, Ireland, and even Britain, could be next to reject austerity.

That's why they decided on punishing the regime by rubbing the noses of the Greek people in the mud - as a warning to the Greek working class and the working class of the whole of Europe. We need an international struggle against austerity.

Tsipras will probably only be able to get the proposals through the Greek Parliament by relying on opposition MPs. He is likely to resort to expelling from Syriza those MPs who continue to oppose the deal.

The effect of the proposed measures on the Greek working class will be huge. Already the depression in Greece has been economically and socially devastating.

Some sections of Greek workers could be demoralised by the disappointment of the magnificent 'No' vote in the referendum one week, followed the next by the acceptance of huge cuts. But not everyone will feel resigned.

We hope, along with our Greek sister party Xekinima, that workers will fight with all means at their disposal.

This may have to include, if all possibilities are used up inside Syriza, the fight for a new party which will confront Greek and European capitalism and blaze the path to socialism in Greece.

#ThisIsACoup

As EU ministers negotiated the ins and outs of the 'deal,' hundreds of thousands of Twitter users appended '#ThisIsACoup' to their tweets opposing the terms imposed on Greece by the Troika.

The hashtag was trending internationally as well as in both Greece and Germany, showing the solidarity felt by working class people across the world. The German left party, Die Linke, has also opposed the deal.

Preparing the ground

In 2013 Socialism Today (the Socialist Party's magazine - www.socialismtoday.org) reported on the structural changes agreed at the Syriza congress of that year.

This included dissolving the federal components of Syriza and ending their ability to speak publicly of their independent positions - an attempt to limit the influence of Syriza's left wing.

We said: "The right-wing of Syriza and the leading group around Tsipras have made their choices. They have rolled up their sleeves and showed their intentions in the clearest way.

"The left is obliged to answer back. In a sense, the really big clashes in Syriza have just begun."

For more see www.socialismtoday.org/172/greece.html

Time for a new, mass revolutionary left to oppose all austerity!

Editorial statement by Xekinima (CWI Greece), 10/07/2015

July 9th was a black day for the Greek left. SYRIZA's leading team, around prime minister Alexis Tsipras, subordinated itself completely and absolutely to the demands of the Troika lenders.

The Greek working class finds itself in a tragic position. They voted for SYRIZA in order to find solutions to their problems and to escape from the Memoranda (austerity packages). Yet after five months in government the only thing that SYRIZA was able to deliver was another catastrophic Memorandum which finishes off the pro-austerity policies of the previous governments of New Democracy and PASOK.

The working masses do not forget that the same people who are today betraying the ideas and principles of the Left are the same people who had promised to get rid of the Memorandum "within one day and with one law". It's the same people who promised the Salonica Programme (SYRIZA's more radical pre-election promises), which they claimed would be carried out irrespectively of the negotiations with the Troika.

The leading group in SYRIZA and Alexis Tsipras have been proven tragically incapable of responding to the tasks of the moment and unworthy of the confidence of the working class. They are unworthy of the earth-shaking 'No' vote on 5 July which reverberated throughout Europe and the whole world.

They betrayed the confidence of workers, pensioners, the unemployed and the poor, who voted by 70%-80% in favour of No in the working class neighbourhoods and cities. They betrayed the great struggle launched by the Left and the working class, all across Europe, in support of the struggling Greek workers.

And yet, even at this time, the SYRIZA leaders around Tsipras have the gall to ask people to rally today in favor of 'No' because, supposedly, this 'government of the Left' needs the support of people in the streets! But why should the

working class rally and demonstrate to defend those who have stabbed it in the back! Particularly when, only a few days ago, on Friday 3 July, workers and youth came out in their hundreds of thousands into the centre of Athens and on 5 July voted No by a massive 61.3%.

The so-called negotiations with the Troika are still, supposedly, continuing and it seems that the only possibility, however remote, of a reversal of the process of the subordination of SYRIZA is if sections of the ruling classes in Europe simply decide to kick Greece out of the Eurozone. This would be the only instance in which Tsipras could come into a head-on clash with the Eurozone. If this happened, it would of course not change even one iota any of the above criticisms of the leadership of SYRIZA.

Serving capitalism

July 9th represents a historical turning point in the transformation of SYRIZA from a party of the Left into a party in the service of the capitalist system. Tsipras and the ruling team have crossed the Rubicon. And they will continue on this road even if this leads them into the hands of a 'national government' along with the enemies of yesterday, even if they have to expel the left wing of SYRIZA and 'destroy' the party.

What lies behind this new historical tragedy of the Greek Left is nothing else but the complete lack of understanding by the leadership of the class character of living reality. And a complete lack of understanding of what class struggle means.

They went to the EU to "fight for their proposals" with water pistols against machine guns. They tried to "explain" and to "convince" Schauble and the rest of the capitalist gang leading the EU, naively and foolishly, that they were applying wrong policies and should change them. They never had and never showed any confidence in the power of the working class and its ability to take destiny into its own hands.

They swallowed the fairy tale perpetuated by the ruling class that their profit system is invincible, that capitalism can never be overthrown and that the exit from the euro would be equal to a social catastrophe.

The defeat in which Tsipras and his government has led the Greek working class is historical but it is not final. It not like the defeat suffered by the left and working class in the Civil War in Greece. There is still a lot of potential for resistance.

The immediate task is the coming together of the forces of the Left which understand the need for a regroupment along the lines of revolutionary socialism, to plan the next steps. There are serious forces in the non-parliamentary Left, inside ANTARSYA (Anti-capitalist Left) and SYRIZA etc., which understand that without rupture with the capitalist system and the Eurozone there is no perspective for a better life.

These forces must urgently meet and discuss and take all the necessary steps, to lay the basis for a new, mass revolutionary Left. To lead the struggles of tomorrow and to offer the perspective of struggle for a future against the false hopes of Tsipras and his circle.

On the evening of 10 July, a planned SYRIZA demonstration taking place in Syntagma, in central Athens, will now probably become a rally mainly of the SYRIZA Left and of ANTARSYA against the Tsipras U-turn. Members of Xekinima (CWI Greece) will distribute the above statement at the protest.

Xekinima (CWI Greece) calls for the Left SYRIZA MPs and MPs from the other Left parties to oppose and to vote against the latest proposals of the Tsipras leadership. The Left in Greece must appeal to workers and youth to mobilise against the new Memorandum, including organising mass protests and demonstrations, invoking the powerful No mandate from last week's referendum to oppose any sell-out of their class interests.

