

Raise the minimum wage: £10 NOW

"If we are to stop future generations spiralling into never ending poverty, we have to support and more importantly campaign for a minimum wage of £10 now. The days of the state having to prop up bad employers who exploit workers by paying dramatically low wages has to be brought to an end. If politicians don't agree then we need to change them."

Ronnie Draper, General secretary Bakers, Food & Allied Workers Union

"I'm a teaching assistant. My job is very satisfying - apart from the financial part. At 29 it's a good job - but my girlfriend and I still live at home with my parents. It's the only way we've managed to save anything meaningful.

The strike on 10 July was my first [see reports on pages 2-3]. This year's Tolpuddle festival will also be my first. The Tolpuddle martyrs' sacrifice was an inspiration that signified the start of trade unionism. The Fast Food Rights campaign initiated by the bakers' union also reflects a new era; one that will require tremendous fighting spirit and sacrifice. But these new layers of workers will have the experience and the support of experienced trade unions to help.

These current strikes are also a source of hope and inspiration for the un-unionised, the new layer of trade unionists and anyone who rejects austerity. With the historic victory of the \$15 minimum wage in Seattle and the launch of our own £10 an hour campaign socialists have the programme to inspire people."

Phil Snider, Southampton Socialist Party

"All trade unions and especially the GMB need to campaign for wages not benefits. People need a living wage you can actually live on. People need to get organised in unions to campaign for this where they work. In the end, only unions can make work pay."

Martin Smith, GMB national organiser

We demand:

- ?A minimum wage of £10 an hour without exemptions as a step towards a real living wage
 - ?End the pay freeze now!
 - ?End zero-hour contracts and all forced under-employment
 - ?Investment in a massive programme to create socially useful jobs
-

Abuse scandals reveal abusive system

Hannah Sell, Socialist Party deputy general secretary

"Trust me, I'm a politician. Now, you're really having a laugh" was how Andrew Rawnsley put it in the Observer (13/7/14). Never before have the institutions of British capitalism been so distrusted. The media, bankers, and the church: support for all has been dramatically undermined. Capitalist politicians, however, top the list.

Just before the local elections one poll asked voters what word best described their feelings about Westminster politicians. Almost half answered 'angry'.

The latest poisonous scandal - relating to charges of child abuse - leaking out of Westminster will do further profound damage to the capitalist parties. When the expenses scandal first broke we raised a comparison with the gigantic corruption scandal in Italy in the early 1990s. It resulted in the disappearance of whole parties and a complete restructuring of the Italian electoral system in the 'clean hands' operation.

The ongoing expenses disgrace in Britain, against the background of the worst economic crisis in 80 years and a prolonged fall in incomes for the majority, have enormously corroded the authority of parliament, but have not yet led to the kind of meltdown that took place in Italy.

Depending how the current child abuse cover-up story unfolds it is not excluded that a crisis on an Italian scale could now be posed.

Back when the Jimmy Savile sexual abuse scandal first broke the outpouring of anger that took place was not only against the abhorrent actions of one individual, but of the systematic cover-up of those actions by different capitalist institutions over a period of decades. All the attempts of individuals, including individual police officers, to take action against Savile were blocked because he was an 'important' person close to Margaret Thatcher.

And as Brian Caton's interview graphically reveals, he assisted Thatcher's government in attempting to carry through privatisation and to break the unions.

Deep-rooted problems

In the weeks and months following the Savile disclosure there was an attempt by the representatives of capitalism to divert this mood into concentrating on dealing with individual predators like Savile, while emphasising that they are rare aberrations. Unfortunately, however, while the scale of Savile's abuse may have been exceptional, it reflects a deep-rooted problem in capitalist society. One UK study, by Child and Women Abuse Studies, estimated that one in 20 women and one in 50 men have experienced childhood sexual abuse.

The latest allegations surfacing in the press show that Savile was not alone, not only in society but also in the corridors of power. The Sunday Mirror quotes a former Tory party activist who says that in the 1980s he: "helped procure the youngest and prettiest" boys for several cabinet ministers after being told to find "entertainment".

The Sunday Mirror also reports that the Tory activist told Thatcher what had taken place. He also alleges that Michael Havers, the brother of Baroness Butler-Sloss who was originally heading the government inquiry into the issue, was present at at least one such "entertainment".

Regardless of whether this is true, Havers was attorney general from 1979 to 1987. If, as is claimed, a dossier of evidence relating to a paedophile ring at Westminster was deliberately destroyed, it was likely to have happened on Havers' watch.

We do not know whether there was an organised paedophile ring at Westminster, or whether all the revelations currently appearing in the press are accurate. It is no surprise to socialists, however, to learn of child abuse by MPs or other powerful figures. Capitalism is a system built on exploitation and power. A tiny minority have enormous wealth and power while the vast majority is exploited. The capitalist parties' role is ultimately to rule in the interests, not of the people who elected them, but the tiny capitalist elite that hold power in British society.

Capitalism warps and distorts human behaviour, leading to all kinds of horrors. Child abuse takes place in all classes of society, most often within the family. But given that the sexual abuse of children is fundamentally about power, it is to be expected that it is more common among those who hold powerful positions in society (as is domestic violence) and that it is often carried out against those with the least power.

All children are largely powerless, but as the Savile, care home, and grooming scandals have all shown those children

who suffer abuse are often selected because they are in especially vulnerable and powerless situations.

Cover-up attempt?

It is sickening but not unexpected, if members of Thatcher's government - whose day jobs were carrying out crimes against the working class - the miners' strike, anti-trade union laws, the poll tax, introducing the anti-gay Section 28 legislation, to name a few - were also abusing the powerless for 'entertainment'. Nor were the crimes committed limited to the Tory Party as the accusations against the Liberal Democrat Cyril Smith show.

By announcing a judge-led inquiry into what took place, the government hoped to be seen to be taking action, while in reality kicking the problem into the long grass. Once this might have worked, but today, when suspicion of capitalist politicians runs so deep, it will not be possible to prevent the further deepening of public anger at the cesspool of Westminster.

Even if, with the collaboration of the majority of the capitalist press, they manage to pull off the difficult task of largely postponing the issue until after the general election, they will not prevent it further damaging Westminster's authority.

The initial choice of Butler-Sloss to head the inquiry shows again the arrogance and stupidity of the current government, imagining that a woman at the very heart of the establishment, with a long history of acting in its interests, would be a credible choice.

The ranks of high court judges are not packed with anti-establishment figures, to put it mildly, with almost 70% having been privately educated and almost 80% having gone to Oxbridge. Butler-Sloss, nonetheless, seems to have got a particularly distinguished record for whitewashes.

Even the Pope has admitted that 2% of the Catholic clergy are paedophiles. But it has been revealed that, when investigating cases of child abuse in the Church of England, Butler-Sloss explained to one victim that she was not intending to refer to a Bishop in her final report. This was not because he was innocent, but because she did not want to undermine the Church of England!

To have continued to insist on Butler-Sloss heading the inquiry would have completely discredited any report the inquiry produced. They have been forced to search for a seemingly more 'independent' figure.

Workers' inquiry

Inevitably, any inquiry in the hands of representatives of the ruling class will attempt to consign whatever it finds to being a problem of the distant past. However, the Sunday Mirror's report suggests that some of those involved in the 1980s are still active in politics today. More generally, child abuse remains endemic in society. It is true that there has been progress, particularly in the form of laws and regulations to protect children.

The Savile and Rolf Harris revelations will undoubtedly have given greater confidence to other victims of abuse to speak out. But the huge cuts and privatisation that this government is carrying out, and which began under Labour, are tearing apart the limited safety net that previously existed.

At the same time, we live in a world where inequality is growing, where more and more workers are in insecure low-paid work without any trade union representation, in a world in which whistle-blowing against abuse is much more difficult and it is easier for abusers in powerful positions to get away with it. It is also a world where workers' organisations with the power to defend services and challenge abuse, are under vicious attack. The fight against cuts and for workers' rights is an essential part of combatting child abuse.

Socialists demand a genuine, democratic, workers' inquiry into child abuse involving Britain's establishment, past and present - including Westminster and the Church of England. Such an inquiry would be conducted by democratically elected and accountable representatives of the trade unions, community organisations and abuse survivors' groups. It could provide the working class with the truth.

The Mirror's revelations will add fuel to the burning anger that already exists with the establishment parties. In the short term this can contribute to the 'anti-party' mood and even to votes for Ukip, who are just another pro-cuts party of the 1% but are widely presented as the best stick with which to beat the establishment.

The need for a new party of a completely 'different type' is more urgent than ever. A mass workers' party would stand for the powerless against the abusers of power. It would stand, as Brian shows the POA did, against all cuts in public services. It would also fight for a massive extension of democracy - including a real right for constituents to recall their MPs and for MPs to only receive the salary of a skilled worker.

Socialists would also argue for such a party to stand for an end to capitalism - a system built on exploitation - and a democratic socialist society. Such a society would be built on an entirely different set of relationships, free from the power, coercion and inequalities that are fundamental to capitalism. Only then would it be possible to begin to completely eradicate child abuse.

Savile: a Tory weapon against the working class

Brian Caton, former general secretary of the POA prison officers' union and Barnsley Socialist Party member, spoke to the Socialist about his time as national officer for special hospitals. At that time serial abuser Jimmy Savile had a key position in Broadmoor psychiatric hospital, granted by Edwina Currie, then a Tory junior health minister.

According to the Guardian Currie was "supportive of Savile's promise to confront unionised prison officers." Currie told an NHS inquiry that Savile had looked at "everything he could use to blackmail the POA", and she thought this approach was a "pretty classy piece of operation".

This interview contains some disturbing details.

What was the union's approach to Savile at the time?

The staff were saying this man being on this ward is unhelpful at best and downright disruptive at worst. It was disruptive to staff and actually prevented them from doing the work that they needed to do. If he was on the ward these people didn't go to therapy sessions, to treatment, or to sit down with psychiatric social workers or their nurse.

I was making lots of noise about him being there. Firstly the POA central committee determined that we would not allow for Savile to expand his influence into any other of the special hospitals. Further we set out to create a media campaign not purely about Savile but also to put the real case to maintain the values of special hospitals keeping their unique status.

The government's views remained unchanged and Broadmoor management embarked on an attack against POA members using unwarranted and unnecessary disciplinary cases against prominent branch officials and members.

Many years later Savile was at Tory conference and spoke to me a couple of times. He was constantly bobbing up and wanting to talk to me about the POA. I found him creepy beyond belief. He ended up appearing in this Chinese restaurant in Bournemouth - I gave him very short sharp shift.

What was the context of Savile's presence at Broadmoor?

