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Evict this millionaires' government

Scrap the bedroom tax

New data shows that greedy Con-Dem MPs in the cruel cuts Coalition made over £7 million doing outside jobs.

Not content with creaming off their expenses they take on directorships in profiteering companies too. Among them 17 declared more than £100,000 in income during the 2012-13 parliamentary session.

Bankers, hedge fund managers and property magnates are also stacking up the cash. Big business is literally hoarding billions - an estimated £850 billion. At the same time, they use offshore havens and clever accounting to avoid paying tax.

Imagine if it was suggested they'd be evicted if they didn't pay their taxes? Instead, many pro-big business governments argue they can't force the wealthy elite to pay their taxes in case they leave.

The implementation of the bedroom tax is taking the idea there's 'one law for them and one law for us' to new extremes. Some of the poorest in society are being threatened with eviction since the Con-Dems singled them out for special suffering - a cut of hundreds of pounds a year from already very low incomes.

The degree to which we are suffering austerity is devastating. It is reflected in the rapid expansion of food banks.

In the last four years there has been a ten-fold increase in payday loans as incomes don't stretch to the end of the month. And now the government is proposing more cuts to be announced at the end of June for 2015-16.

Enough is enough!

We can't take the pain - already tens of thousands across Britain have shown they simply cannot pay the bedroom tax. And there is a massive mood to fight it.

Join the struggle and we can defeat this tax and, by building a mass working class-led

movement, the pro-austerity government too.

- No evictions of tenants who fall into rent arrears as a result of austerity cuts. Organise local campaigns to oppose the tax and defend our homes, and link them to existing anti-cuts groups. Build anti-eviction armies in every area to protect people's homes
- Stand candidates against councillors who try to evict us. Build a new mass workers' party that draws together workers, young people and activists from workplaces and anti-cuts campaigns, to provide a fighting, political alternative to the pro-cuts parties
- Cap rents and build homes. Invest in a major programme of council house building and refurbishment to provide affordable homes for all and decent jobs
- End low pay! If workers are paid a genuinely living wage they would not need to claim housing benefit
- Boardroom tax not bedroom tax. Make the rich pay for their crisis including nationalisation of the banking system, major corporations and utilities under democratic control with compensation paid only on the basis of proven need
- Fight all the cuts. Trade unions must build for a 24-hour general strike as the next major step in building a mass campaign against austerity
- For a socialist alternative to cuts and capitalism with a democratic socialist plan of production based on the interests of the overwhelming majority of people - not the 1%

Campaign to stop bedroom tax evictions!

Less than two months after being introduced, the bedroom tax is already causing the chaos campaigners predicted it would.

Since 1 April housing benefit has been slashed for council or housing association tenants who the millionaire Con-Dem ministers claim have 'spare' bedrooms. To avoid this tenants are told to move or they face massive increases in the amount of rent they are expected to cover.

Some councils and housing associations are warning tenants who aren't able to pay that they could be evicted after just one month's rent being short. Nearly a thousand people have received notice of arrears letters in Bradford. In Brighton, an anti-bedroom tax campaigner has been threatened with eviction, despite the Green Party-led council previously promising no evictions because of the bedroom tax.

Battles ahead

This shows the bitter battles that lie ahead for anti-bedroom tax campaigns. We need to build anti-eviction 'armies' on every estate, ready to lobby courts and to physically defend tenants

against bailiffs if necessary. This also means that campaigners and tenants need to get to know the legal position on evictions for rent arrears, which some of the articles on this page outline.

Con-Dem politicians claim the bedroom tax is needed because it's unfair that people who claim benefits have 'spare' bedrooms paid for by the public purse. But the question they all fail to answer is where they want people to move to. Councils certainly don't have spare smaller housing for all those affected. In fact the housing shortage is so bad that it was recently reported that Newham council in east London has moved people needing emergency accommodation 100 miles away to cram them into B&Bs in Birmingham.

Some Labour politicians have spoken out against the tax - but will they also 'walk the walk'? Labour could kill off the bedroom tax today if it wished, by pledging that a future Labour government would scrap it and bail out councils who have refused to implement it. Councils can use prudential borrowing powers and reserves to cover the shortfall in the meantime. They should link up with local campaigns to build a mass movement to defeat the tax.

But so far only six Labour councillors in Labour councils have voted against the cuts - and they have been suspended and expelled from the Labour Party, an indication of the Labour leadership's real attitude to the bedroom tax and other cuts.

There are enough resources in society to provide a decent, affordable home for all. The Socialist Party is campaigning around the country for the bedroom tax to be scrapped. We want councils to pledge not to implement the cut and not to evict those who can't pay.

If they don't, we will stand candidates against them as part of the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition at the next election. We call for huge investment in a programme to regenerate empty housing and to build new houses to match demand.

See www.socialistparty.org.uk for campaign reports and other bedroom tax news. Get in touch for leaflets, posters and other campaign material:

info@socialistparty.org.uk

020 8988 8777

Disabled people unfairly hit...twice

Sharron Milsom

A woman signing our anti-cuts petition claimed she'd been turned down for a Discretionary Housing Payment (DHP) to help cover the bedroom tax due to her Disability Living Allowance (DLA). This sounded wrong, I thought someone had made a mistake. But later another said that the council had taken her DLA into account when assessing her application.

As the purpose of DLA is to help meet the extra cost of disability the money is not counted as income when other benefits are assessed. But it can be with DHPs. There had been no mistake, government guidelines allow councils to treat DLA as income when considering whether to provide help with a tenant's bedroom tax or any other difficulty paying rent.

Not extra income

Many disabled people hand most or all of their DLA over to Motability for hire of a car. Others spend the money running a car bought privately or need to pay taxi fares. Many are paying for personal care or help in the home. Yet it's considered ok for this money to be spent on rent!

The government says that a council may want to 'bear in mind' that DLA might be committed to expenditures 'for which the money was intended' - but allows councils to require the money be available for rent anyway. It is all left to the council's discretion.

Also, each council's DHP allocation is limited - when the year's money has gone, it's gone. With 25,000 applications already received, councils are saying that the money's nothing like enough. If every DLA claimant received DHP, they would each get only £2.51 a week!

Yet whenever government ministers are challenged with cases of disabled people needing extra bedrooms - say because their home has been adapted at great cost or a room is needed for medical or mobility equipment - their stock answer is that this is the sort of thing that DHPs are for.

They aim to convince the public that such tenants will not have to pay the bedroom tax - when it's likely they will. Neither do they mention that any help will be means-tested or that the tenant will have to submit all their expenditure for scrutiny, listing money spent on food, clothes, phone bills, etc. Yet despite such tactics they are not succeeding in winning support for the bedroom tax.

I face losing my home of 31 years

31 years in the same house, now threatened with a notice of possession by Stevenage Labour council. Why? I am in arrears of £80.21, which is one month's bedroom tax, which this

government of freeloaders have introduced.

Using the Nuremberg defence, council officials have said we are just following the new law. Stevenage borough council is refusing to accept any appeals against their decisions, even though all my bedrooms are being used.

Tenants in Bedwell ward of Stevenage are organising to defend each other from the council harassment and eviction. We are meeting at Bedwell Centre on Monday 3 June at 8pm.

Steve, Stevenage

The eviction process...

This is a general outline of what legal steps social landlords must take to evict someone because of rent arrears. It indicates that there is room for a well organised campaign to combine protesting with a challenge to the legal process. Thanks to Notts Bedroom Tax Campaign for this useful information which campaigns should discuss.

Stage 1

A social housing landlord can't start court action for rent arrears unless they've:

- tried to come to an agreement with you to pay off what you owe. This must be an amount you can afford to pay, based on how much money you have coming into your household and how much you need to spend
- offered to help you to claim housing benefit/Discretionary Housing Payments (DHP)
- advised you to get help from a Citizens Advice Bureau or debt advice agency

When a tenant has accrued rent arrears the landlord will initially make contact with them to discuss why the rent arrears have occurred and discuss solutions to resolve them (ie payment plans).

Stage 2

The landlord will send the tenant a letter (Notice to Seek Possession), stating that due to rent arrears there are potential grounds for possession. The notice usually states that court proceedings will commence by a certain date - this is usually a four week period.

Stage 3

If no arrangement or progress has been made regarding the rent arrears post the set date then it is usually seven days after this date that the landlord will apply to issue possession proceedings in the court.

Stage 4

The court will then serve the summons to the tenant once a date has been scheduled for the hearing. At the court hearing the judge can:

- Make an outright possession order (the landlord can take over possession of their property; however this cannot be done without a warrant of eviction)
- Dismiss the claim for possession
- Make a postponed/suspended possession order (an agreement is reached whereby the tenant will ensure their rent is paid plus an agreed amount of the arrears)
- Adjourn the hearing until a future date (usually the case when housing benefit has not been processed and the rent arrears have accrued due to the delayed housing benefit claim). If you currently have an appeal with the council it depends what the appeal is about as to whether they will adjourn the hearing. If it's about bedroom tax generally it is unlikely at this stage a judge will commit to make a decision where others could easier follow suit. If it's about bedroom size, or other technicalities then it should be adjourned until it has been determined. A hearing should be adjourned if DHP has been submitted but a tenant is still waiting to hear - usually income and expenditure breakdown is helpful for the courts at this stage to show there is a reasonable prospect of DHP being awarded

Stage 5

If a tenant fails to adhere to the court's agreement the landlord will return to the court to apply for a warrant for possession. A warrant for possession is granted then a hearing for eviction is set. This is when eviction occurs and you will receive date/time when the court bailiffs will be attending to evict you from the property. It is usually a month until the eviction date.