[CWI in Greece] calls for the Left to break with austerity and to adopt a socialist programme. This includes refusal to pay the debt; controls on capital flows; for a 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.

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

What programme for the Greek left?

Xekinima calls for the Left Platform Syriza MPs and MPs from the other left parties to oppose and to vote against the latest proposals of the Tsipras leadership.

The left in Greece must appeal to workers and youth to mobilise against the new Memorandum, including organising mass protests and demonstrations, invoking the powerful No mandate from last week's referendum to oppose any sell-out of their class interests.

Xekinima calls for the left to break with austerity and to adopt a socialist programme. This includes refusal to pay the debt; controls on capital flows; for a 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 before the referendum, we need to 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.

We must appeal to workers and youth across Europe to fight austerity and for a socialist Europe.

Part of the above was first posted on the Socialist Party website on 11 July 2015; more was added (from the *Socialist* paper) on 15 July.

South Africa

The Marikana report - a whitewash

Weizmann Hamilton, Workers' and Socialist Party (South Africa)

Under severe pressure from the families of the victims of the Marikana massacre (where 34 striking miners were shot dead by police on 16 August 2012) and threats of legal action, President Jacob Zuma has released the report of the

Farlam Commission of Inquiry.

Not unexpectedly, the report completely exonerates the government. Lonmin, the platinum mining company where the strike took place, has been rapped over the knuckles with a feather.

As part of its mining licence Lonmin was supposed to ensure adequate housing was available for workers - it ignored this. The company also falsified reports of its redirection of funds for social responsibilities. It engaged in tax evasion.

There is not even the suggestion in the report of compensation for the victims' families, nor any comment on the blatant violation of its dispute resolution procedures.

As is customary with such inquiries, the foot soldiers have to fall on their swords for the establishment. Such was the weight of the evidence of state culpability that it was impossible not to make recommendations for investigation into criminal liability against the police involved in the shootings.

In the most shocking attempt at holding the workers responsible for the massacre, the commission found that the actions of the workers - singing 'provocative' songs and arming themselves with traditional weapons - had contributed to the massacre.

Stand-off

Marikana was a stand-off. On the one side, workers who had laid down their tools, refusing to continue to be exploited like slaves, and seeking a peaceful resolution of a labour dispute.

On the other, the aggression of police deployed with premeditated murderous intent, armed with riot shields, water cannon, armoured vehicles, hand guns, automatic rifles, helicopters ferrying snipers and razor wire. Yet the judge offers the workers nothing, and the police and the bosses the equivalent of an amnesty.

Buried inside the commission's recommendations for corrective measures - eg riot control training and the fitting of helicopters with cameras - is a recommendation that would be hilarious if it were not so callous. It suggests first aid training for all police officers. Presumably this is so that when police shoot down the defenceless, they should attend to their victims themselves.

The reality is that the police left them there to die for a full hour, barring emergency vehicles from attending to the wounded. The commission could find 'only' one person that might have survived the hour the police waited while they contaminated the scene and planted weapons next to dead bodies.

The first burst of gunfire, which was captured by the world's television cameras and claimed the lives of 17 miners in eight seconds, occurred after workers, realising that they were about to be massacred, were led down the hill by the 'Man in the Green Blanket', Mgcineni Nkokeni.

Trapped

After observing the aggressive manner of the police deployment, Nkokeni (one of the workers) advised it was better to avoid bloodshed, descend the hill and return to the squatter camp where they lived. The workers were instead 'kettled' with razor wire and driven in the direction of the waiting police who gunned them down.

Fifteen minutes later, workers fled up the hill to hide between rocks and under bushes. The police had scant regard for standing orders that require warnings before the use of live ammunition and for the lower body to be targeted.

Families of the victims have understandably reacted with outrage and cynicism at the report. What confidence can they have in a police force whose initial reaction to the massacre was to arrest and charge the survivors with the murder of their comrades?

Conspiracy

There was a conspiracy reaching to the tops of the police senior command structures to cover up by planting and manipulating evidence at the scene and doctoring the video tapes. Written and taped minutes of police planning meetings were concealed and false testimony given to the commission. Yet the commission failed to recommend perjury charges against senior police.

The elaborate efforts by the state to cover up the Marikana massacre, of which the Farlam Commission is but the latest attempt, will in all likelihood succeed in shielding the government, Lonmin, and particularly the ministers at the heart of the operations to crush the strike.

What the establishment will not be able to prevent, however, is the political fall-out from the massacre. Marikana was far more than a simple labour dispute 'tragically' mishandled. It was a political earthquake, the after-shocks of which continue to rock the political establishment. The latest development of this is the South African Communist Party's (SACP) renunciation of Zuma.

From the onset, the strategists of the ruling class understood that this was no ordinary strike over wages (although, they did consider the demand for a R12,500 minimum wage outlandish).

Often socialists come to the same conclusion as the strategists of capitalism, but from the opposite class standpoint. The Democratic Socialist Movement (DSM - CWI South Africa), co-founders of the Workers and Socialist Party, was the only left force to intervene in these tumultuous events.

DSM had been present in Rustenburg for three years before Marikana, anticipating that the chain of working class illusions in the post-apartheid system would break at its strongest link - the Nation Union of Mineworkers (NUM). At that time the NUM was the biggest, richest and politically most influential of Cosatu's (trade union federation) affiliates.

We understood that the mining industry, despite its relative decline in the share of the country's GDP, was historically the economic and political backbone of South African capitalism.

We understood the importance of the fact that the strike of the Lonmin workers was led by an independent strike committee.

Whole system

It was a rebellion not only against the exploitation in an industry in which it would take the average mine worker 300 years to earn what a CEO earns in one year, but also against the NUM.

It was an expression of the realisation that the NUM had degenerated into collaborators with the mining bosses.

Because the NUM was the powerhouse of Cosatu, and because Cosatu in turn was the most important ally of the African National Congress (ANC) government in the Tripartite Alliance with the ANC and SACP, this was in reality an unarmed political uprising against the entire political establishment.

The Lonmin workers were not alone in realising the treachery of the NUM. Across the Rustenburg mining belt, workers had established independent strike committees. Far from crushing the strike, the Marikana massacre provoked a movement that spread into the mining industry as a whole.

The DSM-initiated Rustenburg-wide Joint Strike Coordinating Committee developed into the National Strike Committee. At its height it led a strike of over 100,000 workers in the mining industry, inspiring also a strike of farm workers.

By the end of that year, the decision was made between DSM and a number of the strike committees to launch the Workers and Socialist Party (WASP), which we did in 2013.

