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# Give us jobs not cuts

**Hannah Sell, Socialist Party deputy general secretary**

April 2013 will be remembered as the month when the government trampled millions of people at the bottom of British society into the dirt while millionaires got a £100,000 a year tax cut. Under the Con-Dem government 400,000 more children are going to be growing up in poverty.

In the last ten months alone the Trussell Trust has issued food parcels to 346,000 individuals and families, compared to 60,000 in 2010. Many of those queuing for food parcels are in work but in a world of pay freezes, benefit cuts and soaring rents and utility bills, are no longer able to make ends meet.

While prices are growing twice as fast as wages, the Resolution Foundation shows the median wage has fallen by £3,200 since 2009, to £21,700.

The Con-Dems say that the bedroom tax and the universal credit and other vicious cuts to benefits are to 'encourage people into work' but, as the PCS civil service union has been pointing out, there are not enough jobs. Many of those that do exist are low-paid and precarious.

John McNally, vice-president of the PCS, said: "The coalition government's cuts and privatisation austerity programme is working for the super-rich but for no one else - 2.5 million are unemployed and 6.8 million under-employed but there are less than half a million vacancies.

"Yet the coalition is determined to continue slashing public sector jobs and services in its ideological war to 'shrink the state'. This is despite the fact that for every public sector job lost, one, probably two and sometimes as many as three will also go in the private sector.

"PCS is fighting back against these attacks. The TUC should be implementing its policy of organising coordinated industrial action across the public and private sectors to oppose austerity and get rid of this government of gangsters and spivs."

PCS general secretary Mark Serwotka recently pointed out: "The real issue for the government is not making work pay, but making work exist."

There is plenty of work that needs to be done - a massive programme of high quality council house building to be let at rents which people can afford would immediately create thousands of jobs. The health service is running with dangerously low levels of staffing - filling those gaps with well-trained and properly paid workers would create more thousands of jobs. There are many more examples. The work is there and there are millions of people needing decent jobs.

What is missing is a democratic socialist plan of production which could run society in the interests of the majority, not the millionaires. If you want to fight for such a socialist society - join us today.

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## **Editorial of the Socialist**

# **Labour's offer limited to austerity-lite**

Anger at the Con-Dem coalition is growing as the prospect of endless austerity and economic crisis stretches out in front of Britain's population.

A massive 65% of people now say that they expect their children to have a much harder life than they have had.

In this situation Labour - as the opposition party - ought to be racing ahead in the polls. Instead, while it does have a clear poll lead this has softened in recent weeks.

This does not represent a surge of support for the governing parties, but disbelief that Labour has any real alternative.

Guardian columnist John Harris blurted out the fears of millions about a future Labour government: "If it carries on as it is, the party risks a national version of the tragedies currently being played out in Labour-controlled places all over the country, where councillors wail about Tory cuts and instigate them nonetheless. So 2015 is a date now fraught with danger: will it somehow mark the beginning of the end, or the same basic nightmare, unchanged but for the faces at the top?"

Harris is a loyal Labour supporter who normally puts the most optimistic left gloss possible on Labour's policy pronouncements.

However, the sight of every Labour council relentlessly implementing Con-Dem cuts is too much for him.

What a contrast with Liverpool city council, led by the Militant (now the Socialist Party) alongside others, which 30 years ago came to power promising to build high-quality council housing, leisure centres and nurseries, and to create good jobs.

By mobilising the population of Liverpool in a mass campaign it was able to defeat the Tory government and to introduce all these policies and more.

Last weekend 500 people attended a rally in Liverpool to celebrate the anniversary of that heroic council coming to power, a real demonstration of the enthusiasm that still exists for councils prepared to fight, declaring 'it is better to break the law than break the poor' (see below).

Labour leader Ed Miliband, however, is attempting to crush any hopes that his party would reverse austerity.

Labour's failure to offer anything fundamentally different to the Con-Dems was summed up by its abstention on the Workfare Bill, thereby denying thousands of unemployed people the compensation they were entitled to after enforced slave labour in the likes of Poundland.

## **Unite and Labour**

When Len McCluskey, general secretary of Unite, the biggest trade union in Britain and Labour's largest funder, warned Miliband he would be defeated if he was "seduced" by the Blairites, Miliband accused McCluskey of a "reprehensible" attempt to "divide the party" and take it back to the 1980s.

If Miliband was to put as much energy into attacking the millionaires' Con-Dem government as he put into his attack on McCluskey, Labour would certainly be further ahead in the polls.

Miliband also put out a press statement in which he denounced a general strike against austerity "as a terrible idea".

So Labour is demanding that trade unions do not organise strike action against the worst attacks on the public sector in 80 years, but instead wait for a Labour government... which is not promising to reverse the worst attacks on the public sector in 80 years!

Without doubt right-wing trade union leaders are pleading with their members to sit tight and 'hold on for a Labour government'.

But to fail to call a 24-hour general strike, as the next step in an on-going serious struggle against austerity, would be a terrible dereliction of duty.

Such a strike would be enormously popular; opinion polls have shown over 80% support for it.

As Bob Crow, general secretary of the RMT transport union, said at the National Shop Stewards' Network (NSSN) lobby of the TUC on 24 April: "If the TUC calls a 24-hour general strike, the young, the unorganised and the unemployed will join the unions".

Unfortunately, that TUC general council meeting did not name the day for a 24-hour general strike, although it did agree to organise a meeting to discuss coordinating action between those unions that are considering action. This must be immediately followed up with the maximum possible coordinated action.

Local government workers are facing a continued pay freeze - strike action on this issue could combine with at least the PCS civil service union and teachers in the NUT to create action on a similar scale to 30 November 2011.

This would be a vital step forward, but alone it would not be enough. Rank-and-file trade unionists need to conduct a major campaign to demand that the day is named for a 24-hour general strike.

At the same time the working class needs a political voice. Len McCluskey has argued that it is necessary to fight to reclaim Labour from the Blairites.

Central to his strategy has been a campaign to convince 5,000 Unite members to join the Labour Party.

So far, fewer than 1,000 have joined, reflecting that a majority of Unite members do not see Labour as 'their party'.

Even those who have joined have generally found an empty party, devoid of democratic structures for Unite members to participate in.

Miliband's attack on McCluskey shows that a fight to transform Labour requires far more than the removal of a few 'ultra-Blairite' shadow cabinet ministers.

A serious campaign would have to demand that Labour adopts a socialist programme. Key demands would include the repeal of all the anti-trade union laws and a pledge to reverse the cuts in public services.

It would be necessary to demand that Labour councils stop wielding the axe and 'take the Liverpool road' of refusing to implement cuts.

Also crucial would be the rebuilding of democracy within the Labour Party, which is currently non-existent at national level.

The trade unions no longer even have the right to move motions at the toothless annual conference.

A serious battle by Unite to reclaim Labour would be a step forward. However, the Socialist Party does not believe it would be possible to wrench the Labour Party from the iron grip of pro-capitalist politicians.

If we are proved right Unite would urgently need to draw the conclusion that it should join the struggle to create a new mass party of the working class organised around a socialist programme.

The Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) is doing vital pioneering work to help lay the foundation for the creation of such a party.

It has the support of Bob Crow and the RMT, along with other key trade unionists and socialists, including the Socialist Party.

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# IDS' 'wealthy pensioners' smoke screen

## Reasons for a 24-hour general strike

**Terry Pearce, Thames Valley National Pensioners Convention (personal capacity)**

The proposal by Tory Work and Pensions Secretary, Iain Duncan Smith (IDS), that "wealthier pensioners" should pay back universal benefits such as free TV licences, winter fuel allowances and free bus passes, is merely a cover to launch a full blooded attack on pensions and benefits

after the next general election. It is also an attempt to drive a wedge between pensioners and young people.

There are only 250,000 pensioners in the higher tax bracket. If the government wants to make these contribute more, it could raise income tax on the rich.

A pensioner told me recently that she paid £66.67 tax from a monthly pension of £526.27, while many high earners have just received a tax cut. In reality there are six million pensioners who are so poor that they pay no tax. Many are living in poverty.

## **Young and old, unite**

The National Pensioners Convention (NPC) reckons that every year pensioners contribute £40 billion to society in the form of taxes, voluntary work and unpaid care. In fact, without the work of pensioners, many areas of the voluntary sector would collapse.

We must not allow the Coalition to divide pensioners and young people. In October 2012 the NPC launched Generations United - an initiative to unite the generations to defend public services and the welfare state.

Pensioners make up eleven million voters. The Tories are wary of taking us on. If the Coalition is not stopped they will rip away the gains won over years of struggle by many workers who are now pensioners. Today's youth will be tomorrow's pensioners.

We cannot depend on the Labour opposition to defend the rights of pensioners or youth - Labour wants to review pensioners' benefits after the general election too. Pensioners are up for a fight to defend their bus passes, winter fuel allowances and to win decent pensions.

Let's tell IDS what he can do with his miserable attempt to heap the blame for the crisis on ordinary people - us pensioners will stand alongside all those in struggle, young and old, unite and fight.

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## **Them & Us**

### **Time for plan S**

Changes to the benefit system and recent welfare reforms are forcing a growing number of people to use food banks.

Nationally, the Trussell Trust gave three days of emergency food to 346,992 people in 2012-13 (up from 128,697 in 2011-12) and are opening three new food banks each week.

Coventry had the busiest food bank, with 12,513 people receiving emergency food parcels over the past year.