Stage 6

Even at this stage mitigating circumstances can be submitted (on form N224) and the eviction can be suspended/postponed. The N224 form can either be downloaded from HM Courts & Tribunal Services Website or from the court. On the form you must state the reasons why you have not been able to adhere to the agreed arrangement, ie you lost your job, your claim for housing benefit/DHP hasn't been processed yet.

- If you have an introductory tenancy you need to seek legal advice immediately, you do not have the same rights as above.

...and the exceptions

Paul Kershaw

Housing associations (which control about half of social housing) issue tenancies that give significantly less rights than council tenants get. Some landlords plan to take advantage of this to ram evictions through the courts. The scale of the problem is likely to grow when the new 'Universal Credit' is introduced.

Before the Thatcher government's 1988 Housing Act housing associations gave 'secure tenancies', but the Tories introduced weaker 'Assured' tenancies to encourage banks to invest in housing. Disgracefully Labour did not reverse this.

Last year, before the bedroom tax, social landlords filed a whopping 96,742 possession claims in county courts and 65,054 were successful. But there are already reports of arrears rising and housing associations revising their procedures to make evictions easier.

Housing association tenancies include a way to evict known as 'Ground 8' which removes the court's discretion. Using other grounds landlords have to demonstrate to the court that their course of action is 'reasonable'; with Ground 8 they simply have to show that the tenant owes money. That means you can't argue that your housing benefit is about to come through tomorrow or other extenuating circumstances.

Most haven't used it as a matter of course in the past but many use it occasionally. A recent survey of housing associations by Inside Housing magazine found that 23 out of 37 respondents now plan to use Ground 8 to evict, with just eleven ruling it out.

Some associations have tried to limit the impact of the bedroom tax by reclassifying rooms. Well-known commentators such as Professor Steve Wilcox have expressed surprise that more associations have not gone down this route as the income loss can be small and offset by not having to spend on evicting people! Some argue that agreements with banks would have to be renegotiated; is that worse than evicting the poor? Campaigns to stop the use of Ground 8 are entirely winnable.

Campaigning points

- Local authorities should call on associations to commit not to use Ground 8.
 - Stock transfer agreements (where council housing has been transferred to associations) may include agreements that Ground 8 should not be used.
 - Guidance from the now defunct Housing Corporation has not been superseded and requires that associations first pursue all other reasonable alternatives to recover debt. If they change their approach they need to consult tenants - being explicit about what changes they are making - and amend policies and tenancy agreements accordingly.
 - Housing lawyers report that there are already cases where associations are trying to pull the wool over tenants' eyes, not being clear about the reasons for changes.
 - It is possible to challenge Ground 8 evictions in the Courts if correct procedures have not been followed or if there is a counterclaim for disrepair. There is also developing case law (Pinnock and Powell cases) suggesting that the Human Rights Act could be used to stop these evictions.
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Building a local campaign

1. Spread the word

Go door-to-door with a petition and leaflets advertising a meeting on the estate. Approach the press with the stories of those affected locally.

2. Clog up the system

Encourage those affected to do everything possible to make it difficult for the council. Don't fill in a rent direct debit, ask the council to 'look again' and then appeal. Apply for Discretionary Housing Payment.

3. Prepare to prevent evictions

It may take time to build up arrears but we should be preparing now. Get to know the law on evictions, organise lobbies of the courts if people have hearings and be prepared to mobilise supporters to physically block the way for bailiffs.

4. Put pressure on councils not to implement

Collect signatures on a petition pressuring the local council to refuse to implement the bedroom tax and to promise not to evict anyone who falls in rent arrears because of austerity measures. Organise protests outside council meetings and lobby individual councillors. At the next local elections, stand anti-bedroom tax candidates as part of the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition against councillors who carry through the cuts.

Every week the Socialist is carrying reports of anti-bedroom tax campaigns around the country. Send yours to editors@socialistparty.org.uk

No to terrorism! No to racism! No to war!

Editorial of the Socialist

The unprovoked and vicious killing of an unarmed soldier in Woolwich was an horrific event which must have been profoundly traumatic for the people who witnessed it, and, of course, an appalling tragedy for the victim, and the victim's family and friends.

The Socialist Party completely condemns this attack just as we condemned 7/7, 9/11, and all similar attacks aimed at indiscriminate slaughter. The victim of this latest killing, while one individual rather than many, appears to have been selected possibly only because of the 'help for heroes' t-shirt he was wearing.

The attackers apparently claimed to be acting in the name of Islam, and in protest at the occupations of Iraq and Afghanistan. However, the vast majority of Muslims are as sickened and horrified by this attack as the rest of the population. The brutal imperialist occupations of Iraq and Afghanistan, which have resulted in the deaths of over 100,000 civilians, are not the responsibility of ordinary soldiers, but of the governments that took the decision to invade and then occupy.

Terrorism

The aftermath of this latest killing demonstrates once again that terrorism is a completely mistaken and counter-productive method of struggle. Socialists have always opposed terrorism, because it attempts to substitute the acts of the individual for a mass working class-led movement.

Historically, individual terrorism was at least aimed at representatives of the ruling class. The 'mass terrorism' of the last 15 years, aimed at indiscriminate killing, has far more reactionary consequences. It was the mass terrorism of 9/11 which gave then US President George Bush a 'justification' he could use to invade Afghanistan and then Iraq.

The Woolwich killing was immediately seized by Tory Prime Minister David Cameron to try to bolster flagging support for his government. Responsible for the continuation of the occupation of Afghanistan, the Coalition has become increasingly unpopular as it inflicts

endless austerity on the working class of Britain. The headlines before Wednesday 22 May, the day of the killing, were all about the vicious infighting and splits in the Tory party. On that day the IMF repeated its criticisms of Chancellor Osborne's austerity policies. All of this has been temporarily dropped from the headlines as a result of the Woolwich killing.

The government is also attempting to use this tragedy in order to try to push through a raft of anti-democratic legislation, none of which would have prevented the Woolwich killing, any more than previous anti-democratic legislation prevented 7/7 or defeated the IRA. These draconian measures would, however, be a major curtailment of our democratic rights. They include an attempt to revive the 'snoopers' charter' which would give the state access to everyone's emails and other information.

These measures that Home Secretary Teresa May is proposing are so draconian that Ofcom, the BBC and the Liberal Democrats seem to be opposing them. It is yet another example of Labour's right-wing pro-capitalist character that it seems far more supportive of May's plans.

Why?

Inevitably millions of people have studied the news trying to work out why these two young men carried out this horrific killing. Clearly they decided to become 'martyrs', making no attempt to leave the scene and rushing the police when they arrived, inevitably resulting in them being shot.

Like the 7/7 bombers these young men were brought up in Britain. Both, like one of the 7/7 bombers, did not come from a Muslim background but converted as young men. To most people, including most Muslims, it seems unimaginable that these apparently ordinary young men should have taken such an extreme step.

The government and newspapers have limited their explanation to describing the perpetrators as 'evil' or in the grip of an 'evil ideology'. Of course, anyone who could carry out such acts will be widely considered 'evil'. However, it is an inadequate explanation of why these young men chose this road.

Tory London Mayor Boris Johnson, along with other capitalist politicians including Labour's David Lammy, has declared that the government's foreign policy had nothing to do with the Woolwich attack. But it clearly formed at least part of the killers' motivation, as has also been the case with previous terrorist attacks. The occupations of Iraq and Afghanistan, accompanied as they were by a prevalence of racist anti-Muslim propaganda in the right-wing media, have had a profound effect on the consciousness of Muslims worldwide.

Bush's regime invaded Afghanistan and then Iraq partly to increase its prestige in the wake of 9/11 by flexing its military might, but also to follow the dream of cheap oil for US imperialism.

For millions of Muslims, the invasions of Iraq and Afghanistan, along with the plight of the Palestinians, are perceived as part of a war on their religion. Many Iraqis and Afghans have been tortured and killed in US and British military detention camps.

Globally, capitalism is a system in profound crisis. In many countries religious, national and ethnic tensions are increasing and even leading to war. The major capitalist powers intervene in these conflicts not to find a solution, but to further their own interests, as was the case in Libya. This inevitably increases the danger of terrorist attacks in Britain, the US and elsewhere. Both of the killers were from Nigerian families, and both the increasing ethnic and religious conflict and brutal state repression in Nigeria is likely to have had an impact on them.