We'd had the Olliff report which sought to move special hospitals into the mainstream NHS and away from the very special and necessary administration held jointly under the Department of Health and the Home Office. The government was saying it's nothing to do with the union - but of course it was.

There were a lot of things that I was unhappy about to do with special hospitals - the way in which patients were seen as prisoners, the way in which staff were seen as prison officers. They weren't. And we knew that there were lots of people that shouldn't be in there - it was just that we had nowhere to send them.

The government's proposals were all about changing everything - people's conditions of service, the way in which they worked, their pay scales, the uniforms, the level of qualified staff, to exactly the opposite, instead of having two-thirds qualified and a third unqualified it went to two-thirds unqualified and a third qualified.

And of course Savile was in that context but, to be honest, I never put the two things together other than the complaints I got regularly that the workers didn't want this man in Broadmoor.

I am convinced now that when the Special Hospitals Service Authority took over in the early 1990s, there was an overall strategy to have fear and intimidation in the workplace to stop workers and the POA responding to the proposed changes. It was clear to us that these changes would threaten the safety and security of staff and patients and the public.

In 1991 the POA took strike action against the proposed changes and was quite successful. Many parts of Olliff were abandoned.

But the Tories' and senior management's view was, push it closer to the edge until someone falls over the precipice - then we know where the boundary is and we'll not go past that. Until ten years later they're pushing against it again until someone falls off.

What has been the impact of these Tory changes to the prison service?

There's no greater number of dangerous people in society then there was many years ago - they're just in different places. They used to be in special hospitals getting psychotherapy and special treatment - they're now in prison not getting it.

There's only one addition to that correlation - it costs £110-£115,000 a year to keep someone in a high security hospital or a regional secure unit. It costs £38,000 to keep them in prison. Albeit that when they come out of the system having received psychiatric care they're usually less likely to re-offend. So there was a bigger picture if you like.

I'm not exaggerating when I say 50%, in female establishments it's as high as 80 and 90%, of the prison population are wrongly placed, should be in psychiatric supervision and care. But that's not happening - we've lost community psychiatric nurses. We haven't got a system or a process to allow people to be cared for in the community.

The ethos was, so long as these people were out of sight, they're out of mind. But POA members were dealing with these people the best they could, given the financial limits on the service.

I'll give you one example - I met two drunken psychiatric nurses in a high security hospital club. I said why are they soaked? They said they'd just had a 14 year old have his teeth removed. So bad was his self-harming that he'd been ripping the veins out of his own arms and legs with his teeth. The only way these guys could cope with dealing with these kind of problems day in, day out, seven days a week, 12 hour shifts including overtime, was by getting drunk every night.

The Tories were insistent that everything had to change. And the only stumbling block was the POA. Because there was no successful alternative being put forward other than the POA must change its 'culture', you can't wear a uniform, you can't put these people at night where they should be, which is in their rooms sleeping - sleep was a great stabiliser to these people.

What role has the POA played in the prison service?

The POA has changed and the change goes on. We decided that, every racist that we found, we didn't take them to a disciplinary - we threw them out of the union. Then we said to the prison service this bloke is a racist and we constantly

did it. It took us at least ten years to get the prison service to bring in a system where if they know that someone's in a racist organisation of any description they will throw them out of employment. We forced them to do that.

We were the ones who forced the prison service to end slopping out. I took the motion in the late 70s to conference. They took the toilets out so they could get more prisoners in.

It all comes down to brass.

Scotland: Threat of a Yes majority forces concessions from Project Fear

Philip Stott, Socialist Party Scotland

The independence referendum campaign in Scotland is approaching its concluding two months with opinion polls still showing a lead for the No side - 57% compared to 43% for Yes. This has been greeted with some relief among the capitalist establishment following a significant increase in support for the Yes side during March and April.

It followed a widely derided intervention in February during which Tory George Osborne, Labour's Ed Balls and Lib Dem Danny Alexander all ruled out an independent Scotland being able to use the pound in a currency union. Since then Project Fear - the campaign of Labour, the Tories and the Lib Dems with the support from a majority of the media and big business - has undergone a cosmetic makeover.

A velvet glove has been slipped over the iron fist. The slogan of the so-called 'Better Together' campaign is now: "No thanks". Socialist Party Scotland has previously pointed out that "the stick will still be wielded, but the failure of Project Fear means the carrot of enhanced devolution is now needed."

Alongside this change of tack, and reflecting the overarching interests of US imperialism and international big business, have been the interventions of Barack Obama, Hilary Clinton and even the Pope, who have all spoken of their hope that the UK will remain "successful and united".

The author of the Harry Potter books, JK Rowling, has also donated £1 million to the Better Together campaign. George Galloway waded in, saying a Yes vote would cause "havoc throughout the land".

More powers for Scotland

All three major pro-union parties have now come forward with promises for more powers for the Scottish parliament in exchange for a No vote. The Tories, who opposed devolution in the 1997 referendum, are proposing that the Scottish parliament should control all income tax raised in Scotland. Labour's pledge is that Edinburgh would set three quarters of the basic rate of income tax.

The recent British Election Survey report showed that 74% of people in Scotland want more powers, including a majority of those who say they'll vote No in September. Facing the prospect of a possible defeat in September the concessions coming from the No camp are an attempt to split off those inclined to support Yes as the only way of getting the powers they want.

The recent announcement by David Cameron that Glasgow is to get "city region" status and £500 million in infrastructure investment if Scotland stays part of the union is another example of the carrot and the stick approach.

Yet, it's also clear that continuing austerity, rising poverty and falling wages is providing a bedrock of support for independence. While the momentum behind the Yes campaign has stalled, there has not yet been any significant fall in support for independence either.

A recent report from the Scottish government showing that the numbers living in poverty had risen by 110,000 to 820,000 between April 2012 and 2013 is an indication of the human costs of savage cuts being inflicted by the Con-Dems. In a stunning revelation 52% of those adults living in poverty were in work.

With 70% of the welfare cuts still to be implemented in Scotland - a further £6 billion is due to be cut by 2016 - it's clear that hundreds of thousands will be driven deeper into poverty as a result. It's these conditions that are driving working class support for a Yes vote in September.

Obstacle to a Yes majority

A key factor in allowing the No campaign to still hold a lead in the polls is doubts about whether an independent capitalist Scotland would economically deliver for the majority.

A typical poll for YouGov in late June found that 49% believed that Scotland would be worse off after independence, with 27% who thought it would be better off. When asked if personally they would be better off, only 17% said they would.

While the deluge of propaganda from Project Fear is an important factor in this outlook, what is also clear is that the Scottish National Party's (SNP) pro-big business policies are also an obstacle in convincing those who are uncertain about voting Yes.

The SNP is not campaigning in the referendum for a decisive end to cuts and austerity. Indeed the Scottish Government has implemented £3 billion in Con-Dem cuts since 2010.

The SNP promises a meagre £1,000 "independence bonus" for all, but not until 2029. "If possible", says the SNP, public spending would be increased by £1.2 billion in 2017/18. However, the cuts to the Scottish parliament's budget will have been £6.7 billion by then. A reversal of the cuts under the SNP's plans for independence is ruled out.

As Nicola Sturgeon, deputy first minister, pointed out recently: "Independence is not a magic wand. We won't wake up the day after becoming independent and find that all of Scotland's challenges have disappeared or that overnight we've become a richer, more economically successful country."

This lack of a decisive break from capitalist policies and the austerity that accompanies them by the SNP leadership is weakening support for a Yes vote. None more so than promises to slash taxes for big business under independence, including of the vastly profitable North Sea Oil industry.

In contrast, there is overwhelming public support for public ownership of gas, electricity, transport and oil. The anger at the pro-rich policies of the main parties is growing by the day, as is the idea of a need for a new party to represent the working class majority.

Socialist Party Scotland is campaigning for a Yes vote in September. But we are also putting forward a programme that the powers of independence should be used to end the cuts, tax the rich and big business, and for public ownership and democratic control of the main sectors of the economy.

These ideas have been finding enthusiastic support at public meetings across Scotland. With Tommy Sheridan and others, Socialist Party Scotland has been organising public meetings on the theme of Hope Over Fear - the Socialist Case for Independence. 1,250 have attended six public meetings since April organised in Edinburgh, Dundee, Glasgow and Paisley at which Socialist Party Scotland members have spoken alongside Tommy.

More than 13,000 people have come to hear Tommy Sheridan since January as part of the national Hope Over Fear tour looking for a pro-socialist and anti-austerity ideas they are not getting from the official Yes campaign or the SNP leadership.

Cherry Groce - Met apologises 29 years later

End police racism

Paula Mitchell

Early one morning in September 1985, police smashed their way into a family home with a sledgehammer and shot an innocent, unarmed mother in front of her children. The person they were after, her son, was not in the house and was in fact no longer wanted by the police.

The raid should never have happened. Instead Cherry Groce was paralysed, her young family traumatised, and after 26 years in a wheelchair she died as a result of the injuries.

This is appalling enough. But obscenely, through 29 years of the family battling for justice, an internal report exposing a series of failings was buried until it came to light at the recent inquest.

Incredibly the family even had to fight for legal aid for the inquest, as it was initially refused.

Eventually, following the inquest verdict, Metropolitan police chief Sir Bernard Hogan-Howe has now apologised "unreservedly" that police "actions and omissions" had put the family of an innocent woman through "years of suffering".

This shooting led to riots in Brixton, following the riots of 1981. They were followed by the killing of Joy Gardener by police in Tottenham and the Broadwater Farm riots, and then the murder of Stephen Lawrence and the breathtaking police racism exposed then.

Incidents of police brutality were the spark to massive anger against conditions of poverty and racism - as with the riots that swept Tottenham and other parts of London in 2011 following the police killing of Mark Duggan.

There is a long, long list of cases of police brutality, killings and deaths in custody of black people. And neither is this a case of 'it's all in the past'. Mark Duggan, Sean Rigg and Azelle Rodney are among many more recent cases of deaths of black men at the hands of the police.

Since 1998, 333 people have died in police custody. Black people are 28 times more likely to be stopped and searched than white people and are also disproportionately more likely to be tasered or injured on arrest or in police custody.

This case also highlights the attacks on legal aid which the Con-Dems are set to drastically reduce even further thereby denying access to justice for ordinary people.

Adding to the litany of cover-ups and scandals of the police, capitalist politicians and press - child abuse, sexual assaults, expenses, phone hacking, perjury, Hillsborough, Orgreave, police spying on anti-racist and other campaigners - this will serve again to undermine confidence in the 'establishment', especially among black, Asian and migrant communities.