In the West Midlands, 39.6% of recipients were children - many with parents who are trying to cope with the rising cost of living, underemployment or unemployment.

The UK now has 345 food banks and lays testament to the failure of capitalism. Austerity and cuts continue to hurt the very people who are crying out for help, while at the same time the richest in our society increase their wealth.

George Osborne continues to wreck lives with his failed Plan A, it is time for Plan S - socialism!

**Rob McArdle**

**Coventry East branch**

## **Sharks**

Students at Somerville College, Oxford University, have been left disappointed after outcry cut across plans for their May ball.

Pitched as 'one last night of decadence, debauchery and indulgence' the ball was set to include a live shark.

A normal fish tank just wouldn't cut it when the cheapest tickets for the event cost £110.

Worries about animal welfare led the college principal to step in to stop the plans. But the evening isn't completely ruined - there's still catering by Michelin star chef Raymond Blanc, among other extravagancies.

## **Eurozone**

In a week of announcements of upsurges in profits for various banks and big businesses, another set of figures made clear that, for the majority, the crisis is far from over.

Unemployment across the eurozone has hit a record high of 12.1%, with nearly one in four young people out of work.

In the worst hit countries the situation is unbearable. The Spanish economy contracted for the seventh quarter in a row.

More than six million Spaniards are now unemployed. 80 families a day are having their homes repossessed and three million are living on less than £3,000 a year.

## **Hard times**

Bank of England officials have said that their non-executive directors, who get £15,000 a year for three days a month (that's £417 a day), are not paid enough. The pay does not reflect the workload, apparently.

If they want, I'll be happy to do the job at the current rate.

**Jeff Allen**

## **Keeping it in the family**

Boris Johnson's brother Jo has been given a post as head of Cameron's policy unit. Boris said he was pleased that there would finally be a Johnson in Number 10.

But the 'family' that really matters is probably revealed by the fact that Jo went to Eton and Oxford and got to know George Osborne when they were in the Bullingdon Club together.

## **Pseudo-science**

Jobseekers are being forced to carry out a psychometric test by the Department for Work and Pensions which bloggers have found is completely useless.

The test, My Strengths, asks how much users agree with statements such as "I never go out of my way to visit museums".

It then generated five positive personality traits such as 'love of learning' and 'originality'. But the same result is generated by inputting completely different answers.

Some claimants have been threatened with losing their benefits if they don't complete the test. The test is run by Downing Street's 'behavioural insights' department, costing £500,000 a year.

# What we heard

At the inaugural meeting of Ordsall Against the Bedroom Tax, chair George Tapp, former Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition candidate for the ward, had invited all three Labour councillors to explain the Labour position on the tax.

None of them turned up, but George had thoughtfully provided a cabbage to stand in for them, which he placed on the table. Someone shouted out: "the cabbage has got more principles than they have!"

**Paul Gerrard**

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## The 'precariat': fighting for real jobs

**Claire Laker-Mansfield**

'Get a job!' is the constant refrain of privileged Tory ministers and vicious right-wing tabloids. A million unemployed young people are the subject of a relentless campaign of smears and lies.

But what about the people who have 'done the right thing'? What about those who've been lucky enough to find work, despite the fact that, on average, five jobseekers chase each vacancy? According to the politicians and the media, everyone's on their side.

The toils of the low-paid worker are frequently invoked by Cameron and his ilk - usually as a supposed justification for benefit cuts. But is this sympathy genuine? Are the Tories really 'making work pay'?

Despite waxing lyrical about hard-work being the ultimate test of a person's moral fibre, the government's policies are really ensuring it's far less rewarding. Real wages have fallen by 10% since 2008.

Yet, big business's demands for a more 'flexible' and 'competitive' labour market are continually indulged.

At the behest of the multinationals, the Con-Dems gleefully attack employment rights and give the green-light for further squeezes on terms and conditions.

Their workfare schemes represent the ultimate expression of the race to the bottom. Taxpayers fund paltry dole payments for the unemployed, while companies are offered their labour power for free. Profits soar. Misery deepens.

## **Insecurity**

So for workers, finding a job can be a happy occasion. But it's a happiness often short lived. Because signing-off at the jobcentre rarely heralds the start of a new, stable period in a person's life.

The opportunity to settle into relatively secure living - confident that bills can be paid, rent supplied and that a regular pattern for work and leisure can be established - is a 'luxury' few are allowed.

Insecurity is the name of the game for huge numbers of workers. It's no wonder 'precariat' has become something of a buzzword.

Over 2.5 million people are unemployed including one million young people. Young people are also suffering severe underemployment.

Studies have found that underemployment has dramatically intensified since 2008. In fact the disparity between the number of extra hours people would like to work and those people would like to give up has almost doubled since the onset of the crisis.

But rather than sharing out the work - redistributing hours to those who want to work more (without loss of pay, as socialists demand) - capitalism reinforces this.

Older workers are told they must work more and retire later, meanwhile a 'lost generation' is left out altogether.

Zero-hour contracts are now almost ubiquitous. These represent the ultimate deal for employers. Workers are required to be ready to work on demand, whenever the company deems it necessary, but the employer is under no obligation to provide any hours at all - nor any wages.

People on these contracts live in a state of perpetual insecurity, never knowing whether next week will bring enough hours to pay the gas bill, to pay rent or even buy food.

Once hours are given, they're usually rewarded at minimum wage or close to it. Breaks are rarely paid, shift patterns changed at the whim of the boss and being bullied is a normal part of working life.

In fact, despite the rhetoric coming from the Con-Dems, many of these workers are actually dependent on state benefits for survival; benefits which are being capped, cut and scrapped altogether, ostensibly with 'making work pay' as the aim.

It's because of this that Youth Fight for Jobs has launched the 'Sick Of Your Boss?' initiative. We are aiming to work with trade unions and young workers to fight for a better deal.

It's only by fighting collectively that there's any hope of improving the lot of the 'precariat'.

## **Unionise**

As a starting point that means protesting, highlighting how workers are being treated, naming and shaming the bosses responsible.

But it's also necessary to get organised within the workplace itself. Trade unions can channel the potential power workers have and, through organising industrial action, fight for and win improvements.

The 'logic' of capitalism means that the interests of workers and the bosses are in fundamental opposition.

Put simply, the smaller the wage bill for the boss, the larger the profit margin for the shareholder.

It's only through working people being organised, and in particular, workers exerting economic power through withdrawing their labour - striking - that we have at times been able to secure increasing wages, greater security and other improvements.

'Liberalisation' of the labour market really means loosening all constraints placed on bosses - freeing them to pay workers as little as possible. It's an attempt to reverse the rights won by previous generations.

'Sick Of Your Boss?' aims to take the fight to some of the most exploitative employers in the business.

Many casualised young workers are left feeling isolated. Our campaign aims to give workers confidence from knowing they're not alone - the confidence that comes from organising and fighting alongside others facing similar problems.

We call for decent breaks that workers can take without being 'clocked off'. We're demanding pay that provides enough money to live on, without people needing benefits to act as a top-up.

And we're demanding an end to the 'zero hour contract' - proper contracts and full employment rights.

## **Unreasonable?**

Some would say that, in this time of austerity, it's unreasonable for young workers to be demanding a better deal.

They would say that we should be grateful we're not stuck in the dole queue like so many others.

But surely it's far, far more unreasonable that, in this time of austerity, the bosses are demanding a still greater share of the pie.

You'd think that they might be a bit more grateful for the billions they're already sitting on. You'd think that, in hard times, what we really can't afford, is to further swell the purses of the fat cats.

After all, theirs is money we're unlikely to ever see again. Because not only do the multinationals avoid and evade billions in tax, they are not even investing their money.

That's why fighting for a better deal for young workers is more than just dealing with bullying managers and nasty companies.

It's also about challenging a system that demands the super-exploitation of the many to satiate the greed of the few.

If, while in private hands, companies can't provide young workers with basic security and enough money to live, it's time they are placed in public hands.

And if capitalism - a system where the accumulation of private wealth is the only universal goal - cannot provide a bright future for the 99%; then we need a system that can.

We need to fight for jobs, for decent pay, for security, and for a system that will provide these to all - a socialist system - one run for us, not the bosses!

## **Sick Of Your Boss demands:**

- Decent tea and lunch breaks
- Give us proper contracts, guaranteed hours and full employment rights

- Pay us enough to live on
  - End 'fire at will'
  - We won't be used as cheap or free labour
  - We have the right to get organised at work
  - Scrap the anti-trade union laws
  - Build democratic campaigning trade unions
  - No to benefit cuts
  - Fight sexism and discrimination in the workplace
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## **Fastfood workers of the world, unite!**

### **Review of Manifesto of the Fastfood Worker by Socialist Alternative**

**James Ivens**

Fastfood is starving workers. New York fastfood staff have living costs four times their pay packets. The cry goes up: "we can't survive on \$7.25!"

The average fastfood CEO in the US makes more than twice in a day what staff take home in a year.

Fed-up workers in New York are making a stand. Last November, a strike hit dozens of outlets across the city. Demands include a \$15 hourly wage.

Since then, the Fast Food Forward movement has not gone away. Socialist Alternative (the Socialist Party's sister organisation in the US) has issued a reprint of its 2003 publication, the Manifesto of the Fastfood Worker. This pamphlet is an excellent campaigning tool.

Tony Wilsdon and Brent Gaspaire write about Pizza Hut staff in the state of Washington. They suffered low pay, no say in shift patterns and insecure work and a bullying management.