A generalised anger against imperialist oppression may well have been fuelled by personal experience. One of the perpetrators had recently attempted to go to Somalia, he said because he wanted to live under sharia law. He failed to get there and was instead arrested in Kenya, where he claimed to have suffered beatings, and threats of rape and death. Family members say he had been changed by this experience, and had returned "very withdrawn" and seeing "everyone in authority as being a torturer".

Alienation

Both young men seem to have been involved in gangs and petty crime. One had been stabbed in a drugs-related robbery some years earlier. Right-wing political Islam, it seems, falsely appeared to offer to them a way out from difficult lives.

One million young people are currently unemployed in Britain. Capitalism in Britain is not capable of offering young people a future. For black and Asian youth the nightmare of mass unemployment is even worse. Half of all young black men are unemployed. Police harassment is the norm, with young black and Asian men eight times more likely to be stopped and searched than young white men.

In Woolwich, as in many areas, the few services that existed for the young unemployed are being cut. There have been major cuts in the funding of youth services, including those aimed at ex-offenders.

While the vast majority of young people facing this barren future do not turn to terrorism, a tiny minority can do so. In addition, as recent events in Sweden have shown, there is a significant danger of further riots, perhaps even on a bigger scale than in England in 2011 (see page 9 for report from Swedish socialists).

The trade union movement has a duty to attempt to reach this layer of young people with a mass campaign against cuts and for decent jobs and free education. A first step would be a 24-hour general strike against austerity. Such a strike, provided it was part of a serious struggle

to defeat government cuts, and clearly demanded a decent future for young people, would be the most effective possible step to begin to cut across the alienation of unemployed youth.

No to the racist EDL and BNP

The trade union movement also needs to urgently organise against the increased racism in the wake of the Woolwich killing. A number of racist attacks on mosques have taken place in the last few days.

The racist hooligan English Defence League (EDL) were previously in complete disarray after they were prevented from marching in Walthamstow, north east London, last year by a mobilisation of the local community (in which the Socialist Party played an important role). Woolwich, however, has given them a new lease of life.

Up to 1,000 EDL supporters protested by Downing Street on 27 May. The far right racist British National Party (BNP) is also attempting to use the killing to resuscitate itself and has called a demonstration in Woolwich for Saturday 1 June.

There is a danger that some white youth - also facing the nightmare of unemployment and poverty - can turn to the racism of the far right. It is absolutely correct that the local Greenwich Unite branch is initiating a counter-mobilisation to the BNP, calling for working class unity against terror, racism and war (see page 12).

In the early 1990s, in the wake of the killing of black teenager Stephen Lawrence, 50,000 people marched in nearby Welling to oppose the racist thugs of the BNP. Many marched under our party's slogan of 'jobs and homes not racism'; we need to organise a similar movement today.

There is also an urgent need to begin to build a mass socialist alternative to austerity and racism, and the capitalist system which creates them.

Links to useful reading

The politics of fighting the racist EDL: www.socialistparty.org.uk/articles/14856

Stopping the far-right: The need for democratic debate www.socialistparty.org.uk/articles/15149

Under siege: Muslims in Britain: www.socialismtoday.org/95/muslims.html

Unite to fight racism!

Working class unity is needed to end austerity

Aghast, millions of people watched the shaky amateur footage of the brutal killing of a young soldier, Lee Rigby, in Woolwich, south east London.

Quoted in the Evening Standard, Onay Kasab from Greenwich Socialist Party, summed up the response of socialists: "What happened in Woolwich on Wednesday was a despicable act, whatever the political motivations of the attackers.

"We completely condemn the murder," (see Editorial [No to terrorism! No to racism! No to war!](#)). The racist attacks on Muslims in the days that followed must also be condemned just as strongly.

Three petrol bombs were thrown at a mosque in Grimsby, a fried chicken shop was smashed up in east London, and there has been a big increase in reports of racist attacks since the event on 22 May.

These actions, like the killing, are carried out by a tiny number of people and are unrepresentative of the mass of society.

There is no question racist groups have been emboldened by the events. The English Defence League (EDL) and British National Party (BNP) have been attempting to use the situation to gain support.

But only months ago the BNP appeared to be disintegrating and the EDL was forced out of Waltham Forest, east London, by a massive show of opposition by local working class people and youth.

The Socialist Party played a leading role in forging a breakaway protest that forced the EDL, despite police protection, to scarper.

The group was then beset by major infighting and seemed to be on the retreat. But at the time the Socialist Party warned that the conditions of austerity combined with the absence of a strong working class voice of opposition meant that the EDL or another right-wing or far-right group was likely to emerge to exploit the situation.

Now these organisations are trying to seize the opportunity to spread their racist lies. A few hundred EDL supporters have been mustered from the different splinter groups to unite in anti-Muslim protests in both Newcastle and London. It's reported that, as well as racist chants, they shouted, "we hate Cameron."

The EDL, BNP and their ilk are pernicious racist organisations that feed off the desperate conditions of poverty and hopelessness.

In Breadline Britain, where food banks can't keep up with demand, and volunteers report that the bedroom tax is a contributing factor, there is growing anger and despair.

But their racist lies provide no way of acting on the hatred for the millionaire ministers in the Con-Dem government felt by the millions of people battered by austerity.

In fact their divisive racism can only weaken the one force in society that has the potential to defeat the government's cuts - the organised working class.

A political vacuum exists when all the establishment parties agree that working class people's living standards must be cut to pay for the bankers' crisis. The EDL, BNP and others seek to exploit this.

It is urgent that we build a mass political voice that represents the anti-cuts position of the vast majority of the population.

The Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition, which the Socialist Party supports, is an important step in this campaign (see page 8 and www.tusc.org.uk).

Socialists argue for a massive, united campaign of working class people that has the power not only to marginalise and smash groupings like the EDL, but to provide hope in a real future to those small layers of people who might be attracted by them.

A 24-hour general strike must be fought for as a powerful show of opposition to all austerity measures.

The call from trade unions, the NUT in Lewisham and Unite, for a counter-protest to the BNP on Saturday 1 June will be an important opportunity to argue these points.

Stop the BNP!

Saturday 1 June

(provisional details)

Assemble 1pm at the war memorial

Lewisham High Street (opposite Lewisham hospital)

See www.socialistparty.org.uk for any updates

Even the cutters say cuts aren't working!

Becci Heagney

Chancellor George Osborne has been warned: his austerity package is "playing with fire". Working class people know all too well the effects of the cuts - the painful slashing of our living standards, the hated bedroom tax, the hell of not being able to find a job.

But this warning has come from the International Monetary Fund (IMF), a body which has been responsible for austerity, exploitation and attacks on workers' rights around the world.

Osborne's claim that there is 'no plan B', which is used to insist on savage cuts, is being undermined.

Ongoing crisis

It is hardly surprising that there are questions about the Tories' economic policy. Britain's GDP is still 2% less than it was in 2008.

The private sector has shrunk for the last 15 consecutive months. Prices are rising at 2.4% a year while wages are basically standing still.

Osborne himself has had to extend his deadline for deficit reduction twice and has failed to reach his own growth targets. His solution? Pile on more misery for the working class.

But the IMF is not calling for restraint out of sympathy with us. David Lipton, deputy managing director of the IMF, made a speech on an assessment of the British economy.

He called for plans for investment into infrastructure to be brought forward, in an attempt to balance the £10 billion worth of cuts being made this year.

No friend of ours

But the IMF says this should be done by "streamlining the planning application process and removing regulatory uncertainty", ie removing democratic rights, as well as devolving responsibility to local authorities.

It also recommends that the government should hand bailed out banks RBS and Lloyds TSB back to the private sector.

The IMF is desperate for some sort of growth in the economy. Despite the government's optimism that a triple-dip recession was avoided, in reality the economy is stagnating and the much talked about "green shoots of recovery" remain to be seen.

The IMF's suggestions for growth also include more investment and more exports and a reduction in corporation tax.

However, they also warn about the effects of the ongoing eurozone crisis on the UK economy. If Britain is going to export more, who will buy the exports?

Plan S for socialism!

It is clear that the IMF criticisms reflect the panic among some in the ruling class. It's increasingly apparent that none of the capitalist governments or institutions have a solution to the acute crisis of their system.

The Socialist Party calls for investment in jobs, infrastructure and services but the capitalists are not prepared to do this because they see no profits to be made. We need to build a mass movement to demand governments carry out this investment.

But we have to go further too - we want nationalisation of the biggest companies and the banking system under democratic working class control and management, and a socialist plan of production and services to meet the needs of all.

This is what's 'not to like' about Free Schools, Boris

Martin Powell-Davies, National Union of Teachers executive (personal capacity)

Tory London mayor Boris Johnson, writing in the London Evening Standard, attempted to portray opposition to 'Free Schools' as some kind of 'left-wing conspiracy'.

No, it is mayor Johnson and his government colleagues who are the ones putting ideology before needs.

They are the ones insisting that the critical lack of school places in London has to be addressed through a patchwork of privatised Free Schools instead of urgent investment in well-constructed and democratically planned local authority community schools.

The mayor claims that the Tories' plans to meet the estimated shortfall of 118,000 pupil places in London through Free Schools compares to the school-building programme in the capital at the end of the 19th century.

