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Socialism 2013 - reflecting a thirst to resist and the search for ideas

Sarah Sachs-Eldridge, editor of the Socialist

Socialism 2013 was a powerful tonic for everyone who participated, those new to struggle, and veterans of the socialist and labour movement.

Taking place over the weekend 2nd and 3rd November and organised by the Socialist Party, it was a weekend that comprised two large inspiring rallies and dozens of lively discussion sessions and forums.

As Sarah Wrack, an editor on the Socialist paper, said when chairing Saturday's 'Rally for Socialism': "There's no doubt that just below the surface there's a seething anger being felt by a lot of people - a thirst to resist what's being done to us and to begin to fight for something different".

Socialism 2013 reflected that thirst to resist but also a growing eagerness for ideas and analysis to explain the on-going capitalist crisis and events as they unfold in society, as well as discussion on how we can achieve a socialist alternative.

Giving the keynote speech at Saturday's rally, Socialist Party general secretary Peter Taaffe looked reality in the eye and said that two events - the setback for Unite the Union at Grangemouth and the debacle around Falkirk Labour Party - "indicate the dilemma that confronts the labour movement". Peter added that the union will live to fight another day.

But mobilising all the powers of the working class could have defeated Grangemouth boss Ratcliffe, "one of the haves as well as the have-yachts". "Do you think," asked Peter, "that this pipsqueak Ratcliffe would have been prepared to implement his conspiracy against the unions and workforce if the TUC had carried out the decisions of last year's TUC Congress and organised a 24-hour general strike on a national scale?"

"This would have massively changed the relationship of forces between the capitalists, their government and working people." He reminded us that trade unions still have six million members.

Peter also made the case for the building of a new mass political voice for the working class. A

survey found that 70% of the population in the US demand a new party to provide an alternative to the two parties of big business.

No doubt a similar number would support it here, if they were asked, especially given the role Labour played in triggering the attack on the union at Grangemouth.

Answering the lies of the Con-Dems and their echo-chamber in the big business-owned press, Peter declared Tory Chancellor George Osborne's claims nothing but a fake economic recovery.

It is located mostly in the pockets of the bosses who cream off any benefits for themselves.

What's more capitalism can only offer a terrible future for the young. In Greece 65% of young people are unemployed and Spain is not far behind and one quarter of the world's young people is unemployed, or has no job or training.

Peter explained that while there can be setbacks and difficulties the working class and the 99% of humanity have no choice but to struggle for an alternative.

He explained that the necessary period of learning will be considerably shortened by the building of a mass party, and a mass international.

With revolutionary optimism Peter bid us "go forward to a new socialist world, based on love, solidarity, regard for others and great abundance, that will allow the development of all the powers of humanity, both individual and collective."

Three trade union general secretaries came to address the rally. RMT transport union leader Bob Crow pointed out one of the many contradictions under capitalism - when privatised utility companies demand higher charges the owners of big business pay up. But when it comes to workers looking for wage increases the answer's no.

Mark Serwotka, general secretary of the PCS civil service union set out a programme that the working class could unite around to fight austerity, including no cuts to jobs and pay, nationalising the banks (which he reminded us was official TUC policy) and ending privatisation.

Given that the Socialist Party has been a leading voice in the call for a 24-hour general strike Mark's report that all the unions in dispute are due to meet to discuss coordinated action went down a storm.

Fighting back works

General secretary of the postal workers' union CWU Billy Hayes said he was often asked why he, as a Labour Party member, bothered to attend a Socialist Party event.

He explained that when CWU members protested against the privatisation of Royal Mail at the Stock Exchange it was Socialist Party members who gave them support.

One of the two Southampton Labour councillors who rebelled and voted against the cuts, Keith Morrell, spoke about their successful campaign to get a local swimming pool re-opened.

His story showed very clearly that fighting back works. Keith also reported that he and Don Thomas had joined the Socialist Party in the course of this battle but that "it felt like coming home".

A welcome but unscheduled appearance was made by City Link worker Kev. The workforce is striking against zero-hour contracts and pay cuts of up to £5,000.

Kev was in the audience but Sarah invited him to address the rally and she pledged that the Socialist Party would lend its full support to City Link workers.

Socialist Students had brought solidarity to the picket lines of Higher Education workers two days before.

Huge applause met Ian Pattison's energetic report of this show of solidarity between students and workers and between the generations.

But, Ian said, the most important thing Socialist Students does is to raise the idea of a socialist alternative.

Enthusiasm

Judy Beishon from the Socialist Party executive committee made the appeal for much-needed finance to fund the running of the organisation.

She quipped that, while the rich donate £50,000 to the Tories and get the chance to dine with them, most working class people, if they had £50,000 would rather pay to get away from the likes of Cameron.

The enthusiasm to fund a party that fights the Tories was shown in the magnificent collection of £19,140.

A further £26,500 was donated by the Unison Four from money Unison was forced to pay after

the right-wing leadership was defeated in its vicious witch hunt.

Before the final speaker a short film clip about the workers' struggles in South Africa (SA) was shown, including the miners' strike but also the mowing down of striking miners at Marikana in August 2012 by SA police. No matter how many times you see that footage it never fails to shock.

Standing to prolonged applause in a loud show of international solidarity Mametlwe Sebei described the situation which has followed that "mighty, bloody and brutal" miners' strike.

He spoke about the foundation of the Workers and Socialist Party (WASP) and how it is growing in every area and among all sections of the working class.

Next year's SA elections are said to bring the most important challenge to the now out and out pro-capitalist ANC since they won power in 1994 because the Marikana massacre and now the building of the WASP mean that consciousness has changed dramatically and the working class is starting to see that it needs to determine its own destiny.

Closing the rally Sarah said: "If you've spent years being angry at government after government, tonight has surely shown that now is the time to turn that anger into action and join the fight for a socialist alternative to cuts and crisis." Dozens who attended are now considering joining the Socialist Party.

We hope that the readers of this report take up Sarah's suggestion too: join the socialist fightback!

Fantastic discussion on 'USA, can socialist ideas be built in the belly of the beast'. It's clear from this discussion that they can and they are!

John Cosgrove, Liverpool

A fantastic weekend, full of fantastic discussion, the highlight of which was meeting Sebei from the DSM in South Africa.

Steven Marren

One of the most important aspects of 'Socialism 2013' was that it's not just the usual bog standard outline of how awful the cuts are and how they impact. We get this day in and day out. What Socialism 2013 gives us is hope that we can fight and what's more, a clear strategy to do so. Brilliant weekend with truly inspiring speakers who have been battle tested. My only regret was that I couldn't go to all the sessions!

Helen Riddett

"A little bit spoilt for choice in terms of the range of workshops, it would be good to have access to some of the notes and slides used in the workshops we were unable to attend, but the attended workshops were insightful, engaging and motivational.

"The contributions were also just as valuable. The conference is great for gaging the movement in the global context, and I can't recommend it enough."

Rayne Jennings, Kent

Sunday - final rally

James Ivens

"Socialists don't stand aside and wait for developments. We fight for them."

Now is a complicated time. Five years into the Great Recession, we talk about a 'lull' in the movement.

Yet there is more work to do than ever. There are tectonic contradictions between a bullied, restive working class, and our absentee leadership in industrial and political life.

The Socialist Party's annual forum for education and debate, Socialism, exists to sound out burning questions such as this.

And the 2013 closing rally was a clarion blast amid the white noise of cant, cynicism and despair. It focussed on the need for a new mass workers' party.

Speaking first was Dave Nellist. A former Labour MP and supporter of Militant, forerunner of the Socialist. Dave was expelled from Labour for his Marxist principles. His scorn for what

Labour has become is searing.

TUSC

The Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) is still in its early days, and getting some low results in "difficult terrain".

Dave remarked that, despite having had councillors elected under the TUSC banner, the only national coverage TUSC has had is two minutes and 14 seconds with Andrew Neil in 2010! To try to force the media's hand we need 625 candidates in 2013. We have a third lined up already. Dave Nellist wants you for TUSC.

Speaking next was Paulo Eduardo Gomes, a city councillor from Brazil. A member of the Party of Socialism and Freedom (PSOL), Paulo spoke about his break from the Workers Party (PT), Brazil's equivalent of Labour.

The PT's leader Lula is "more loved by bankers than any other president of Brazil"! Like many in Britain and around the world, Paulo concluded that the old workers' parties were no longer vehicles for socialists.

PSOL is far from perfect, but gives us a glimpse of what a new workers' party can gain.

Rob Williams, chair of the National Shop Stewards Network (NSSN) tackled Grangemouth. This was clearly a setback for the trade union movement and an encouragement to "every little despot" to launch attacks on workers. But it is far from the last word.

Naysayers suggest class struggle is dead. Thousands of furious young teachers, posties, firefighters, lecturers, probation officers, and bakers might say otherwise.

The call for a 24-hour general strike, bringing struggles together, is more relevant than ever.

Precious rations of hope

Speaking last was Hannah Sell, deputy general secretary of the Socialist Party. Hannah remarked that the working class has "entered this epoch unprepared".

Defeats, as well as successes, are inevitable, but nonetheless, the fightback is heroic.

A clear programme and strategy will speed progress and increase the chance of victory. Already our members are leading and winning key battles.

On the basis of growth, as seen in South Africa, we can move from being an important factor to the decisive one, in Britain and the world.

Summing up, Sarah Sachs-Eldridge, editor of the Socialist and chair of the rally, thanked the organisers, especially Lenny Shail.

She then read from a Counterpunch article on our US sister party. Our hugely popular election campaigns are "precious rations of hope... in a time of gathering darkness".

This fight is our fight, and it's only just beginning.

- Subscribe to the Socialist.
- Stand for TUSC.
- And join the Socialist Party.

Enjoyed myself immensely. Impressive organisation - exactly what I would expect.

Councillor Keith Morrell, Southampton

Keith Morrell on joining the Socialist Party: "it feels like coming home" - I felt exactly the same.

Serena Cheung, Brighton

The weekend totally lived up to expectations. I attended outstanding debates on feminism, art and revolution, and the Fourth International. No less than three trade union general secretaries at Saturday's rally - can they knock some heads together on that blinking TUC general council so we get the general strike we desperately need? All this plus great 'craic' with other Salford comrades. Magic.