### **Dangerous work**

A worker interviewed by Socialist Alternative's newspaper Justice reported that pizza delivery is "one of the most dangerous occupations.

"Drivers regularly get into car accidents. We've had drivers robbed at knifepoint, shot at, and even one attacked by a bear!"

Delivery workers pay to fuel and maintain their vehicles. Bosses also imposed a \$1.60 delivery charge on customers.

Assuming this money went to drivers, customers stopped tipping. But drivers received just \$0.65 of the fee.

And of course fastfood workers receive no benefits such as health insurance. In the US there is no 'social wage' in the form of an NHS and welfare state.

Employee benefits are not a luxury. Their response? Organise a fightback: form a union.

Once, burger flipping was a stop-gap. But workers now are not just teenagers passing through. The Manifesto calls this "the great myth of the fastfood industry".

The US Centre for Economic and Policy Research found in 2012 that more than 60% of fastfood workers are over 25.

## **Advice**

The Manifesto goes on to give advice on underground organising in the workplace. Many workers have no experience of building a union.

Some, like me, will have lost a job for their efforts. The pamphlet outlines what to expect, who can help, and how to keep safe.

In spite of a valiant struggle and some victories, their campaign to unionise was not successful. But this was only after a massive and expensive anti-union onslaught. The lies and disinformation put about by management are all neatly debunked.

Even in strong union workplaces, the wealth workers generate is owned by the bosses. They can use this wealth to buy political representatives and lobby governments.

So the authors link the struggle in the workplace with the struggle to end this imbalance. Production and distribution of goods and services should be controlled by all, to be run democratically in the interests of the majority. Socialism.

The 2013 reprint of the Manifesto of the Fastfood Worker adds a new introduction by Jesse Lessinger, drawing on the key developments of the 2008 recession and Occupy movement.

Coupled with last autumn's Walmart strikes, which saw action in 100 cities across the US, Fast Food Forward represents a major new development in the labour movement.

There was a time when auto and steel workers were totally unorganised; they became the bulwarks of US trade unionism.

Service workers deserve a living wage and a say in the workplace. The Manifesto of the Fastfood Worker is rich in lessons for the struggle today.

And not just for American workers. Youth Fight for Jobs and Sick Of Your Boss in Britain need to learn from this experience too.

The pamphlet closes by recalling the seminal text of the socialist movement, the Communist Manifesto.

The words Marx and Engels put down in 1848 hold just as much power today: "We have nothing to lose but our chains. We have a world to win."

Fast food workers of the world, unite!

**Manifesto of the Fastfood Worker can be read in full at [www.socialistalternative.org/publications/fastfood](http://www.socialistalternative.org/publications/fastfood)**

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## Working for G4S

### G4S worker

Where I was first sent to, to work for G4S, took me two and a half hours to get to. It paid either minimum wage or £8 if I needed my Security Industry Agency (SIA) license, which was about half the time.

I had to pay the £220 to renew the SIA license myself. After I got it, I thought I would be offered more jobs and all jobs I was offered would be at the higher rate because I held the license. This was not the case.

I was then offered work at the O2 Arena, to work for the ATP Tennis Finals. This was only one hour from my house, but I found it was grueling work, having to be on my feet for up to 12 hours some days, with only three or four 20 minute breaks for food or anything else. This was also minimum wage.

Sometimes I was taken off the rota just a day or two beforehand. I would turn up to an event, on time and ready to work, and be told that they already had enough stewards.

I was told to write my name on a list and to wait in case they needed more. These lists often had up to 20 names on them.

Very rarely I would be offered a shift, the majority of the time I would be told to go home. I was told that I would be paid for an hour - not worth it, sometimes not even enough to cover my travel if shift began near peak-time. A couple of times they did not even pay me for an hour, they didn't pay me at all.

I think it's tragic that people feel we have no choice but to work for companies and under conditions like this, that we just have to take it. That's why I'm getting involved in Sick Of Your Boss.

See [youthfightforjobs.com](http://youthfightforjobs.com) for a longer version of this article

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## Sexism at work

### Amelia Roberts

When I was working in the advertising industry I found extreme amounts of sexism in the workplace and was made to feel like an outsider because I didn't conform to it.

I tried to create a great impression but was frustrated with the attitudes of the people working alongside me.

Some of the men made comments about my dress sense. "That's a nice skirt shame it's not shorter" and many others. I would walk away angry that I didn't say anything.

Then I found out a bet was being placed on which of my male colleagues I was going to sleep with. Disgusted by this, I spoke to a friend who told me, "it's just people talking, this happens everywhere."

After that incident I noticed that women in the office would just laugh sexism off and then talk about it with colleagues but would never actually say or do anything about it.

I started to lose my patience. With constant sexist jokes and inappropriate comments I had to say 'no more'.

One day one of the men grabbed my arm and made an inappropriate comment. I responded

with a threat that if he ever touched or spoke to me like that again I would take him to court and get him fired.

This was a big shock for many of the people in the company. I was told that I couldn't speak to people in that manner and it was just him being 'friendly'.

Word spread and, believe it or not, a few members of staff came up to me and congratulated me on how I had reacted.

For them it was just nice to see someone take action. Some may see it as only a small thing but after that I never had to deal with behaviour like that again.

It is estimated that 72% of women workers have experienced sexist bullying at work, while 85% believe that there is bias towards men in their workplace.

With figures like these it is shocking that more hasn't been done to stop this behaviour.

My message is that sexism and all forms of discrimination in the workplace are unacceptable. We demand respect and professionalism.

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## **Review of 'South Africa: The Massacre that Changed a Nation'**

**BBC2 Wednesday, 24th April**

**Alec Thraves**

In an hour long documentary, Peter Hain, Labour MP for Neath and a prominent anti-apartheid activist in his youth, returned to his native South Africa to try to discover why the ANC government is losing the support of the black working class and how it is now perceived after presiding over last year's Marikana massacre where 34 Lonmin mineworkers were killed by the police.

In a surprisingly devastating critique of the ANC's failure to ensure 'a better life for all, especially the poor' after 18 years in government, Hain looked visibly shocked and depressed when told during his visit by several traditional ANC supporters that after Marikana they would never vote for the ANC again!

Hain confirmed what the Democratic Socialist Movement (CWI section in South Africa) reported immediately after the massacre, that 'Marikana has changed South Africa for ever'.

DSM members didn't have to wait several months or hear the evidence at Zuma's showpiece Commission of Inquiry to find out what really happened because they were told immediately after the massacre by those strikers who survived.

Marikana was pre-meditated murder, consciously planned and with the collusion of Lonmin, the police and the government at the highest levels.

The film footage of the mineworkers being massacred brought home the disturbing fact to Hain that the brutality of South African capitalism still remains under a black majority ANC government. The report explained that the National Union of Mineworkers was exposed as being in the pockets of the mine owners and the ANC-aligned unions (in Cosatu) were used to stop strikes!

What was missing from the coverage after Marikana was the development of the unofficial strike committees which spread the strike movement across the mining regions.

They were initiated and led by DSM members and supporters and involved dozens of shafts and over 150,000 mineworkers.

## **Mandela and the ANC**

Hain inevitably highlighted the role of his hero Nelson Mandela and unwittingly explained his role in contributing to the dire situation facing the working class in South Africa today.

Mandela's objective, according to Hain, was black majority rule and a stable democracy. In order to achieve this aim Mandela agreed to allow capitalism to continue unthreatened, dominated by white capitalists, in return for a black government in office.

The result, after 18 years in power, has been a widening of the gap between rich and poor and a small, corrupt black elite growing on the backs of the impoverished masses.

Hain tries to convince himself that it is not all bad. He says the ANC has built three million new homes.

I've seen them in Johannesburg and Durban and they are not called matchbox houses for nothing - if you lie down sideways your feet will stick out of the door! They are poorly constructed, many without toilets and having inadequate electricity and water supplies.

He points towards the new ANC schools that have been built but the teacher I spoke to at Freedom Park Township had 60 pupils in his class and no text books, which is unfortunately the norm throughout South Africa.

A thoroughly despondent Hain tackled President Zuma about the corruption that is rife inside the ANC government both nationally and locally.

Zuma dismissed the claims, denied using £20 million of state funds to refurbish his luxury complex and blamed the media for exaggerating the problem.

Even Hain was almost speechless at this incompetent, arrogant and patronising presidential response which was indicative of how divorced from the masses these ANC leaders have become.

Ironically Hain turned to the ex-ANC youth leader, Julius Malema, to seek some oppositional views to the corrupt leadership of Zuma.

After Marikana and during the two month mineworkers' strike Malema tried to ingratiate himself to the strikers by demanding the nationalisation of the mines.

This was no ideological commitment but a populist attempt to gain support in his struggle against Zuma and to be readmitted back into the ANC.

Millionaire businessman Malema is drawn from the same corrupt mould as the rest of the black aspiring capitalists and is no friend of the working class.

## **Widespread deprivation**

Wherever Hain went during his two week visit the story of capitalist oppression remained consistent. In the Western Cape, farmworkers are expected to live on £6 a day but one farm owner generously allowed his labourers to 'eat as many grapes as they like and you'd be surprised how much they eat'!

In the Eastern Cape there is mass migration of the young seeking work; and being shot dead in the mines of Rustenburg! The families they leave behind have literally no money and try to survive on the land.

This is the reality of present day South Africa but Hain concludes this impressive documentary by trying to remain optimistic that the ANC will live up to its democratic legacy.