The Socialist Party unequivocally opposes police harassment and racism. We call for an end to discriminatory stop and search and section 60 and an end to repressive police powers. We demand an independent trade union-led inquiry into police brutality and killings. Stop the police investigating themselves.

We need measures to establish democratic checks on the police through elected committees involving trade union and community representatives.

Con-Dems and Labour fast-track 'snoopers charter'

Manny Thain

Prime Minister David Cameron is rushing a new 'snooper's charter' through parliament. Using the threat of terrorism as a pretext, the law contains wide-ranging surveillance powers which will affect everyone in Britain.

So, why is he doing it, and why now?

Clearly, state surveillance has been getting a bad press lately. Edward Snowden blew the lid off with his revelations of the colossal extent of the snooping done by police and intelligence agencies in the US and Britain.

In April this year, the European Court of Justice ruled that EU powers allowing the blanket collection and retention of personal data, for a wide range of reasons completely unconnected to serious crime or terrorism, were excessive. Those laws were introduced into Britain in 2009 by the Labour government.

And this week, Liberty, Amnesty International and Privacy International are challenging the mass interception and collection of data by the government GCHQ spy centre in the High Court.

The Home Office claims that the new Data Retention and Investigatory Powers bill (Drip) merely clarifies existing law. What it really does is strengthen the law and extend the outsourcing of intelligence gathering to the private sector.

Currently, the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000 (Ripa) imposes penalties on companies that refuse to comply with interception warrants. It also sets out the circumstances in which they may be requested to intercept on a permanent basis.

Drip goes further. Clause 4 of the bill requires overseas companies to comply with interception requests and to build that capability into their products and infrastructure. This will increase the powers of mass interception.

Clause 5 extends the Ripa definition of telecoms services much more widely, to include webmail and social media.

Isabella Sankey, of Liberty, put it bluntly: "This fast-track legislation contains sweeping surveillance powers that will affect every man, woman and child in the UK" (the Guardian, 14 July).

Cameron and his Liberal poodle, Nick Clegg, aim to force it through both houses of parliament this week. They can count on the spineless acquiescence of Ed Miliband. It is a stitch-up between the capitalist establishment parties, rushed through with little debate, scrutiny or accountability.

Clegg has been thrown a bone in the shape of a promised review of the law in 2016. But that is no real safeguard. If past 'anti-terrorism' laws are anything to go by, future parliaments will renew the law as a matter of course.

Of course, these sweeping powers will not be restricted to terrorists. They will be used against workers in struggle - as similar laws always have been. The capitalists are tooling up for the class battles to come. At present, they have the luxury of operating without a mass workers' party to call them to account. That will change.

In the meantime, the need to campaign to defend and extend our democratic rights, and for the accountability of state forces and agencies, are essential parts of a programme for the workers' movement.

Them & Us

Tough at the top

Poverty pay and the cost of living crisis are the big issues for many workers and their families. But for those at the top, life it seems couldn't be better. According to the High Pay Centre the average pay of a company executive has mushroomed from 60 times that of the average worker to a staggering 180 times since the 1990s.

And despite all the media hype of shareholders' pay revolts, in the last year alone, the pay of the average FTSE 100 chief executive went up from £4.1 million to £4.7 million - no problem paying the gas and electric bills for them!

Missed targets

As thousands of trade unionists gathered off Oxford Street in central London on 10 July to protest against pay cuts, etc, those present were breathing in air pollutants from motor vehicle exhausts up to ten times the legal limit.

According to evidence in a court case in the European Court of Justice brought against the Con-Dem government, air pollution in UK cities continues to exceed European Union targets. EU member states should have met air pollution targets from diesel cars and trucks by 2010, but the UK government admits that these won't be met until 2030.

Nitrogen dioxide emissions from diesel engine cars are the main contributor to 29,000 premature deaths a year in Britain. In 2000, only 14% of new cars sold were diesel powered. However, due to Labour and Con-Dem tax policies, by 2010 this figure had grown to nearly 50%.

NHS tipping point

According to a report from the Nuffield trusts charity some 66 NHS trusts are now in deficit while the overall NHS deficit has reached £100 million. And ongoing government cuts of upwards of £20 billion continue to undermine the provision of services by the NHS. The charity says the public healthcare service has "now reached a tipping point".

Warfare not welfare

Tory Prime Minister David Cameron boasts that over one billion pounds extra will go on military spending as a result of austerity cuts on welfare. Added to this skewed cuts agenda is the latest Con-Dem government threat to disabled and ill workers claiming Employment Support Allowance.

ESA claimants already subjected to draconian work capability assessments now face having mental health assessments included. Some 260,000 ESA claimants have mental health issues and the fear is that any mandatory testing for anxiety and depression will be another government cost-cutting exercise to reduce the claimant count.

Gove out!

Tory MP Michael Gove - the government's education wrecker - has been elbowed out in Cameron's 'save the election' Cabinet reshuffle. National Union of Teachers (NUT) executive member Martin Powell-Davies commented:

"Just finished my first post-Gove NUT school meeting in a primary school. All knew the stress and workload and attacks aren't going away but all elated that Gove has gone and can all see that striking delivers results."

J10 strike success: Now build movement to end low pay

"Work should pay, not keep you in poverty." After 10 July no one could be in any doubt that low pay is a major issue in Britain. The Financial Times (FT) quoted striker Barbara Plan, 57, a teaching assistant in Lewisham (11/7/14). Some of her colleagues are working three jobs in schools, as cleaners, teaching assistants and midday meal supervisors "just to keep up with the pay to make a living wage, you ... shouldn't have to go to work to then have your pay topped up with benefits."

Over one million workers are reported to have participated as schools and public services shut down for the day. The Evening Standard's resentful report indicated the strike's success: "In the worst-hit areas of London almost every school was affected, including Enfield where seven schools were open and 76 shut. In Barnet just five secondary schools were fully open while 16 were shut or partly shut."

The reports on page 3 of the Socialist (and on www.socialistparty.org.uk) give a taste of the enormous support for the fight against low pay, including from the general public and private sector workers, and the mood for further action. It is also clear that workers must get organised to make that a reality.

We support the public sector unions' call for an increase of £1 an hour to end the pay freeze. This will not be enough, however, to lift the lowest paid out of poverty. Socialist Party members found huge enthusiasm among strikers and the public for our demand for a £10 minimum wage.

Fuelling the rage and the mood to fight on, no doubt, will be the news that executive pay has grown to almost 180 times that of the average worker. The FT's detailed report indicates it is warning its big business readers that an explosion of anger over low pay is on the cards.

We call for an escalation of the coordinated action, building towards a 24-hour general strike. The National Shop Stewards Network, at its annual meeting the previous week, made the issue of pay central and reiterated the urgent and ongoing need for activists to build pressure on the trade union leaders for more generalised action.

Historic action

Following a lively and impressive march of London workers in the nine trade unions on strike, the Trafalgar Square rally opened with its chairperson, president of South East TUC Martin Gould, declaring it to be nationally the second biggest public sector strike since World War Two.

All the platform speakers described well the plight of low-paid and over-worked public sector workers. A number of them echoed the mood of the marchers, saying the fight would go on; "to the general election and beyond if necessary", as the Unison rep put it. She reminded the audience of the very welcome impending ballot of Unison NHS staff, which means they could be "out in September or October with the rest of us".

Firefighters' union general secretary Matt Wrack made a rousing speech in which he emphasised that "we should do this again, we should do this again soon". It is a testament to the firefighters though that they were on their 15th day of strike action in their pension dispute and "there is no mood for surrender", as Matt spelt out.

Strikers understood that more action will be necessary to defend living standards. There were huge cheers for PCS leader Mark Serwotka, the final speaker of the rally, who said: "Today has to be just the beginning."

Mark warned that there must be no repeat of the sell-out by right-wing trade union leaders of the huge pension strikes in 2011. "Every union here will have to meet together as a matter of urgency to make sure that the action gets bigger and bigger and bigger."

24-hour general strike

At some of the many strike rallies across the country, platform speakers made the call for a 24-hour general strike, which was music to the ears of the workers listening. The one million-plus workers on strike were losing a day's pay in

order to fight a battle that must be won.

At the Durham Miners' Gala Steve Gillan, general secretary of the POA prison officers' union, raised the issue to enormous applause among the estimated over 100,000 trade unionists and working class people there, proof if it is needed that a call for such action from the TUC would be welcomed.

A 24-hour general strike has the potential to transform the situation, building workers' confidence in their ability to challenge low pay and austerity, showing the Con-Dems as weak, as they in fact are.

The working class, when organised and acting independently, is the biggest social force in society, capable not only of defending our pay and public services, but also of promoting a different type of society, one where the wealth is democratically planned to meet the needs of all not just the super-rich - a socialist society.

But the working class needs to increase its level of organisation both industrially - via building a fighting trade union movement - but also politically, by building a new mass party that represents the interests of our class instead of those of the 1%.

Political alternative

Unfortunately none of the platform speakers in London put forward any political alternative to Labour, that didn't support the strike action. Worse, a number of them fed illusions in Labour. This is quite incredible when the Labour leaders have made it absolutely clear that they will stick largely to the Tories' cuts agenda.

Clare Soloman from the People's Assembly gave a completely mixed message, by saying "no cuts" and no to "slower cuts", but preceded that with an appeal to people to go to their local People's Assembly gatherings "to join with people in the Green Party, the Labour Party" and trade unionists, etc. This is no way forward for all the striking local authority workers who work for the Labour-run councils that won't even meet the unions' modest pay requests. Nor for the Brighton workers suffering cuts at the hands of their Green-run council.

Many of the conversations with both strikers and private sector workers referred to the magnificent victory for workers in Seattle who recently won a \$15 minimum wage. Seattle shows that workers can win. But it also shows the importance of the workers' movement building its own political voice.

The election of socialist Kshama Sawant gave the movement for \$15 an uncompromising voice in the decision-making chamber to act on its demands. Seattle also shows that the pro-big business parties, be that the US Democrats or Britain's Labour, cannot be relied on to defend workers.

Workers must rely on their own strength - bringing that to bear through industrial action, by putting up worker and other anti-austerity candidates in elections to oppose all cuts, and by fighting for every improvement to the lives of the 99% and for socialism.

Reports from 10 July pickets and demonstrations

Public sector workers in nine different unions were out on strike in force on 10th July - in a magnificent show of strength to demand an end to the pay freeze.

Local government workers in Unison, Unite and GMB; civil servants in the PCS and Nipsa, teachers in the NUT, firefighters in the FBU, and sections of London transport workers in RMT and TSSA: uniting in action to tell the government that they can't tolerate any further driving down of living standards.