Paul Gerrard, Salford

I've had lots of very positive feedback from people who attended from Southern region. Seven of them agreed to join the Socialist Party.

Nick Chaffey, Southern region

I had a great weekend at Socialism 2013. There were some really good sessions, proper informative and food for thought. It has added more books to my constantly growing to-read list. The rally pumped me up for standing outside in the cold for another hopefully busy autumn. And not forgetting the laughs we had.

Mark Best, Coventry

Hearing the opinions of members from so many different areas was challenging and stimulating but also helped clarify the logic and humanity behind socialism.

Ben Coppage, York

There was a good format with a balance between different subjects. I found the 'bite-size' chunks of education really helpful. It's very compact, with venues all close to each other. There was a good chance to discuss and no expectation of vast knowledge on your behalf so discussions can take place on an equal level.

Martin Conway, Salford

The sessions were absolutely fantastic and very informative, helping to build my understanding of how we can have an alternative to capitalism. The contributions from new and older comrades led to encouraging and lively discussions showing how socialism can transform society. Both rallies were the boost we needed to charge us up for the months ahead - bring on the TUSC 2014 election challenge!

Robert McArdle, Coventry

The session 'what would a socialist society look like?' really gave me an insight into the specific benefits a socialist society would offer.

Ben Dixon, Leeds

I was very impressed with the turnout to the session on Marxist economics and also hearing from my friends that were able to go to other introduction sessions, such as dialectical materialism - their rooms were packed too! Just goes to show that we want to learn more and debate on the classic and basic ideas of Marxism as well as current affairs and campaigns.

Amalia Loizidou, London

Best session of Socialism 2013, 2012 and 2011: Robin Clapp's 'an introduction to Marxist Economics'. His clear and down-to-earth approach and well-prepared introduction, followed by prompt emailing of his notes with advice on further reading and an invitation to contact him with any questions, has inspired me to go and learn more about a subject that I've always felt reluctant to tackle. Thanks Robin - I'll be in touch!

Helen Gadsby, Leicester

The session 'will there be a general strike?' was a serious, sober discussion about where we are and what socialists and active trade unionists need to do to empower working class people and let them realise the strength they have when they take action. A strategy which combines building militant unions in the workplace with putting maximum pressure on the trade union leaders is vital.

Paul Couchman, North Surrey

I enjoyed an excellent discussion about art and revolution. Manny Thain introduced the discussion, particularly talking about Russia and weaving between the build-up, the revolution and the Stalinist aftermath with how this was reflected with developing new innovative forms of art before then stifling it. Following this there were lots of contributions broadening the discussion into music and comedy as well as raising questions. I'll be taking the discussion back to Bristol Socialist Party, as well as looking forward to more articles, ideas and questions on this issue in the Socialist, Socialism Today and future meetings.

Sheila Caffrey, Bristol

I chose the sessions I attended - 'what is the role and relevance of a revolutionary party today?', '40 years on: Pinochet's bloody coup in Chile - what lessons are there for today' and 'what conclusions should we draw from Miliband's Clause IV moment?' specifically because I have questions about them and want to develop my knowledge and understanding.

Paul Wheelhouse, Dewsbury

At the session 'what would a socialist society be like?' there was a fantastic attendance of 65 people - 15 had to sit on the floor! However nothing stopped them from listening to the brilliant and thought provoking speech by Judy Beishon which unleashed a fantastic discussion from the floor.

Sajith Attepuram, Hatfield

The most interesting thing I learned over the weekend was that since May this year there have been 26 byelections in which Labour has polled less than 100 votes or less than 10%. In Nuneaton we are about to start a byelection campaign because a sitting Labour councillor hasn't turned up to any meetings since he was elected, so these figures are even more fuel to the argument TUSC is making that Labour is not and cannot be a vehicle for working class representation.

Pete Playdon, Nuneaton

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MPs' bills paid - we struggle to heat our homes

Nationalise the energy companies

Gail Morrow, Secretary, Scottish Anti-Bedroom Tax Federation

We're being ripped off. The profiteering big six energy companies are taking us all for a ride, hiking their prices, jacking up profits, avoiding taxes, and leaving the majority of us in abject misery.

And now it's been revealed that 340 MPs have claimed public money to pay for the costs of heating their second homes.

Over £200,000 has been handed to these establishment politicians, many of whom are voting through savage cuts to the wages and benefits of the rest of us.

These include the Tory MPs who tell those of us struggling to heat our homes that we should 'wear a jumper'. The elderly have also been given the 'advice' to heat only one room in their house.

A new TUC report shows an increase of 152% in fuel bills over the past ten years, four times the increase in the rate of inflation. Millions are suffering from 'fuel poverty'.

We need energy to live. It should work for us so that the people benefit, not a select few who are removing profit with absolutely no regard for the hardship they are causing to customers.

The solution to the greed and insensitivity of these big businesses is to remove the industry from them and place it under democratic public ownership.

The energy bosses blame the government's 'green taxes' as one of the reasons for these increases but none of these big six companies will be seeing a dip in the profits they make. Opening the books to public scrutiny would reveal the truth.

Profits and bonuses

Profits at the big six energy companies have shot up 74% since 2009. They increased from £2.15 billion in 2009 to £3.74 billion in 2012.

Centrica boss Sam Laidlaw admits that public trust in the energy companies is at an "all-time low" and so he'll be waiving his £1.7 million 'bonus' this year.

But that will still leave him with £950,000 basic pay plus shares. And he'll probably scrape by on last year's £5 million remuneration package!

Labour has said it will freeze prices for 18 months, but you can't control what you don't own. Running the energy industry under the current capitalist system has been a monumental failure for the people.

What we need is nationalisation of the energy industry. This would allow the slashing of prices and massive investment in safer, environmentally friendly alternatives.

The bosses that have financially crippled their customers need to be removed and replaced with a democratically elected and accountable board including workers in the industry and consumers, who can ensure energy production is for the needs of the people rather than for private profit.

People forced to choose between heating their homes and buying food is Dickensian and must be stopped.

Democratic nationalisation is the way to bring this to an end along with a new mass workers' party, fighting for socialism and representing the true needs of people, to take us forward to a fair and just society.

End the witch hunt of Stevie Deans and Unite

Sections of the capitalist media and the Tory Party leadership have gone into overdrive in their denunciation of the trade union Unite and its former convener at Grangemouth, Stephen Deans.

Stephen Deans has been subject to scandalous attacks from the trade union hating press and the Tory and Labour leadership, which Socialist Party Scotland totally condemns.

This has followed on from the events at Grangemouth where Unite suffered a setback and major attacks on workers' terms and conditions and trade union rights at the plant.

This has emboldened the vile anti-union press barons and the pro- big business political establishment.

While we have genuine constructive criticisms about the way Unite conducted the dispute, we give our full support to Stevie Deans and the union both in the plant and outside against this attack on Unite's right to organise effectively both industrially and politically. The rest of the labour and trade union movement should also come to their aid.

Stevie Deans resigned from his job, before he was sacked by Ineos, which has been conducting a campaign of victimisation against him for months.

He is also standing down as the chair of the Falkirk Labour Party. A brutal assault against Stevie has taken place in the pages of the Sunday Times, the Daily Mail et al.

Cameron even went as far as attacking Stevie Deans in the House of Commons describing him as a "rogue trade unionist" who almost brought the plant to its knees.

Cameron went on to demand that Labour leader Ed Miliband launch an inquiry into Unite's activities, including in the Falkirk constituency.

Unite have also been targeted by Cameron for their leverage campaigning, which involved protests outside the homes of Ineos bosses. These were "sinister" and "bullying" tactics according to the Tories.

A company that conducted out-and-out blackmail against its workforce being portrayed as a victim of "bullying" by Unite is laughable.

And this from a government that is waging war on the poor and the working class by slashing benefits and wages and assaulting living standards.

But it's not only the Tories and their lapdogs in the media who have been on the warpath. Labour MP and former Home Secretary, Jack Straw has called Unite's role "disgraceful" and has added his voice to a new inquiry into Unite and Falkirk.

Even 'liberal' commentators have turned their bile on the trade union movement. Iain MacWhirter, writing in the Sunday Herald in the aftermath of the events at Grangemouth, commented: "Unite seemed prepared to allow one of Scotland's most important industrial centres... to be sacrificed to their own obstinacy and self-interest".

Fear

Driving these attacks is the class hatred of the capitalist elite at the idea that a trade union should defend its members against cuts.

Also that an explosive situation exists in British society that could erupt at any time. It's the same fear that saw the Mail launch a mad dog attack on Ed Miliband's father, Ralph, describing him as a "man who hated Britain."

This followed Miliband's speech at the Labour conference where he promised to freeze energy prices for 18 months.

Even this paltry pledge, falling way short of the need to nationalise the big six energy firms as put forward by the Socialist Party, was seized on as a lurch to the left by the Labour leader.

It is nothing of the sort. Ralph Miliband was a Marxist, but his son is no Marxist as he himself made clear: "I want to make capitalism work for working people, not destroy it."

Nevertheless, Miliband's attack on the energy companies was hugely popular. His poll ratings have risen as a result, reflecting the massive public support for action on energy bills and the plummeting standard of living for the majority.

This reflects the huge potential for the building of a new mass working class party, with a programme for public ownership and wealth redistribution.

Unfortunately, as Unite have found out in Falkirk, any attempt to change the Labour Party back to the left and for the interests of trade union members will not be tolerated by the Labour leadership.

Labour has been transformed from a party that, while always having a pro-capitalist leadership, was a workers' party at its base.

Today, it is now completely committed to the interests of capitalism. Its democratic structures have been obliterated and, as Unite have found, there are no avenues open for the working class to change it.

It was Ed Miliband who ensured that a dossier on Unite's role in Falkirk was handed to the police. The bosses at Ineos used this to launch their witch-hunt against Stevie Deans in order to weaken the union.

Len McCluskey, the general secretary of Unite, has quite correctly gone on the offensive defending the right of Unite to conduct its leverage campaign and also to engage on the political plane and to try and alter the direction of the Labour Party.