Such wishful thinking is not unexpected from a Labour MP tied to capitalism in Britain.

However, the experiences of the mineworkers and other sections of the South African working class over the past several months have drawn far more concrete conclusions of how to deal with a big business ANC government.

The recent initiative of the mineworkers' unofficial National Strike Committee, DSM and other working class groups, to launch the Workers and Socialist Party (WASP) in order to challenge the ANC in next year's general election is a huge step forward.

A socialist alternative to a corrupt government that's defending a brutal capitalist regime which presided over the Marikana massacre is the only solution to what Peter Hain described as 'deeply, deeply depressing'!

**[Watch this on iplayer](#) and send a donation to the CWI's 'South Africa Appeal' today!**

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Donations can be sent via the Socialist Party at PO box 24697, London E11 1YD, clearly marked 'South Africa Appeal' (cheques to 'Socialist Party'); or made via the [Donations page](#) on the Socialist Party website (typing 'South Africa Appeal' in the message field).

**For more articles on South Africa, the DSM and WASP, go to the CWI website [socialistworld.net](http://socialistworld.net)**

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## **Cyprus economic meltdown: Build a socialist alternative to austerity**

Although the media circus has moved on, the economic situation facing the population of Greek-speaking Cyprus is now even more dire.

Niall Mulholland, who has recently visited the island, reports on the challenges facing the working class and the Left organisations in particular.

The weather in Cyprus at this time of year is warm, with a refreshing breeze blowing over the island. The same pleasant balance cannot be said about the economy, which is in meltdown.

Last March, the Cypriot government, led by President Nicos Anastasiades, agreed to a €10 billion bailout package with the 'Troika' (International Monetary Fund, European Central Bank and the European Union).

In return, Cyprus was told it must raise €5.8 billion. The agreement saw bank depositors with more than €100,000 face big levies, hitting many small businesses.

The country's second largest bank, Laiki Bank, was closed down and its €9 billion worth of debts taken on by the Bank of Cyprus.

After a two-week closure, banks reopened on 28 March but with strict controls on the amount people can withdraw each day.

But, as if this was not bad enough, last week the already stunned and angry Greek Cypriots were told that the bailout had ballooned from €17 billion to €23 billion.

Cyprus has to find €6 billion more than the €7 billion mooted when the preliminary agreement was reached on 25 March.

President Anastasiades' right-wing government had already decided to impose swingeing austerity measures, bank closures, property taxes, privatisations of the three most profitable semi-state sector companies (electricity, telecommunications, and ports), and many sector job losses.

They are even considering selling part of the gold supplies of the Central Bank, worth €400 million.

Political scandal surrounds the government. Anastasiades has been forced to strenuously deny that he knew a legislative bill was being prepared for the deeply unpopular 'haircut' of all bank depositors prior to the European Group meeting in March.

Popular anger is aroused by reports that insider information enabled the rich to take out millions of euros from bank deposits before 15 March.

Officially the Cypriot economy is due to fall by 8.7% this year and by 3.9% in 2014. But many economists believe there will be a 10% fall in 2013, and a plummet of anything between 15-25% by the end of next year.

The government tries to dampen popular opposition to austerity by claiming the measures will not be as harsh as previously planned because some privatisations will be pushed back to 2018, there will be fewer cuts in education and the repayment of the bailout loans will start after ten years and will take 12 more years (in total, Cyprus will, in effect, be under the control of Troika for the next 22 years).

But this is cold comfort to the working class and middle classes who face years of austerity, job losses or emigration.

Unemployment is already sitting at 14%. 'Social markets' (modern soup kitchens) are springing up everywhere.

Working people also expect that, like Greece, the Troika will be in Nicosia every few months, demanding a new wave of cuts in return for bailout conditions.

The newspapers are full of despair. It is generally felt that the crisis is the worst since the 1974 Turkish army invasion.

The trade unions and Left need to ensure they lead mass struggles against austerity or there is a danger that nationalist forces and even the far right will gain the initiative.

This needs to include deepening relations with working people in North Cyprus, who have suffered their own austerity cuts for years, as well as developing common struggle with the working people in other countries of southern Europe that are hit by the Troika's austerity policies.

## **Class battles**

So far, apart from organising some protests during the March crisis, the unions have given no real lead.

The right-wing unions are in talks with the government about 'managing' the crisis. The Left unions, linked to Akel (Greek Cypriot communist party), rhetorically oppose cuts but do not call for any firm action.

Members of New Internationalist Left (CWI, Cyprus) participate in a broad campaign against austerity initiated mainly by forces affiliated to Akel, the 'Movement Against Privatisation and Austerity', but criticise its lack of a fighting programme.

The economic crisis is deep and will only get worse. A radical alternative must therefore be posed.

If the unions and Left fail to resist effectively, other populist, nationalist 'anti-austerity' campaigns can make headway.

Unlike Greece, which, in effect, has suffered 28 years of austerity, many Cypriots are unprepared for the very hard landing ahead after years of economic boom.

But looming class battles will radicalise more and more Cypriots in the next months and years.

In anticipation of coming struggles, the New Internationalist Left puts forward a socialist alternative.

This includes repudiating the debt, nationalisation of the banks under democratic public control and management, opposing privatisations, breaking with the bosses' euro, and for the public ownership of the key industries and major utilities, to enable the economy to be democratically planned to serve the needs of the majority, not the profits of bankers and the speculator minority.

A new powerful Left needs to be built in Cyprus, with the aim of forming a government based on the needs of working people.

The situation facing Cypriot society is desperate; only a bold, socialist, internationalist programme can resolve the crisis in the interests of the majority.

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## **Bangladesh building collapse - casualties of a**

# rotten profit system

It is said that where labour is cheap, life is cheap. This is never more so than in the recent horrific deaths of over 400 garment workers crushed in a collapsed building in Dhaka, the capital of Bangladesh. Hundreds are still missing and a further 1,000 workers were injured.

The disaster led to spontaneous protests by thousands of low-paid garment factory workers throughout the city who demanded justice for the dead and injured. Police attacked demonstrators using tear gas and rubber bullets.

The opposition Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), a capitalist Islamist party, has opportunistically called for a national strike on 2 May. When in power previously it did nothing to advance workers' rights.

According to media reports, the day before the disaster inspection teams had found huge cracks in the building's structure.

But while shops and a bank on the lower floor immediately closed the owners of the garment factory above told employees to continue working, despite the obvious safety risks.

## Exploitation

There are an estimated 5,000 factories in Bangladesh paying around 3.2 million workers as little as £24 a month to make clothes for western-based companies such as Primark, Matalan, Wal-Mart, Benetton, etc.

This is not the first time such a catastrophe has happened at a garment factory in the area. A similar collapse occurred in 2005. And only last November, a fire at another garment factory in Dhaka left 112 dead.

Despite repeated assurances from brand importers and local authorities that they would ensure the safety of workers and eradicate substandard buildings, it's clear from this latest disaster that nothing has changed.

The building's owner, arrested along with six others, is reportedly well connected to the ruling Awami League and the BNP.

It is clear that the bosses both globally and locally will not protect workers when there are vast profits to be made; neither will the Bangladesh government as the garment industry accounts for 80% of the country's export earnings.

Trade unions should pressure clothing companies into binding agreements on health and safety for workers in ex-colonial countries.

Only strong union organisation can fight to improve workplace health and safety and drive up wages to acceptable levels.

The building of effective trade unions won't, however, be easily achieved. Last year trade union activist Aminul Islam was murdered and the police have not solved the case.

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## **Local government: fight for decent pay, terms and conditions**

**Glenn Kelly**

Local government employers have come back with their so-called final offer for this year's pay deal - a miserable 1%. For a worker on £20,000 a year, this offer will mean 10p an hour extra before tax and national insurance. For the many workers on lower pay than this, it will be even less.

In eight of the last 12 years local government workers' pay increase has not even matched the inflation rate and for the last two years we have had a pay freeze. So members are rightly desperate to stop the slide in their living standards.

While it is good that the employers have not felt able to attack other terms and conditions at this stage, they have issued a clear warning to the unions that they want to go over the heads of national negotiations and help councils locally and regionally to attack things like sick pay and allowances.

The national employers clearly want to reduce the national negotiations to only include pay and leave the rest to be fought out at a local level. This will be the beginning of the end of national bargaining if not fought.

Both the miserable pay offer and the threat to our terms and conditions must be met with a clear response. Local government workers must make it clear that we won't accept this and we will fight it through national industrial action linking up with all the other workers facing attacks at the moment.

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# Justice for 'the 33' sacked tube workers

## Used, abused and refused

## Sack the agency not the workers

In 2007, London Underground (LU) took over a Trainpeople agency contract from Silverlink. Ignoring their agreements with unions to make agency workers permanent after six months, LU continued to employ workers through the Trainpeople agency, paying them as little as £6.75 an hour, instead of giving them permanent LU contracts.

Then LU initially ignored the 2011 Agency Worker Regulations (AWR), refusing to give the Trainpeople workers equal rights with permanent staff.

After winning equal pay - but still owed thousands of pounds in back pay - the agency workers were sacked in December 2012 when LU ended the Trainpeople contract one year early.

The RMT transport union is campaigning for all 33 to be re-employed as permanent staff.

### **Three of the 33 spoke to the Socialist about their struggle**

First account:

I used to work for London Underground on the north end of the Bakerloo line from Queens Park to Harrow and Wealdstone for five years.