Consequences

The first aftershock of the Marikana earthquake was another major split in the ANC - the second in five years.

Expelled ANC Youth League president, Julius Malema, launched the Economic Freedom Fighters on a radical left-populist programme. Then in December 2013 the metal workers' union Numsa voted to withdraw support for the ANC.

Although Numsa, regrettably, did not heed WASP's call for it to support our election campaign, our decision to stand in the elections had placed the question of socialism in the political mainstream.

Cosatu reacted to Numsa's decision by expelling it. Cosatu, at one time the most powerful, militant and radical trade union federation on the African continent, has now all but disintegrated.

The Tripartite Alliance has been left in ruins by the Marikana earthquake. The way has now been cleared for the development of a mass workers' party.

WASP is campaigning for the formation of a new trade union federation, supporting the united front launched by Numsa, building the Socialist Youth Movement and a federation of socialist community campaigns, and campaigning for the unity of these forces in a mass workers' party on a socialist programme.

International news in brief

US: re-elect Kshama Sawant

Socialist Alternative member Kshama Sawant is standing for re-election to Seattle City Council after her historic win in 2013 with 90,000 votes. Kshama won that campaign supporting the fight for a \$15 an hour minimum wage - which has since been won and introduced across Seattle. This time Kshama is focusing her campaign on the demand for rent control.

See www.socialistalternative.org and www.kshamasawant.org

Ireland: Triple-A 5K

Supporters of the Anti-Austerity Alliance (AAA - coalition including the Socialist Party, CWI Ireland) ran a sponsored fun-run on 12 July. The event was expected to raise thousands towards election campaigns.

See www.socialistparty.ie and www.antiausterityalliance.ie

Belgium: summer camp

90 people attended the summer camp of Linkse Socialistische Partij/Parti Socialiste de Lutte (PSL/LSP - CWI Belgium)

See www.actieflinks.be

2005: Jean Charles de Menezes shooting

Still demanding justice!

Steve Nally, Lambeth Socialist Party

On 22 July 2005 an innocent man was brutally shot to death by police at Stockwell tube station in south London. That man was a young Brazilian worker called Jean Charles de Menezes.

Like millions of Londoners that day Jean, an electrician, was on his way to work. However, he became the target of a ruthless 'shoot to kill' Metropolitan Police operation.

Two weeks earlier 52 people had tragically lost their lives in a wave of terrorist bombings on London's transport system. Then, on 21 July, four terrorists attempted but failed to detonate their bombs.

The next day Jean was murdered by police, who initially claimed that he was a "terrorist". I remember people cheering at my workplace when the news came through. I still feel sickened by the memory of that.

As a result of the bombings a police operation had been set up to track down suspected terrorists. One such operation was in Tulse Hill, Lambeth, and it focussed on the housing block where Jean lived.

On the morning of 22 July he left for work getting two buses to Stockwell tube and boarded a tube train. He did not jump the barriers and run down the escalator as the police initially claimed. He did not stand up to them as they claimed. Nor did he disobey orders as they claimed.

Cover-up

In reality Jean was jumped upon, unawares, and killed with seven bullets to the head. He didn't stand a chance.

To cover themselves the police spun a web of lies and deliberately hampered the inquiry immediately set up by the Independent Police Complaints Commission.

Jean was no terrorist. If he had been, why did the police allow him to leave home, get on two buses and enter a busy tube station without arresting him beforehand?

And why on that particular day was the CCTV not working at Stockwell tube station? Perhaps it may have shown what really happened on the day. However it took a determined campaign to expose the truth.

On Monday 25 July the Stop The War Coalition (STWC) organised a 400-strong vigil outside Stockwell tube station. Menezes family members and supporters present at the vigil demanded that the vigil march on Parliament, about two miles away.

Despite police objections the vigil developed into an impromptu march. By the time it was halted by riot police at Vauxhall Bridge it had grown into a demonstration of over 700, with members of the local Portuguese community joining it as it progressed down South Lambeth Road.

The local Socialist Party branch made an immediate call for a mass demonstration through the Stockwell area to protest against Jean's murder and to protect and unite the local community - in particular the 30,000 strong Portuguese community based in that part of Lambeth.

We also called for class unity, no to war and terrorism, and an open public inquiry led by trade unionists and the community groups into the shooting.

Although these demands were well received in the local area, prevarication by the STWC and others meant that such a march did not take place and the justice campaign was eventually diverted down the route of legal process alone.

Socialist Party

Following the vigil the Socialist Party held a successful public meeting in Stockwell on 11 August, attended by over 40 local people.

Alongside this Socialist Party members also participated in the Menezes family campaign - Justice 4 Jean. Its first action was a lobby of Downing Street on 22 August.

Over 600 attended and again it quickly turned into an impromptu march, this time on Scotland Yard. These two impromptu marches highlighted the potential for an immediate demonstration of many thousands.

Meanwhile, the Stockwell area came under siege from the police. It was not enough for them to kill a man in cold blood. They also decided to use their powers to intimidate the local community as more of the awful truth emerged.

At one stage you literally could not turn a street corner without seeing police vehicles. To me it felt like living in a mini-police state.

The STWC then organised a national anti-war demonstration for 24 September with a feeder march from Stockwell tube station. The Socialist Party again went onto the streets and into the local Portuguese community giving out 6,000 leaflets.

We also held a meeting at Lambeth College which 60 students attended and got resolutions passed by Lambeth Unison and the RMT transport union branch that covered Stockwell tube.

The feeder march was a success but was not the mass demonstration and accompanying campaign required to get justice for Jean and to fully hold the police to account.

In 2006 the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) decided not to prosecute the police officers responsible for Jean's early death. Unlike Jean they were allowed to return to work.

Instead, the CPS prosecuted the Metropolitan Police for breaking health and safety legislation! And in 2007, they were found guilty.

Open verdict

The following year, at Jean's inquest, the Coroner instructed the jury that they could not return a verdict of "unlawful killing", which by then was the only verdict that could describe what happened. Instead, an open verdict was returned.

In a final insult to Jean's family, the Gold Commander in charge of police operations on 22 July 2005, Cressida Dick, was promoted to the position of Deputy Assistant Commissioner.

Labour prime minister at the time, Tony Blair, and London Mayor, Ken Livingstone, while apologising for the shooting praised the police for 'doing a difficult job'.

The state tried to smear Jean's memory, telling the media he was 'an illegal migrant worker'. They even posthumously accused him of sexual assault. This was emphatically disproved.

