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Axe the killer tax: End the bedroom tax now

"Don't blame yourself for me ending my life. The only people to blame are the government." This was what 53 year old Stephanie Bottrill from Solihull said to her son in a note she left for him before she killed herself because of the bedroom tax.

Because of the Con-Dems' bedroom tax Stephanie was told she would lose £20 a week from her housing benefit. Struggling to make ends meet, subsisting on tinned custard, it is reported that she told neighbours: "I can't afford to live anymore."

Stephanie's son Steven was quoted as saying: "They haven't thought it through properly, how it will affect people. For my mum £80 a month is a huge amount of money but for people who are on huge salaries who have gone to Eton it is a different world.

"She was struggling already, it was a lot to ask for. All the winter she didn't have the heating on. She wrapped up warm, she had hot water bottles even when she was watching the telly. In 2013 in Britain you can't imagine this. To live like that."

Stephanie had the auto-immune disorder Myasthenia gravis, which meant she couldn't work, though she was never officially registered disabled so received no disability benefit. She had agreed to downsize to a smaller property but the council had nothing available.

This is a tragedy made in Westminster by a government that wants to make working class people pay for the crisis of the bankers, the super-rich and the capitalist system they represent.

Socialist Party members in Birmingham know some family members. To them it's clear that the bedroom tax made things just seem impossible for Stephanie.

Stephanie didn't want to be a 'charity case', one relative said, adding: "I wouldn't say the government killed her but they were definitely accomplices."

That millionaire ministers make things so much worse and demoralise people when they attack as scroungers and skivers anyone who needs benefits to meet the impossible gap between low incomes and rising rent and living costs.

The Sunday People concluded: "This tragedy is a game changer. It demands a fundamental rethink of housing benefit reform..." Referring to the bedroom tax it said: "This broken tax

cannot be repaired. It must be stopped."

The Socialist Party calls for a mass movement to ensure this vicious and now murderous measure is binned for good. Our communities must try to defend people within them to ensure that no-one else feel so isolated and helpless when faced with these problems.

Pro-cuts parties to blame in suicide tragedy

Labour has been attempting to present itself as the party that opposes the bedroom tax. Asked about this case, Ed Balls said that there was "no doubt this policy is driving people to the edge of despair... Now I'm for tough welfare reform but not hitting the most vulnerable, the disabled, it's not fair."

Socialists and most campaigners think all the welfare reforms are unfair. And in reality Labour is not even against the bedroom tax - Labour leader Ed Miliband could not bring himself to pledge that a future Labour government would repeal it.

As well as dire misery for those affected the bedroom tax has unleashed a fury - it is seen as totally unfair. People all over the country are starting to organise themselves to stop it. The Socialist Party is part of this and is calling on councils to refuse to evict and fundamentally to refuse to implement the Tories' murderous policy.

Dave Nellist, former socialist Labour MP, said: "All anti-bedroom tax campaigners will feel sorrow for Stephanie's family and their loss - and anger that this despicable, uncaring law has claimed her life. The Socialist Party wants to organise groups in every community so no one else feels lost or alone as Stephanie did.

"The best way to make sure no other person or family feels such pressure is for them to know their friends and neighbours will stand with them in solidarity. That's the spirit that beat the poll tax, that's the spirit that will beat the bedroom tax. And just as we forced Mrs Thatcher to retreat over that, we'll force this generation of Tories, in the Con-Dem government and in the councils that carry through their policies to the word, to back down as well."

We have no faith in any of the capitalist parties to make such a clear stand on the side of ordinary people - tied as they are to the 1% super-rich. The Socialist Party is part of the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition which is calling for 'no cuts' candidates to stand in elections to give a voice to the millions who oppose the government's misery measures.

- Scrap the bedroom tax
- Build local support for anyone who can't pay
- Demand no evictions of tenants who fall into arrears because of the bedroom tax or any austerity cuts. Build anti-eviction armies to protect our homes

- Stop all the cuts - tax bankers not bedrooms to pay for the crisis
 - Trade unions to give a lead to the fight against austerity by calling a 24-hour general strike
-

We can beat the bedroom tax!