During that time I carried out frontline duties such as working as a Customer Service Assistant and a Station Assistant Multifunctional (ticket office clerk) in full LU uniform but without any of the benefits a permanent employee is entitled to, no travel pay, sick pay, pension, etc.

In those five years I applied continuously for a permanent position and continuously was refused. In those five years of service for LU I have attained many successful achievements and appraisal from management within LU.

In October 2011 the AWR came into place, and I hoped that at last I would see a light at the end of the tunnel.

Unfortunately the agency, Trainpeople, and LU made a mockery of it. They both ignored the law and continued exploiting us and refused us our rights according to AWR.

When questions about our rights were raised with the agency and LU via our union, RMT, they showed no intention to respect and obey the law.

As we raised questions and explored our rights LU dramatically terminated the contract.

We were given this news on 19 December 2012. When everyone was looking forward to celebrating their Christmas, I was in the opposite mindset, not knowing where and how I will get the funds to pay for my house, bills, food, etc.

This was to be my worst nightmare. I could lose my house and all the money I put into it and be made homeless.

After receiving such horrible news I was depressed, unable to think straight. I haven't been working for nearly four months; I have had no income coming during that time.

I have sold so many of my personal belongings just to try to fund my bills. I can't eat or sleep well and now I haven't got anything else to sell.

According to the AWR I am owed up to £15,000 in back pay, I am yet to see a penny of it.

All my rights have been refused and now I am being humiliated continuously by the very same company that I respectfully and professionally served for five years.

Second account:

I started in February 2009. I was paid as little as £6.75 compared to what LU paid their staff, as much as £17.76. Almost three times as much! We were being treated as second class citizens - modern day slavery.

I was doing CSA and SMF [Customer Service Assistant and Station Assistant Multifunctional]. When you are in charge of a small station, you are in charge of everything - you are the manager, you do the announcements. If something happens on the station you are the one in charge.

A new group station manager took over around 2010. He said he was going to do everything in his power to get rid of the agency workers, not knowing that one of us was there and overheard him say that.

To accomplish this, he had trained supervisors and DSMs [duty managers], but they were trained by some of us - we trained them! We train them but we are not good enough to get these jobs!

We wrote to Trainpeople about the new regulations and our position. But still they didn't say anything until we hired a 'no win, no fee' lawyer. Am I supposed to hire a lawyer to get paid?

In November 2011, there were vacant internal positions - we applied. The feedback we got was: 'awaiting assessment'.

Between November 2011 and March 2012, we didn't get any response. They finished the recruitment campaign and said they wanted to recruit internally, so they moved us from internal to external! Then I was sent back the same afternoon to do the work which I was not qualified to apply for!

For the Olympics the permanent staff got a bonus. We worked, filled in for holidays, but didn't get any bonus.

After the Olympics the LU bosses were commended - OBEs etc. I contributed; if I hadn't done my work properly, I would have jeopardised the awards they received. I didn't even get a thank you!

Other train companies, when the agency law came in, took the agency workers in.

RMT have set up a hardship fund but we're still struggling. I can't provide for my children any more. That is why every other day I come to the LU headquarters to make a noise.

LU have taken on 550 more people - if you are recruiting 550, why don't you take on 33 who have been working for five years?

Third account:

We have achieved both 100% 'mystery shopper' ratings and commendation letters. We have covered all sorts of posts that need to be filled, eg ticket office clerk, barrier staff, etc.

We have a proven track record and some of us can speak French, Arabic and Italian which helps in communicating with customers.

LU claimed to have launched a fair and transparent recruitment policy.

But we have been told we cannot reach the "benchmark".

We were carrying out the same tasks as non-agency, permanent staff. We have also trained duty station managers and station supervisors. At no point was our quality of work ever called into question.

One of our colleagues dealt with a 'one under' fatality - someone going under a train. But when he sought counselling, he was told that he is not qualified as he was not a London Underground employee, even though he was fully uniformed!

We are devastated and depressed by the loss of our jobs. We've protested outside the stations and LU offices, and outside London City Hall. We have also got coverage in the local Hammersmith and Fulham newspaper.

One of our colleagues has become homeless and many others are on the verge of becoming homeless. Some are walking two miles a day to go to a soup kitchen because they cannot afford food.

Our positions have been filled by 33 totally new staff and I believe it will cost £10,000 per person to train them - in total £330,000.

I am a father of three who is now unemployed. I was the only breadwinner of the family. I used to take my nine-year old daughter to supplementary classes.

She was getting excellent literacy and numeracy grades. Now I can no longer afford the tuition fees. I'm now being supported financially by my grandparents to survive. I have been roundly used, refused and abused by LU bosses.

---

## **Support the 33**

**Join their protest at Edgware Road tube station (District Line entrance), 8am, Friday 3 May**

**Send donations to RMT, 39 Chalton Street, London NW1 1JD**

**Please make cheques payable to 'RMT' and mark on the back 'Hardship fund for the 33'**

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

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# Saying no to blacklisting in Southampton

Unite activists from the Southampton area came together on 25 April to join the growing voice of workers across the country speaking out against the illegal practices of employers blacklisting union activists from employment.

Unite members explained what the blacklisting meant: "They want workers to be fearful of joining unions.

"Sites are not safe. Fawley refinery has operated a blacklist for 30 years. It is not a safe place to work, accidents are covered up for fear of the sack."

Malcolm Bonnett, Unite regional officer for construction, said: "Companies like Kier are big beneficiaries from council contracts and to build social housing. It is time councils stopped giving money to companies like this.

This is about safety at work. We have to stop the fatalities. We want direct employment and to get rid of agencies and payroll companies ripping off our members."

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## Unison health conference

### Fight to rebuild the NHS!

#### Socialist Party correspondents

The Unison Health Care conference took place at a time of unprecedented attacks on the NHS, pay and workers' terms and conditions.

"Unison members are in the eye of the storm and we need to make a stand," commented Unison general secretary Dave Prentis.

But what followed showed the abject failure of the Unison leadership to provide any way forward.

Rather than "making a stand" the Unison Service Group Executive (SGE) opposed every single motion and amendment that called for the union to mobilise its strength to fight the cuts.

There was even opposition to the call for a national demonstration in defence of the NHS.

Yet the answer to the lie that NHS workers are not prepared to strike is given, for example, by the magnificent struggle of Unison members in the Mid Yorkshire NHS Trust and Thera East Midlands, reported in previous issues of the Socialist.

Len Hockey, from the Waltham Forest Health branch, pointed out that: "26 March 2011 saw 750,000 take part in the biggest ever labour movement demonstration.

"This was followed by the 30 November and the biggest coordinated strike since 1926. We can deliver mass support for action when we act."

The Unison leadership opposed this saying: "let's keep a national demonstration as an aspiration and make sure there is a demand there first."

John Malcolm, from Tees Esk and Wear Valleys Health, effectively answered this capitulation by highlighting the huge demonstrations of over 25,000 in Lewisham and up to 50,000 in Stafford that proved "when a lead is given there can be a response".

Speaking to a composite on pay Socialist Party member Roger Davey called for a ballot for industrial action unless the pay review body increases its 1% pay cap.

Helen Ridett from South Lewisham, Gary Freeman, Brian Loader and other Socialist Party members brought crushing examples of the way in which the cuts were affecting members and the huge potential to organise a struggle.

The SGE's response was: "we only fight if we know we can win, pay is not an issue just now, it's defending jobs and conditions."

But the leadership were also opposed to national action over attacks to terms and conditions. National agreements have been eroded as a result of concession bargaining.

Rather than placate employers, this has only emboldened them to go further in attacking national agreements.

It's clear from the conference that the Unison leadership sees no alternative to cuts. 'Wait for a Labour government' is the largely unspoken strategy of the leadership. Yet Labour has refused to commit to reversing any of the Tory cuts.

Socialist Party members are standing in the current national executive council elections to provide a fighting leadership, a leadership that rejects concession bargaining and fights to mobilise the members and local communities into a mass movement to defend and re-build

the NHS as part of a struggle to defeat austerity.

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# Land Registry: Fight Con-Dems' privatisation plans

**A PCS member**

As well as trying to sell off Royal Mail, the government apparently has its eyes on Companies House, the Land Registry, the Met Office and Ordnance Survey.

This will raise alarm bells for workers in all these organisations. But the Land Registry's public sector status is already under scrutiny with up to 1,000 of the current 4,500 jobs under threat over the next five years.

The Land Registry maintains a register of freehold and leasehold land across England and Wales. This provides security for land and home ownership and allows people to easily and securely buy and sell property.

But the Land Registry's current purpose is now: "to enable the release of economic value in land and property and related data markets".

This signals the organisation aligning itself with the market rather than delivering a public service.

The Land Registry has been in existence for more than 150 years but there are still vast swathes of unregistered land.

Significant amounts of this are likely either to be held by wealthy trusts or owned by corporations. Consequently this land remains in the same hands from generation to generation.

This means that the trigger that requires registration (the sale of land) is never reached. The land's ownership remains hidden and consequently there is no accountability.

A more comprehensive register would provide greater transparency for the ownership of land in England and Wales, but for this to become a reality, this needs to become a compulsory process.

PCS, the largest union representing staff in the Land Registry, believes that Land Registry staff

have the necessary skills to expand the role of Land Registry into planning and controlling the use of land.

This could have massive social benefits in addressing the housing shortage and for the environmentally friendly use of land.