The brutal murder of Jean Charles de Menezes shows how far the state will go to 'get their man' and what they will do to try to cover up their actions. It shows how unaccountable the police are and will even reward those who carry out such catastrophic deeds in the name of 'justice'.

It also shows the need for mass protests and well organised campaigns when such events occur. Jean never got any justice and his family will never get any peace from the memory of a son taken so brutally.

Ten years since the killing of Jean Charles de Menezes

Lambeth and Southwark Socialist Party branches public meeting:

Thursday 23 July 2015, 7.30-9pm

Stockwell Community Centre, 1 Studley Rd, London SW4 6RA

Labour council axes union facility time

Jane Nellist, National Union of Teachers (NUT) Coventry (personal capacity)

Coventry council, a Labour-controlled authority, is planning draconian cuts to facility time - union reps' time for trade union duties.

The Socialist has already reported on Tory-led Bromley council's huge attacks on facility time, to prepare for mass privatisation. But attacks from a Labour council are an absolute disgrace. What's worse, the council is trying to railroad through changes without negotiation or regard to agreements with the unions.

Ignored

The council has ignored a dispute lodged by teachers' unions NUT, NASUWT and ATL, public service union Unison and general union Unite. It defends its proposals by referencing right-wing pressure group the Taxpayers' Alliance, widely believed to be a Tory front organisation.

Unison would lose 45% of facilities time, Unite 21% - and the NUT 70%.

Unite and Unison are affiliated to the Labour Party. Local Labour leaders have ignored pressure to withdraw the proposals. Labour's open preparations to do the Tories' dirty work show why workers need political representatives who support them - like the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition.

The unions have had some success in staving off the council's worst excesses. Now the council wants to prepare the ground for still more attacks on services, pay, conditions and jobs - on top of the thousand already cut.

If Labour gets away with it in Coventry, then your council services and workplace will be next.

Our trade union movement has made great advances over the decades. But what we are seeing now challenges all of those gains. We must not allow this to happen.

Support Coventry council workers by signing the petition: <http://tinyurl.com/q4tp625>

Cardiff teachers strike against 'death wish' workload

Teachers at Fitzalan High School in Cardiff struck on 9 July against new timetables. The dispute could be a test case for the council's attempts to force more from workers.

Changes would increase the number of lessons by 15%. Teachers are already exhausted.

Teachers' unions NUT and NASUWT are demanding more staff if plans go ahead. A recent national survey found 89%

of teachers with mental health problems blame workload.

"If my resolve ever weakens, I always think of ex-colleagues," one said. "We're not just taking action for our own sake. Conditions are so bad now that wanting to go into teaching feels more like a death wish than a vocation."

Picket lines were well-attended, well-organised and effective. Local media reported almost 100 teachers stayed away.

Management predictably downplayed the impact, but reports from inside tell of chaos reigning. The school stayed open despite the absence of teachers - and despite caretaking staff organised by general union GMB refusing to cross the picket line.

Joint action

Discussion has also erupted among non-teaching staff. Their appetite is building for joining the action.

Support workers' union membership numbers had been weakened by what members describe as a feeble response from their union to negotiations. Some had lost almost a fifth of their salary.

But now, many are discussing re-joining - and this time holding union leaders to account.

Transport workers shut down tube and railway

London Underground

Naomi Byron

London Underground workers struck on 8 and 9 July against pay cuts, job cuts, shift changes and attacks on conditions. All four unions - RMT, Aslef, TSSA and Unite - struck together, closing the entire network for the first time in 13 years.

"I've never seen a strike like it. Management aren't even trying to open most stations," said one picket at London Bridge.

The station was all locked up, with a sign saying "closed till 5.20am on Friday 10 July". It was unnaturally quiet for rush hour - but then most people couldn't get there. The tube was entirely shut down.

Loads of drivers beeped their support. Commuters gave pickets the thumbs up or a few words of encouragement.

The 'Red Line' bulletin - from Socialist Party members in transport union RMT - went down well. Pickets were especially keen on our argument for joint action with bus drivers. They are fighting for standardised pay across different companies, and organised successful London-wide strikes earlier this year.

See more on this strike at

http://www.socialistparty.org.uk/campaign/Workplace_and_TU_campaigns/London+underground/21061

First Great Western

Alec Thraves

Swansea may be the end of the line for First Great Western rail passengers. But staff organised by transport union RMT

are determined it won't be the end of the line for their jobs and conditions. They struck on 8 to 10 July.

Swansea RMT branch secretary Owen Herbert spoke to the Socialist.

"First Great Western are using the new Hitachi 'Super Express' trains to scrap the buffet car, tender out maintenance jobs, cut station and ticket office staff - and, most worryingly, remove the train guard by introducing driver-only operation.

"In Swansea, as with other maintenance depots, around 80 maintenance jobs are at risk. Catering staff are obviously concerned over removal of the buffet service. Train guards play an essential role in providing a professional service for the health and safety of passengers.

"The RMT and East Coast, which are also introducing the new Hitachi trains, have negotiated an agreement which satisfies all the concerns of our union. Our members on Great Western are determined to reach a similar deal - otherwise future action will be on the cards!"

Read more on this strike at <http://www.socialistparty.org.uk/articles/21062/09-07-2015/striking-against-detrimental-changes>

Unite rules conference

Biggest union clings to Labour, but considers law-busting strikes

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

A battle over Britain's biggest trade union's support for Labour took place at its conference on 6 to 10 July. The leadership of general union Unite won a stay of execution for the Labour link, but lost on other proposals. Conference also approved the union's right to take action outside the law, and political autonomy for Scottish members.

Unite's four-yearly 'rules conference' makes changes to the rule book which lays the foundation for all other union policies. It also holds biennial 'policy conferences' to discuss smaller changes within the rules.

The executive council - Unite's ruling body - proposed deferring any change to political strategy until Labour's leadership is chosen. General Secretary Len McCluskey had to promise the rules conference would be recalled "if circumstances change". Despite this, 10% of delegates opposed the statement.

Jeremy Corbyn

The air of hope and desperation for Jeremy Corbyn to do well in Labour's leadership contest was palpable. But what will be done if he loses? Will Unite and other Labour-affiliated unions continue to back a party which, even in opposition, does not oppose Tory policies?

Following the conference, Labour approved the anti-working class parts of George Osborne's budget. The executive's statement was swiftly rendered out of date. But it was always designed to get through conference and no further.

More positively, conference removed the words "so far as may be lawful" from the rule book. Unite should use the decision to allow unlawful action to coordinate with other unions to fight proposed new anti-strike laws. The government plans undemocratic restrictions on union voting to prevent stoppages.