New party

We agree that Unite and the rest of the trade union movement should be at the forefront of politics. However, it's clear from the attacks on Unite from the Labour leadership that this requires the creation of a new political party for trade union and working class interests in general.

There is currently no mass party that stands for public ownership of energy, transport and the privatised industries.

No party in parliament that fights for the repeal of the brutal anti-trade union laws. No party that calls for a massive redistribution of wealth from the capitalist elite to the millions living in poverty and insecurity.

In other words, no mass party that stands for the interests of the majority of society.

The Socialist Party has long campaigned for the unions to end their formal link with the Labour Party.

We call for an emergency conference of trade unions, both Labour affiliated unions and those of the railworkers (RMT), the firefighters (FBU) and the civil servants (PCS) who are not affiliated to Labour, to discuss the setting up of a new workers' party.

We participate in the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition with the RMT and other leading trade union members, as a step in this direction.

This would be the best answer to the attacks on the trade unions from the Tories, the capitalist press and the Labour leaders. It's time to act and act now. There is no time to waste.

The is an editorial from the paper of Socialist Party Scotland, the Socialist.

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Fight for a living wage!

Simon Carter

The cost of living is soaring but real wages for millions of workers, as opposed to the millionaires, have fallen by around 9% in the UK since the financial crash and recession began.

This driving down of wages, alongside draconian government spending cuts, is causing widespread hardship and enduring poverty.

Increasing numbers of working households have to use food banks to feed their families.

Little wonder then that it's dawned on Ed Miliband that raising the poverty pay levels of the minimum wage (£6.31 an hour) may be a vote winner. Around 4.5 million workers are paid less than £7 an hour.

The Labour leader has proposed a "make work pay" deal if Labour wins the next general election. This would raise the minimum wage to the "living wage", an informal benchmark figure, currently set at £8.55 an hour in London and £7.45 an hour in the rest of the country.

Predictably Tory ministers have dismissed this demand accusing Labour of "calling for yet more borrowing and more debt".

They also pointed out that Ed Balls, the shadow chancellor, had previously criticised Miliband's policy during the 2010 Labour leadership contest, saying it would require "a substantial extra cost either to the Exchequer or to business".

Business leaders have been more cautious in their comments, not least because under Ed's proposals private firms would be able to claim back about a third of the cost of raising their workers' wages to the living wage, worth up to £1,000.

Moreover, such a scheme would be voluntary, requiring companies to sign up to it. In other words, Labour's pledge amounts to yet more public bailouts to profitable companies.

Even the living wage will only scratch the surface of in-work poverty - not least because of cuts in working hours, a rise in part-time jobs instead of full time work, and zero-hour

contracts (see youthfightforjobs.com).

Establishment politicians will at best only tinker with capitalism and do little to redistribute company profits to workers' earnings.

Workers must use their collective strength through trade union organisation to fight to compel the bosses into paying a real living wage.

Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition candidates in next year's local elections, who include Socialist Party members, are pledged to fight for councils to adopt measures to introduce a living wage of £10 an hour and hold those that have already signed up to their word.

"Boris Johnson's increase of 25p on the London Living Wage (LLW) to £8.55 an hour is an insult to hard working Londoners.

"The fact that politicians in London think that this will be enough to live on shows how completely out of touch they are with working class people.

The LLW can be opted-in and out of by employers as they see fit; a paltry 200 employers have signed up to the living wage since it was introduced in 2005. This means that only 11,500 workers actually benefit from it."

Nancy Taaffe, Socialist Party member and Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition prospective candidate (www.tusc.org.uk)

A joyless economic recovery?

Ross Saunders

The UK economy will shortly become the fastest growing economy in the western world predicts the ICAEW (the body which represents accountants).

The bosses' organisation, the CBI, has also stoked optimism with a prediction of higher growth than it had anticipated - 1.4% for 2013 and 2.4% for 2014, up from 1.2% and 2.3% respectively.

This follows the Office for National Statistics reporting that the economy has improved consistently all year and was now registering "fairly strong" performance not just in services but across several sectors including construction and manufacturing, the best since 2010.

So where's our share of the 'recovery'? If any readers of the Socialist are expecting to benefit from this 'boom', then prepare to be disappointed!

The evidence of recent history shows that any increase in wealth from growth in the economy, without a determined effort to prise it out of the hands of the capitalists, will not automatically translate into better living standards for the working class.

The National Institute of Economic and Social Research calculates that real wages won't be back to their pre-recession peak until 2019!

The Trade Union Congress reckons that on average each worker is £2,000 a year worse off since the start of the last recession.

The figures show we've been getting poorer, while the wealth we create gets swallowed up by the capitalists.

According to the Sunday Times Rich List 2013 the top 1,000 UK fat cats' combined wealth amounts to almost £450 billion. That's an increase of more than £35 billion from last year

There's been no austerity for the rich, and now there's no recovery of living standards for us. There are more families made homeless having to be housed in temporary bed and breakfast accommodation than at any time in the last decade.

And it's not just those who are out of work who have been hit. Over six million of those in poverty in Britain are in working households.

It's an indictment of the profit system of capitalism that over half of benefits are now claimed by the low-waged because scrooge employers won't pay enough for workers to live on.

Working class people have to fight in the workplaces for economic justice and build a socialist political alternative to capitalism - the only way that lasting prosperity for the millions can be achieved.

Them and Us

Wet rags

After the recent energy prices handbag fight between Labour and Tory MPs, expect a new bidding war for voters' attentions over water bills, which have soared by more than 60% over the past decade.

Like the 'big six' energy corporations, water companies have enjoyed mega-profits (Thames made £1.7 billion in the last five years) since the industry was privatised in England and Wales in 1989. Many water companies also use legal loopholes to avoid paying corporation tax.

They claim higher bills reflect higher infrastructure investment, yet leakage rates are a staggering 22%.

The water industry has also accumulated huge levels of debt overall to finance its operations - costing consumers £2 billion a year more than if it was publicly financed - or nearly £80 per household.

'Regulation' has failed miserably to curb these vulture capitalists. Only with nationalisation can water bills be cut and investment increased.

Shape shifter

Who said in 1999: "Taxation is legalised extortion and is valid only to the extent of the law. Tax avoidance is not paying less tax than you 'should'. Tax avoidance is paying less tax than Parliament would have wanted"?

None other than Edward Troup, the six figure salaried and de facto head of HM Revenue and Customs, whose responsibilities include "shaping tax policy and strategy"!

Thanks to Iain Dalton

Free school fraud

Education secretary Michael Gove is accused of sitting on a departmental report revealing widespread financial fraud at a flagship free school.

Free schools are Gove's bright idea, guaranteed to reinforce social inequalities and wreck public education.

The Kings Science Academy in Bradford, previously lauded by Prime Minister David Cameron, spent £86,000 of public money without submitting invoices and used "fabricated invoices".

Auditors reported their findings to police on 23 April this year. However, a redacted report

from this probe into the school was only published by the Department for Education two weeks ago after the National Union of Teachers had released its own document into the alleged financial fraud.

Christmas cheer

Austerity Britain continues to claim more victims. According to housing charity Shelter, 80,000 children in Britain will be homeless this Christmas, many forced into emergency bed and breakfast accommodation.

This shocking statistic follows the government's own figures which report the numbers of homeless families housed in emergency bed and breakfast accommodation being at a ten year high.

Ethical banking

The supposed alternative 'cooperative model' to corporate capitalism suffered a humiliating setback after the Co-op bank went into meltdown with £1.5 billion of debt.

A 'rescue' package will force the Co-op's group of supermarkets, funeral homes and pharmacies into handing over 70% of the bank to bondholders led by the US hedge fund asset strippers, Silver Point and Aurelius. Thousands of jobs could be axed along with 15% of the bank's branches.

This is no UTOPIA

John Pilger, the renowned investigative journalist and award winning film maker, has recently completed a new film, Utopia, which deals with the subjugation of the Aboriginal First Australians. John gave an interview to the Socialist about the film's themes and Niall Mulholland reviews it.

Your new film, Utopia, is a powerful and harrowing look at the legacy of colonial genocide and successive government policies on Australia's indigenous people. What made you return to this theme?

Like many expatriates, the more I saw of the world, the more I wanted to know about my homeland. For white Australians, time and distance are essential as ways of seeing; we live far away from almost everywhere and we often feel both disconnected from and drawn to Europe and the United States.

It is ironic that the uniqueness of Australia - its ancient land and extraordinary first people - are devalued or simply not known about by those of us who came later, as if we are bystanders in our own country. My first film about Australia was in 1976; I've made half a dozen since then.

The film shows that the Howard government's 'intervention' into the Northern Territories (NT) was based on lies and media hysteria about sexual abuse in Aboriginal communities. Is there a link between this scandal and big mining corporations' exploitation of uranium and other natural resources in NT?

There is a link, but it's not necessarily the most important one. There is a frustration in the Australian elite that the remote Aboriginal population refuses to conform to suburban ways; it cannot be controlled and socially engineered.

This is historic. These days, free market ideology determines the bureaucratic meddling in indigenous societies.

The very notion of communal living is anathema to politicians and the media. How dare Aboriginal people practise a form of socialism! How dare they claim the same rights to services as non-indigenous Australians, which the so-called free market cannot deliver.

How dare they refuse to be 'reconciled' and assimilated. That their difference demands respect, above all, is beyond the grasp of most politicians.

The levels of poverty, racism and rates of imprisonment suffered by the indigenous people are shocking. Why do you think it is not more widely known about in Australia and internationally?

Australia has never known the opprobrium directed at South Africa. Why? Demographically, Australia is the reverse of South Africa.

Black South Africans are the majority; black Australians make up less than 3% of the population.

If you went to Johannesburg during the apartheid era, it was impossible not to be struck by the racist divisions.

Fly into Australia, and you see a mostly white and multicultural society - first Australians excluded.

Travel behind the postcard façade of Sydney and you can discover a very different Australia,

which many non-indigenous Australians are reluctant to recognise, or deny. The raw racism often shocks tourists because it seems so casual and unself-conscious.