Cardiff

Over 70,000 public sector workers were on strike in Wales as part of the national action of over a million workers against the government's pay restraint, and service and pensions cuts.

Across Wales, schools, libraries, government buildings, council offices, museums and refuse collection were all closed or cancelled by one of the biggest strikes in modern times. Members of Unison, GMB, Unite, PCS, FBU and NUT brought parts of Wales to a standstill and an early holiday for thousands of school students.

The mood on the picket lines was confident and light hearted as pickets basked in the early morning sunshine.

At Cardiff's Lamby Way depot over 30 refuse collectors gathered to support their picket. In other workplaces like Marland House and the central library no pickets were needed as the buildings were completely closed.

At the Job Centre only management and security (not on strike) had crossed the picket line. Even the Crown Prosecution Service was on strike.

The National Museum was closed "what a beautiful sight - an empty car park!" said one striker. 30 strikers picketed the Welsh government offices in Cathays Park.

There was gridlock on the A4232 as a result of striking workers closing the Bute tunnel.

The media tried to turn the understandable frustration of drivers locked in jams in west Cardiff against the strikers, but generally it didn't work. Despite Mark Hutchings' hatchet job on BBC radio World at One there has been massive public support for the strike - mainly working people themselves dealing with low pay.

Strikers leafleting in Cardiff shopping centre reported not one adverse comment; a centre security guard said "Yes we do!" on seeing a PCS "We all need a pay rise" sticker.

At the Cardiff rally the loudest cheers were for those who made the most fighting speeches. Andy Richards, regional secretary of Unite, got the loudest cheer when he responded to Tory threats to curtail the right to strike: "If the government puts the trade unions outside the law, then we will act outside the law!"

The general feeling of strikers was that this must not be a one-off, a proper programme of industrial action over the summer and autumn must be prepared to force the government to back down and at the rally in Cardiff dozens of strikers signed the Socialist Party petition for a general strike.

Steffan Bateman, Mark Evans and Ross Saunders

Birmingham

July 10th brought out workers across Birmingham in a fantastic day of strike action.

Birmingham Socialist Party members visited pickets across the city and supported workers taking action in a wide range of disputes. We spoke to members of PCS, NUT, GMB, Unison and Unite at Digbeth refuse depot, Featherstone nursery school and children's centre, Erdington and Selly Oak job centres, Revenue and Customs, OFWAT and many more.

Later, around 1,500 strikers gathered in glorious sunshine for a rally at Victoria Square and were addressed by trade union leaders. It was really inspiring to see the mass of working class people who filled the square, bedecked in brightly coloured T-shirts, flags and banners.

A deafening chorus of vuvuzelas, drums and whistles could be heard wherever you stood in the city centre that afternoon. One of the biggest cheers from the crowd was in response to PCS assistant general secretary Chris Baugh's call for an escalation of strike action in the autumn.

Ted Woodley, Birmingham Socialist Party

Leicester

Driving around for a parking place, you could sense that today was going to be different. There were picket lines everywhere!

Changes are afoot in Leicester. Two ex Labour councillors, Wayne Naylor and Barbara Potter have joined TUSC and pledged to fight all cuts.

In contrast to Labour mayor Pete Soulsby who is slashing services whilst indulging in vanity projects and expenses-paid foreign trips.

A couple of weeks ago Soulsby had refused to back the council workers' pay claim in the council chamber when rebel councillor Wayne Naylor asked the question. Yet Pete Soulsby spoke at the strike rally today in support of workers. Labour councillors who had voted for cuts were on picket lines.

Why the change of heart? You can't help wondering if Soulsby's late conversion to apparently supporting the strike had something to do with the pressure from these TUSC councillors and the council unions being made aware of his evasion in the council chamber.

In any case Soulsby was heckled and booed by some of the council workers for the hypocrisy of appearing on the platform at the same time as cutting jobs and services.

Wayne and Barbara also spoke just after Soulsby and, in contrast, got cheers for pledging to fight the cuts.

One teacher who was being made redundant was striking even though she would lose some of her redundancy money. "If it wasn't for unions, I wouldn't be getting any redundancy money and when I was off sick, I got sick pay, thanks to the struggles of trade unionists in the past", she said.

Catherine Gathercole from the voluntary sector said she supported the strike because the voluntary sector relies on public services and what happens to them affects all of us.

Gary Sanders, a Labour councillor and PCS member was angry about the pay offer and working people having to claim benefits because their wages haven't risen as much as prices. "People are being driven further into poverty and the sooner we have a 24-hour general strike the better", he said.

Heather Rawling, NUT

Swansea

The roads were really quiet in Swansea this morning which was the best indication of the impact of the public sector strike. The numbers present on picket lines across the city were not huge but at each one it was reported that most workers had stayed away.

At the refuse depot only four out of 200 had gone into work, at the Pension Centre and Land Registry there were just a few cars driving through and there was a good response from PCS members at the massive DVLA.

Unison's city centre rally brought together all the striking unions, each of them showing a determination to start fighting back.

Despite Swansea trades council secretary and Unison member Ronnie Job being refused the opportunity of bringing solidarity greetings, another trades council member, Carrie-Anne Watkins, speaking from PCS, got one of the best receptions at the rally when she said her members have been fighting the Con-Dems for years but would also fight as hard against any Labour government cuts if they dared introduce them.

She was cheered when she condemned Labour controlled Swansea city council for implementing £26 million worth of cuts in this year's budget.

This strike was a good start but with Unison calling for two days of strike action in September the momentum must be maintained to turn that call into a 24-hour general strike!

Alec Thraves, vice president, Swansea Trades Council

Spelthorne

Southampton

Hundreds of strikers gathered at Southampton civic centre to rally in defiance of the Con-Dem pay freeze. There is enormous anger at the pressure on people's pockets and the day-to-day problems at work. What is missing is a clear and bold strategy to take this fight forward.

Many speakers rightly criticised the impact of government cuts but it was only NUT and Socialist Party member Liz Filer who captured the mood demanding that the TUC name the date for a 24-hour general strike.

It gained the largest cheer of the day. To make this happen will require a concerted campaign amongst union members to ensure that strong support is built for further action and pressure put on branch, region and national leaderships to deliver. We have a fight to win!

Nick Chaffey

Hull

In Hull up to 1,000 workers took part in the joint trade union strike day rally and march. Workers striking in the FBU, NUT, PCS, GMB, Unite and Unison all marched united against the decimation of public services.

The determined mood surrounding the strike was summed up by the Willerby refuge workers, who for the first time managed to all but close the depot. Only two of the machines went out, all run by management. This news was greeted with cheers from the crowd.

Local GMB rep Tony captured the militant mood perfectly with his speech. Tony gave trade union leaders Kenny, McCluskey, Prentis and O'Grady a mandate for a general strike, to rapturous applause demanding that the trade unions bring the government to its knees to show where the power in society really lies.

The final speaker, Mike Whale of the NUT and secretary of the joint council trade unions shop stewards committee laid out a stark warning to the Labour Party.

After backing Tony's call for a general strike, Mike told the crowd that as important as getting rid of the Tories is, the Labour Party has a simple choice to make, it either stands with the working class or it stands against us.

And if Labour leaders stand against the working class then the strength of the trade union movement will sweep them away!

The Hull TUSC banner was visible throughout and many copies of the Socialist were sold.

Hull Socialist Party

Birkenhead

A Unison member in Birkenhead, Merseyside said:

"Our members showed strong support today to my union Unison's demand for fair pay. We have had no pay rises for the last three years. The morale is low and we are working under pressure. As care workers we want to give the best possible care but our services and pay continues to be cut.

"Unison has called for further action in September which we welcome ... With other public sector unions joining us we are stronger together. Enough is enough. The message I would like to give is it's crucial we make a stand for our members and also for future generations."

A Unite shop steward:

"As leisure industry workers we provide vital services for the local community. Yet we have had no pay rise for the last four years so how are we expected to live? The cost of living has gone up, council tax is up and our money goes nowhere.

"We have also lost four days unpaid holiday leave and have also lost pay enhancements. But we have had fantastic support today from our members, our customers and the general public. The leisure centre is closed. We won't give up the fight. We need to make a stand. We have had enough. Everyone now needs to join the fight to get what we deserve and for a living wage and decent conditions."

Bolton

Lively and noisy picket lines made their presence felt across Bolton this morning, at schools, the fire station, and council and civil service buildings.

The vast majority of schools were closed, whilst the strike was very solid amongst council workers. Later, around 300 protesters joined a march through the town centre and rallied on the town hall square.

Jo Johnson, Unison steward in housing services, told me on the picket line: "Our members are really suffering because of poverty pay. The government tells us that the economy is in recovery and business is picking up. Well, if that's the case, we want our fair share!"

"We want to put an end to poverty pay in both the public and private sectors", said Suzi Boardman, a worker in children's services. "This isn't a race to the bottom and we refuse to fall for the government's divide and conquer tactics of pitting public sector against private sector workers. Enough is enough. We all need a pay rise."

Matt Kilsby, Chair, Bolton Unison LG branch

Nottingham

Picket lines were everywhere and the council offices were pretty empty at 9.30am. Most striking workers were out to defend the services as well as for their own pay, terms and conditions.

One library picket made the point that "the bankers and politicians insist that we're all in it together while giving themselves pay rises and freezing ours, it's insulting to our intelligence", and a striking worker at the DWP said that "we need a general strike. ...[for a week] ...everyone is under attack and we need to get together to fight back against it". There were at least 2,000 people on the march.

Geraint Thomas

Brighton

Thousands of workers marched through Brighton to a rally on the Level. Three young and vibrant feeder marches from Hove town hall, Hollingdean bin depot and the Jobcentre converged for the final stretch.

At the rally, PCS rep Serena Cheung said: "Politicians complain about voter turnout but today people are voting with their feet ..." "Today has been magnificent but this is a start not an end".

Phil Clarke, secretary of the local trades council and an NUT NEC member, added: "It's going to take more - not just a day in September but a programme of industrial action" and appealed for strikers to go back to their union branches and argue for that.

Sarah Wrack

Sheffield

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Salford

Andrew Carss and Hugh Caffrey spoke to striking Unison and PCS members across Salford:

Stella, PCS rep, Ministry of Justice:

"I'm striking today because there's been no wage increase in six years, people think we're on a fantastic wage, but that definitely isn't the case".

Bora Oktas, Unison convenor at Salix Housing:

"We are in one of the most deprived areas in the UK, Salford. It's quite a tough area to work in, it's not like working in Didsbury or Wilmslow where you're dealing with lots of rich people! Working in Salford takes a lot from us. We suffer

a lot of stress and make a lot of sacrifices to do our job. We love our jobs but in return we want what we deserve, because we deserve it for sure!"