Yes, the late-Victorian era saw major investment in school buildings, and other public services, not least the school board buildings that still stand the test of time today.

Under pressure from a movement that first saw Labour and socialist candidates winning election victories to school boards, they also recognised the benefit of elected local authorities being able to control and plan those resources.

Free Schools come from a very different tradition. They stem from the neoliberal politics of the end of the 20th century, when public services became just another source of rich-pickings for big business.

Short-sighted fat cats, represented by both Tory and New Labour politicians, were driven merely by a desire to make a quick return.

Instead of re-investing profits in production and services, they helped to create the speculative bubble whose implosion has led to the present continuing economic crisis.

In Sweden, one of the first countries to experiment with the Free School model, it has been shown to have had a detrimental effect on education and equality.

Johnson asks in the Standard "what is not to like" about Free Schools. For starters, as in Sweden, they are schools where their owners will be allowed to declare a profit. Education businesses can cut costs to make money out of children's education.

Privatisation free-for-all

Instead of democratically controlled planning of school places, Free Schools will create a chaotic and inefficient free-for-all of private providers.

Instead of government having to properly invest to provide the schools that our children deserve, Free Schools will also be allowed to open in empty offices and other inappropriate provision.

If Boris Johnson really wants to follow the traditions of his Victorian forebears, he should join the National Union of Teachers (NUT) in insisting on proper investment in high-quality schools, not blaming councils for 'red-tape' when they rightly question the appropriateness of some of the plans proposed by prospective Free School providers.

The mayor tries to hide the truth of Tory cuts and penny-pinching by pointing to the extra £982 million in 'targeted basic need' funds being provided to help boroughs set up new schools.

Yet London councils have written to Michael Gove explaining that the allocation is totally inadequate and based on a funding formula that ignores the high cost of land and building in the capital.

London councils estimate that they require an additional £1.04 billion if they are to provide the places needed by 2015-16.

Against the background of huge cuts to council budgets, this figure cannot be found - unless the government provides the necessary investment from central funds.

Of course, instead of just complaining about the cuts, councillors should be joining trade unions and communities in a mass campaign to win the resources needed to protect and provide public services.

So yes, Boris, it is high time to 'put aside politics and open the schools we need'. Instead of your ideological insistence on privatised Free Schools, London councils require the funding - just a small fraction of the billions swilling around the City of London every day - to plan and build the schools we urgently need.

Martin is the Local Associations National Action Campaign candidate for NUT vice-president: electmartin1.blogspot.co.uk

Nasty party exposed by equal marriage bill

Michael Johnson

When MPs decided to debate amendments to the Con-Dems' 'gay marriage' bill, most people probably braced themselves for a bit of homophobia disguised as concern over religion.

And that was there: Conservative MP David Burrows said, essentially, religious schools should be able to teach that gay marriage is wrong.

Others made the typical but still infuriating argument that allowing LGB people to marry would be marginalising and discriminating against those who think that LGB marriage is an 'equality too far'. The 95% of LGBT youth who regularly experience discrimination seem to be less deserving of consideration!

Things escalated when another Tory MP Gerald Howarth criticised an apparent 'aggressive homosexual community' for pushing things so that straight people now have fewer rights than LGBT people.

Obviously, the 'aggressive homosexual' controlled media has been hushing up gangs of LGBT people beating up straight people for seeming straight...

Lord Tebbit said the Conservative Party had 'fucked up' and posed such brain teasers as: "When we have a queen who is a lesbian and she marries another lady and then decides she would like to have a child and someone donates sperm and she gives birth to a child, is that child heir to the throne?" and whether the bill would mean he could marry his son to allow him to avoid paying inheritance tax!

But the arguments against - and wrecking amendments such as 'opt out' clauses - failed spectacularly.

Labour answered Cameron's eleventh hour plea and voted against the amendments. So marriage equality took a small step forward.

Majority support

Cameron has pushed this bill to try to make the Tories look progressive. Marriage equality is supported by the large majority of the UK, despite what some church leaders have presented.

Marriage equality is an important step forward, but this is not the end of the struggle: the marriage bill as it stands is not perfect, especially for trans people due to the wording around

gender and the implications towards the status of a marriage or civil partnership if someone transitions.

But many LGB people, due to the attacks and cuts introduced by the government such as increasing unemployment, low pay, and lack of housing, will have a low quality of life after marriage.

The LGBT community must unite with the other oppressed sections of society: women, immigrants, and the working class as a whole; to fight for true marriage equality, including civil partnerships for any consenting couple regardless of gender or homophobic prejudice.

This movement must also resist attacks affecting the working class as a whole, fighting not just for a few small gains over time but for a true transformation in society.

Stop the NHS privatisation rip-off

Steve Harbord, Unison rep, London Ambulance Service (personal capacity)

Privatisation of the NHS is demoralising NHS staff as terms and conditions are attacked and staff are ground down by an ever increasing workload. My pay rise last year and for the last three years? 0%!

The NHS is all up for grabs. Private companies such as Harmoni bid for frontline medical care contracts. Private ambulance firms such as Medi Force move into emergency 999 cover.

Privatisation's 'mandate' comes from big business. Britain's fat cats are sitting on £850 billion, but refuse to invest it as they're not guaranteed a profit.

They wait to be handed public services like the NHS to make a profit out of taxpayers' money.

Labour's shadow health minister Andy Burnham recently spoke on the increase of private ambulance firms covering emergency calls, saying we should not see such an increase "without proper debate". So it's OK to hand over billions of taxpayers' money to the spivs but let's chat about it first!

Labour in government took the privatisation baton and ran with it. None of the three main parties says that the NHS should stay a 'not for profit' public service.

The trade union movement should organise a united fightback, starting by withdrawing funds

from the pro-privatising Labour Party.

Union funds should only be used to back individuals and parties that oppose privatising vital public services.

Socialists call for the nationalisation of public services under democratic workers' control.

Salford Socialist Students help lead fightback against job and course cuts

On 23 May, Salford Socialist Students assembled outside the student union calling for all members of the university to stand defiant with them against the 12th proposed round of cuts in 18 months.

A leaked document stated that this summer the university was to axe a further 75 staff, and cut courses that a prospective 1,300 students had already signed up to.

Martyn Moss, UCU regional officer, said that Salford was "unenviably the most prolific university in the UK for axing staff".

Chris Sheehy, secretary of UCU at the university, stated that she had called on the student union several times with no response.

Only Socialist Students had responded and staff were delighted that there were students who would speak up. The Unison branch secretary Michelle Livesey also attended with other Unison members.

We delivered a letter to the University of Salford's vice-chancellor, demanding that he either confirm or deny the allegations in the media, and pledging our support for any action the unions take to fight the cuts.

Becki Holroyd

London students fight union closure plan

Around 100 students gathered outside University of London Union (ULU) on 22 May in protest against the closure of the facility.

The university management want to replace ULU with a management-run, commercialised 'student services centre'.

No student has been involved in this decision.

Management have spun the lie that ULU is too expensive to run. Yet most of the university's £800,000 annual grant is paid back by ULU in rent.

There is a big mood to fight this attack among London students, who know this is an attack on student democracy and the ability to fight and organise against the further cuts and privatisation to come across the 18 University of London colleges.

Helen Pattison

PCS conference sends defiant message to the government

Rob Williams

PCS union delegates met in Brighton for their annual conference last week to review the union's resistance to the Con-Dems' vicious austerity attacks.

It's clear that the union has been singled out for special treatment by the government because of the crucial role that it has played in defying spending cuts; especially in the campaign of coordinated industrial action by the trade unions that reached a peak with the 30 November 2011 pensions' strike (N30).

This attack was underlined as many delegates were for the first time denied facility time by the employer to attend conference.

There was a sober debate on the national industrial action campaign that started on Budget Day (20 March 2013) to defend hard-won terms and conditions alongside challenging the pay freeze, defending pensions and jobs, and resisting privatisation.

Despite its best efforts to reach out to other unions to coordinate strike action, PCS has had to

take action on its own.

The union has been engaged in a war of attrition, with flexible tactics involving national and group action.

The next tranche of action will be headed by joint DWP/HMRC regional strikes in the week starting 3 June, potentially involving 140,000 PCS members.

There is also the possibility of strike action at the end of June to link up with the beginning of a rolling regional teachers strike, starting in north west England on 27 June.

A national teachers strike this autumn once again poses the basis for mass coordinated industrial action, up to and including a 24-hour general strike.

Time and time again in the group conferences, which preceded the national one, delegates heard of concessions being dragged out of management through group action - from stopping compulsory redundancies in DWP to protecting some workplace nurseries in HMRC - that has been almost a constant feature of union action over the past year.

PCS's role in heading up the general fight against austerity was highlighted in the debate on the welfare cuts.

The national executive (NEC) gave qualified support to a motion which called for non-cooperation with the vindictive sanctions against claimants.

The NEC made it clear that while all tactics should be considered, it must be to supplement the industrial action campaign, involving the maximum number of workers; but not allow members and activists to be isolated, which could open the door to victimisation.