It is vital that the Land Registry remains in the public sector with enforceable powers backed by the weight of government. This will also be crucial to maintain public confidence in the conveyancing process.

PCS has indicated it is prepared to launch a massive campaign to defend members' jobs, terms and conditions and crucially the Land Registry's civil service status, potentially including the use of industrial action.

On 18 April, to compound the worries of workers, Michael Fallon the business minister, appointed Ed Lester as the new Land Registry chief executive.

Lester previously worked for the Student Loans Company (SLC), the privatisation-related problems there have been well documented.

Worse still, it has been reported that he was paid through a private firm - a tax avoidance mechanism.

This has not been well received by low-paid civil servants in the middle of a two-year pay freeze. Workers are worried that his appointment is part of the rush towards privatisation.

The Land Registry has won awards for being a flagship employer, but it may end up sailing on the sea of privatisation with the Jolly Roger overhead.

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## **Unison: Defend the Four**

On 3 May, after nearly six years of a tortuous fight with the Unison bureaucracy, an employment tribunal remedy hearing is to be held.

This is to finally resolve the outstanding issue of the illegal action that was taken against four Unison members, Glenn Kelly, Suzanne Muna, Onay Kasab and Brian Debus.

These four Socialist Party members have been subjected to a sustained witch-hunt after leafleting Unison conference in 2007.

They were falsely accused of racism and banned from holding office in the union for between two and three years each.

The employment tribunal ruled that Unison acted illegally. The union appealed against the original decision and lost.

They were going to the High Court but pulled out. The next stage for the Four is to seek financial compensation.

- For more information see: [www.stopthewitchhunt.org.uk](http://www.stopthewitchhunt.org.uk)
- 

## Workplace news in brief

### Swansea RMT

Train managers working for First Great Western were on strike on 26 April over the sacking of a guard.

Alec Thraves spoke to Peter Skelly, full time RMT regional organiser on the protest outside Swansea station: "The one day strike has arisen because one of our train managers [ticket inspectors/guards] has been disgracefully sacked after an incident which occurred on a train when he was on leave.

"This incident was never reported by any passengers, train manager nor the transport police who were called to the incident.

"Our member, some weeks later was called to an interview and dismissed, his appeal failed and he remains sacked! That's why our members have voted to take this day of action.

"This could obviously have serious consequences in the future for our members. First Great Western seem to be adopting a 'shoot on sight' policy which our union is determined to oppose by all means necessary."

### Fight DfE closures

Department for Education (DfE) staff have been told that six of the offices in England will be shut, putting around 500 jobs at risk.

This includes Runcorn, where low-paid staff will be forced to move or commute to Manchester to work in a building that is due to be demolished.

The PCS union's 1,800 members, who in March held a two-hour strike against the plans, will walk out from 3-5pm on 1 May.

The offices which are being closed are Runcorn, Bristol, Histon, Guildford, London (Greycoat Street) and Nottingham (Lime House).

The DfE closures follow a review involving consultancy Bain and Company, which recommended cuts deeper even than those demanded by chancellor George Osborne.

PCS believes education secretary Gove is using the DfE as an ideological test-bed for wider civil service cuts.

## **Anti-academy strike**

A lively picket of 30 teachers gathered at the gates of Hamstead Hall secondary school in Birmingham on 25 April as part of a one-day strike against management bulldozing through plans to become an academy.

One NUT rep commented: "If it ain't broke, don't fix it. If Ofsted have said we're a good school, why should we have to transfer over to being an academy?"

**Nick Hart, Birmingham Socialist Party**

## **NSSN lobbies the TUC**

The National Shop Stewards Network lobbied the TUC on 24 April, to argue for a general strike against austerity.

For a full report see [TUC: Set the Date](#)

## **The 7th annual conference of the NSSN**

**29 June 2013 11am - 5pm in the Camden Centre, Judd Street, London WC1H 9JE**

Speakers include union general secretaries: Mark Serwotka, PCS, Billy Hayes, CWU and Steve Gillan, POA. [info@shopstewards.net](mailto:info@shopstewards.net) PO Box 54498, London E10 9DE

# Liverpool: Rally marks 30 year anniversary of election of socialist council

## Great event remembers the '47' struggle

**Dave Walsh, Unite Convener for Liverpool City Council**

Almost 500 people attended an exhibition and tumultuous public meeting at the Adelphi hotel in Liverpool on Saturday 27 April to mark the 30th anniversary of the socialist Labour council.

That council confronted Thatcher's Tory government and defied its cuts and austerity. The meeting marvellously recreated the mood and fighting spirit of the 1980s in Liverpool.

Loud applause and enthusiasm greeted every platform speaker and contribution from the floor.

This was not a meeting for nostalgia, but brought out the lessons of the Liverpool struggle for the battles needed today, raising important points about how they can be fought.

The number attending was impressive given the fact that it clashed with a North West teachers' conference as well as a Unite Community branch meeting.

To warm applause, Felicity Dowling, one of the 49 Labour councillors elected in May 1983 (now the '47') listed the names of the councillors who had passed away, and also giants of the Labour movement former MPs Eric Heffer, Eddie Loyden and Terry Fields.

She was scathing about those who now make common cause with Labour's right wing, accepting the 'inevitability' of cuts and austerity.

## Trade union speakers

National DWP president Fran Heathcote from the PCS union - that had locally hosted the rally along with Unite - said that the tremendous stand made by the 47 needs to be replicated today in order to inspire a new generation of young activists.

She also declared that the PCS would continue to give leadership in the fight back against austerity.

Len McCluskey, General Secretary of the union Unite and a key supporter of the Militant-led 1983 to 1987 council, made a powerful speech.

He said that when his support was requested for the 47 commemoration project he had no hesitation in backing it and speaking at this event because he was proud of what the 47 had achieved.

He called for current Labour councillors to emulate the 47 and declared, to claps and cheers, that the government would be powerless if every Labour council refused to carry out cuts.

## **Role of the Militant**

Socialist Party general secretary Peter Taaffe, co-author of the book Liverpool - a City that Dared to Fight, then contrasted the Labour Party of the 1980s with New Labour, saying it was now a hollow shell incapable of representing the interests of working class people.

He declared to loud applause that Militant's (now the Socialist Party) strategy of 'Can't Pay, Won't Pay' defeated both the Poll Tax and Margaret Thatcher.

He called for a massive campaign against the bedroom tax which he stressed can be beaten.

Peter told the meeting that the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) can play a key role in building an alliance of all forces that are willing to fight for a socialist alternative, with the trade union movement being the bedrock of a future alternative mass party of the working class.

He also emphasised that the mass campaign in Liverpool was key in compelling Thatcher's minister Patrick Jenkin to release funding worth £60 million to the city.

Tony Mulhearn, Liverpool Labour Party president in 1980-85, detailed the catastrophic situation that the 47 inherited.

Sixty-five per cent of the Merseyside economy had collapsed. He declared to applause that it was a slander when Neil Kinnock stated that the crisis had been 'of the 47's own making'.

He described the present minister for local government, Eric Pickles, as the most repulsive symbol of austerity, 'squatting like a bloated toad without compassion or empathy for the needy, declaring that if social provision doesn't make a quick buck, close it down'.

Referring to Liverpool Labour mayor Joe Anderson, he added that the only thing more repulsive was when Pickles called on Anderson to jump, Anderson responded by asking 'how high?'. This was greeted with laughter and cheers.

## **Tony Benn**

Former Labour MP and cabinet minister Tony Benn was welcomed on to the stage by Peter Taaffe, where he received a standing ovation.

Tony said he had been inspired by the courage of the 47 and had always been reinvigorated after addressing so many mass meetings in Liverpool. The support given by the people of Liverpool never failed to impress him.

## **Rousing contributions**

The contributions from the floor continued the theme of the platform speakers.

Southampton Labour councillor Keith Morrell received a huge ovation when chair Paul Astbury (one of the 47) introduced him as a brave councillor who had been suspended from the Southampton Labour Party for voting against cuts.

Keith declared that New Labour's implementation of cuts should be opposed by all councillors.

Transport union RMT Executive member Daren Ireland declared his support for the 47 and emphasised the commitment of the RMT to support TUSC as the alternative coalition for all workers who are now effectively disenfranchised.

Mark Hoskinson, secretary of Liverpool Trades Union Council, said that the book *A City that Dared to Fight*, by Peter Taaffe and Tony Mulhearn, showed the way forward for today. 'We have to dare to fight' he stressed.

Juliet Edgar from the Bootle bedroom tax campaign, called on the trade unions to back all the campaigns against austerity.

Jerry Tyrrell, a TUSC supporter, condemned the Labour-supporting Fabian Society for suggesting that pensioners should pay their 'fair share of austerity'.

This meeting marked a big step forward for the Labour movement in Liverpool and augurs well for the development of successful campaigning today.

There was also a great exhibition of posters, photos, etc, giving facts and figures about the

Liverpool struggle and those who participated in it.

***Union conferences are being urged to display this exhibition; details can be obtained from Dave Walsh on 0796 951 1796.***

***The exhibition can be viewed at Jack Jones House in Liverpool until 14 May 2013.***

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**Liverpool: A city that dared to fight, by Peter Taaffe and Tony Mulhearn**

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## **Scotland: Anti-bedroom tax federation launched**

**Nicola Crawford and Jim McFarlane**

On Saturday 27 April over 250 delegates and visitors from across Scotland attended the conference to found the All Scottish Anti-Bedroom Tax Federation.