Conference gave Unite in Scotland the power to make independent decisions about political strategy. Members in Ireland already have this right - and back pro-union candidates instead of Labour. The Scottish regional secretary and chair, however, were at pains to say this would not mean disaffiliating from Labour. This is despite its recent electoral drubbing in Scotland.

Leadership defeats

The leadership did not have things all its own way. On the first morning, its standing orders - rules for how conference would operate - were defeated. Delegates were suspicious the executive would push through votes on blanket statements to prevent votes on changes it opposed. Conference was suspended for an hour while this rule was rewritten!

The executive was also defeated over changes to general secretary elections. It wanted to raise the minimum number of branches which need to nominate a candidate from 50 to 100.

Unite members in the Socialist Party and Socialist Party Scotland proposed or supported rule changes to further democratise the union. These included annual policy conferences, electing some full-time union staff, and reducing members' terms of office on elected committees from three to two years. Unfortunately, these were defeated.

Socialist ideas

However, interest in our ideas led to us selling 83 copies of the Socialist, plus several of our Scottish sister paper. This is double the number sold at last year's policy conference.

A successful fringe meeting was addressed by Socialist Party general secretary Peter Taaffe and Suzanne Muna, newly elected to the union's executive. The meeting helped raise over £700 for our funds. A Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition meeting was attended by several strikers from south London's Bromley council visiting for the day.

The outcome of the conference may be disappointing for those looking to the biggest union to give a political lead. But the question of a new mass workers' party will not go away. Our members in Unite, from the union's executive to the rank and file, will continue to fight for it.

Workplace news in brief

Lobby of the TUC

The National Shop Stewards Network (NSSN) plans to lobby TUC congress. The NSSN will demand the TUC organise a midweek demo against the Tory trade union bill, and prepare for a 24-hour general strike if it passes.

Sunday 13 September 2015, 1 to 3.30pm, at the Grand Hotel, Brighton. If you want to attend and need transport, email info@shopstewards.net.

Barnet vandal

A leading trade unionist at a striking north London council has fallen victim to anti-union vandalism. John Burgess is branch secretary of public service union Unison in Barnet. The vandal put a nail through a tyre on John's car, and stuck an offensive note to his windscreen. The Socialist Party condemns this cowardly attack, and calls for solidarity with John and his union branch.

Gallery giving

Workers at central London's National Gallery are collecting for their strike fund on 13 to 17 July. Members of public service union PCS walk out again on 14 to 16 July, and plan more strikes on 20 to 22. They are fighting guest services privatisation and victimisation of rep Candy Udwin - whose appeal date is 22 July.

Please send donations to account number 20045841, sort code 08-60-01, quoting reference 'NG Collection'. Cheques to National Organising Department, National Gallery Collection, PCS, 160 Falcon Road, London SW11 2LN.

Universal discredit

Universal credit workers plan to strike on 20 and 21 July over increasingly oppressive conditions. The universal credit scheme is part of Tory attacks on the welfare state. PCS members voted for strikes by 84% on a 56% turnout. Workers are fighting poor resources, bullying management, inadequate training, impossible targets and staff shortages.

Probation strike

Probation workers struck on 14 July after the National Probation Service and community rehabilitation companies offered a 0% pay rise. The two-hour walkout was organised by Unison.

Bromley solidarity

Workers for Bromley council, south London, pictured supporting union rep Kathy Smith. Kathy, branch secretary of general union Unite, has had all her union facility time removed. Glenn Kelly, branch secretary of public service union Unison, has suffered the same attack.

This means they have to carry out their trade union duties - equivalent to full-time jobs - in their spare time. Bromley's Tory council is trying to drive through privatisation of more than 90% of jobs. (Photo O Kasab)

Reverse social care sell-offs

Jean Thorpe, Nottingham Socialist Party

As people live longer, more and more are likely to need care services when they get older.

Over 1.3 million people in the UK currently rely on social care. Another three million are cared for by friends and family. In the next 30 years, the number living beyond 85 is set to grow by 180% - and the numbers of those living with dementia is likely to double.

At the same time, there is a national crisis in care, caused by a disastrous mix of privatisation and funding cuts. The last government slashed the adult social care budget by £3.5 billion. Homecare and other community services were particularly hard hit.

In 1993, 95% of homecare was delivered by local councils. That figure is now down to 11%. Some is with the voluntary sector, and the overwhelming majority is delivered by private companies.

Figures for nursing and residential homes indicate that in 1979, 64% of care places were in the public sector. By 2012 this had fallen to 6% - a shocking level of outsourcing. The private care market is big money - with over half a million places, worth an estimated £24 billion.

Southern Cross

It was probably not till the collapse of the Southern Cross care home group in 2011 that the public became aware of private equity companies' control of social care. Southern Cross was then Britain's largest adult care home provider. It collapsed after rapid expansion meant it could not pay rent on many of its homes. The welfare of 31,000 residents was threatened.

The privately run Winterbourne View care home scandal followed hot on the heels of Southern Cross. BBC Panorama secretly recorded care workers abusing disabled residents. There is no justification for this sickening behaviour. But scandals like this will only become more common as untrained care staff are forced into impossible working conditions for poverty pay.

Privatisation across adult social care, which started in the late 1980s, is more prevalent than in children's social care. Nevertheless, the private sector is very well established in the children's residential and fostering sector.

In England, 75% of children's homes are privately run, with a further 11% run by charities. Infamous outsourcing firms G4S and Serco, along with various private equity companies, own two of the three biggest foster home placement providers. There are big profits to be made in this sector.

Polly Toynbee, in a Guardian article last year, talked about private investment firm Gravity International. It advertised 18% profit return in one year. A fully occupied four-bed children's home can yield an annual profit of £624,000.

Money motivation

A major concern is that the locations of most children's homes are determined by property prices rather than the needs of children. Many end up living many miles from their family and community. 25% of homes are based in north-west England. Only 6% are in London, even though the capital has the largest and youngest population.

Ann Coffey, Labour MP for Stockport, highlighted other serious issues in a 2012 comment to the BBC. "Homes are advertising very aggressively for children who are much damaged, who have histories of drug abuse, sexual abuse, alcohol abuse." Firms seek the most damaged children, possibly because councils pay more for these placements.

The government is now looking to privatise child protection social work. There was a huge public furore over this proposal last year, with 70,000 signing petitions opposing it. The Labour Party did not oppose privatisation.

The government appeared to back down. Publicity died away - but beneath the radar, the Tories were developing a loophole.