Other debates included a possible merger with Unite and the issue of Scottish independence.

On Unite, a passionate debate saw motions with a positive attitude to merger but setting out clear 'red lines' of protecting PCS's lay member democracy, its fighting culture, and opposition to Labour party affiliation, passed on card votes.

This is a testament to members' determination to defend the culture that has developed in PCS since the previous right-wing leadership was ousted in 2000.

It also shows a total opposition to Labour that developed under the Blair and Brown New Labour years when 100,000 civil servant jobs were axed.

On Scotland, conference agreed to organise a debate among Scottish members that would see a special Scottish PCS conference determine the union's attitude to next year's independence referendum.

PCS has been engaged in a continual battle with the Con-Dems since 2010. Alongside other militant unions and the National Shop Stewards Network (see page 3), it has been a key organisation in the anti-austerity resistance, as well as trying to maintain joint action post-N30. This conference ensured that this role will continue.

Joint regional strike action by PCS members in DWP/HMRC will start from 3 June
see: www.shopstewards.net

PCS Land Registry delegates commit to action

Delegates representing PCS members from all Land Registry (LR) offices met in Brighton 20-21 May.

The key session of the conference debated LR's 'Business Strategy' and management's preferred GovCo business model, which together threaten 1,000 jobs and would take the organisation one step closer to privatisation.

Delegates unanimously endorsed resolutions that commit the Group Executive to mounting a strong tactical campaign.

Delegates also agreed that if any member is threatened with compulsory redundancy or if the Minister for Land Registry (Michael Fallon) approves a move away from LR's public sector status then members should be balloted positively for industrial action.

With strong leadership, a broad member based campaign and the threat and delivery of industrial action, privatisation and compulsory redundancies in LR can also be resisted.

Dave Lunn, PCS Land Registry

Strike action needed to save Royal Mail

Robert McArdle, Coventry (South Midlands CWU member)

A gigantic battle is currently underway at Royal Mail as to who should run this 497 year old service.

The coalition government and fat cat bosses are in the process of carving up and selling off the postal service to the highest bidder, while the public and the Communication Workers Union (CWU) oppose privatisation.

A consultative ballot is currently taking place among the CWU postal members on four key issues - privatisation, pay, workplace issues and unfair competition.

Workplace reps have been actively building the campaign for a yes vote in support of the union, with results expected on 19 June.

Recent figures showed Royal Mail made £403 million in the past year - while in public hands - although it has spent the past few years gearing up towards privatisation.

This has cost 50,000 workers their jobs over the past decade and terms and conditions are under constant attack.

Further than Thatcher

Customers have seen stamp prices increase dramatically in recent years as they pay the price for liberalisation of the postal industry.

Only a determined fightback from rank and file union members can stop the government in its tracks.

The Con-Dems are going even further than Thatcher, who refused to privatise the Queen's head. The coalition of millionaires is continuing its scorched earth policies - rushing through the privatisation of our postal service, even though the sale is hugely unpopular.

This is why postal workers, with support from the wider community, need to take action urgently if we want to avoid what happened after the privatisation of our railways and utilities. This is a weak coalition that has made more U-turns than a bicycle with a wonky wheel!

CWU general secretary Billy Hayes will be one of the speakers at the National Shop Stewards Network conference on 29 June and workers will be looking for a speech that delivers a strong, militant leadership that is willing to fight for its members.

7th annual conference of the National Shop Stewards Network

29 June 11am-5pm

The Camden Centre, Judd Street, London WC1H 9JE

See www.shopstewards.net

Wales TUC conference - a missed opportunity

Andrew Price, Cardiff Trades Council conference delegate

Wales TUC conference used to be an annual event lasting three days. Recently it was decided, wrongly, to reduce the conference to a two-yearly event, with a one-day conference organised in the interim. The interim conference met on 22 May in Cardiff.

This interim conference was given a very narrow remit, only being allowed to discuss motions on matters devolved to the National Assembly for Wales.

This enabled the Standing Orders Committee to rule out 15 motions submitted by affiliated organisations leaving only five motions and amendments.

All of this nonsense comes at a time when the working class throughout Wales faces an unprecedented attack from the Con-Dem coalition government.

Rather than submitting motions for democratic discussion, followed by a vote, the Wales TUC General Council issued statements that were both divisive and inadequate.

Hence the statement on austerity concentrated more fire on 'narrow political groups with megaphones' than on the Tories.

It proposed a bus touring Wales persuading MPs and Assembly Members to oppose austerity rather than mobilising workers to take the strike action necessary to defeat the Tories and their allies!

The one motion to offer a correct strategy in the face of cuts and attacks was from Swansea

Trades Council.

It opposed the NHS cuts being introduced by the Labour-controlled Welsh Assembly but was subjected to a brutal and undemocratic counter-attack from its opponents.

This involved a statement of opposition being made by the General Council before the motion had been moved or seconded followed by a phalanx of right-wing trade union officials taking to the rostrum to denounce it.

All of this led to the motion's inevitable defeat, although to their great credit the motion was supported by PCS, RMT, UCU unions and a number of Trades Councils.

However, positive motions were passed against the bedroom tax, on Further Education and on blacklisting.

It is now necessary for every Welsh trade union activist to ensure that the General Council does what these motions called for.

The Welsh working class probably suffers more from austerity than its counterparts elsewhere in the UK yet its leaders are tied to a hopelessly inadequate policy of 'partnership' with the Labour-controlled National Assembly- a body with no inclination to confront Tory cuts.

But at rank and file level there is the potential for change - witnessed by the recent successful launch of Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) in Wales, coupled with a successful fringe meeting at this conference, and by the growth in support for the Welsh Shop Stewards Network.

From these forces a new leadership must be forged that will reject the cowardly politics of compromise and collaboration giving the entire Welsh working class a leadership it deserves.

No future with care company Future Directions

Dozens of North West Unison union activists descended on Rochdale on the Bank Holiday weekend to support Unison members at Future Directions, a 'social care' company.

The 114 employees support people with learning disabilities in their own homes, and used to work for the council.

Privatised and run by a charity since 2006, in October last year the business was bought by

Future Directions, a private company 100% owned by Calderstones NHS Trust (work that one out!).

Ever since, they have been battling to maintain conditions of service against an all-out onslaught - holidays down from eight to four weeks, no sick pay for the first three days and only for one month, no premium rates, you name it, the company wants everything.

Unison balloted for three-day strike action to take place over the Bank Holiday weekend, and the workers responded with enthusiasm: 72% voted, 95+% voted to strike and the three-day Bank Holiday was selected.

Calderstone's NHS tried to get its own workers to scab over the weekend by offering to pay the very premium rates they want to deny their own staff! Prompt contact with Calderstone's Unison branch scotched that one.

Court injunction

Then, on the day before the strike was due to start - Saturday 25th May - the company gave notice it was seeking an injunction.

Set for a Manchester court at 1.00pm, the hearing was then transferred to Chester, giving the union the run-around.

The injunction to stop the strike was granted, on the same grounds that injunctions have been used against the RMT union, ie that the union had failed to supply the full details of the strikers' workplaces, which are of course the clients' homes.

Needless to say the management knew exactly where staff worked because they had demanded an exemption in every single client's case (several were agreed, including in the case of a terminally ill client).

So what should have been a strike rally nevertheless went ahead with workers who were off-shift, in brilliant sunshine and with big support from other branches.

Angela, who has worked for the service for 20 years, commented: "They say they have the experience but we're the only ones with the experience.

We are like family members to our clients. I travelled with one to visit his parents in France where they now live. We won't go down without a fight".

John Morrison, Unison steward, echoed her confidence: "We believe we will get our way".

This is a must-win dispute for Unison in the North West. A victory here would give heart to other care workers and to those still battling against privatisation. We haven't heard the last from the workers at Future Directions.

Paul Gerrard

This version of this article was first posted on the Socialist Party website on 28 May 2013 and may vary slightly from the version subsequently printed in The Socialist.

Fire service cuts

Lewisham 'ready for a fight'

In Lewisham, New Cross and Downham fire stations are threatened with closure.

Members of Lewisham Socialist Party joined the Fire Brigade Union (FBU) at the borough 'consultation' on Boris Johnson's fire service plan, which includes closing 12 London fire stations and cuts at many more, and axing 500 firefighters jobs.

All members of the public who spoke opposed the plans. Johnson's representative, James Cleverly, a Bromley member of the Greater London Assembly (GLA) was jeered when he said cuts will make London safer. So was the Liberal Democrat GLA member for supporting the coalition's cuts budget.

Two Socialist Party members were called in to ask questions. Susanna Farley called for demonstrations against the plans and occupations of threatened fire stations.

To cheers, she said that if the FBU decides to take strike action against the cuts it will get massive community support.

Cleverly replied that 'he hopes industrial action can be avoided'. The best way for him to avoid action is to withdraw the cuts plan!

Greg Randall asked the Labour GLA member on the platform whether Labour would reverse the cuts if they come back into power. The answer, basically "No", angered the audience.

Greg asked Cleverly whether he and Johnson are ready for a fight - they have certainly picked one with the people of Lewisham.