You interview former Labor PM, Kevin Rudd, about his 'apology' for the state's policy of forcibly removing indigenous children from their families. Do you consider his apology adequate?

My film makes clear that Rudd's apology was far from adequate. It was not an apology to indigenous Australians for the massacres, dispossession and present-day enforced deprivation.

It was an apology to those stolen from their families as children - part of a policy of "breeding out the black", based on a policy influenced by eugenics.

The Sydney Morning Herald eloquently expressed the cynicism. "The Rudd government," it said, "has moved quickly to clear away this piece of political wreckage in a way that responds to some of its own supporters' emotional needs, yet it changes nothing. It is a shrewd manoeuvre."

On the day of the apology, Rudd declared, "I want to be blunt; there will be no compensation." Imagine him saying that to a similarly abused section of the white population.

Utopia describes the "hidden history of struggle" of indigenous Australians, like the eight-year heroic Gurindji cattle ranchers' strike. Do you see these sorts of struggles as a way of winning justice and equal rights for First Australians?

The great strikes or "walk-offs" of stockmen and their families in the late 1940s and 1960s effectively ended slave labour in Australia.

In those days, Aboriginal workers were the backbone of the Australian cattle industry. Today, they have been pushed out by mechanisation - and subtle forms of racism.

Like working people everywhere, they have suffered from the diminishing of collective power. Their collective spirit, however, remains their strength - as long as they resist the co-option and divisiveness that has become a weapon used against them.

In the film, and generally, you have strongly criticised the agenda of powerful corporate media and sections of state run media. But does the huge public opposition to a US-led war on Syria make you optimistic?

Is there a "huge public opposition" to a US-led war on Syria? There is certainly a disquiet, even hostility, to Cameron's and Obama's unerring warmongering.

But there is not a tenacious, organised opposition on the scale of the Vietnam War demonstrations, or the opposition to the invasion of Iraq.

Public resistance is fragmented, because people are threatened and disorientated and there is no persuasive left movement to articulate their anger and bring them together.

That's true in Britain, and even more true in Australia where a principled, active left is courageous, but small.

Utopia castigates Labor leaders, from Bob Hawke to Julia Gillard, who reneged on promises to advance aboriginal rights, caving in to corporate interests. With the struggle for social, land, cultural and economic rights for First Australians yet to be won, what response to your film would you like to see from the Left in Australia and internationally?

Labor Party leaders like Bob Hawke and Julia Gillard are the antithesis of the left. Indigenous people have had few allies in the Australian Labor Party which has reneged on pledges of a 'moral restitution'. Hawke was one of the worst. Gillard had no interest in indigenous people.

My film goes to Australia in January with the aim of persuading audiences that it's time to face the truth, which is the starting point for Australia to become the decent, liberal society it claims to be.

I think most Australians would like a resolution; but they need to be reminded that this starts with them - for only when they offer the original people a treaty - to be negotiated as equals - can they claim true nationhood.

Review by Niall Mulholland

John Pilger's Utopia opens with disturbing CCTV footage of a bloodied young Aboriginal man being dragged along the floor of an Alice Springs police station by officers. He is then shown lying in a cell, neglected and dying.

Another video clip shows an Aboriginal boy callously tasered by police officers. These distressing images are interspersed with views of Sydney's rich beachside residences.

Pilger's powerful, harrowing new documentary is an account of the horrors of colonialism, Aboriginal resistance and the terrible conditions facing 'First Australians' today.

The film takes its title, Utopia, from the (bitterly ironic) name of an isolated Aboriginal settlement in the Northern Territories (NT).

Pilger first filmed in Utopia 28 years ago and depressingly the town's appalling levels of poverty have only worsened.

Multiple families live in overcrowded shacks, lacking proper sanitation or running water. Overflowing toilets cause rampant diseases such as diarrhoea and gastro-enteritis.

Illnesses lead to a loss of hearing in young Aboriginal children which, in turn, delays their learning.

In the first of several brilliant interviews (Pilger is one of the few journalists able to make government ministers really sweat), Warren Snowden, the Minister of Health for Indigenous, complacently claims "significant progress" is being made by his department.

Pilger responds with shocking facts: rheumatic heart disease among Aboriginal people is the highest in the world; one third of Aboriginal men die before they reach 45 years; and a UN "shame list" records that trachoma (a bacterial eye infection that can cause preventable blindness) is rife among the country's First Australians.

The film looks at the official establishment version of Australian history and that of the oppressed Aboriginal people.

On a tour of the national War Memorial, Pilger finds no reference to the resistance of the indigenous Australians to colonial invasion.

A renewed ideological campaign by the right wing John Howard government in the 1990s denied there was ever a colonial policy of oppression and genocide.

This was, Pilger believes, to try to justify "stealing land and banishing people" - the reality of colonial rule and the development of Australian capitalism.

'Australia Day' - the official annual celebration marking the anniversary of the 1788 arrival of the first fleet of British ships - is referred to as the "Day of Mourning" by First Australians.

Along with two Aboriginal rights' activists, Pilger visits Rottnest Island, off the Western Australian coast.

Almost continuously from the 1830s to the 1930s, this was the site of at first a British concentration camp and then a prison for Aboriginal people.

The three visitors are appalled that the building is now a luxury spa and hotel, former prison cells are now A\$240-a night rooms. The hotel brochure has no mention of its dark, cruel past.

Injustices

Prison existence remains a possibility for many First Australians. In Western Australia, Aboriginal Australians are eight times as likely to be imprisoned as the black population under apartheid South Africa.

Brutal mistreatment of indigenous people in police custody is routine. In 2008, a prisoner purposely left in a prison van "cooked to death" in 50 degrees heat.

No police officer was arrested or convicted for this crime. The government minister responsible proudly tells Pilger that this horrific death inspired her to put her senior staff on a "cultural sensitivity course"!

Pilger returns to a campaign he covered before, that of Arthur and Leila Murray's fight for justice for their son, Eddie, who in 1981 was found dead in police custody.

Arthur and fellow Aboriginal cotton chippers led an historic strike in the town of Wee Waa, New South Wales, winning higher wages.

Arthur says he "paid the price" for this victory, with the racist harassment of his family and his 21 year-old son's death at the hands of the police.

The inquest coroner called police evidence "highly suspicious". Poignantly the film informs us that Arthur Murray died in 2012, predeceased by his wife, without either of them getting justice for their slain son.

The "hidden history" of Aboriginal resistance is further highlighted by the Gurindji strike. This eight year struggle of cattle ranch workers was the longest strike in Australian history.

Their heroic struggle eventually won equal pay and better working and living conditions.

In the interview with John Pilger accompanying this review, he points out that since the peak of Aboriginal labour struggles from the 1940s to the 60s, "Like working people everywhere, they have suffered from the diminishing of collective power. Their collective spirit, however, remains their strength..."

This spirit was severely tested in 2007 when the Howard government announced a state of emergency in the Northern Territories, deploying police-military rule.

This was justified by baseless claims that Aboriginal children needed saving from sexual abuse carried out by gangs in "unthinkable numbers".

The main source for this was the 'Late Line' ABC TV programme. The government seized on the claims of an anonymous "youth worker" who appeared (disguised) on camera making wild claims about paedophile rings in Aboriginal communities.

Yet there was no evidence to back up the Late Line allegations and the anonymous "youth worker" was exposed as a senior government official!

Australia's racial discrimination act was suspended by the Howard government, with Labour Party support, to allow the 'Intervention' in the Northern Territories (NT).

Local community elders were threatened with loss of basic services if they did not agree to hand over land leases.

Coincidence or not, shortly afterwards big corporations started mining uranium and other natural resources in NT.

Profits of A\$1billion a day are made by these companies, exploiting land they do not own.

Utopia also highlights the heart-breaking scandal of the 'stolen generation' - the systematic removal by the state of over 100,000 children from their families from the 1920s to the 1950s as part of a policy to "breed out the black".

Many of the stolen were made to work as domestic servants or as labourers on cattle stations.

In 2008, then Labor Prime Minister, Kevin Rudd made an official apology to parliament for this abomination.

But, as Pilger points out, Rudd did not go further and apologise for genocide or land theft. In an interviews with the former prime minister, Pilger points out that hundreds of indigenous children are being removed from Aboriginal homes on the flimsiest pretexts.

The Labor leaders have a long record of betraying Aboriginal Australians. The Bob Hawke government abandoned a pledge on land rights after sustained big business and right-wing media attacks.

The more recent Julia Gillard government also backed down over a tax on the mining industry - the £60 billion raised would have been enough to end Aboriginal poverty - after hysterical opposition from the same reactionary forces.

Pilger concludes Utopia by arguing that the notion of 'reconciliation' is not possible without real justice and sharing land with the First Australians. How can it be when Australia is the world's

12th largest economy, yet First Australians have the lowest life expectancy of any of the world's indigenous peoples?

The Socialist Party in Australia (sister party of the Socialist Party in England and Wales) supports the struggle for First Australians' rights and regard this as part of the struggle of the working class and poor to end racism, poverty and inequality and to fundamentally change society.

Shocking and disturbing, Utopia is not easy viewing and nor should it be. But it is also inspiring and a celebration of resistance.

Utopia will be released at the Curzon Soho cinema in London on Friday 15 November. And on Monday 18 November, the Picture House Brixton, will beam Utopia to 30 cinemas across the UK, together with a question and answer session with John Pilger.

Utopia will be available on DVD from 16 December. ITV will broadcast the film in December.

University staff take joint strike action

Thursday 31st October saw joint strike action by campus unions across the country, and signalled the beginning of action by UCU, Unison and Unite against real terms pay cuts for university staff.

Reports from across the country suggest the strikes were well supported, with many universities almost totally shutdown, and large numbers of staff joining the picket lines, from porters to professors.

Thousands of students joined the striking workers on picket lines as well, in solidarity, but also in anger that their tuition fees are being spent on flashy student union buildings, vice chancellors' pay rises and massive financial surpluses rather than the staff who teach them, provide their services and maintain their universities!

Sam Morecroft, Sheffield UCU education officer

(See below for Sam's report of the action in Sheffield)

East London

Joint action by university staff in the Unite, Unison and UCU unions was well supported at the Stratford site of the University of East London on 31 October.