Delegates were sent from 70 local anti-bedroom tax campaigns, and four trade union branches representing local government and Housing Association workers also attended.

Brian Smith, secretary of Glasgow City Unison and a member of Socialist Party Scotland, chaired the conference.

The conference began with Gary Burns of Govan Law Centre. Gary talked about the Centre's petition campaign to get the Scottish government to change section 16 of the Housing Act. This would prevent evictions taking place.

## **SNP**

Sandra White, Scottish National Party MSP, pledged to physically stand with anyone in her constituency threatened with eviction.

However, she ruled out the need for her government to change section 16 to prevent evictions.

She also opposed the demand for the Scottish government to spend just £52 million a year to ensure that no one on housing benefit would be worse off, stating "if we began down that road where would that end?"

A number of delegates were angered by her dismissal of the idea of using the Scottish government block grant to make up the shortfall lost to housing providers.

The SNP has already offset the Con-Dems' cut to council tax benefit by taking this approach.

White called for those present to vote for Scottish independence in September 2014 as the only sure way of defeating the Con-Dem cuts.

This drew criticisms from a significant number of speakers who demanded that the SNP government stand up now and fight to defend working class people.

## **Founding statement**

The founding statement, unanimously agreed, included ideas Socialist Party Scotland has prominently raised in the campaign such as the building of an anti-eviction army to physically oppose any attempted evictions

The statement called for the writing-off of any debt accrued due to the bedroom tax and supported the building of new social housing; as well as the important demand to oppose all cuts and austerity measures.

Jim McFarlane from Dundee Bin the Bedroom Tax Campaign outlined how the campaign there put pressure on the local council and ensured that Dundee was the first council in the country to pledge no evictions, at least for a year. This was a welcome concession but doesn't go far enough.

There had been some debate leading up to the conference on whether politicians who oppose the bedroom tax in words but vote for cuts should be welcomed uncritically into the federation.

Accepting support from people who support other cuts or attacks on the working class damages the credibility of the campaign.

Sinead Daly from the Ardler campaign in Dundee pointed to the example of communities organising to prevent warrant sales taking place during the struggle to get rid of the poll tax.

Ian Leech, Glasgow Unison rep and delegate from Glasgow Southside talked about the need to link up communities and trade unions to oppose all cuts.

We also need a mass party that represents trade unionists and working class communities as none of the main parties oppose the cuts agenda of big business and the Tories, he said.

Luke Ivory, a delegate from the East End of Glasgow campaign and Socialist Party Scotland member, got loud applause when he declared that if the existing political representatives were not prepared to oppose the cuts then we should look to stand against them.

Luke was elected Federation secretary and Tommy Sheridan was elected chair.

The closing session heard from trade unionists and Tommy Gorman, a prominent activist involved in the fight to save Disability Day Centres from Labour party cuts in Glasgow.

Tommy Sheridan closed the conference with a call for an all Scotland demonstration against the Bedroom Tax on 1 June.

He reminded the audience of the momentous battle against the poll tax and the tactics and strategy used then that would be just as relevant today.

Full report see: [www.socialistpartyscotland.org.uk](http://www.socialistpartyscotland.org.uk)

# Council Tax: Con-Dems turn screw on poorest

## A benefits advisor

For the first time this April, hundreds of thousands of the poorest in society received a shock with their post - for the first time, they will have received a bill for their council tax.

Under the new council tax rules, Council Tax Benefit has been abolished and replaced with Council Tax Support.

With this, each local authority will have its own scheme - the total available budget, though, has been reduced by a massive £480 million, or 10% of the previous total.

What this means is that, for many thousands of claimants, they will have to pay council tax for the first time.

If you are on very low wages, or on benefits, you will now have to claim from the local council.

The rules for this are much the same - except that each council has to decide how much of the cut they are going to pass on to Council Tax Support claimants.

Some councils have deferred it, some aren't making any charge. Others, like my own council in Liverpool, have decided that the poorest in society must pay 8.5% of their council tax bill; in neighbouring Knowsley, it is 20%.

Of the 43,500 working age claimants in Liverpool, 37,000 will have to pay for the first time, with the others having to make higher payments. For those on full benefit, this means at least £1.70 a week, £88 a year.

This can mean crossing the borderline between survival and starving for many. Already, the agency I work for runs out of food vouchers as soon as we can get them in; we are now having to refer people to a soup kitchen run by a local church.

The benefits people get are worked out as the minimum needed for survival. How on earth can this already meagre sum be reduced even more in a "contribution" towards Council Tax Support?

People are coming into my agency terrified of the future, of how they are going to manage on reduced housing benefit after the "bedroom tax", of how they are going to find the extra £6-

£7 a month for the Council Tax Support reduction.

## **Fightback**

That mood of despair could be turned into a fighting spirit of hope even if only one council were to stand up to the Con-Dem government and refuse to pass their cuts onto ordinary people and instead launch a fighting campaign against cuts and austerity.

Heroically, a handful of councillors have stood up to be counted; in Liverpool, not one councillor has had the guts to support the people they were elected to defend.

With no council elections in Liverpool this year, they think they have a breathing space before they can be brought to account.

We need to build a movement that, this year and next, can show the real feelings of ordinary working people towards this government and those in the Labour Party who have deserted the fight.

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## **Harlow benefit rebels**

Harlow Council is demanding that a terminally-ill jobless woman pays council tax, according to a local protest group.

Harlow Council Tax Benefit Rebels came across the case in the course of its campaign for the restoration of 100% council tax relief for jobless householders.

Spokesperson Wat Tyler said: "Harlow council demonstrates utter callousness in demanding council tax from someone unable to work as a result of a terminal illness."

"It is disgusting. Mike Danvers, the councillor responsible for implementing this policy, was himself taken to court 20-odd years ago for refusing to pay the Poll Tax on the grounds that he thought it was unfair."

"We refuse to succumb to the council's bullying. Jobless householders can persuade Harlow council to back down if we ignore its threats and continue our refusal to pay.

Harlow council privately admits that it is not worth taking people to court for small amounts, and has budgeted for an expected mass default. We continue to say: Can't Pay? Don't Pay!"

More information: 07745193048; wat2013@hotmail.co.uk;

[www.benefitrebels.blogspot.co.uk](http://www.benefitrebels.blogspot.co.uk)

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## In brief

### Plymouth

Plymouth city council has voted 34 votes to 20 to write to the government asking it to scrap the bedroom tax.

Forcing the Labour council to vocalise objection is a good first step but this is only the beginning of the struggle in Plymouth.

The campaign group Plymouth Against Benefit Cuts, which has been set up mainly by Socialist Party activists, will be reaching out into the communities affected by the bedroom tax.

Plymouth city council needs to be pushed to act against the bedroom tax, not just posture for the sake of winning favour for future election campaigns.

The bedroom tax is not the only cut people are being hit with. Cuts to council tax benefits will affect even more people.

This is something that was barely discussed in the full council meeting on 22 April, except for the council to state that it is willing to use bailiffs to evict those who accrue debts from non-payment of council tax.

This is outrageous and we must campaign for the council to pledge not to evict tenants affected by welfare cuts.

We need to demand that the council really stands up for the people of Plymouth and pledges not to implement any of these cuts.

If they refuse, the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition will stand anti-cuts candidates against them.

**Ryan Aldred, Plymouth Socialist Party**

## Ordsall

Over 50 people attended a lively launch of Salford's newest anti-bedroom tax campaign, on the Ordsall estate on 25 April.

George Tapp of Salford Pensioners' Association convened the meeting, backed by the Unite union.

Hugh Caffrey from the Socialist Party outlined this vicious attack by the bankers' government on the poorest people, which Labour opposes in words but implements in practice.

Steve North brought solidarity from the local trades council and Salford Unison, representing over 5,000 workers in Salford. Steve reported that the trades council has adopted a position of 'no evictions'.

Tony Moore, Jarrow marcher for Youth Fight for Jobs, said young people face a future of living at home with their parents as the bedroom tax makes it unaffordable to move.

Salford's May Day march will be the next demonstration for the Ordsall campaign on Saturday 4 May - 10am at Bexley Square, off Chapel Street, Salford.

A further meeting will take place in a fortnight and a demonstration will be held outside the Salix Homes office in Ordsall.

**Salford Socialist Party reporters**

## Campaign material

Socialist Party anti-bedroom tax posters and leaflets are available to assist party branches build for public meetings. Orders to 020 8988 8777

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## Southampton Labour council leader quits as anti-cuts pressure grows

## Build a new mass workers' party

**Nick Chaffey**

Under pressure from the dire budget crisis and growing opposition from anti-cuts campaigners, Southampton's Labour council leader, Richard Williams, dramatically resigned.

Without previously informing members of his group, he quit and walked out of the special council meeting on Thursday 25 April.

The meeting had been called to hear the report of an investigation into the council leadership's response to the resignation from the council cabinet of then fellow Labour councillor Keith Morrell in May 2012.

Labour had just won control of Southampton for the first time since 1999 and Keith had been appointed as cabinet member for improvement and efficiency.

But within days it was clear that Labour would not keep the promises it made in opposition to defend council services and so Keith resigned, writing to Richard Williams explaining why.

Unwilling to accept his resignation on such political grounds, Williams issued a press release claiming Keith had resigned due to ill health!

Over the subsequent months Keith and fellow 'Against the Cuts' councillor Don Thomas have proved their political fitness by challenging the decisions of the Labour group to implement Con-Dem cuts.