Richard, Unison social workers' convenor at Salford council:

"I'm striking today for fair pay, services here have been slashed to pieces. My own pay has been safeguarded, but they're getting rid of that too, next year, it was the only thing left to slash. People here are frustrated with conditions, that's why we're all here."

London

Tens of thousands of trade unionists marched from Portland Place in central London to a rally in Trafalgar Square.

Addressing the rally were union general secretaries Mark Serwotka (PCS) and Matt Wrack (FBU), and Jeremy Corbyn MP, among others.

A report of the rally will follow.

Central London PCS:

A PCS organiser commented: "Our PCS picket lines around central London were really good and Ministry of Defence pickets were much better than they sometimes might be". PCS strikers joined in the march as it went through central London, gathering up contingents of workers usual.

Tower Hamlets:

Pete Dickenson reports that at Harbinger primary school on the Isle of Dogs, there were about 20 on the picket - nearly all the teachers were there.

National Gallery

One of the many picket lines across the capital was a show of strength by PCS members who work in the National Gallery. Around 25 were supporting the picket in front of the gallery in Trafalgar Square, and more assembled at the back entrance.

They are striking as part of the coordinated action to end the public sector pay cap, but with added anger because the gallery's director spread shock waves when he announced a week ago that up to 400 out of 600 gallery staff are to be privatised.

Gallery workers have already been struggling to get by on poverty levels of pay. Now management has said it's decided to privatise because it has been trying to change - ie erode - the workers' terms and conditions 'without success'. So further attacks on the workforce would go hand-in-hand with privatisation, an outcome that the PCS members are determined to fight.

Judy Beishon

Woolwich

Local government workers in Unite held a 100-strong picket at the Woolwich centre. Socialist Party members were out

in full force to support them. Many low paid workers were wearing the new '£10Now' t-shirt in support of the campaign for a genuine living wage.

A caretaker who had been working for the council for eight years and had never been on strike before told me that "this country needs a revolution" and bought a copy of the Socialist.

The mood on the picket was lifted by the appearance of Unite general secretary Len McCluskey who gave a speech calling on council workers to carry on the fight until they win.

One Unite member received rapturous applause when he said in his speech to the picket: "I say we need two things; a general strike against austerity and a mass party that actually represents working class people".

Paul Callanan

Setting up a Socialist Party stall on Oxford Street, near the march assembly point outside the BBC offices in Portland Place, Sarah Sachs-Eldridge commented:

"Even before the strikers come through it's clear that low pay is THE issue. There's big interest in the strike and especially in the call for a £10 an hour minimum wage. Reflecting that, ordinary Oxford Street workers have bought ten copies of the Socialist from the stall in less than an hour".

Carmarthenshire

Services and schools across Carmarthenshire stopped on 10 July when thousands of council workers, teachers and firefighters took action against austerity.

Carmarthenshire Unison branch organised more than 20 picket lines across the vast spread of the county from 5.30am, and striking council workers and teachers joined each other's picket lines in a superb show of solidarity.

More than 100 strikers and supporters turned out for a lunchtime rally in Carmarthen's Nott Square, to hear speeches from PCS, FBU, Unison, NUJ, Usdaw and NUT trade unionists, along with solidarity brought by Jonathan Edwards, Plaid Cymru MP for Carmarthen East and Dinefwr.

Dave Warren, as PCS rep at DVLA Swansea, said that the magnificent action today had to be just the beginning of a concerted and coordinated campaign of action to force back the austerity programme of the Westminster coalition government.

Carmarthenshire Unison branch secretary Mark Evans warned that Labour councils and the Welsh Labour government should also be put on notice that they will be held to account by trade unionists in Wales if they continue to carry out cuts.

Scott Jones, a local Usdaw shop steward, echoed the call made by others at the rally that future action needs to bring in private sector workers to make it even more effective.

Ken Smith, NUJ Wales chair, said that the effectiveness of today's action was shown by the fact that Cameron and Gove wanted to ban strikes. "They wouldn't want to ban them unless you were being effective today", he added.

Mark Evans summed up the day as "a magnificent show of solidarity in this county. After months of battling this local Labour council on a whole number of issues from their plan to make more than £30 million of cuts, to them trying to end trade union facility time, it's great to get such a united, strong response from our members. We have shown in our recent battles that we don't give up. We're not going away, this is just the start."

Ken Smith

Portsmouth

Portsmouth had a great turnout for the strike, with a number of unions picketing the civic offices. The strikers were determined that the fight back would go on, they will no longer tolerate poverty wages.

One Unison member raised the need for an alternative to the main parties and cuts on services.

At the 600-strong rally and march many of the workers supported the call of the Socialist Party for a 24-hour general strike, realising what would be needed to beat this austerity government.

The speakers at the rally echoed the defiance of the workers that the fight will go on.

Nick Doyle

Leeds

Around 2,500 trade unionists attended the rally in Leeds. PCS speaker Marion Lloyd got a huge cheer when she called for opposition to Labour's cuts as well as those of the Tories.

Winchester

It was an early start on picket lines around Hampshire where striking trade union members picketed council offices, libraries and fire stations.

It was an opportunity to engage with the public and deliver the message that public sector workers deserve fair pay instead of being the victims of the Con-Dem cuts.

We received widespread support from the public, many sounding car horns and passing with a thumbs up.

At a lunchtime rally, preceded by a traffic-stopping march through the city centre, speakers made it clear to all that this is just the start of the fightback. We now need to galvanise support for further actions in the autumn.

Dave Anderson, Unison convenor

Grimsby

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Durham

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Warrington

PCS members picketed at Hilden House pensions centre, at the front and back of the building.

At the Town Hall Unison members were in good heart by the Golden Gates. They estimated about two-thirds of the workforce had heeded the strike call. The pickets explained that people are struggling after years of pay freezes.

At New Town House, Unison pickets were handing out their leaflets to passers-by and the majority of the hundreds of council workers employed there had not come in.

The Job Centre on Mersey Street was also on strike. As was the Woolston bin depot, where the strike was 100% solid.

Unite members were not impressed with the salary increases handed to senior executives at the council last year while the workforce are expected to just struggle on.

We also visited a picket of the FBU at Winwick Road, among others.

Andy Ford

Chesterfield

On 10th July schools, libraries and council offices were closed to protest against the measly 1% pay rise (while 'we are all in it together' MPs received 11%).

Chesterfield council is proposing cuts of £157 million which will effect many low paid female workers, the disabled and elderly.

There were speeches from several union representatives including GMB, FBU and Unison, and finishing with Labour MP for Bolsover Dennis Skinner.

Elaine Evans

Kirklees

Every council building apart from two and 80% of schools were shut down. All non-union members and scabs were forced to run the gauntlet of a huge picket line as only one of the council buildings was open to those who wanted to work!

About 800-1,000 turned out for the very lively demo which went round the town centre twice, each time past the building for strike breakers and then the cafe where a sympathetic ex-council worker provided refreshments for all the pickets (he opened the cafe with the proceeds from a payout at a tribunal hearing when he was unfairly dismissed).

All the speakers reflected the mood by calling for more action and coordinated strikes in the autumn; the biggest cheer going up for speakers who questioned support for Miliband who had failed to support the strikes.

The rally was followed by a very successful NSSN meeting of around 20 strikers who all expressed interest in future activities.

An NUT activist decided to join the Socialist Party, just short of 30 copies of the Socialist were sold and our new '£10 now' t-shirts made their first outing.

Mike Forster

Bristol

Sunny weather greeted us in Bristol on the morning of the J10 public sector strike and it seemed to match the mood of local government workers, teachers, firefighters and civil servants on the picket lines and on the 3-4,000 strong march and rally.

Not that workers aren't angry with the Con-Dems and their policies of pay restraint, cuts and privatisation, but people seemed pleasantly surprised by the level of support for the strike across the many workplaces affected.

After years of constant attacks and vilification by politicians and the media matched by prevarication by some of the unions, it was good to see the power of six big unions coordinating strike action against the government again.

In Bristol we have the added problem of a toxic 'independent' mayor who treats local government workers and their union representatives with contempt.

Although the strike was on national issues, it sent a clear message to George Ferguson that Bristol City Council employees are prepared to strike to defend themselves.

Matt Carey

Cakes in Nottingham

This version of this article was first posted on the Socialist Party website on 10 July 2014 and may vary slightly from the version subsequently printed in The Socialist.

London post-demo NSSN meeting

Trade unionists crammed into a pub room for the National Shop Stewards Network's post-demo meeting on 10th July, spilling out on to the pavement.

It's becoming a bit of a tradition for activists after a strike demo in London to come for a drink with the NSSN, talk over the day and discuss 'what next', and have the opportunity to get up on a chair to speak.

We always also involve new trade unionists, new reps, many of whom have never before had this sort of opportunity to discuss what needs to be done, and who enthusiastically respond to the ideas of the NSSN and of socialists.

This time we joined up with a delegation from the GMB, including general secretary Paul Kenny, who made a welcome impromptu speech and promised further coordinated action in the autumn.

Striker and NUT NEC member Martin Powell-Davies chaired the informal meeting, and Rob Williams, chair of the NSSN, Suzanne Muna branch secretary of housing Unite branch 1111, and Bryan Kennedy, victimised Unite convenor, also spoke.

As well as strikers and other trade unionists, the speakers included Socialist Party general secretary Peter Taaffe, who explained about the fantastic movement in America for \$15Now. Peter condemned the Labour leader Ed Miliband for refusing to back the strikes and called for trade unions to take a step towards a new party that represents working class people.

The GMB stewards especially agreed with Peter's call for union organisers to come from the workplace instead of unions always recruiting organisers straight from university. "Today we have seen the potential power of the working class".

Dean Gilligan (GMB regional committee) who reported on a successful strike was so enthused he agreed to come on to the NSSN national steering committee.

The room was abuzz with discussion about how to build towards the general strike action that is necessary, and lots of new workers signed up to the NSSN.

Paula Mitchell

This version of this article was first posted on the Socialist Party website on 14 July 2014 and may vary slightly from the version subsequently printed in The Socialist.

No more onslaught on Gaza!

End the repeated Israeli state terror

Judy Beishon

The trapped, blockaded 1.8 million people in the Gaza strip have been viciously bombarded from air, sea and land. The ferocity of the war on this densely populated coastal enclave of land has once again being viewed with shock and outrage by people worldwide.