Staff have been offered a 1% pay increase and no more by an intransigent management, Steve Martin, UCU UEL branch secretary told the Socialist, meaning that university staff have effectively suffered a 13% pay cut over the last five years while there is a £1 billion surplus in the higher education sector.

"Fundamentally", Steve said, "Enough is enough. We've got to make a stand. The feeling in the branch is that 1% is not enough. It's the straw that broke the camel's back."

UCU picket John George said that members were not just angry about pay, but also pensions, and increased workloads. "I have a wife and young child. Every penny matters these days."

Unite covers technical staff at the university, Unite Health and Safety rep Kevin Head explained. The national management side simply won't negotiate on its 1% offer made over the summer, so the strike was necessary. "We've all suffered from austerity" Unite steward Kevin Clough commented.

He reported that "all entrances are covered and no one's been through so far apart from management."

"This is the first time we've been out together for many years", UEL Unison branch secretary Sue Parkin told the Socialist. "It's good! United we stand, divided we fall! It's good to know that it is national action with support across the country."

"The universities are often confused as to whether they are private or public sector employers. Well, private sector pay has gone up by 2 ½%."

Pete Mason, east London Socialist Party

Leicester Socialist Students show support

Socialist Student members did a banner drop in support of striking staff at Leicester university. They occupied the students' union building roof and dropped a large banner supporting the workers at the main entrance to the university.

Unite and Unison campus branches backed a joint leaflet with Socialist Students advertising a

follow up Socialist Students meeting.

Pickets, including UCU members handed out thousands of these flyers. The front page of the student newspaper has an article written by a Socialist Students member supporting the strike.

Swansea

Swansea university saw the largest picket line for many years with over 30 UCU, Unison and Unite strikers receiving support from staff, NUS, Socialist Students, Swansea Trades Council and Swansea Socialist Party.

All of them felt they were being ripped off by management who now run universities as big business companies with the rewards going to the top and the staff being left further and further behind.

At Swansea Met university the pickets were not as large but were equally determined to stop their pay and working conditions being eroded any further.

Everyone I spoke to felt the united action of university workers should be broadened out to include other trade unionists who are also taking or preparing for their own action and the demand for a 24-hour general strike was literally an ABC answer.

Alec Thraves, Swansea Socialist Party and Swansea Trades Council.

Pickets surround Southampton university campus

Across Southampton university striking members of UCU, Unite and Unison gathered to picket out teaching, admin and works buildings.

The mood was very upbeat, very determined and very angry. "We are UNITE and we are RIGHT!" chanted one group outside the main entrance.

Activists report large numbers joining the union right up to the start of the strike. Unite members in security walked out at midnight, forcing management to staff the cameras.

Significantly a Student Union Council meeting passed a motion of support, which boosted the mood of union members and cut across the idea this a battle of workers versus students.

Socialist Students had been out leafletting students in the week, held a meeting with UCU to discuss the strike and were out giving solidarity on the picket line today.

Very noticeably the campus was quiet; standing by the main bus stop, pickets said there were very few students and staff turning up.

Nick Chaffey

Kings College London

At least six picket lines were running all morning across the various campuses of Kings College, London.

Pickets worked hard to speak to every student and staff member going into the building asking them to support the strike and not cross the picket line.

Workers were pleased to have the support of the student union and a group of students joined the main picket line on the Strand.

They pointed out that it was positive to have all three campus unions out together for the first time in several years but agreed with the Socialist Party that coordinating with the other unions striking over the next week would have been even more effective.

Jim Howard, King's College Unite branch chair said: "We're on strike because the cost of living is continually rising, travel fares, utility bills and food are going up. But wages have been frozen. The more action is coordinated the better chance we have to succeed."

Many were interested in coming to the Socialist Party's 'Socialism 2013' event this weekend, especially to hear the discussion on 'Will a general strike take place in Britain?'

Three workers bought copies of the Socialist and two Unite members wanted to know about Socialist Party meetings in their local area.

Sarah Wrack and Ian Pattison

Sheffield

At the University of Sheffield, we managed to almost totally shut down the university, with a high level of staff on strike and strong picket lines on all the main buildings.

This was followed by a joint march around Sheffield city centre with our brothers and sisters at Sheffield Hallam university, and a lively rally in Barkers Pool.

The level of student support was fantastic, with many students visiting us, bringing tea and biscuits, and helping us to convince students not to cross the picket lines.

In addition, a group of around 40 students occupied a lecture theatre in an attempt to prevent lectures from taking place.

This support is and will be of momentous importance as we continue with our dispute; it will give staff the courage necessary to take further action if our employers continue to refuse to negotiate meaningfully with us.

There were one or two less welcome moments - two colleagues crossed our picket line - but there were also important positives. Many staff members who did not strike in 2011 not only supported the action this time round but joined in with picket lines and on the march.

This is great to see from the point of union activists; we have to make sure that next time, not a single member of staff undermines our strike.

Most significantly, however, was the very visible number of young, vocal, early career staff who showed a determination to organise and fight back that was inspiring to older colleagues.

There were also vibrant picket lines at Sheffield Hallam, but as a significant percentage of the workforce there are GMB members these were more visibly undermined by the GMB's failure to join other campus unions in the dispute, having accepted the real terms pay cut deal fairly early on.

This dispute is far from over; the following day staff returned to work and began a period of action short of strike action - working to rule.

If there is no attempt by the employer to seriously engage with negotiations, UCU plans to mobilise further strikes in defence of pay and conditions, and we hope other unions will join us.

Thursday showed very clearly just how strong our trade unions are when they strike together, and in my branch there is strong support for coordinated action with other unions, both on campuses and in the public and private sector.

Sam Morecroft, Sheffield UCU education officer

Across London

Socialist Students and Socialist Party members in London visited pickets at at least three quarters of the 22 universities in London, from Brunel in the west, to London Met in the north, University of East London, and Kingston in the south, as well as lots in between.

Several local rallies took place as well as a lively march and rally in central London.

Like the teachers march in October these pickets were young and energetic, sick of battling for four years for decent pay, and confident to explain their case to students.

Postgraduate teachers joined lecturers, library staff, technicians and even security guards on picket lines all round London.

The fact that all three unions were on strike together made a big difference and almost uniformly pickets thought they should coordinate with other unions. There was also interest in standing as candidates with TUSC.

Paula Mitchell, London Socialist Party

Bradford

Socialist Party members joined Unison, UCU and Unite pickets at Bradford university as part of the national strike over pay.

Mark Bridge, UCU deputy head of HE who was visiting the picket lines spoke to the Socialist:

"Union members have had enough of their wages been screwed down year on year, had enough of an employer that's saying to them at the national level we don't think you will do anything about it.

"Members have had enough, we know that they have the money to improve wages, they're not prepared to do it without a considerable show of action by the trade unions.

"And that's what we're doing today, this is the start of the fightback on pay in Higher

Education."

But union members were also taking action over issues related to pay, such as the fact that all senior members of staff have their wages negotiated individually which has seen their pay skyrocket (the average vice-chancellor is paid almost £250,000 a year).

Luke Hoggarth, a Unison member, also spoke to the Socialist:

"I'm on a zero-hour contract, universities are using them as an excuse to remove rights at work. I voted yes to the strike because I also earn less than a living wage.

"Everyone should get paid no less than £7.45, it would be fairer that way and that's why I'm out today."

Students joined the pickets at the university, with hand-made banners, and plan a meeting to build solidarity for future action between students, lecturers and other campus workers in the future.

Iain Dalton

Leeds - Coordination and solidarity

Amongst the older strikers, the phrase that was often to be heard was "Never did I think I would be striking again". For some who made their way to the pickets around the University of Leeds, Leeds Metropolitan University and Leeds College of Art, it was several decades since they had participated in a day of strike action.

It was not only education institutions within Leeds that were represented in the crowds that thronged towards Victoria Square: staff from the University of Bradford and other local institutions were to be seen waving banners and passing on the many chants.

Leeds Socialist Students was one of several student groups that turned out to show solidarity with the lecturers and support staff, touring the picket lines and joining the hundreds that marched in to town.

The variety of speakers at the midday Victoria Square rally was testament to the wide coordination and broad solidarity that had made the day possible. Opened by Paul Blackledge, a member of the UCU national executive committee and a professor at Leeds Met, speeches followed from union representatives at Leeds College of Art and University of Leeds.

The words expressed from the steps of the art gallery showed regret at the lack of industrial action last year and hope that this show of might would be followed up by further action. There was a sense that the battle had been renewed and that there was now a momentum, a reserve of energy, for the fight.

Millie Cooper, Student Union president at Leeds Met, echoed the belief amongst strikers that better paid, less overworked, and more motivated staff members are better for everyone involved in education. She pledged that students would support the staff in every way possible to make this happen.

Elizabeth Watkins, Leeds University Socialist Students

Birmingham

Aston university had its biggest picket line in years. One member of the support staff in Unite told the Socialist: "Really, I feel sorry for the students, who over the past ten years have been turned from learners into consumers".

Meanwhile GMB-organised security staff at the University of Birmingham, though not on strike themselves, turned a blind eye to student anti-cuts campaigners as they chained bikes to the vehicle barriers, preventing any deliveries from crossing the picket line.

A lively and upbeat rally at lunchtime brought together over 100 staff and students, with the call to link up disputes to create a general strike well received.

Nick Hart, Birmingham Socialist Students

Newcastle: United for Education

Newcastle's rally to support striking higher education workers was well supported, with plenty of workers from the three unions (UCU, Unison and Unite) flying their banners.

Boos rang out as one speaker mentioned that a vice chancellor from one of the region's universities had bought a Picasso to hang in his office - yet they say there is no spare cash!

Liz Lawrence's (UCU vice president) call for a general strike was well received. Afterwards she told the Socialist: "We've got to tie up the struggles."

"The TUC spoke about this in September [at TUC congress]. This action today had three unions involved - people like joint action!"

She went on to say: "I think we should be defending other groups of workers, such as the CWU and others fighting attacks in the public sector."

Earlier in the day, on the picket lines, it was clear that there is increased anger as university staff see their pay shrink, while over half of vice-chancellors earn over £242,000.