Workplace News in brief

UCU university pay

University management made their "final offer" of a 1% pay rise to workers on 21 May. The offer, a laughable improvement on the 0.8% second offer, falls short of workers' demands for an above-inflation rise to make up for some of the past four years of pay cuts, coupled with a living wage for all university workers.

University staff also want national agreements to close the gender pay gap which exceeds 30% at some universities, to bring workload to manageable levels, and to stop casualisation, as well as a UK-wide promise to stop redundancies - all things bosses have refused to take seriously in negotiations.

Of the five unions, UCU, Unison, Unite, EIS and GMB, who take part in the negotiations, Unison and EIS are already recommending rejection. Strike action could potentially begin as early as 23 October.

UCU's annual congress takes place on 29-31 May in Brighton but its negotiators are refusing to make a recommendation on the offer.

Congress should reject the offer and elect new, fighting negotiators. Most critically, UCU must avoid the fiasco of 2012, when an absentee leadership meant that of the five Higher Education trade unions only UCU failed to win a strike ballot on pay.

UCU is in budgetary crisis due to dropping membership numbers. Scandalously the UCU leadership has refused to rule out making union staff redundant.

To survive and thrive, UCU must adopt a fighting lead against cuts and job losses and show potential members the power of a union.

Edmund Schluessel, UCU member

Equinox strike

Workers at Equinox Care - a charity dealing with substance abuse problems - have voted (by 98%) for two days of strike action against pay cuts of up to £8,000 a year for many staff.

Unite, the union representing more than half the workforce, said the ballot result was "a massive vote of no confidence" in chief executive Bill Puddicombe.

Management proposes huge cuts for frontline staff directly working with some of the most vulnerable people in society. As a result, most staff face cuts of between £4,000 and £8,000 a year.

Two separate 24-hour strikes are set to be called, and further strike action is on the cards, unless the dispute is settled.

Tory hammer horror

"Hammer home the value of culture to our economy!" Thus spake Maria Miller, Tory culture secretary, this April. But entertainers' union Equity has been hammering this home since the recession began.

The 43,000-strong union's 2013 conference was mixed but positive. Equity is increasing in membership. It has won key battles on the minimum wage in fringe theatre, and credit-squeezing on TV.

Left resolutions on introductory fees and union democracy failed. However, reactionary motions against recent democratic improvements fell too.

There was a real increase in 'fresh blood' at this conference, which bodes well for the future. Let's show Miller the hams can hammer.

James Ivens

- Equity members interested in forming a united left group should contact james. ivens@gmail.com
-

Haringey TUSC: trade unions and communities prepare for 2014

Paul Kershaw

Sixty people attended the launch of the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition's (TUSC) anti-cuts electoral challenge for next year's local elections in the London borough of Haringey.

The meeting was chaired by local UCU union rep Jenny Sutton, who has stood as a TUSC candidate in previous elections.

Platform speaker Oktay Sahbaz, of the Day-Mer Turkish and Kurdish group that hosted the meeting, highlighted the plight of refugee and immigrant communities.

Frank Murray, Chair of Weir Hall Action Group and co-chair of Tottenham Concerned Residents Committee, showed how plans to 'regenerate' Tottenham were designed for profit rather than to help local people.

Speakers dealt with a wide range of issues including the murder of Mark Duggan, which sparked riots in the area two years ago, cuts to youth centres locally, and the need for trade unions to orientate to the unemployed and excluded.

From the floor, John Dolan of Haringey Unison quoted Labour council leader Clare Kober from 2011 who said that if a Labour government had been elected in 2010, that would still have meant £42 million cuts over three years in Haringey.

One floor speaker suggested that if the attendance list was used as a candidates list in the council elections, it would be a better and more representative list than Labour's.

Steve Hedley, Assistant General Secretary of the RMT transport union pointed out that a key difference between TUSC and previous attempts to create a left alternative to the Labour Party was the active involvement of the organised working class through the trade unions.

The RMT nationally backs TUSC and he called on people to get their trade unions to support TUSC either at local level or nationally.

Bobbie Cranney is standing as a TUSC candidate in the 6 June Walkergate ward byelection in Newcastle.

TUSC is also standing in the Southampton Woolston ward byelection on 13 June, with Sue

Atkins as the candidate.

Building the Socialist Party

'Brilliant' South West conference sees record turnout

Robin Clapp, South West Socialist Party secretary

"It was amazing to learn from some brilliant and thinking people yesterday. It was inspiring. Capitalism must end and I'd like to learn a lot more about how I can go about bringing about that change."

That was the verdict from Chris, one of three young people who joined the Socialist Party (SP) at the end of the largest South West regional conference for a number of years.

Delegates and visitors from 19 different towns and cities heard SP deputy secretary Hannah Sell deliver a thorough analysis of the volatile situation unfolding in Britain and Europe.

Over 20 members followed this up with contributions that dealt with attacks in the workplaces, organising the fightback, a programme for opposing the far right, and lessons from struggles in Greece and Spain.

Workshops

Workshops on challenging women's oppression, youth and workplace campaigning followed. Each resulted in practical initiatives - a regional women's meeting in July, Sick of Your Boss campaign plans, and an Exeter trade union meeting in September.

I introduced the closing session that looked at the progress made in the last twelve months. With a 50% increase in the rate of new members joining, every area has new campaigners eager to help build the socialist fightback.

It was agreed to build a SP branch in Somerset, starting with a Saturday 'super stall' in June. At a similar campaign stall in Poole, members sold 82 papers in four hours, raised £46 in fighting fund, with two people joining since as a result - who are now out campaigning on Saturdays themselves!

The conference mood of optimism was expressed concretely by a magnificent fighting fund collection of £1,125.

The last word must go to Matt Stabb from Trowbridge, who is new to our ranks but a veteran in the struggles of disabled workers: "Cheers for a brilliant South West congress yesterday! Thank you for making me so welcome! It was so good to meet other members and feel part of the good work that is going on."

Fund the fightback in the SP collectathon

Socialist Party members are preparing to launch a fundraising collectathon fortnight between 8 and 23 June.

Our members are out every day, campaigning throughout England and Wales, discussing how we can fight back against the bedroom tax, NHS cuts, cuts in council services and job losses.

We aim to use this fortnight to sell more copies of the Socialist and gain more donations to the Socialist Party's fighting fund.

We need this finance to produce leaflets, pamphlets and posters to get our message across that these cuts can be fought and that we can win.

This Con-Dem government of millionaires knows nothing of the lives of ordinary people and are indifferent to the misery that their policies are causing.

By contrast, in the pages of the Socialist you can not only find reports and stories about how these cuts are affecting our lives and our communities but also how workers are fighting back.

Above all you can find an explanation of what is wrong with this capitalist system and how we can change it.

Can you help? Can you spare an extra hour on those three Saturdays to help run a longer campaign stall to get those donations in? Can you plan a fundraising party, car boot or jumble sale to help raise some much-needed cash? Can you make a donation yourself to support the Socialist Party's campaigns?

Ken Douglas

Boosting South West Wales paper sales

Swansea Socialist Party had one of its most successful paper sales in the week that the Socialist's editor Sarah Sachs-Eldridge visited South West Wales to discuss 'the year of the paper'.

We sold 77 copies of issue 765, mainly from three stalls held in the centre of Swansea.

This bumper sale was due to a combination of campaigning on an issue that resonates with the public and organising to do extra paper sales.

The campaign against the bedroom tax is winning overwhelming support on the streets of Swansea, not only from people affected by the tax or who have friends and relatives who are affected, but from many others who recognise the cruelty and unfairness of the tax.

We had a very successful joint meeting with the Llanelli and West Wales branch, which sold 71 copies that week.

There was a very useful discussion on the role of the Socialist and how we can make better use of it - and sell more. We'll be making use of those ideas to boost our sales.

Owen Rogers

Socialist Party youth organisers meeting Sunday 30 June, 10.30am-4.30pm, London

Email clairelaker@socialistparty.org.uk or phone 020 8988 8777 for details

Come help Marxist CWI comedian Anti-Duhring Battalion get through to the second round of 'So You Think You're Funny' on Sunday 2 June, 8.30pm at Crack Comedy, The Grey Horse, 46 Richmond Road, Kingston, KT2 5EE

Oppose Kazakhstan regime's latest campaign

clampdown

CWI reporters

On 22 May police, in a dawn raid, entered houses and hostels in Astana where housing justice protesters from across Kazakhstan were being accommodated. More than 80 members of the 'Leave the People's Homes Alone' campaign were arrested.

Many have now been released but five leaders, including Esenbek Ukteshbayev and his partner Baxut Sulemenova, were summarily tried for organising an 'unsanctioned demonstration'.

Esenbek was sentenced to ten days imprisonment. Baxut was released with a \$130 fine. Another campaigner has been sentenced for seven days. Independent journalist Berig Zhakiparov was also arrested and detained by the police.

The campaigners had refused to be fobbed off with new promises from MPs of the ruling party Nur Otan.

They have demanded a revision of some of their housing debts, extra time to pay and also orders to stop any eviction of families from their homes.