By 14 July, the Israeli forces had carried out 1,474 attacks on targets in Gaza, dropping 1,500 tons of explosives, in the space of a week. The damage inflicted is horrific, with the death toll of Gazans at over 180, more than 75% of them civilians according to the UN, at least 32 of them children. Well over 1,100 have been injured and untold thousands traumatised.

Extended families eating Ramadan meals after sunset have suffered unimaginable atrocities and many people are homeless having had their properties blown up. In one strike, 17 members of a family died. Even a care home for severely disabled people was hit.

The Israeli government declared its bombardment of Gaza to be 'defensive', but not only is the balance of military forces massively disproportionate, it and its predecessors have for decades subjected the Palestinian Authority (PA) areas to brutal repression and effective occupation.

Even in periods of 'ceasefire' Israeli army incursions into the PA areas haven't stopped, with regular assassinations and many detentions - over 5,000 Palestinians are held in Israeli jails. This has been accompanied by determinedly developing Jewish settlements in East Jerusalem and across the West Bank.

On Tuesday 15 July there were discussions aimed at a ceasefire but these quickly broke down. They may resume in the coming days, but if no ceasefire does takes hold then the death and destruction could become even worse, with ground assaults possible.

Either way, nothing in this national conflict will be solved and the terrible cycles of bloodshed will continue for as long as the capitalist elites and politicians on both sides of the national divide remain in power. An alternative scenario can only be put forward through workers and the poor in the Palestinian territories and the working class in Israel building their own political organisations that can act in the interests of ordinary people: against occupation, national oppression, terror, war and poverty.

Israeli ministers' calculations

When an Israeli government committee discussed a ceasefire on 15 July, right-wing ministers Naftali Bennett and Avigdor Lieberman strongly opposed it, wanting instead to escalate the onslaught to a ground assault that would inflict even greater destruction on Hamas and the Gazan population.

Prime minister Netanyahu has been part of the majority of ministers who have been wary of this, due to the inevitability of Israeli soldiers suffering casualties and the unlikelihood of it completely stopping the rocket fire from Gaza, even temporarily. There have also been a number of other reasons behind their calculations, including the difficulties of withdrawing quickly once a ground attack has begun and some concern about inflicting massive devastation - the Israeli ruling class fears having to take direct responsibility for the welfare of the 1.8 million Gazans.

In addition, the turmoil and civil wars in the region and the international pressure to de-escalate, despite Netanyahu's denials, have inevitably been factors weighed up. A greater Palestinian death toll would increase that pressure.

Furthermore, escalation can only double and treble the already high hostility across the Palestinian territories towards the Israeli regime. It would also add to the anger and discontent within the Arab population in Israel itself, who in many areas erupted in protest last month following the barbaric killing of a Palestinian youth by far-right Jewish nationalists. That in turn came after the tragic murder of three Israeli teenagers near Hebron, to which the Israeli military responded by inflicting collective punishment across the Palestinian territories.

Rocket fire

In the week following 7 July, warning sirens sounded in many Israeli towns and cities, including in Tel Aviv. The rockets fired from Gaza reached their longest range yet, as far as 170 kilometres into Israel. Israel's Iron Dome anti-missile system intercepted a large number of them, and many others landed outside built-up areas.

The bouts of rocket fire from Gaza - much increased during the recent events - reflect the desperation of Palestinians in the strip, but are no deterrent to the Israeli regime with its overwhelming superiority of firepower. Moreover, rocket and other attacks on Israeli civilians, carried out by groups that are not under democratic control, are counter-productive because they are met by stepped-up repression from the Israeli military.

Also their indiscriminate nature spreads fear across Israeli communities with the result that Israeli workers are pushed towards the camp of their right-wing government, for instance, not helping to erode the majority support in Israel there has been for the bombardment of Gaza in its initial days. (That support would most likely lessen in the event of a ground invasion, not least because loss of life of Israeli soldiers would be virtually inevitable.)

Hamas had tried to stick to the ceasefire agreement that followed the 2012 war on Gaza, until these latest events unfolded and its leaders saw it as against their interests to hold back their militias. They have faced increasing difficulties following the loss of their exile headquarters in Syria and the loss of support they received from Egypt's short-lived Muslim Brotherhood regime prior to its removal from power last year.

This, combined with the Israeli blockade on Gaza, the destruction and Egyptian closure of smuggling tunnels through to Egypt and the regular assassinations of Hamas leaders, has weakened Hamas - factors contributing to it needing the recent 'unity' agreement with the West Bank PA leaders in Fatah.

On the other hand, Hamas could possibly emerge strengthened to some degree from the war, regarding support among the Palestinian masses, as a result of its harder line than Fatah against the bombardment and the western powers that justify it.

However, neither the right-wing Islamist leaders of Hamas, nor those of secular Fatah, all pro-capitalist, will advance the interests of the Palestinian masses.

Fatah PA president Mahmood Abbas looks to the western powers to intervene; he has again been appealing to the UN to condemn Israel's actions, while western leaders like Obama, Hollande and Cameron - key players in the UN - have been expressing solidarity with the Israeli government. The US gives \$3.15 billion a year to Israel, a state that has become an important base of support for western imperialism in an extremely volatile region. Around three-quarters of that funding is used to buy US military equipment.

Mass action needed

The Palestinians can't rely on their present leaders or the totally hypocritical imperialist powers to help their struggle. Neither can they look to the reactionary Arab regimes, which propagandise in favour of the Palestinians but have no interest in doing more. Left to the capitalist politicians on both sides of the national divide the cycles of bloodshed will go on, just as "Operation Protective Edge" has followed the savage "Operation Pillar of Defence" in 2012 and "Cast Lead" in 2008/09.

Time and time again 'peace' talks have so far failed, fundamentally because it isn't in the interests of the Israeli ruling class for there to be a viable, independent Palestinian state next to Israel, with a historic claim on its land, unpredictable political forces in its leadership and some degree of competition for natural resources, trade and inward investment. The only way of realising a genuine Palestinian state, along with peace and security, is not from deals at the top, but from mass actions at grassroots level.

The Palestinians can only rely on building their own democratically-run grassroots organisations, to organise defence against repression - with the right to arms - and mass actions to further their interests. In early 2008 a mass offensive by Gazans broke the Israeli siege, forcing open the Rafah crossing point into Egypt for a period of eleven days. Mass action could be carried out against many other targets, including land seizures and the separation wall.

The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, reported poll results on 13 July that found that a large majority of Palestinians favour the tactic of "popular resistance" - such as demonstrations and strikes - over violence, to achieve their goals.

It also indicated increased support for a 'one state' solution, rather than two, which is ominous for the Israeli ruling class. It can't contemplate Israeli Jews becoming a minority in the state the creation of which was justified as a safe-haven for Jews following the Holocaust.

But that same ruling class can offer no solutions to end the national conflict, resorting only to cycles of death and destruction which solve nothing. Just as the Palestinians need to build independent working class led organisations, the Israeli working class needs to do likewise. Israeli workers too suffer from the constant insecurity and have many attacks on their pay, conditions and welfare at the hands of their bosses and government.

Socialist Struggle Movement, the CWI in Israel-Palestine is involved in supporting the regular workers' strikes and struggles in Israel and the PA, as well as participating in the joint demonstrations of Arabs and Jews that take place against the occupation.

It argues for socialist ideas, and the building of new mass workers' parties and movements that can challenge and remove the capitalist parties. A socialist Palestine and a socialist Israel as part of a socialist confederation of the Middle East would be able to end the outbreaks of bloodshed once and for all.

- Stop the slaughter! End the missile strikes and other attacks on Gaza! No to this war of the Israeli government of big business and settlements.

End the blockade of Gaza. For the immediate withdrawal of the Israeli army from the Palestinian territories. The national conflict will not be solved by military means.

- For a mass struggle of the Palestinians, under their own democratic control, to fight for genuine national liberation.
 - For independent workers' organisations in Palestine and Israel.
 - For an independent, democratic socialist Palestinian state, alongside a democratic socialist Israel, with two capitals in Jerusalem and guaranteed democratic rights for all minorities, as part of the struggle for a socialist Middle East and regional peace.
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Stop the onslaught on Gaza

London demonstration - 11th July

Travelling early on Friday evening to the London demonstration against the war on Gaza, it was clear it would be a large protest. The station platforms and train carriages were full of people heading for High Street Kensington, where the protest was assembling near the Israeli embassy.

The police had fenced off a strip of the street to hem in the protesters, but this 'cage' was quickly overwhelmed by the mass of people assembling.

Soon, the entire width of the high street and much of the length was full of people, determined to show their anger at the brutal actions of the Israeli military.

A double decker bus was 'occupied' by protesters, who were soon on its roof waving flags. The huge crowd erupted in cheers when an orthodox Jewish man climbed up to join others on the bus roof, equally keen to express his condemnation of the bombardment of Gaza.

London Socialist Party members received a constant stream of people at our stalls, signing our petition condemning the actions of the Israeli regime, donating money, buying the Socialist and taking our leaflet (text below).

Overall, 155 copies of the Socialist were bought, £200 given in donations and over 30 people filled in Socialist Party 'join' cards.

London Socialist Party, Stop the war on Gaza meetings, go to:

<http://www.socialistparty.org.uk/articles/18944/12-07-2014/stop-the-war-on-gaza-london-meetings>

Birmingham

On Friday 11th July close to 1,000 people rallied in Birmingham city centre against the attacks on Palestinian civilians by the Israeli army.

The largest and most youthful demonstration in Birmingham in support of the people of Gaza for some years, the march stopped traffic in the city centre as it made its way to the BBC's local headquarters to protest against the way in which it has covered the attacks.

Nick Hart, Birmingham Central Socialist Party

Swansea

Around 100 protesters, mainly from the Swansea Palestinian community, held a protest and spontaneous march last Saturday in Swansea city centre. With banners, flags and placards demanding an end to the Israeli slaughter in Gaza the protesters got a warm reception from shoppers as they marched around the city centre.

Our Socialist Party stall which we set up earlier in the city centre saw a lot of young people sign our petition and show an interest in our material. When we moved up to the protest our leaflets were eagerly taken and our stall was busy with many Palestinians agreeing with our demands.

Swansea Socialist Party branch will be discussing the Israeli attacks on Gaza this Thursday and will be welcoming the Swansea Palestinian community and the general public to come and listen to the socialist response to these latest attacks by the Israeli state: **Thursday July 17th, 7.30pm, Dyfatty Community Centre, Chapel St, Swansea SA1 1NB**

Alec Thraves

Manchester

(Posted on 15.7.14)

Hundreds of protesters stormed Piccadilly Gardens in Manchester on Saturday to protest against the vile attack on the Palestinian people by the Israeli state.

An open-mic rally allowed workers to express their support for Palestinians and fury with the Israeli regime and the imperialist governments who have helped to arm it.