At Newcastle university one of the lecturers on the picket line said: "Over the course of the last few years student numbers have increased, while staffing levels haven't.

"There's now around 200 students in lectures. This is okay as far as delivering lectures is concerned, but there's little time to do marking or giving students feedback."

Elaine Brunskill

London Queen Mary

Pickets at Queen Mary university in East London were lively, with a good turnout from students coming to give solidarity as well as members of all three unions.

Staff and students spoke about the increasing number of people on zero hour contracts with the university, and how more and more teaching staff are only paid by the hour, including half of the English and Drama department.

A number of students agreed not to cross the picket line, and lots of vehicles turned away after appeals from staff and students.

Every entrance on campus was picketed, and the fact that Unison, Unite and UCU were striking together brought real confidence to the pickets.

Strikers were proud of the effect that the action had, and were prepared to come out again if the government still refuses to listen.

The idea of a general strike of all workers went down very well, and six pickets bought copies of the Socialist.

Naomi Byron

University of Nottingham

In a show of solidarity UCU members were joined by students at the picket lines that covered all entrances onto campus.

The staff felt enough was enough and are now prepared for further action to defend the profession and education in general. There was also a Unite march on campus.

Vlad Tomes

This version of this article was first posted on the Socialist Party website on 31 October 2013 and may vary slightly from the version subsequently printed in The Socialist.

FBU strike: Determination to force the government back

Firefighters were on strike on 1 and 4 November across England and Wales. Between the two strikes fire minister Brandon Lewis wrote to the FBU effectively worsening his offer on pensions. He made it clear that fire authorities would start the process of sacking older firefighters unfit for the job.

Firefighters would face the 'choice' of being sacked or leaving with a much reduced pension. At the same time firefighters are having to pay large increases in their pension contributions, pricing some out of the scheme altogether.

The strikes were solid and gained a lot of public support. The next strike has been announced for 13 November from 10am-2pm.

Leeds

Over 30 joined the picket line in Gipton, Leeds, as firefighters walked out at 6.30pm on Friday 1st November to be joined by fellow FBU members who were off duty.

Pickets were incensed over the government's attempts to increase their retirement age. But, just like many other workers in dispute, this is not the only attack they are facing.

The Labour-led local fire authority has voted through successive cuts packages which include closing a whole number of stations including Gipton and replacing several by stations in mid points between them.

But as pickets explained, this will make the new stations further away from the highest risk areas where there have been several fires this year that they have only just got to in time.

The last few years have also seen a drip-drip series of cuts, removing roles such as cooks and clerks and throwing that work onto firefighters who then have less time to drill and go out and fight fires.

Pickets here were in a hardened mood and were angry that action had been called off last week; as one picket put it: 'It shows weakness and sends the wrong message'.

But with today's strike and Monday's coming up they are determined to take whatever action is necessary to force the government and employers back.

Iain Dalton, Leeds Socialist Party

Salford

Socialist Party reporters spoke to Paul Davies (Salford FBU secretary), Paul Nugent (Chair) and Dave Allsey:

Paul N: "The last strike was called off because the employers wrote to the FBU saying they needed to consult with each individual fire authority but there's been no movement since then regarding any changes to pensions.

"Due to budget cuts, with 400 posts lost in Greater Manchester over the last six years, we're very thin on the ground, which means that there's no jobs to redeploy people to if they fail a medical, all possible posts are now done by civilians".

Dave: "It's across the board, not just the fire service, it's an ideological attack on the public

services, now there's a financial crisis, and not just in this country either, it's a global attack onto the public sector, they're attacking everybody".

A quarter of an hour into the strike a fire engine crawled out of the station and set off with its blue light on, to boos and shouts of 'scab'. We noticed a manager's car following.

Paul D: "Those lads who've just turned out, they've had a week's training, it could be anything, and they're followed by one of the managers to check on what they do. It's not a good situation".

The next step? Paul D: "We need to take some coordinated action with other trade unions. I'll say it, we need a national, a general strike, that would be a good thing to try and organise, and the next logical step, I think".

This version of this article was first posted on the Socialist Party website on 1 November 2013 and may vary slightly from the version subsequently printed in The Socialist.

Postal strike called off for now

No retreat from defending jobs and working conditions!

A Coventry postal worker

Communication Workers Union (CWU) members are worried that their union was the first to blink as they stared into the eyes of the privatised Royal Mail bosses.

Having gained a resounding 78% 'Yes' vote for industrial action, members may have felt that they were being led up the garden path as the CWU 'stood down' from the planned 24-hour strike on 4 November.

While talks are complicated and on-going - calling off strike action could well play into the hands of the employer who will continue to drag out talks in the hope support for action will drop.

A ground-breaking deal that protects workers' terms and conditions is worth fighting for but we know that goes against the ethos of a privatised Royal Mail, particularly in the worst

capitalist crisis for 70 years.

An improved pay offer is likely to be offered and an agreement is expected before 13 November, as both the CWU and management clear their diaries for talks.

But workers are right to be concerned about their future terms and conditions. The big Royal Mail shareholders will try to call the shots in the years to come - with a race to the bottom.

Bosses want the CWU to sign up to a three-year no-strike agreement. This would be a serious mistake for the CWU even to contemplate this.

It would give management a free rein to pursue its agenda of increased workloads and savage budget cuts.

Instead of taking strike action on 4 November, CWU reps across Royal Mail and the Post Office attended a national briefing in London.

While this was an opportunity to fire up union reps, it was not as effective as the collective workforce taking industrial action.

Pulling back from strike action while a deal is not yet on the table presents a real danger that Royal Mail could undermine the strength of feeling within the union by delaying tactics.

The CWU has a strong mandate for taking strike action. To ensure that no further momentum is lost in this dispute there has to be a strict timetable for the talks with the threat of strike action if nothing productive has been gained.

CWU should meet all other unions currently in dispute to discuss mass coordinated strike action as a step towards a 24-hour general strike to stop the Tory-led austerity offensive.

In any case, if Labour had given a commitment to re-nationalise Royal Mail, the plug would have been pulled on the sell-off.

That inaction should prompt a debate within our union about our continued affiliation to Labour and the need for a new mass workers' party based on the unions.

Warrington bus workers striking against pay freeze

Unite the Union members at Network Warrington bus company are striking against a pay freeze. They have announced a further three days of strike action after rejecting the 'insulting' offers of management.

On the company board sit several leading Labour councillors, whose main action seems to be to denigrate the union and help management enforce the pay freeze!

In contrast, suspended Labour councillor Kevin Bennett is speaking up for the workers.

Kevin says:

"On Monday 28th October, at a packed meeting of over 100 employees, the latest offer was emphatically rejected by the members.

A spokesperson for Unite the Union told me that there are untruths being put out by senior managers and board members that there were only 30 members at the meeting.

He said that this is a lie, Unite the Union and its members are playing strictly by the rules, which is more than can be said for the senior management.

The Unite spokesperson also said that although the Chief Executive and the board are saying there's no money, another accountant has been appointed; Where are they getting the money to pay for this?

Unite members have agreed to further action that will result in three consecutive days of strike action on 13th, 14th and 15th November."

Join the picket lines on 13-15 November, at the Network Warrington depot, Wilderspool Causeway, Warrington town centre.

This version of this article was first posted on the Socialist Party website on 30 October 2013 and may vary slightly from the version subsequently printed in The Socialist.

Yodel Cardiff parcel delivery operation

Bosses find new ways of turning the screw

At Yodel Cardiff parcel delivery operation, workers are finding it impossible to earn a living.

The Socialist reported, back in July, on the difficulties faced by delivery drivers at the Nantgarw depot on the edge of Cardiff.

A system of fines for not turning up has effectively ended holidays. Drivers face being fined for making deliveries early for some customers and fined for being late for others.

Yodel is part of the Barclay Brothers Empire. They fooled some drivers into thinking they could become little entrepreneurs. "Become a 'Service Partner,'" they said "and have your own little posse of drivers earning for you."

Some went for it, overseeing four-to-six drivers and hoping to cream enough off their earnings to enable them to get out of the madcap dash themselves.

Ryan, one of the drivers, watched as one Service Partner's gang broke up under the pressure. He said: "This guy trained up a lad to do a round but he found it really hard.

"He started at 6am and didn't finish until 9.30pm. The next day he finished at 8.30pm and on the third day he had a friend to help him and that went a bit better.

"But on the Saturday his friend did it on his own. He finished at God knows what time and he quit on the spot. The other lad came in on the Monday, realised how much money he was making and just left.

"The Service Partner came in, found all these parcels on the floor and copped for a fine."

Ryan feels sympathy for the Service Partners, as they're being manipulated by the firm. He said: "They're mostly genuine guys.

"They go out on the round themselves, they just get paid a little more if their drivers do it as well."

Workplace news in brief

NUT vice-president

As national strike action by teachers is postponed, now, more than ever, NUT members need to vote for clear, consistent leadership. Vote 1 for Martin Powell-Davies in the NUT vice-president election. Martin says:

Let's get every school out on a united one-day national strike. Call on other unions - like fire-fighters, postal workers, civil servants - to strike alongside us. Build united NUT/NASUWT school committees to keep up the pressure for joint action.

Continue our action next term; if education minister Gove won't step back, then we should step up to a two-day strike.

Read more on martin's blog: www.electmartin1.blogspot.co.uk

Money for nothing

Transport union RMT has condemned the way that the private rail companies have been making a fortune by not running trains during bad weather.

If bad weather is forecast the companies just leave the trains in the sheds and claim compensation from Network Rail.

As RMT general secretary Bob Crow said: "RMT is in no doubt that the train operators are happy to exploit this chaos as the system allows them to get paid for doing nothing. The whole situation stinks and reinforces the case for public ownership. "

Shared services

After a successful strike by PCS members working in Shared Services offices in DWP and Defra, some concessions have been won.

Members on the picket line in Blackpool on 25 October told local Socialist Party member Jane Hersey that they would fight any staff transfers.

Remaining services and departments are being 'overhauled' which many believe refers to more privatisation.

The strike has forced more negotiations and some important protection for the workers.