Private companies could still profit from services by setting up a non-profit subsidiary. The parent company can then make a profit by charging its subsidiary for buildings, admin, IT and other services. Similarly, owners or sponsors of school academy chains can make a profit from 'non-profit' academised schools.

Some commentators claim private companies are not interested in running such 'high-risk' services. But we know companies will go wherever profits can be made. The Guardian has reported that Serco and G4S already have a joint contract in one area for forensic examination of children who may have been sexually abused.

Total failure

The record of privateers like G4S, and notorious private training firm A4E, is one of total failure. A4E forged paperwork and falsely claimed it had helped the long-term unemployed back into work so it would hit targets. G4S had to pay back nearly £110 million to the taxpayer after it charged for monitoring non-existent electronic tags on offenders. None of this has prevented privatisation surging forward.

For staff in privatised social care, there are plenty of horror stories. Public service union Unison produced a 2012 report called "Time to Care" based on testimony from homecare workers.

It described "call cramming": visits are too close together, meaning they can last only 15 minutes, or even less. Staff reported feeling ashamed by rushed visits. Service users had a different care worker on every visit, even when very personal care is being delivered.

Workers also described not being paid travel time between visits, meaning they were effectively earning less than the minimum wage. There has now been a legal ruling that non-payment of travel time is not allowed to take an employee below the (totally inadequate) minimum wage.

The report also highlighted the compassion and dedication of staff who often undertook work that was unpaid.

Creeping but endemic privatisation in social care has not always attracted the level of publicity that NHS privatisation has. But cutbacks in social care have a knock-on effect on the NHS.

Those no longer needing medical attention can become stuck in hospital because there are no social care places available. Any integration between the NHS and social care must not be used to cut services further, which would only exacerbate the problem.

There have also been significant local disputes involving care workers in the private sector.

Care workers in Doncaster took 90 days of strike action in 2014. This followed pay cuts of up to 35% after being transferred from the NHS to private firm Care UK. The company - owned by private equity firm Bridgepoint - also brought in 100 new employees on far lower wages. Ed Miliband, then leader of the Labour Party and the local MP, failed to visit the picket line or show any kind of public solidarity.

Staff at private company Thera East Midlands struck in 2013 over attacks on pay, terms and conditions. Employees in Salford's mental health services waged a big campaign against privatisation and closures, and service users played a prominent role in the campaign.

What solution?

Private companies often claim they have to cut their employees' pay and conditions because the public bodies that commission their services do not pay enough. But the answer to this is not to give the private companies more public money to be creamed off as profit.

To end the current crisis, we must end privatisation. All outsourced social care should be brought back into public ownership, under the democratic control of workers and the community. Only then can we guarantee full funding for proper training and facilities, decent pay and reasonable working conditions. Without this, workers - and vulnerable service users - will continue to suffer.

A day in the life: a care worker facing privatisation

"I am a care worker at Bromley council, south London, providing a service for the most vulnerable adults in the borough.

Having done this job for years, I have come to never expect thanks from the council. Instead I take great satisfaction from doing my job. But now, I face being handed over to a private company, and all the uncertainty that comes with that.

On a typical day, I enter at 8.30am for the team briefing. This is a forum for issues with service users, along with general smooth running of the service. I expect once a private company takes over, this will become a thing of the past: time means money.

Once a week, I and a colleague take out six service users to nearby Bexleyheath via minibus. They play ten-pin

bowling, have lunch and look around the shops. Will a private company still allow this kind of trip?

Around 9.30, I gather everyone, make sure they have their coats, have been to the toilet and get onto the minibus safely. I ensure everyone is seat belted. My colleague drives while I keep a watchful eye on the service users.

Once at the bowling centre, we assist with a ramp for those with more complex needs who cannot bowl themselves. Then sometimes our group likes to visit the supermarket to buy a snack before lunch. Most can eat without help, but two have their food cut up.

After lunch, they enjoy looking around the local shops. Their favourites are the pound stores where they buy sweets and chocolates - however we try to promote healthy eating! By 2.45pm we head back to the minibus, to arrive back around 3.15.

We help our people off the bus and take those who need it to the toilet. We wait for borough transport to collect them anytime up to 4.27, or beyond if running late.

Other activities include lunch clubs, baking, arts and crafts, mobility exercises, pottery, an older persons' group, hygiene, bingo, music, computing, photography and sensory exercises.

These activities are so important. Relatives want to know that when their loved ones are in our care, they are not just plonked in front of the television.

So far, we have been told very little about Certitude, who the council wants to hand the service over to. We are told that this is due to "commercial sensitivity". But what about the sensitivity of the people we care for?

That is why I have been taking strike action. I want to protect the service for those I care for."

TV review

Orphan Black - refreshing take on sci-fi story

Mary Finch reviews BBC America series Orphan Black.

Orphan Black is brilliantly written television. The story revolves around young women who find out they're clones, created as part of an illegal experiment. The storylines develop rapidly as they discover more about themselves and the wider agenda they're part of.

It's a refreshing, intelligent feminist take on the sci-fi genre, placing the most surreal elements of science in an everyday context of mothers and workers. For example many films fail the 'Bechdel test'. This rates a film as sexist if it doesn't have at least two women in it, who talk to each other about something other than a man.

Almost all conversations in Orphan Black take place between two women about other women. Almost all the main characters are women, who are complex, individual and central to the storylines, rather than being treated as background props.

Rachel, the almost unfeeling director of the cloning experiment, shows intense vulnerability as the story about her parents unfolds. The ditsy blonde clone working in a nail salon, unaware of her biological identity, is quickly shown to be systematically investigating it. There are no one-sided women.

The vastly different personalities of each clone are made deliberately noticeable, as is their struggle to be seen as individual and human, rather than just test subjects. The clones' fight to have control over their own biology has formed a central plotline of all three seasons so far, and this leads into even more explicit pro-choice politics.

The daughter of a conservative Christian family is unwillingly made pregnant with a clone's foetus. But her solution is simple, the donor Helena says: "Do not have my babies if you do not want to have my babies."

The main protagonist, Sarah Manning, is from an obviously working class background. Rather than her being demonised for criminal behaviour, it's presented more as a result of her harsh experience of the foster system and her lack of opportunities, caused by class constraints.

Another main character, Cosima, is a lesbian, which is shown as incidental to both her character and the show. LGBT people aren't presented as remarkably different from their straight counterparts; they certainly aren't a novelty. They're treated as real, normal people. Inevitably, there are drawbacks; notably there is an overwhelmingly white cast - black and Asian women are completely left out of the picture.