With the backing of council unions Unite and Unison they fought the closure of Oaklands swimming pool and were suspended and then expelled from the Labour Party for doing so.

They supported the vociferous campaign to defend youth services from closure and presented a 'no cuts' budget amendment to the council budget meeting in February (see <http://www.tusc.org.uk/press180213.php>)

## **No to austerity**

So fearful were Labour of allowing such ideas to be publicly debated they refused to allow the no cuts amendment to be heard.

But under intense pressure from the Save Southampton Youth Services campaign, concessions were made and some services were temporarily reprieved.

Pressure on the Labour group and its leader has grown as the impact of the cuts is being felt. Council union leaders have been vocal in criticising the Labour council as jobs and services are

cut.

The unravelling of what was another example of New Labour spin over Keith's 2012 cabinet resignation may have been the apparent trigger for Williams walking - but the real reason is the growing opposition in the city to the establishment parties' shared austerity agenda.

Williams' resignation has sparked a byelection in the city's Woolston ward. What is becoming increasingly clear to people is the need for more councillors like Keith and Don, prepared to fight against the cuts.

That's why the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) will be standing a candidate in Woolston, to send another anti-cuts voice to shake up the council chamber!

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## **Doncaster: For a mayor that would really stop the bedroom tax!**

On Saturday 27 April, 18 Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) supporters were out campaigning for 'Mary4Mayor' in Doncaster town centre on a successful day despite the distractions of rain, security guards and the racist English Defence League (EDL).

Frenchgate shopping centre security tried to move us from under the centre's overhang, claiming private property.

We stood our ground and an hour later the Town Centre manager explained to the security that we were on a public footpath. TUSC 1, security 0.

The Grimsby EDL were out 'on tour' in Doncaster, handing out leaflets attacking TUSC. We must be doing something right if in this election, out of the ten candidates, the EDL feel they have to single out TUSC to attack. TUSC 1, far right 0.

And we even beat the rain, selling 60 socialist newspapers and raising over £50 in public donations.

Earlier in the week, a dozen people attended the Thorne Against the Bedroom Tax public meeting called by the Mary4Mayor campaign.

Spontaneous applause interrupted Mary's speech three times as she explained why she was standing for mayor and her policies, especially her commitment to scrap the bedroom tax in

Doncaster.

## Rare sight

TUSC has been campaigning for Mary4Mayor out on the streets of Doncaster for over five weeks now, but on 26 April we saw the Labour Party out for the first time! Around a dozen Labour people with balloons and leaflets were near the markets.

'What's going on,' we thought, 'have they realised that the mayoral election is next Thursday?' Then we saw the regional ITV news interviewing Labour candidate Ross Jones. So they'd turned up just for the cameras. Half an hour later they had gone.

Meanwhile, people queued at our TUSC stall campaigning against the bedroom tax, which Labour leader Ed Miliband won't even commit to repealing! There was lots of support for Mary with several supporters taking posters.

The campaigning is having an influence. On 28 April, Doncaster council announced a £1 million hardship fund for residents affected by the bedroom tax.

But as Mary said: "If Doncaster council and mayor really want to help, then they should reclassify properties as not having 'spare' bedrooms and refuse to evict any tenants for bedroom tax rent arrears."

One person at the bedroom tax meeting said that she would not have been able to eat this week after paying her bedroom tax if a friend hadn't lent her some money.

This shows why we have to organise to beat the bedroom tax, kick out the Tory government and elect a working class mayor on a worker's wage.

## Building TUSC in Newcastle byelections

**Paul Phillips, TUSC South Heaton candidate**

In the 25 May South Heaton ward byelection in Newcastle, TUSC polled 69 votes - 5.3% - increasing our vote by 1% from last year, finishing in fourth place out of seven candidates. TUSC beat the Tories, Newcastle First - 'Ukip in disguise' - and another independent

During the election campaign there was sheer anger at the bedroom tax.

The local Newcastle Labour council have been trying their hardest to justify a £100 million cuts budget where we will see the closures of ten libraries and all youth services! Labour won the

byelection, but with 1,100 less votes than in the 2011 poll.

Though the Greens - with a national media profile and an MP in Brighton - finished second, they were not offering any alternative to the cuts. The Lib Dems finished third.

This election has allowed us to set a foundation down for future polls and TUSC will be campaigning from now until next year so residents of Newcastle have a clear anti-cuts socialist alternative to vote for.

TUSC also stood Rory Jobe in the Castle ward byelection, getting 47 votes (1.8%).

## **Leicester: hostel beds cut as homelessness rises**

**Tessa Warrington, Leicester TUSC byelection candidate**

Michael is homeless. I spoke to him at a three-night sleep-out, the latest protest organised by homeless action group Streetlife.

The Labour-controlled Leicester city council cuts of £2.2 million - a third of the homelessness budget - include plans to close two hostels and turn a third into an 'assessment' centre - a loss of over 200 beds.

At the same time, council tax benefit cuts of 20% and the bedroom tax, will increase homelessness. But the council claims that hostel beds are not being filled.

Michael was born in Leicester. After serving in the armed forces as a medic in Bazrah, he developed Gulf War syndrome - which was not yet recognised in the UK as a medical condition. So Michael settled in Germany and had a family.

When he separated from his wife he moved to Spain with a further deterioration of his health. However, recently the status of his condition was changed, disqualifying him from disability benefits.

This has forced him to return to the UK to work in order to continue receiving benefits.

When he came back, Michael had nowhere to live. His mother is disabled and living in a one-bed bungalow.

However, the council's Housing Options Centre said he did not 'fit the criteria' to qualify for a

bed.

He was unable to get a place in any of Leicester's hostels and had no choice but to sleep rough for an entire week.

Physically and mentally exhausted, he sat through the night on the steps of Leicester's most central hostel.

When an outreach volunteer arranged for provision of a bed, Michael found that in a dorm of ten, seven beds were empty.

People are denied a bed by the Housing Options for not 'fitting the criteria'. No wonder the hostels aren't 'full'! Sadly, Leicester's street corners are.

**Tessa is the Abbey ward TUSC candidate in the 9 May Leicester city council byelection**

## **TUSC against cuts**

The Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition is standing 121 candidates, in 20 of the 35 councils with elections this year.

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

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## **Thatcher funeral day event in Newbridge**

The 17th of April was not a day to remember Margaret Thatcher. It was a day to reflect with pride on the working class heroes who fought her.

That was the verdict of the crowd in the Newbridge hotel, in South Wales. At the front of the club was the South Wales NUM banner with the slogan "The past we inherit, the future we build through socialism".

The mood in the club was buoyant. People wanted to remember how the miners' strike had brought everyone together to fight, but also they wanted the young people in the crowd to know just what forces the state had been prepared to use to try to crush us.

Ron Stoa, Penallta Colliery NUM lodge secretary, spoke about how you had to drive over the

mountain just to get to Celynen South to picket, because the police were sending back all the cars on the main road that had more than one man in them, even if they were going in to work at the local Girlings plant.

He told about reporting to sign in twice a day at the police station when they were bound over to 'keep the peace' and identifying themselves as "the enemy within" just to wind up the officer on duty.

Ron told how the police - supposedly impartial - went around trying to get people to go back to work. How when they went to Orgreave, for once there were no road blocks, because the police were luring them in - how men were driven over a 20 foot drop at a culvert and how the police wrecked the town when men fled there.

## **Solidarity**

Ron talked about how deeply everyone felt the solidarity from near and far; how solid the organisation was - scabs were as rare as Tories in South Wales, after all - and how women who had never been involved in anything before had risen to the challenge, starting out organising food, moving quickly onto the picket lines and then on to speak at meetings of hundreds of people.

All through the 25 minute speech young people at the front sat rapt, drinking in every word. When Ron had finished, the applause roared through the room.

People gathered round to shake Ron's hand and then they spent the rest of the night glad to be all together, proud to be South Wales miners and their families.

**Mariam Kamish, South Wales NUM**

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## **Welsh Labour: less class-consciousness than a nine-year old?**

On the day of Thatcher's funeral, my nine-year old son, Harry, came home from school to say that they had been made to watch part of the ceremony.

I was just reaching for a pen to compose an angry letter to the school when Harry told me he had already complained himself.

When his teacher asked why he objected, he said that it was "... because of what she had

done to the miners and because she lied all the time". It made me a proud dad.

Unfortunately, it seems that some of the leaders of Welsh Labour haven't got an equal class understanding.

Welsh government First Minister, Carwyn Jones, was among the great and good of Labour who went to the funeral to pay their respects.

When Neil Kinnock said that Thatcher had been "... fortunate in her enemies", I thought he had come to a belated understanding of the role he had played in extending her premiership, by attacking socialists rather than the Tories.

Unfortunately not; he wasn't referring to himself but to Arthur Scargill. If Kinnock had shown the same understanding of who the class enemy was as Scargill, or even my son Harry, then we wouldn't have had to wait until the poll tax to turn the iron lady into scrap.

Welsh Labour's honouring of Thatcher is one more indication that we need to build a genuine, fighting, alternative to bury everything she stood for.

The TUSC Wales organising meeting (Saturday 27 April) is hopefully a step in that direction.

**Ronnie Job, Swansea**

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This version of this article was first posted on the Socialist Party website on 26 April 2013 and may vary slightly from the version subsequently printed in The Socialist.

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<http://www.socialistparty.org.uk/articles/16582>