Some speakers noted the support of many ordinary Israelis for the Palestinians' cause, and Socialist Party members got the best reception when we praised the joint protests of Jews and Arabs against the Israeli regime, whilst calling for more joint action and another Intifada to end the occupation.

Our stall was mobbed with people wanting to sign our petition and our material was eagerly received. 13 people expressed a desire to join the Socialist Party, and some enthusiastic protesters took our petitions round the crowd to sign and handed out our leaflets. We sold dozens of copies of the Socialist and raised £175 for the party's fighting fund.

After the rally, the demo surged over to Media City in Salford to highlight the bias in the BBC's reporting on the conflict. The longer it went on, the more people came, as up to 2,000 protesters piled in from around the region. Shamefully, no one from the BBC even bothered to come out to explain why their coverage has been so sympathetic to the Israeli regime.

Laurence Maples

Text of the Socialist Party leaflet, 11.7.14:

[For a later article, go to: <http://www.socialistparty.org.uk/articles/18959/15-07-2014/no-more-onslaught-on-gaza>]

[For pdf of leaflet, click here](#)

Stop the bombing of Gaza - End Israeli state terror!

Netanyahu's Israeli government has launched a horrific onslaught of hundreds of air strikes on the densely populated Gaza strip. Over 100 Gazans have been killed in one week, including 20 children. 400 have been injured. One strike hit a group of football fans who had gathered to watch a world cup match; nine were killed.

Netanyahu argues that this brutality is necessary to counter the increased rocket fire on Israeli towns by Palestinian militias, and David Cameron has given him his support for this carnage. The Palestinians are largely militarily defenceless against the huge Israeli armed forces, but the militias' rocket fire is no deterrent to the Israeli regime and its indiscriminate use is counter-productive.

The savagery of the Israeli regime's bombardment is stark, especially when considering that there have been no Israeli deaths and few serious injuries so far from the rockets in this round of bloodshed, though tragic loss of life of Israeli civilians may yet happen.

This terrible military offensive will solve nothing. Netanyahu rejected the ceasefire conditions of Gaza's Hamas leaders: an end to the Israeli offensive and blockade, the release of prisoners who were freed under a prisoner swap but then re-arrested, and no sabotaging of the new Palestinian 'unity' government. Instead the Israeli army has been preparing for an even greater onslaught - a ground invasion - which would escalate the bloodshed, especially for the Palestinians.

The entire strategy of Netanyahu's right-wing coalition government has been one of continuing the repressive occupation and creating more 'facts on the ground' through its programmes of Jewish settlement building and expansion. Palestinians in the occupied territories are forced to suffer heavy repression with regular military incursions, acute unemployment and poverty, and are blockaded, separated and have land continually confiscated.

No end to the national conflict is possible on this basis - the Palestinians have no choice but to continue to struggle for national liberation and decent living standards.

The present cycle of bloodshed was triggered when three Israeli teenagers disappeared and were later tragically found murdered. The Israeli military forces launched a collective punishment operation across the Palestinian territories and there were some nationalist far-right demonstrations and attacks in Israel which included the horrific murder of a young east Jerusalem Palestinian. In response, widespread protests and riots broke out among Palestinians in a number of areas of Israel.

There were also joint anti-war protests of Jews and Arabs in Tel Aviv, Jerusalem and Haifa, which Socialist Struggle Movement (the Committee for a Workers International - CWI - in Israel/Palestine) has participated in.

Anti-war demonstrations around the world need to be stepped up; and also in Israel - to oppose the propaganda and nationalist incitement of the Israeli leaders and make it clear that the bloodshed is not in the interests of ordinary Israelis. A majority of Israeli people support the setting up of an independent Palestinian state and the dismantling of settlements. However, Netanyahu's government is using the murders of the three Israeli teenagers and the rocket fire to reinforce the fears of Israelis and unleash further savage repression, which will certainly not bring peace and security for people in Israel.

Tragically, the pro-capitalist political leaders on both sides of the national divide have no programme that will end the cycles of bloodshed. Instead, the Palestinian masses need to build their own grassroots organisations that can democratically organise defence and take offensive initiatives based on mass struggle - such as against the blockade and land seizures.

In Israel, following the unprecedented social movement involving hundreds of thousands of people in 2011, a new workers' party is needed to concretely advance the aspirations of that movement - for decent housing, services, pay etc.

It will be through the building of new mass workers' parties and movements in the region that the pro-big business agendas of the capitalist parties can be challenged and thrown out, and socialist ideas can start to take hold. That will be the route to building a socialist Palestine and a socialist Israel as part of a socialist confederation of the Middle East, laying the basis for a future free of war, terror and poverty.

- Stop the slaughter! End the missile strikes and other attacks on Gaza! No to this war of the Israeli government of big business and settlements.
 - End the blockade of Gaza. For the immediate withdrawal of the Israeli army from the Palestinian territories. The national conflict will not be solved by military means.
 - For a mass struggle of the Palestinians, under their own democratic control, to fight for genuine national liberation.
 - For independent workers' organisations in Palestine and Israel.
 - For an independent, democratic socialist Palestinian state, alongside a democratic socialist Israel, with two capitals in Jerusalem and guaranteed democratic rights for all minorities, as part of the struggle for a socialist Middle East and regional peace.
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This version of this article was first posted on the Socialist Party website on 11 July 2014 and may vary slightly from the version subsequently printed in The Socialist.

Tyneside Safety Glass strikers celebrate stunning victory

Elaine Brunskill

After three weeks of strike action TSG strikers have won a tremendous victory against tight-fisted bosses who had offered an insulting 0% pay increase.

Initially, the bosses stated that they would not talk terms while the strike continued. By relying on agency workers (illegally taken on), they seemed intent on breaking both the strike and the union.

However, as it became increasingly clear that the strike was rock solid and that the agency workers were not capable of doing the work to the normal "world class standards", TSG bosses were then forced to backtrack and negotiate.

The vast majority of the strikers voted to accept the company offer of 2.8% backdated to 1 April this year. This will be followed by two years of inflation plus 0.1% (up to a maximum of 3%)

Also, the various rates for different shifts have been rounded up to the highest figure, and a sacked union member has been re-instated.

To maintain solidarity for three weeks of strike has been a marvellous achievement. This has been done by getting as many strikers active as possible. The strikers have attended picket lines from 5am every morning.

They've also attended rallies, public meetings, and went along to the picket lines of other disputes including the Fire Brigades Union.

Above all this dispute highlights that militant strike action works!

Due to ongoing costs from the strike continued donations are welcome.

For details contact: 07761421607

Eve-of-strike success for Look Ahead Unite members

After weeks of negotiation and an escalating threat of industrial action, with a seven-day strike due to start on 9 July, Unite LE1111 members working in the four Hackney Look Ahead mental health services were finally made an offer that they considered acceptable - and what a victory!

The offer included guaranteed redeployment or retention on current pay and conditions for those who wish to stay in service, enhanced redundancy for those who wish to leave, and trade union recognition for the Unite organised projects in Hackney (where, incidentally, membership is over 99%!).

Look Ahead workers have done an amazing job in halting this particular attempt at a race to the bottom. They are already on low pay, having received an average pay cut of 15% less than two years ago, yet the employer was demanding a further 14% pay cut.

Look Ahead Care and Support is notorious within the care sector for undercutting other providers on service costs to win contracts, then slashing staff terms and conditions and the quality of services in order to make the contract pay. Publicly funded service contracts are thus squeezed to make a surplus, which is then partly used for lavish executive pay rises.

The victory shows what can be achieved when members stick together and have the confidence to make a stand - and if our members in Look Ahead can do it, others can too.

Unite members

Napo election: militant union strategy needed to defeat privatisation

National vice-chair elections in Napo (which organises family court and probation workers) run from 18 July to 22 August. There are three candidates contesting two positions.

Socialist Party member Chas Berry, who has contested council elections as an anti-cuts Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition candidate, explains why he is standing.

"Napo is involved in a long battle to defeat the government's attempt to break up and privatise the probation service. So far, this has involved two and a half days of national strike action as well as a concerted campaign in the media and in Parliament to force Justice Secretary Chris Grayling to back down.

Our strength has been our willingness to lead an independent strategy that has forced concessions that protect significant parts of our terms and conditions and it is this pressure and the threat of further action that is the key to seeing off the privatisation of the newly created Community Rehabilitation Companies (CRCs).

We can have no confidence in Labour coming to the rescue and must maintain our independent position of opposition to privatisation up to and, if necessary, beyond 'share sale' later this year.

Independence does not mean isolation, however, and we must try to build on common ground with Unison, GMB and other unions. Alongside our colleagues in Family Courts we face the common problems of low pay, high workloads and the threat of privatisation.

Unity in action around pay can unite us all and seize back the initiative from the privateers. General strike action on this issue would raise the confidence of all workers and send a powerful message that we won't accept the degradation and ruination of our livelihoods.

With all the major parties following the same big business agenda it is vital we use our political fund to back candidates that won't do their dirty work for them. This means helping those like in TUSC who want to see a new party that represents the millions not the millionaires."

Workplace news in brief

FBU demands member's reinstatement

Fire Brigades Union (FBU) members have engaged in a further eight days of rolling industrial action in defence of their pensions from government cost-cutting attacks. FBU members were prominent on the recent J10 strike demonstrations and protests.

However, management at Hertfordshire Fire and Rescue Service have, vindictively, sacked FBU member Ashley Brown for commenting about the union's strike action on social media. In response a FBU solidarity rally (above) of over 100 was held on 15 July as county councillors met in Hertford. FBU general secretary Matt Wrack addressed the solidarity rally.

Hackney sparks

21 electricians, members of Unite, working for Hackney Homes in east London, have taken their second set of two-day strike action.

Hackney Homes is the arms-length management organisation (Almo) that runs Hackney council's housing. Workers are angry after having unfair work targets imposed on them in November 2012, which has resulted in some electricians facing a 20% cut in their salaries.

Hackney Homes bosses have also disciplined 50% of electricians for failing to meet these unreasonable targets.

In the last financial year Hackney Homes made a surplus of £1.4 million on that proportion of their annual budget assigned to the direct labour force, yet to change these unfair targets would only cost Hackney Homes about £20,000.

The electricians are demanding that Hackney Homes rescind the disciplinary action and that the current targets are replaced with genuinely fair and achievable targets.

Chris Newby

Lambeth College

Management at Lambeth College in south London has threatened its most vulnerable students in an ongoing campaign to tear up workers' contracts.

Members of lecturers' union UCU recently struck against changes for five and a half weeks. This was the union's longest ever action. Support workers in Unison also walked out for five days.