Socialist Party Ireland MEP Paul Murphy has sent a letter of protest to the Kazakhstan Ambassador in Belgium.

Please send protests to UK ambassador Mr Kairat Abusseitov at:
london@kazembassy.org.uk,

and also send copies to: campaignkazakhstan@gmail.com

A video at www.youtube.com/watch?v=KQQn43PVBpc shows what happened when a delegation went in to 'discuss' with representatives of the ruling party of dictatorial president Nursultan Nazarbayev

South Africa: Eye-witness to the developing struggle

Over the past several months, the South African affiliate of the Committee for a Workers' International, the Democratic Socialist Movement (DSM), has been working with others to launch the Workers and Socialist Party (WASP) as a broad party of the working class aiming to unite the struggles of workers, communities and youth around a programme of socialist nationalisation.

Visits have been made by Socialist Party general secretary Peter Taaffe and national committee member Alec Thraves and other Socialist Party members have made more extended visits.

Here one of these visitors recounts the events and developments that occurred during their four months in South Africa.

The immediate background to the launch of WASP, the events that made it a possibility, was the rapid spread of strike action in the mining sector in 2012.

Then in August the police opened fire and killed 34 striking miners. The Marikana massacre was a watershed in South African society.

There is no doubt that this was planned with the collusion of the state, the mining bosses and the union leaders.

They were punishing workers for daring to take strike action to improve their living conditions and for taking their fate into their own hands by ejecting the right wing-led national Union of Miners (NUM) from the shafts and establishing independent worker-led strike committees to coordinate their action.

Even before Marikana and the 2012 miners' strikes, South Africa had been dubbed the world capital of protest due to the combativity of the working class and poor in the workplaces, townships and universities.

This has been a response to the African National Congress's (ANC) abject failure to address the burning social issues in the country following the overthrow of the racist segregation system of Apartheid.

The failure of the ANC is demonstrated by the growing inequality in the country. South Africa is more unequal now than when the Apartheid regime legislated for inequality and presided

over a brutal apparatus of repression to maintain it.

The growth in inequality since the historic 1994 election of the ANC is the direct consequence of the ANC's refusal to break with capitalism and instead to embrace it.

Building the DSM

The forces of the DSM are small but have grown rapidly in the past 18 months. In the course of the 2012 miners' strikes it gained a national profile in the media and dug deep roots among the mining communities.

Two of DSM's best branches are in the village of Chaneng in Rustenburg next to the Royal Bafokeng Platinum mine, and the Wedela branch, in a township outside Carletonville in the shadow of the Harmony Gold Kusaselthu shaft.

We organised a national conference of DSM to weld together our new recruits and instil the ideas and organisational methods necessary for building a revolutionary party.

More than half of the 50-plus in attendance were mineworkers from all the major mining communities. A broader national leadership - a national committee - was elected and has already held its first meeting.

A new edition of DSM's paper - Izwi Labasebenzi - was prepared for the conference along with DSM t-shirts, creating a real buzz and sense of identity.

The paper is vital in South Africa where poverty and dire infrastructure means that less than a million people, about 3% of the population, have regular internet access.

One of the attendees at the conference, a young miner from the KDC goldfields, had not formally joined.

He demanded we sort out his membership then and there and trembling with excitement exclaimed how he "wanted to join more than anything else in the world".

Following the three day conference, one of the miners went straight back to his township and went door-to-door with the new paper selling 50 to his friends and neighbours.

The profile of DSM and its growing reputation as the organisation that leads and wins struggles has opened many doors.

It is often approached by communities to come and help lead their 'service delivery' struggles

in the informal settlements and townships. These protests can take intense forms.

In one township, DSM members spent the entire night debating and discussing with a community struggling against electricity cut-offs, arguing that it would in fact set their struggle back if they carried out their plan of beating up the ANC councillor and burning down her house!

The transport union Natawu has asked us to organise a series of political education events for their shop stewards.

Launching WASP

Winning this layer to the banner of the CWI was no accident. The DSM carefully prepared its limited forces over the previous period, by turning towards the mining industry with the perspective that the class struggle would develop to a high crescendo in the near future.

It was this painstaking work that won us our first recruits from the mines and gave us political authority among the mineworkers when the strike wave began.

DSM members were able to address mass meetings of mineworkers organised by the independent worker-led strike committees that threw out the corrupt mining union, NUM, and organised the strikes themselves.

When we put forward the ideas of socialism and of building an independent party of the working class these ideas were taken up by workers as their own.

Working closely with the strike committees, it was at DSM's initiative that they began linking up, first across the platinum belt of Rustenburg, and later, into a national strike committee spanning the provinces of the North West, Gauteng and Limpopo.

Many of the new young strike leaders pushed forward by the workers have joined the DSM, including the chairman of the national strike committee.

Following the Marikana massacre one clear sentiment crystallised in the minds of millions of workers: this government does not support us and we need to build an alternative.

Towards the end of last year, the DSM along with a number of the independent strike committees began taking steps to transform this sentiment into a reality and the planning of the launch of what would become WASP began in earnest. The national strike committee formally backed the launching of WASP in early March.

The launch of WASP on the public holiday of Sharpeville Day (21 March) underlines the huge potential that exists.

Over 500 municipality workers from Pretoria attended the launch. These were workers that DSM comrades had helped lead in a successful dispute against the out-sourcing of their jobs.

In explaining why she was attending the launch, one worker commented: "These people have been with us through thick and thin".

Representatives of more than a dozen mines in gold, platinum, coal and iron ore attended and spoke at the launch.

The president and two executive members of the Natawu transport union also spoke from the top table. WASP's launch received extensive coverage in the media with leading members doing dozens of radio and television interviews.

Shifting debate

The launch of WASP and its profile in the mines, alongside that of the national strike committee, has had a significant mass impact and shifted the debate taking place in the country on the future of the ANC and the trade union movement.

Our forces are limited and WASP has yet to win a mass membership, but our enemies understand the danger that our ideas and our growing organisation represent.

No less than the deputy president of the ANC himself commented: "We keep hearing about the... [WASP]...or whatever and that seems also to be fanning the flames."

What these supporters of big business do not realise is they are viewing things back to front: it is not a case of the DSM or WASP pulling the workers' strings, rather WASP is the outcome of the conclusions that the working class are themselves drawing.

The Workers and Socialist Party (WASP) was launched on Sharpeville Day (21 March) to a packed hall of over 500 Pretoria municipality workers; mineworkers' delegates from a dozen mines in gold, platinum, coal and iron ore; and executive members of the 20,000-strong revolutionary transport union Natawu. The launch received extensive coverage in the South African media.

The initiative to launch WASP was born directly out of the experiences of the mineworkers in the course of their 2012 strike action.

The brutal repression and collusion of the state, the mine bosses and the corrupt union leaders, culminating in the Marikana massacre, crystalized one clear sentiment in the minds of millions: 'the ANC government does not care about us and we need our own political alternative'.

At a meeting at the end of last year, six of the rank and file strike committees that sprang up during the strikes, along with the Democratic Socialist Movement, agreed to take the step of launching WASP.

The mineworkers' national strike committee voted unanimously to back WASP at its meeting on 9 March.

WASP aims to unite the struggles of workers, communities and young people under one umbrella. WASP stands for the nationalisation of the mines and other sectors of the economy under democratic workers' control and management and intends to contest the 2014 general election.

- To help support WASP and the work of the mineworkers' national strike committee please send donations to:

c/o The Socialist Party

PO Box 24697

London

E11 1YD

Cheques payable to: "Socialist Party"

Please specify that the payment is a donation for WASP/mineworkers' national strike committee.

Receipts can be sent.

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Riots expose inequality in Sweden

Neoliberalism and police violence have created social time-bomb

Sweden, portrayed as an egalitarian and equal society, has witnessed unprecedented rioting by youth in a predominately immigrant area of Stockholm.

The unrest, which also spread to other parts of the country, erupted after a 69 year old migrant worker was shot dead by police.

These disturbances have taken place against a backdrop of fast-track neoliberal economic policies by the right-wing government leading to widening inequality and growing joblessness, especially among immigrants.

As Arne Johansson of Rättvisepartiet Socialisterna (CWI, Sweden) told the Financial Times: "Neoliberalism has been taken to an extreme here" (25 May).

From Offensiv, paper of Rättvisepartiet Socialisterna (RS - CWI Sweden)

Husby, a working class suburb of Stockholm, has in recent days been the focus of widespread unrest that has caught even global attention.

We have experienced evenings and nights with a large number of burned out cars, vandalism and stone throwing that was triggered by a brutal intervention of riot-equipped police.

On 22 May, RS initiated a protest, through a local campaign (Järvas Framtid - Network for Järva's Future), at Husby square with 500 people.

The meeting explained the roots of these events - the right-wing policies attacking living standards and services in the area - as well as criticising the police and arguing that vandalism is no way forward.

The riots started on the night of Monday 20 May and have spread to more suburbs around Stockholm. These areas, built in the 1970s and housing mainly low-paid workers with a large proportion of immigrants, have long been under attack from neoliberal policies in all areas - unemployment, cuts in unemployment benefits, housing shortages, school privatisations and constant cuts in local services.