But Orphan Black is a huge step forward for women, with a pro-choice, pro-feminist angle. It is extremely well written television, cutting across the misogynistic representations that otherwise dominate capitalist media.

Budget Day in London - Angry coordinated protests and solidarity

Paula Mitchell, London Socialist Party secretary

Four disabled activists were arrested as protesters were manhandled by police outside parliament at lunchtime on budget day, Wednesday 7th July.

Politicians for the rich were protected by aggressive police lines while they made decisions to hammer the poor. The abolition of the Independent Living Fund and changes to Employment and Support Allowance are just the latest savage cuts meted out on disabled people. People have died as a result of cuts to disability benefits and sanctions.

But far from being 'vulnerable', Disabled People against Cuts (DPAC) activists threw balls at Downing Street to say #Balls2theBudget, blocked Westminster Bridge and unfurled an enormous banner across the river from parliament.

Four public sector union branches coordinated strike action on budget day: Bromley Unite and Unison, Barnet Unison and PCS at the National Gallery, all fighting privatisation and defending trade union rights. These unions had planned a protest in Parliament Square, and joined together with the DPAC protesters, showing the solidarity we will need on a national scale to defeat the Tories.

Rally next to Parliament

Socialist Party member Glenn Kelly, Bromley Unison branch secretary, compered a rally in front of parliament. Speakers from each of the strikes and from DPAC were joined by RMT executive member for London Transport, John Reid, to report on the massive coordinated strike action of four tube unions that was due to start later in the day.

Youth Fight Austerity and TUSC representatives also spoke. Everyone agreed: if we can coordinate like this on a local level, why can't the national trade union leaders coordinate in a one day general strike?

At tea-time it was the turn of the 'heritage wardens' to flex their muscles as they enforced the ridiculously anti-democratic by-laws relating to Parliament Square: no amplified sound, no tables, no paper selling, no fundraising, no distributing written material! "You can hold your banners" we were told! Even Tory Westminster council was more accommodating and allowed us to set up a modest line of stalls on a specific piece of pavement.

Arrival of Youth Fight Austerity

Nonetheless, protesters were undeterred as a few hundred gathered for the People's Assembly 'die-in'. This protest was enlivened by the arrival of the brilliant Youth Fight Austerity contingent that marched to Parliament Square from Downing Street - only to immediately have its megaphone confiscated! An anti-austerity London mayor candidate will have to include fighting for the right to protest in their manifesto!

Later young people again blocked the road by parliament.

Socialist Party members and TUSC supporters also joined migrant workers at Sotheby's protesting at their ruthless employer. Cleaners have been banned from work after protesting for better sick pay!

Budget day was a declaration of war by this government of the rich. But it was met with a great day of action, brought to a conclusion by the start of the magnificent four-union tube strike.

Socialist Party members, TUSC supporters, youth protesters, trade unionists - we were all happy to end our day standing alongside the tube strikers at Paddington, London Bridge and elsewhere. As London ground to a standstill and the might of the organised working class was proudly on display we felt the message to the Tory Bully Boys was clear.

This version of this article was first posted on the Socialist Party website on 9 July 2015 and may vary slightly from the version subsequently printed in The Socialist.

Osborne attacks youth... we take to the streets!

The budget saw vicious attacks on huge sections of society. But one group particularly hard hit was young people. The abolition of student grants, attacks on our right to housing benefit and that under-25s will be excluded from the new so-called living wage, mean young people are facing an even more bleak and uncertain future. But Osborne's cuts budget was met with resistance. Protests took place around the country. Youth Fight for Jobs organised over 20 of these under the banner Youth Fight Austerity (YFA), in a national day of action on 8 July. From Syntagma to Parliament Square a cry of 'oxi' - no to austerity and misery, is ringing through the streets. And this is only the beginning.

See below and www.youthfightforjobs.com for more reports and photographs.

Birmingham

Birmingham Youth Fight for Jobs held an anti-austerity demonstration on budget day. The well attended evening protest grew to over 300 after a feeder march from Birmingham Against the Cuts joined in. The crowd had lots of energy and there were numerous speakers of different ages, some being new to the experience.

A group photograph was taken in support of the Greek people, after which, everyone marched to the West Midlands BBC office. Chanting all the way, and gaining attention from passers-by, the march delivered a letter to the West Midlands BBC director requesting they present more anti-austerity coverage.

YFA's lively stalls and their demands of a £10 an hour minimum wage, rebuilding public services and a 24-hour general strike were extremely popular. A short but vibrant rally included speakers from the RMT, CWU and Unison as well as YFA and campaigners against cuts to local library services.

Overall, with a youthful and fresh feeling, the protest has added to the range of demonstrations held in Birmingham and has received much positive feedback from people. Over 100 signed up to be involved in YFJ's future anti austerity campaigns who had never participated in political activity before.

Protests were also held in Wolverhampton and 100 attended an early evening protest in Coventry.

Corinthia Ward, Birmingham Youth Fight for Jobs

London

As part of Youth Fight Austerity's national action we voiced our anger at Osborne's planned cuts outside Downing Street. As Socialist Party member Mary Finch made clear, the scrapping of the maintenance grant and its replacement with a loan is not only another attack on students who already struggle to survive, but an attack on young working class people who now face an even higher level of debt if they get to university.

Youth Fight Austerity then marched on Parliament Square to join with other anti-austerity protesters, blocking the road and making lots of noise. While some despaired at the 'death' of the public sector, we made it clear that an organised, united fightback is needed.

Marianne Murray, Lewisham Socialist Party

On 11 July Youth Fight for Jobs took our tents and placards to Parliament Square in London to protest at what is a government declaration of war on young people. The occupation received publicity in both the Daily Mirror and the Observer newspapers. The budget is an attempt to snatch our future and the grim outlook of increasing hardship for young people stands in stark contrast with Osborne's treatment of the rich.

We erected tents to highlight the devastating effects of housing benefit cuts on vulnerable young people. This was followed by speeches and a discussion of how to take the fight forward.

Ian Pattison, Youth Fight for Jobs

Huddersfield

Around 50 people gathered for a protest called by TUSC and Youth Fight for Jobs in Huddersfield at lunchtime. The protest heard from local trade union speakers and campaign groups including Iain Dalton on behalf of Youth Fight for Jobs. Especially noticeable was the number of people stopping to listen to the speeches on their lunch break. The vast majority of these were young people including young workers and one group of six college students. Most went away with a copy of the Socialist and left their details to find out more about Youth Fight for Jobs and the Socialist Party.