Strikers made an orderly return to work on Wednesday 9 July, in time for the summer break. They had succeeded in forcing management to the negotiating table.

Bullying principal Mark Silverman has demanded ransom. Staff must reject fresh action against attacks on sick pay,

hours and holidays.

His captive? Courses for students with disabilities and learners of English as a second or other language (Esol).

However, with no concessions on offer, UCU plans to re-ballot next term.

Esol courses alone generate around 40% of the FE college's income. UCU has declared it will "not be bullied by outlandish threats".

James Ivens

BT pay sell-out

The telecoms executive of the Communication Workers Union (CWU) has concluded an interim agreement with BT which will see new recruits to the company earning from £5,300 to £8,053 a year less.

On top of this the working week is extended by 1.5 hours, there are no enhanced overtime rates for Sundays and bank holidays and sick leave entitlement is half that of existing BT employees.

The union executive says this will help BT to recruit direct labour rather than use third party contractors, and repatriate work currently done offshore. There is absolutely nothing (except greed) to stop BT repatriating all off-shored work on existing pay and conditions. There is no better illustration of a 'partnership' approach with employers which can wipe out previously hard-won gains.

A new union leadership is urgently needed which will defend members from attacks on pay and conditions

Clive Walder

Union Bureaucracy Unmasked: The Defend the Four Story

Read how four Socialist Party members defeated victimisation within their own union.

Available for £5 (plus p&p) from www.leftbooks.co.uk - 020 8988 8789

Leicester anti-cuts councillors join up with TUSC

Leicester TUSC

Two Leicester anti-cuts councillors have joined up with the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) in the ever-widening fight against the establishment parties and their austerity policies.

Ex-Labour councillors Barbara Potter and Wayne Naylor, who will sit on the council as the Leicester Independent Councillors Against Cuts group, will now be a constituent part of the Leicester TUSC steering committee, alongside the Socialist Party, the Socialist Workers Party and prominent trade unionists in the city.

Time for something new

In a press statement announcing their decision to link up with TUSC, the councillors explained that while they were in

the Labour Party they were loyal because they feared the alternative of letting the Tories in. But they were hampered in their aims of defending their local constituents and both now feel that they can do that better outside the Labour Party - and that the time had come to build something new both locally and on a national level.

Let down

"To be a part of a national political group with an anti-cuts stance is what we wanted to achieve all along", said Barbara, "and we would like to thank TUSC and all of its city members for seeing that we can build a positive platform in Leicester".

"We want to build something that is credible for everyone who feels let down by both the government and the Labour council who are delivering cuts. We believe that there is a better way than this, and we will show people that it can be done", said Wayne.

"People are looking for something different, they have felt let down and need a political party that supports them in the difficulties they face".

Leicester TUSC is now planning a conference to discuss a 'people's budget' for Leicester on 4 October - which Barbara and Wayne will then present to the council at its budget-making meeting next year - and will be inviting community groups, trade unions and the people of Leicester to attend and contribute their views on what services the council should provide.

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. In May 2014 TUSC stood 554 candidates, the largest left-of-Labour local election challenge for over 60 years.

- www.tusc.org.uk

Royal Mail privatisation

Profits for the rich, insecurity for workers

A cross-party parliamentary committee has looked into the 2013 privatisation of the 60% of Royal Mail that was then in government hands. It criticised the sell-off as having been done 'too cheaply'. But, says Communication Workers Union (CWU) member Carl Harper, that only tells part of the story.

Cameron's Con-Dem government eagerly privatised the 497-year old national institution of Royal Mail, even when 70% of the public and 96% of workers opposed the sale.

The Con-Dems are ideologically committed to 'rebalancing' the economy, transferring 170,000 public sector workers to the private sector.

This fire sale, like other privatisations, was rushed through to make profits for wealthy private investors and faceless institutions - the Con-Dems' capitalist 'chums'.

The CWU said from the beginning that the taxpayer would lose out, both financially and in service losses, from privatisation. US bank JP Morgan valued Royal Mail at up to £10 billion - three times the float figure of £3.3 billion. The company's 330 pence share price rose over 50% in a month, losing the public billions of pounds.

CWU general secretary Billy Hayes called for Con-Dem minister Cable's resignation, demanding: "A full inquiry into the mishandling of this unnecessary privatisation" and calling for the Public Accounts Committee "to scrutinise how badly the taxpayer has been left out of pocket."

If profits [over £400million in the last financial year] had just been reinvested into Royal Mail and capital was accessed on the open market - as many companies do - Royal Mail could have kept providing services such as those for rural communities, elderly people, small businesses and the blind, as enjoyed under public ownership. Now its uncertain future will be based on profit margins, not services.

The media claims workers were given a percentage of the company through 'free shares' but we are far more concerned about jobs, terms, conditions and customer services than shares - which workers cannot sell for at least three years.

Workers turned the company round through extensive 'modernisation', but now fear that privateers aim to maximise their profits by minimising the value of jobs, terms and conditions.

The unions must still oppose the government's privatisation plans. We must also fight its impact on workers whose jobs were sold. CWU members voted for industrial action to support the union's demands for a legally binding agreement that protects members' interests and prevents a 'race to the bottom' across the sector.

Previous privatisations led to cuts in jobs, terms and conditions and in many cases failed overall. CWU members' robust attitude in past industrial conflicts will undoubtedly be needed to protect against a similar fate.

Con-Dem attacks on working class people and the unions, to protect the capitalist 1%, are unrelenting. Mass coordinated action is required. A political party representative of the 99% must lead the battle to protect pay, jobs, terms and conditions, and also the war to take back control from the greedy privateers!

Obituary - John Hayes

Robin Clapp

Socialist Party members are still reeling at the news of John Hayes' sudden death after falling from scaffolding outside his home. This committed socialist became a supporter of the Socialist Party's predecessor Militant in 1980. John never wavered in his desire to popularise the ideas of Marxism in his community and among his workmates.

He and I often travelled around his beloved Dorset, running impromptu stalls, recruiting members, organising meetings, then visiting a local beauty spot and a pub or two! Only months ago, after a successful stall, we journeyed to Maiden Castle's Iron Age hilltop settlement where John talked enthusiastically about the day when the Red Flag would fly there.

During a varied career John worked in the building industry, as a carer in a home with damaged young people and latterly as a driver for Dorset ambulance service. Almost fatally electrocuted while working for Southern Electric in the 1980s, he recovered from terrible burns to successfully prosecute the company for negligence. Typically, our fighting fund benefitted from much of his compensation.

After this accident, he became a student, securing an impressive degree in historical architecture. Like many other working class people who, given the chance, he displayed hitherto untapped talents.

He became interested in the preservation of historical buildings, taking me to many churches where his knowledge amazed even vicars, who peeped out of their vestries to hear him detailing their buildings' real history and the role of humble masons, carpenters and glass workers in constructing them.

In Dorset, sometimes finding a meeting venue was hard. Once I was interrupted in mid-flow by a pub landlord who threatened to throw us out for 'sedition'. John claimed we were the society for preserving the myth of the Black Dog of

Wimborne. The nonplussed landlord let us stay, while my subsequent speech had far too many canine references.

His family and all who knew him find John's death hard to come to terms with. Adversity never deterred him and his sunny outlook always made you raise your game. He held our banner strongly, marched forward with his class unerringly and retained his complete belief in socialism faithfully. We mourn and salute you.

SWP's Marxism: absence of serious debate and strategy

London Socialist Party members

'Marxism' is the annual 'festival of ideas' hosted by the Socialist Workers Party (SWP). Unlike Socialism (taking place on 8/9 November), the weekend hosted by the Socialist Party, Marxism does not have a good record for open and democratic discussion.

Despite the size and influence of the Socialist Party we have never been invited to debate at Marxism. Socialism, by contrast, has hosted debates with the SWP.

Nonetheless, this year, as in previous years, Socialist Party members attended Marxism and attempted to raise our views. It was not easy to do so. In a session on the trade unions the Socialist Party's tactics were explicitly criticised and yet, when our member appealed to be able to answer the points, he was still not called.

Some issues of vital importance to the working class were on the agenda and yet no debate or criticism was allowed. In a session on how to fight Ukip, introduced by SWP national secretary Charlie Kimber, Hannah Sell, deputy general secretary of the Socialist Party, who sits alongside Kimber on the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) national steering committee, was called in to speak but only for two minutes at the end of the discussion after she'd appealed directly to Kimber.

'Stand up to Ukip'

In his introduction to the session Kimber outlined the SWP's strategy for defeating Ukip via the 'stand up to Ukip' campaign they have initiated. This focused on demonstrating against Ukip and building a 'broad movement'. In particular, the importance of protesting outside Ukip's national conference in Doncaster on 27 September was emphasised.

If the workers' movement in Doncaster can build a significant demonstration - making it clear that they do not support Ukip, which is just one more pro-establishment, pro-big business party - that would play a positive role in the campaign to undercut Ukip.

However, a demonstration will not automatically play a positive role in undermining Ukip. If it is perceived by workers as a demonstration of 'establishment politicians' it could actually be counter-productive. There is a real danger of this.

In his reply Kimber dismissed a criticism Hannah had made, that it is a mistake for 'stand up to Ukip' to organise joint campaigning stalls with Labour and Lib Dem councillors who are implementing huge cuts in public services. Such a campaign will never succeed in winning those workers who are voting for Ukip in order to punish the establishment parties, but will instead allow Ukip to claim that socialists are part of the establishment.

Alternative

In addition, rather than 'standing up to Ukip' such a campaign can instead end up 'propping up Labour'. Kimber's response to this, however, was to simply restate the importance of a 'broad' campaign against Ukip.

In his introduction Kimber had made no mention of the need to also build a workers' electoral alternative to Ukip, despite the SWP taking part in TUSC along with the transport workers' union (the RMT), the Socialist Party and others. He recognised that some workers are supporting Ukip because they see it as a means to protest against the big three establishment parties, but did not draw any conclusions from this.

He spoke about how class struggle - for example the 10 July strike - would unite workers and undercut Ukip but did not explain who the strikers should vote for - given that Labour had opposed the strikes and has repeatedly said it will continue with austerity. No mention was made of how unpopular a Labour government would become and the danger of a further growth in support for Ukip.

Hannah raised the importance of TUSC and that it is a step towards building a mass workers' party, which is a vital part of undermining Ukip. In his reply Kimber agreed that TUSC was an important part of opposing Ukip and appealed to SWP members to take it seriously. However, there was unfortunately no session dealing with TUSC on the agenda of Marxism.

<http://www.socialistparty.org.uk/articles/18966>