The strike has therefore been suspended pending further negotiations.

Keith Henderson, GMB

Keith Henderson is a former regional organiser of the GMB union. He was dismissed from the GMB last December.

Keith has always believed that the real reason for his dismissal was because of his socialist beliefs.

A recent Employment Tribunal Judgment has effectively agreed.

An online petition has been setup to support Keith's reinstatement: http://www.petitions24.com/no_witch-hunts_in_the_gmb_union_reinstate_keith_henderson

City Link

RMT members working for the City Link distribution company voted for strike action against the threatened imposition of new contracts which will substantially cut their pay and conditions.

There was a 90% vote for action but the company challenged the original ballot. The RMT reorganised it and the new ballot will close on 12 November.

Action may therefore take place in the run-up to the busy Christmas period.

Trade union action needed to protect London NHS

Barts Trust bosses sack union chair

Waltham Forest Socialist Party members

The campaign to stop £77.5 million worth of cuts in Barts Health NHS Trust has entered a new phase.

Last week the trust dismissed Waltham Forest Unison Health branch chair Charlotte Monro on a trumped up charge of gross misconduct.

This pattern is an all too familiar one: an employer wants to make draconian cuts, it calculates that if it attacks the union leaders this will frighten any oppositional voices into silence. However, opposition has not been silenced.

The workers and the community in Waltham Forest, and the workers at the borough's hospital, Whipps Cross, have proved time and time again that they are willing to fight back against cuts that could result in the closure of our local general hospital if we don't stop them.

The Unison health branch has organised two packed local meetings of over 100, a workers' gate protest of over 200 and a local demo of over 700.

There has been an indicative ballot which delivered a 98.8% yes vote for strike action to stop the cuts.

The community and the workforce are chomping at the bit for united, decisive action to halt the down-bandings, cuts and victimisation.

There is every possibility that, if Unison's London region gave a lead and permitted a strike ballot for all Trust union members, cuts could be stopped and Charlotte could be reinstated on appeal.

Charlotte's only 'crime' was to speak publicly against the stroke unit being moved from Whipps Cross.

We would argue that this is not only her right but her duty as Unison branch chair in the hospital.

The employer has gone after her because things that were everyday trade union behaviour in the past become intolerable to employers who want to drive through cuts of £77.5 million.

During investigations and disciplinary hearings some may feel they should lie low, not attract too much attention and let "justice" take its course in the belief that logic will prevail.

Public campaign needed

But the Socialist always argued for a public campaign to defend Charlotte, that the workers should be balloted to defend their activist, that virtually nothing is won at the negotiating table - or in the courtroom - without it being won on the battlefield first.

The victories secured in the high court in Lewisham hospital were preceded by a local demo of 30,000 people.

Those 30,000 people will be needed again if Tory health secretary Jeremy Hunt changes the law to undo this brilliant victory.

Every tool in our armoury must be used to stop the decimation of our NHS. We must have mass demonstrations, legal challenges and occupations, but it is the workforce that must play the decisive role in defending their jobs, union reps and our services for any lasting victory.

Hunt's West London A&E closures

The dismantling of NHS services in west London continues apace, despite the attempted spin by Con-Dem government representatives to the contrary.

Health minister Jeremy Hunt last week accepted 'in full' proposals to centralise A&E services at five rather than nine hospitals in west London - signalling the closure of A&Es at Central Middlesex and Hammersmith hospitals 'as soon as practicable'.

Forced into making at least an appearance of listening to the massive outpouring of local opposition to his plans, Hunt announced that accident and emergency services would continue at Ealing and Charing Cross hospitals.

However, since he also stated that these units would be a 'different shape and size' - and that it is clear that this does not mean bigger and better - it is questionable how much of a victory this really represents.

Above all, no guarantees have been given for the future of clinical services at either Ealing or Charing Cross, and preparations for the transfer of services and sell-off of land are continuing.

Given this, it appears that the proposed accident and emergency departments will in reality only be minor injuries units.

Local residents have been battling for over 20 years to maintain and improve NHS provision in the area, and that battle will need to continue and intensify.

Above all, it will be necessary to involve hospital workers to campaign and fight alongside local service users in order to develop such a campaign.

This needs to be expanded to cover the whole of West London. The local Socialist Party campaigns for:

- No partial or total closure of any A&E services in West London
- One unified campaign in West London to ensure that hospitals are not played off against the others - stand together or hang separately!
- A mass meeting of staff from all four affected hospitals, to ensure they are united and integrated into the campaign
- Trade unions to organise strike action supported by the anti-cuts campaigns and service users
- No to the privatisation of our health service - stop the PFI fiasco and kick out the profiteers
- Rebuild the NHS as a publicly funded entity, under democratic control of the staff, patients and the general public
- For an electoral alternative, through the Trade Union and Socialist Coalition, to challenge the cuts agenda in town halls and parliament, by standing candidates at the next local council elections

Sullivan Roberts, West London Socialist Party

Lewisham hospital gets second court victory

But battle to stop cuts must continue

A south London nurse

Lewisham NHS workers and campaigners won a second court victory on 29 October, stopping Tory health secretary Jeremy Hunt from cutting A&E and maternity services at the hospital.

Lewisham's population of 250,000 played a key role in pushing the Labour-run council to mount a legal challenge. Tens of thousands joined protests last November and in January.

At a huge Save Lewisham Hospital public meeting last autumn, Socialist Party member and ex-Lewisham councillor Chris Flood demanded a legal challenge as well as industrial action.

The legal action showed that bankrupt South London Healthcare Trust (SLHT) had no right to raid the pocket of neighbouring Lewisham hospital to clear debts accrued through the business-friendly but services-hostile Private Finance Initiative (PFI).

The challenge was upheld in July and Jeremy Hunt's actions had been deemed unlawful. Hunt inevitably appealed - costing £92,000 in public money - but lost last week.

However the law is now being amended. Legislation is being rushed through parliament giving

bankrupt NHS administrators the legal right to raid the funds of neighbouring trusts to bail out costly PFI hospitals.

But the £200 million PFI debts at Queen Elizabeth Hospital in Woolwich have now been written off. Why can't all PFI be scrapped?

At the same time, SLHT was dissolved on 1 October. As a result, Queen Elizabeth has now been merged with Lewisham hospital to form Lewisham and Greenwich NHS Trust - which will no doubt result in more cuts. 50 jobs have gone already.

So Lewisham hospital is not out of the woods yet and nor are other hospitals in the area.

Health unions at Lewisham hospital, especially Unison, need to organise and link up with sister union branches in other hospital trusts, and with patients and campaigners to be ready for the next tranche of attacks.

NHS campaigns would become much stronger with the industrial muscle of trade unionists in their ranks.

Defenders of the health service cannot trust in Labour politicians' promises to save us. Under Labour, the NHS came under attack as well.

We cannot rely forever on the legal system alone or on promises from career politicians to save our NHS.

New pamphlet: Defend the NHS!

A compilation of articles by campaigners fighting to stop the destruction of the NHS

Just £2 including p&p Phone 020 8988 8777

Make cheques payable to Socialist Party and send to Socialist Party, PO Box 24697, London E11 1YD

**Build a mass movement to defeat workfare
and all cuts**

Helen Pattison, Youth Fight for Jobs London

On 30 October the Supreme Court quashed the government's appeal against Cait Reilly and Jamieson Wilson legal victory over workfare.

Workfare schemes were said to be legally flawed, based on invalid regulations, and didn't give enough information about sanctions if claimants refused the slave-like schemes.

However, this legal victory is very limited. The court announced that workfare is not "forced or compulsory labour" and therefore we will see little change for benefit claimants.

Nor can they claim compensation if they were on a workfare scheme or sanctioned for refusing to do so.

In fact, the government, aided by Labour abstentions, have rushed the retrospective Jobseekers (Back to Work Schemes) Act through parliament to make sure they can carry on letting their big business buddies take advantage of workfare schemes.

As a Youth Fight for Jobs campaigner, I can't count how many times I have organised protests inside or outside a workfare employer, or been at rallies listening to previously paid staff forced to work for free, and claimants forced to be a revolving door of free labour for companies bragging about record-breaking profits.

We are not being left on the scrapheap because we don't have the skills or experience for work. Young people are being forced into long-term unemployment or underemployment.

On top of the 2.5 million people chasing 500,000 job vacancies, there is another 5.5 million on zero-hour contracts, many also looking for more permanent and secure employment.

Simple maths show that there aren't enough jobs. The only way to reduce unemployment is public investment in a mass programme of socially useful jobs, with permanent contracts and decent pay.

This is why separate legal cases against the workfare schemes, zero-hour contracts or other attacks can only take us so far. The government of austerity will ultimately side step legal attacks anyway.

A movement, on the other hand, is growing against the government and its mountains of cuts.

Trade unions represent over six million workers who are taking active steps, such as Unite Community supporting Youth Fight for Jobs, to link up the employed and unemployed in the

fight against austerity.

Nuneaton: 18-year old student stands for TUSC

Aidan O'Toole, an 18-year-old sixth former, told the Socialist why he's standing for the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition in the Nuneaton Arbury ward byelection on 5 December.

Four other TUSC candidates are standing in byelections in England and Wales on the same day.

"From a young age I've been aware of the injustices we face at the hands of the current ruling elite, whether that be the Tory Party or the Labour Party.

Instead of taxing the million pound banker bonuses the government have decided instead to hit ordinary people by cutting their public services and benefits.

These cuts have inevitably pushed people into deeper and deeper poverty, even before they get hit by 10% increases in energy prices.

This is why I decided to stand for TUSC, to stop the exploitation of my class at the hands of the ruling elite and to help less fortunate people.

We all know that the current two parties won't do jack to help anyone outside their little circle so it's up to us as socialists to do so."

The Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) is an electoral alliance that stands candidates against all cuts and privatisation.

It involves the RMT transport workers' union, leading members of other trade unions including the PCS, NUT and POA, and socialist groups including the Socialist Party.

Could you stand for TUSC in the 2014 council elections?

See www.tusc.org.uk

Waltham Forest's 'join' week of action success

Sarah Wrack, Waltham Forest Socialist Party

Waltham Forest Socialist Party's recruitment week of action was a great success.