Huddersfield Youth Fight for Jobs

Nuneaton

Nuneaton Youth Fight Austerity demo was a great success. We had lots of conversations with people who were disgusted with the Tories' austerity attacks. They signed our petitions and took away TUSC leaflets about building the anti-austerity movement. Also, people were keen to get more information about the Socialist Party and our ideas.

Aidan O'Toole, Nuneaton Socialist Party

Nottingham

Nearly 100 people came out and voiced their anger at the spectacularly divisive budget that will see those with least, suffer the most.

Alongside a People's Assembly march and TUSC stall we had a Youth Fight Austerity stall. It was run by young

members who are disproportionately more affected by the official age discrimination in pay, benefits and further attacks on the right of education that this government is delighted to enforce.

A poignant speech from a schoolgirl expressed the indignation at the news that grants for students from low-income households will be totally removed and replaced by loans. The pots and pans of the crowd rang out, conviction for further action was strengthened and future students were made aware of Socialist Students.

Vlad Tomes, Nottingham Socialist Party

Southampton

Budget day brought together anti-cuts campaigners under the banner of Youth Fight Austerity to protest at the Bargate before marching through town to join a protest organised by the People's Assembly (PA).

Campaigners to save Woodside Lodge care home and the Bitterne Walk-In NHS service joined with young workers and trade unionists organised by YFA. Our banners, leaflets and megaphone attracted many people, some stayed to join the protest. Others we had never met before came with their own placards and stories to tell. After half an hour we marched through town, a small but lively and noisy protest and getting plenty of support.

As we arrived at the PA protest chanting, "We can stop the cuts!" we were applauded by all those there. Many people agree that opposition to these cuts must grow, many are new to protests and politics.

Southampton Youth Fight for Jobs

Worcester

25 turned up to protest against the budget in Worcester, including Youth Fight Austerity, TUSC, Worcester TUC, and members of the newly formed Unite Community branch. I was interviewed for BBC Hereford and Worcester radio as were others. Lots of people looked at our placards and banners, some signed petitions, and I had many worthwhile conversations with people in the space of an hour.

Pete McNally, Worcester Socialist Party

Record attendance at Durham Miners' Gala

Elaine Brunskill, Socialist Party Northern region

A record number of around 150,000 people attended this year's Durham Miners' gala.

Many we spoke to were shocked and dismayed that the Tories had managed to scrape into power. But it was also apparent that Osborne's budget has created seething anger in working-class communities.

Fightback

At our Socialist Party stalls we spoke to young people, workers, people on benefits, others who were retired and the mood to unite and fight back against austerity was tangible.

Our call to reject the Tory budget and to put pressure on the TUC to get off its knees and to call a 24 hour general strike definitely hit a chord.

One older worker I spoke to likened Cameron to Thatcher, saying, "He thinks he's invincible, but he's going too far and there'll be a backlash. Look what happened to Thatcher with the Poll Tax!"

A mother and daughter vented their anger at the terminology used by Osborne in his budget: "Nobody is fooled when he used the TUC's slogan 'Britain needs a pay rise', the only ones they look after are the rich."

The Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) had an excellent response. Also Jeremy Corbyn standing in the Labour leadership contest has led to a discussion about the idea of socialism and the need to fight austerity. Though, ironically, the Labour Party members I spoke to were not going to vote for him, one said "My heart says Corbyn, but my head says not!"

Interest

We sold in excess of 200 papers, raised around £300 fighting fund and sold £80 of literature. We also have a number of names to follow up who are interested in joining the Socialist Party.

200 march against closure of Longton Cottage Hospital

Andy Bentley, Stoke Socialist Party

Longton Cottage Hospital workers and other NHS workers led a march from outside the hospital to the town centre on Saturday 11 July. Trade union flags and banners from Unison, Unite, PCS, GMB, CWU, North Staffs TUC, Trade Unionist & Socialist Coalition (TUSC) and Stoke Socialist Party made it a very colourful event.

As the march arrived at the bandstand in Bennett's Precinct for a rally, shop workers came out and joined shoppers to applaud the marchers and sign our petitions. Many stayed to listen to speaker after speaker laying into NHS bosses who are planning to get rid of all Longton Cottage beds and its eventual closure.

Stoke Socialist Party branch secretary Liat Norris, who was the compere at the rally, read out messages of support.

Solidarity

He said: "The most important thing for me was the numerous messages of solidarity from other unions and workers that we received, showing that the LCH workers aren't on their own in the struggle to save their hospital. They have the support of huge swathes of the community who will continue to come out and fight if these plans go ahead."

Representing TUSC, I made the point that local health bosses claim to want consultation over closing beds and Longton Cottage Hospital.

But we have already started our own real consultation and in just four weeks 4000 people have signed our petitions to keep all beds and the hospital open. It was working class people who fought to get the NHS, now we have to fight to save it.

- Please send messages of support to: savelongtoncottage@gmail.com
-

Bromley Unite members stop council tax bailiffs

On 13 July around 30 activists from the Unite trade union and local residents in Bromley, south London, stopped bailiffs evicting Paul Rooney and his 14 year-old daughter Roisin.

Paul gave up work as a social work manager to look after Roisin who has physical and learning disabilities.

Tory controlled Bromley council has outsourced its council tax collection service to Liberata. The company reportedly claims that Paul owes just over £2,000 in council tax. It is alleged that Liberata has also tacked on £49,000 in solicitors' fees!

Unite says that mistakes by Liberata in not processing correctly his application for council tax benefit delayed his council tax payments.

Paul's case is now going before a judge to see if it needs to go back to court.

Unite regional officer, Onay Kasab, who represents members at the council, said: "This appalling case just reinforces what Unite has repeatedly argued; that privatising council services has been a horrendous mistake.

"Our members at the council will continue to fight for the maintenance of decent in-house council services and the jettisoning of the deeply flawed privatisation agenda."

Bromley council is determined to become a 'commissioning council' ie privatising its services, and reducing the number of council employees from 4,000 to just 300 - despite having £130 million in its reserves.

The privatisation programme has been opposed by Unite's council members who recently staged a fourth wave of strikes over the plans.

Road accident highlights need to save school crossings

On the same day as Save Derbyshire School Crossing Campaigners put questions about cuts to a meeting at Derbyshire County Council, a Lollypop Lady at their local school in Chesterfield was hit by a car. She was struck on the hand while helping children across the road. What could happen if there was no one to help at school crossings? The petition to keep the patrols got 16,000 signatures.

Elaine Evans

<http://www.socialistparty.org.uk/articles/21085>