In Husby, the public health centre was closed down and replaced with a smaller private one. Schools and youth centres have been closed, etc.

Young people have been especially affected. 570 young people aged 20-25 years in Husby - almost four in ten - have neither jobs nor studies to go to.

Poverty gap widens

In general, a recent OECD report showed Sweden having the fastest growing gap between rich and poor, falling from being the most "equal" to number 14 (of 34 OECD countries).

The results of Swedish schools have likewise fallen from among the best down to average or below average.

What triggered this week's dramatic events is undoubtedly the police intervention and shooting dead of a 69-year-old man.

This has raised strong criticism and anger among many local inhabitants, especially young people who often have personal experiences of brutality or harassment by the police. 'Something like that would never happen in the rich areas', is a widespread perception in Husby.

A local youth organisation called Megafonen organised a small demonstration demanding an independent investigation of the shooting by the police as well as a public apology to the man's relatives and local residents.

RS took part in the demonstration and supported the demands, adding our demand for

democratic control of the police.

When the violence broke out on Sunday evening, the police intervened brutally and with racist abuse against the youth and locals.

Credible witnesses say the violence only gathered momentum after a police dog attacked a mother who came there to get her 14 year old son away from the scene.

Adult locals, including two 'community hosts' were also subjected to baton blows and punched in the face by police.

They were also subjected to a stream of abusing words such as 'monkeys', 'fools', 'blackies', etc.

Blaming immigrants

Establishment media and politicians have been quick to condemn the riots. Prime Minister Fredrik Reinfeldt stressed that the inhabitants of Husby should 'learn the rules in Sweden', implying that immigrants are behind the violence.

The local sub-council leader, a conservative, said Husby residents should only be thankful and called its young people 'thugs'.

The media in general have no links to these areas and cannot understand what is going on. Of course people in Husby were also scared, angry and frustrated over the car fires.

At the same time as explaining the political roots to the riots, socialists need to take a stand.

In the first statement from RS on Monday, we wrote: "Although many can understand vandalism as a kind of protest, this is unfortunately completely misguided, destructive and divisive among the local population.

"Many who have seen their pizzeria vandalised, their cars burned and the 50 people who were forced to evacuate because the garage was on fire are now in danger of just shouting for more police."

We have also explained that it is wrong to simply hope that the spontaneous protests might convey a message that can induce rulers to make concessions.

Husby struggles

At the protest in Husby on Wednesday, Arne Johansson, editor of Offensiv and Husby resident, was the main speaker.

He condemned the police brutality and continued: "What is needed is a united struggle against the government and the council.

"We have always had a spirit of solidarity in Husby, a sense of pride for our neighbourhood. We are used to fighting together for what we want".

In fact, Husby, until the last few days, has been relatively spared from cars being set on fire and vandalism. The fact that there have been many local struggles is a reason for that.

Husby's residents have a long tradition of fighting for their interests, with RS playing a leading role.

A council plan for demolition of houses, luxury renovations and 70% rent rises was defeated in a struggle in 2007-08.

The same local network (Järvas Framtid) also fought and won against privatisation of the local swimming facilities and against the plan to adopt a local traffic lay-out that would have made it more dangerous for pedestrians. Other battles, such as against the closure of the health centre, have been lost.

At the street protest, local people were encouraged to speak and everyone was invited to further campaign meetings and protests.

Hammarkullen in Gothenburg, a suburb similar to Husby, has seen increased crime rates which recently culminated in gunfire.

RS organised a rally against violence and for improvements instead of cuts. 250 people came to the square with one day's notice.

"What Hammarkullen and other suburbs need is education, work and housing", said Kristofer Lundberg, RS Gothenburg, at the rally.

The head of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) has warned that escalating unemployment and poverty in parts of Europe, due to governmental austerity measures, could lead to increased civil unrest.

- 12% of Europe's workforce is unemployed, while 120 million people in the EU - nearly a quarter of the bloc's population - are at risk of poverty and social exclusion.
- In Greece and Spain over 50% of under-25s are out of work. In parts of Greece that

figure is 75%; while in Portugal youth unemployment has soared from around 30% two years ago to 43% now.

- The number of people receiving food aid from the IFRC has rocketed from 2.3 million in 2009 to 4.1 million today.
-

Sri Lanka: Working class beginning to move forward

Srinath Perera, United Socialist Party (USP - CWI, Sri Lanka)

A one-day protest general strike held on 21 May was a significant step forward for the working class in Sri Lanka.

It was called by the Coordinating Committee of the Trade Union Alliance as a warning shot against the huge hike in electricity tariffs by President Mahinda Rajapaksa's government.

Although the strike was not a complete success, it nevertheless sent a powerful message to the autocratic regime in this country.

In fact, the 21 May action was the first national token strike since the defeat of the historic July 1980 general strike.

In that respect it represents the beginning of a new era for the Sri Lankan working class.

Although the trade union alliance tirelessly worked round the clock to make the strike a success, its inability to reach out to important layers of the working class, mainly in the public sector and also in some private sector establishments, was visible.

The betrayals of the so-called radical, traditional trade union leaders of the LSSP and CP - who wavered initially and then tried to sabotage the strike - impacted on the majority of the working class who were bewildered by the government's massive anti-strike propaganda and frightened by various threats and intimidation from the bosses.

The different trade union leaders, linked to different political parties, are now being pushed to come together and take joint decisions to win the demands of the working class.

This unity must be consolidated by forming, at national level, a democratic workers' convention to discuss future plans, the problems faced by the working class, and to take

common decisions on future action.

Solidarity Day

Saturday 8 June,

4pm to 8pm.

School of Oriental and African Studies, Vernon Square Campus, Vernon Square, Penton Rise, London, WC1X 9EW

Contact: info@tamilsolidarity.org, Keerthikan@tamilsolidarity.org or 07778327044

www.tamilsolidarity.org

Rotten greedy banks still threaten crisis

Andy Beadle reviews the BBC2 series Bankers

On 15 September 2008, the big city bank Lehman Brothers went bust. Within days, lending between banks dried up.

Only a colossal government bailout let Britain's banking system continue. Across the world similar policies transformed the banking crisis into vast debts for national governments, which they try to pass on to ordinary people by cuts and austerity.

If you thought the original banking crisis had gone away, BBC2's recent "Bankers" series showed that banking methods have hardly reformed. The government is no better placed to face another bank failure.

Programme one covered the Libor scandal. Long after Lehman Brothers' collapse and Northern Rock's bailout, this corruption at the banking system's heart came to light last year.

Libor, an inter-bank lending rate influencing the level of every other loan on the market, is set by the big banks collectively but was unsupervised and unregulated by any outside authority like the Bank of England. The system was based on 'trust'.

Journalist Gillian Tett said she could not penetrate the banks' secrecy on how things are actually run.

Clearly banks, under pressure from shareholders to maximise profits, manipulated the Libor rate to conceal their financial difficulties.

Lord Turner, Financial Services Authority (FSA) chairman 2008-13 admitted he failed to intervene over "legitimate criticism".

Only in July 2012 did the governor of the Bank of England intervene. Barclays was fined £290 million and CEO Bob Diamond was forced to resign.

Royal Bank of Scotland was fined £390 million, UBS nearly £1 billion though no board members resigned. No other banks have yet been named.

The second part, dealing with risk, looked at banking giants MF Global and JP Morgan. Risk, the bankers say, is good.

In practice it's good only as long as you're lucky. Banks keep taking big risks, sure that the government will pick up the pieces if they fail.

In summer 2011 MF Global was one of the biggest financial bankruptcies since the crash. JP Morgan and its chairman and chief executive Jamie Dimon survive, though his bonus has halved - to \$10 million!

Both banks found ways of estimating risk - endorsed by regulators - which played down their recklessness.

When even those limits were breached, they simply found imaginative ways of estimating risk. Gillian Tett claims JP Morgan is one of the better-run banks - what are the rest like?

Mis-selling

This episode showed the underlying causes of 2008 are still widespread and a new crash could happen at any time.

The last episode covered the mis-selling scandal. All banks have been involved, ripping off

customers, destroying small businesses and ruining lives. Mis-selling could be £25 billion in Britain or £420 a person!

Former bank employees explained the pressures to sell customers products they didn't need. Pressure on staff was so strong the Archbishop of Canterbury confessed he might have succumbed.

A clip showed Gordon Brown praising the financial services sector's contribution. Many bank bosses got knighthoods from New Labour.

Bankers, commentators and politicians talk of the need to rebuild trust in discredited banks. But they were also determined to keep the banks free of all meaningful regulation or government supervision.

All could see the unfairness involved in banking secrecy and refusal to lend money to needy workers and small firms.

Yet none of them had an alternative to more of the same - undemocratic domination by the powerful financial services industry.

A new workers' party unfettered by corrupt links to these money barons could gain widespread support.

It would call for the banks - not just the ones in temporary difficulty - to be nationalised under democratic workers' control.

<http://www.socialistparty.org.uk/articles/16800>