It kicked off with two campaign stalls in different areas of the east London borough which boldly appealed for people angry at cuts, crisis and capitalism to consider joining the Socialist Party.

We used megaphones to explain what the Socialist Party stands for and had loads of people coming over to discuss.

17 copies of the Socialist were sold and ten people gave their details to find out more about joining.

The following day we visited addresses of people who had previously given their details and one person agreed to join.

For the rest of the week we did similar activity at train stations around the borough and at Whipps Cross hospital where we've been involved in a campaign against cuts.

On all the activity we were giving out leaflets for a meeting to explain why people should join, as well as for Socialism 2013.

Five new people came to the meeting, and several others weren't able to make it but planned to come to Socialism 2013.

At the meeting Helen Pattison, one of the London regional organisers of the Socialist Party, asked us to explain what it was that first got us angry and want to get involved.

We had a great discussion, covering wide-ranging topics from the campaign at Whipps Cross to the nationalisation of the banks.

We ended the week with details of 15 new people, one person agreed to join, and with some good ideas for the future, such as making the bold recruitment stalls a regular thing.

Huddersfield students say: Save our bar and

café!

The bar and café at Huddersfield Student Union is set to close when the union moves to the university's new learning and leisure building, with around 100 jobs to go.

The closure has been blamed on a 'change in student culture' and entertainment services losing £100,000 a year.

However, when staff suggested a solution in closing some services at quieter times, this was slapped down with the response that the bar and café are open to provide services to students!

Currently the union is housed in a university-owned building. A lower rent is promised for the new premises.

The union leadership say the savings will be invested in other services, including campaigning and support for societies.

The new building will also include more facilities for societies. All of this is to welcomed. However, if student unions need extra facilities then the funding for this should be campaigned for, rather than trading away one set of services and facilities for another.

Socialist Students organised a meeting to discuss protest action against the closure. Our meeting elected a delegation to meet union representatives to express our concerns.

While making it clear we disagreed with losing student control over the bar and café, we also queried the exact nature of these services.

Democratic student union control means that, for example, the union café is the only place on campus that serves nut-allergy safe meals.

Staff have been guaranteed interviews for jobs, but we suspect all will be casualised rather than some permanent full-time jobs as at present.

We are sending an open letter to university management. If we don't get satisfactory answers we will be organising protests on campus.

Jake Lawley, University of Huddersfield Socialist Students and Iain Dalton, Socialist Students Yorkshire organiser

No Fire Zone reveals truth of war crimes against Tamils

Cameron to Sri Lanka - not in our name

Senan, Tamil Solidarity international coordinator

"Reeling from No Fire Zone" was actor Hugh Grant's tweeted response to Callum Macrae's latest documentary about the massacre of Tamils in Sri Lanka.

First broadcast by Channel 4 on 3 November, it invokes once again the enormous sadness that engulfed Tamils across the world in 2009 when they witnessed the horrendous slaughter.

No Fire Zone also exposes the utter hypocrisy and heartlessness of the Tory leadership who are preparing to meet the author of the Tamils' incredible suffering at the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (Chogm) taking place in Colombo. The Tamil word chogam actually means 'sadness'.

This is Callum's third film and it leaves no doubt that horrendous war crimes took place. Disturbing film clips show how the military forced the population into more and more tiny spaces - called 'no fire zones' - but repeatedly targeted and heavily shelled them there. This included the areas designated as hospitals by the Red Cross.

Sickeningly there is 'trophy' footage of summary executions of surrendered and often sexually abused prisoners.

Former UN staffers struggle to recollect their experiences of how the population was intentionally starved of food and medicine.

War crimes lawyers confirm that a 12 year old boy was shot at close range by military personnel.

And finally it shows how the war criminal government tried to hide the evidence. Throughout the film there are clips of military spokespeople reporting lies that not one civilian has been killed. The UN estimates it could have been 70,000 or more killed in the last weeks alone.

Four years on, some areas remain under high security military control. The documentary gives a glimpse of the on-going war against the Tamil community and other minorities - how the cultural make-up of the North and East traditional Tamil areas is being changed systematically.

But Tamil Solidarity argues that the struggle must go on - based on the mass participation of Tamil young people and workers, and making an appeal to the wider British working class and youth.

Tamils in Sri Lanka sent a strong message of defiance in recent elections. Despite government dirty tricks, bribes and threats, voters in the North rejected the government parties and their allies overwhelmingly.

This defiance must now be developed into building a movement of resistance. What we do here in solidarity will be vital to that.

The Channel 4 Killing Fields documentaries have helped to break the British media silence on this issue. However, campaigners have fought hard to bring out the truth.

Tamil Solidarity campaigns to raise awareness and build solidarity among young people and the trade unions.

Unison, which organises more than 1.3 million public sector workers, voted to affiliate to the Tamil Solidarity campaign at its 2012 national conference.

Many leading trade union activists have already come out in opposition to Chogm in Sri Lanka. Labour left MP Jeremy Corbyn has indicated that he will take part in Tamil Solidarity's 'Not in Our Name' protest action at Downing Street on 15 November to coincide with the Chogm opening ceremony.

Well-known playwright Rani Moorthy, campaigning writer Meena Kandasamy, and others have pledged to participate in the protest day of action across the world.

Disgracefully a section of Tamil campaigners maintain their links with the Tories. What should be the response to David Cameron going to Chogm? Tamils in Britain should cut all links with Tories.

And they must join with those, such as Tamil Solidarity, such as the trade unions and the young people, who say that the struggle must continue.

Protest - Chogm

15 November 4-7pm, Downing Street

tamilsolidarity.org 0777 832 7044

Book review: Marxism in Today's World

Tom Baldwin

A new edition of *Marxism in Today's World*, about the Committee for a Workers' International (CWI), the international organisation which the Socialist Party is affiliated to, was released this year.

Since it was first published in 2006 I have found this book useful and inspiring. It puts the CWI's position on many vital issues and explains the method and analysis behind it.

The book arose from a long interview by an Italian Marxist, Yuri Columbo with Socialist Party general secretary Peter Taaffe and the CWI's Bob Labi.

Its conversational style makes it an engaging read, helping the reader find their way through many, often complicated, political questions such as the national question in Ireland and Israel/Palestine and the class nature of the former Soviet Union and of China today.

Internationalism is vital to Marxists. Workers have common interests across national borders and socialism cannot be built in a single country.

That internationalist perspective runs through the book which focuses on international issues. There is an appetite for these ideas - it has been translated into at least five languages, on top of the original English and Italian versions.

New edition

The book is reproduced now because, the new introduction explains: "there is a generalised crisis of capitalism throughout the globe." A lot has happened in the seven years since the original publication including the deep economic crisis and the Arab Spring's mass revolutionary movements. These are mentioned in a new introduction.

For Marxists truth is concrete, you cannot always transplant old slogans into a new situation. But defending an independent working class approach and our consistent application of Marxist methods and ideas mean the positions outlined in the book stand the test of time. It correctly anticipated many subsequent developments.

While Gordon Brown was still claiming to have abolished 'boom and bust' and most capitalists

expected uninterrupted economic growth, we said of the world economy: "Often a flame flares the brightest just before it dies out.

"All the ingredients of a collapse are there.... the whole mighty edifice of society has become indebted.

"The world economy is resting on 'chicken legs', the US housing boom and the growing Chinese reserves."

Comparing these predictions to the unthinking optimism of most capitalist economists at the time shows the superiority of the Marxist method!

In tracing the process leading to the end of apartheid in South Africa, the book explains that despite empowerment for a small black elite, the country still has the same capitalist set-up.

But it also predicts "the revolutionary drive and potential is there amongst the working class, which will break out again."

The new edition's front page is a picture of the founding conference of the Workers' and Socialist Party, built out of the heroic struggles of South African workers, especially miners, following the Marikana massacre.

Practical role

The first time I read the book it helped me get my head round the issues discussed but even now I find it a valuable resource to help put forward and explain our ideas.

I recommend it to new and potential members as a good introduction to our party and international. It is useful for those wanting to compare our approach to that of other left organisations and internationals.

The ideas in this book play a practical role in building the CWI. A few years ago we recruited two Indian members, living in Bristol for a time.

Translating the book was important preparation for their return and gave them a useful tool for their pioneering work in a new part of their country. I would recommend Marxism in Today's World for all readers of the Socialist.

Marxism in Today's World by Peter Taaffe

Answers on war, capitalism and environment

Special offer: £8 including P&P

Available from Socialist Books: PO Box 24697, London E11 1YD

020 8988 8789 socialistbooks.org.uk

bookshop@socialistparty.org.uk

Answering Tory lies about teachers

Monique, Bradford Socialist Party

I work in education and see the effects that cuts to jobs and services have on our younger generation and the toll that constant stress takes on our teachers and school staff.

Propaganda by the clearly uneducated Tory minister Gove suggests that teachers are underworked and overpaid and don't deserve holidays, let alone have the right to take strike action.

Are teachers 'underworked'? Many teachers work long hours from before 8am and after 5pm, not only because of meetings, lesson planning and marking but also because of constant changes in setting objectives and changes in the curriculum.

That's not to mention the work taken home over the weekend and performance related pay.

Are teachers 'overpaid'? If we were to calculate a teacher's salary by the hour (based on the amount of work they do) the average would be less than the national minimum wage.

Do teachers not deserve holidays? Many teachers spend most of their half-term and full-term breaks catching up with the mountains of work they need to do for the next term as more and more schools are setting objectives for each term eight weeks in advance,

Don't teachers have the right to take strike action? Is this because it inconveniences people? That means it is an effective way to get the government's attention.

The stress caused by attacks on pensions and increasing workloads has a detrimental effect on the lives of teachers (including the newly qualified ones) and also on those pupils whose lives we are trying to change for the better.

Are we letting pupils down by striking? On the contrary! If teachers and school staff were to continue having their terms and conditions attacked, we would already have let our pupils down if we did not stand up for ourselves.

We should send a message to this oppressive government that we will fight for a real future for our pupils' education, and defend teachers.

<http://www.socialistparty.org.uk/articles/17695>