An estimated 660,000 households were hit by the bedroom tax when it was introduced on 1 April. Housing benefit is being cut for people in social housing who are judged to have one or more spare rooms. This cut targets the poorest and most vulnerable - two thirds of households affected include a disabled person. Campaigns against the bedroom tax have been launched across the country to defend those affected and call for the tax to be scrapped.

Stand Up in Bootle

Stand Up in Bootle originated as an anti-bedroom tax group. It now has 1,600 supporters on Facebook and has organised some impressive demonstrations, as well as helping hundreds of frightened tenants and claimants deal with appeals against bedroom tax assessments. Andy Ford from Warrington Trades Council interviewed Juliet, one of the main organisers.

"I saw the first leaflets, from a group calling itself 'Stand Up For Social Housing in Bootle' organised by RMT executive member Daz Proctor (who stood for the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition in the recent Eastleigh byelection) before Christmas. I have been active in the community since 1994, so I took notice. I contacted them and started going to the meetings in January. The meetings were packed - sometimes more than 100 people - because no one else was talking about the huge effect of the bedroom tax at that stage."

From the meetings Stand Up in Bootle organised the massive demonstration of up to 1,200 people on The Strand in Bootle on 28 February this year. The event was a huge and unexpected success, leading to headlines such as 'Bedroom Tax Protest Sweeps Bootle' and really put the movement on the map, spawning other groups across Merseyside, Halton and Warrington.

Organising

The movement has spread very much through social media such as Facebook and Twitter as well as the traditional leaflets and posters. Gradually the group has moved from Facebook conversations and informal activity to a more formal structure with a committee and minutes, although not everyone is seeing the need or the benefit.

"A lot of people here just do not have experience of those structures" explains Juliet. Unemployment in Bootle has always been high and many people are on invalidity. Even those in work are likely to have casual or low-paid work, so not many people have been trade union members.

And yet the people in Bootle are in desperate need of help. One post on the Facebook page says: "Just had my letter from One Vision telling me I have to pay £51.76 a month for the bedroom tax. I think it is terrible, how are we meant to live? I have two boys and they have their own rooms but they said to me that they can share. Why would my seven year old want to share with his two year old brother?"

People simply cannot take any more. Stand Up in Bootle distributed 11,000 leaflets in the area for their protest on 1 May, paid for on a shoestring, and again the event was a great success.

Housing associations

The group is presenting a petition to Sefton Council on 27 June calling for no evictions for bedroom tax arrears, and for the councillors to pressurise the housing associations, of which there are 23 in Bootle, to also pledge no evictions. Tenants are finding that their houses have been transferred from local authority control to huge faceless housing associations. The housing associations are important because the Labour councillors' reply is often that the council no longer manages any housing.

"One Vision has 11,000 houses, and we cannot find who the governing board actually is", says Juliet. There is a similar picture for Arena, another huge housing association in the North West, which appears to have no governing board, while Riverside has a board comprising a chartered surveyor from Winchester, an accountant at BNFL, a Finance Director of Littlewoods, and a retired company director - and just one tenant! Not to worry though, Paul Brant, Labour deputy leader of Liverpool city council, is the chair of the Riverside board.

"We have found an interlocking network of housing association directors" says Juliet. "Someone might be a senior manager at one housing association, but they are also a director on the board of another, and so on in a repeating pattern."

Many of the Stand Up in Bootle group were involved in an attempt to win back the Labour Party in Sefton. People joined the party in 2004/05, at that time arguing against a major schools closure programme.

The future

"We gained support in two wards, but they soon closed them down, with false claims of

harassment" says Juliet. "There were accusations that we had formed a party within a party, and eventually the whole constituency Labour Party was suspended. I left in disgust."

What of the future? "I don't tell anyone not to pay the bedroom tax" she says, "It is a personal decision. We are helping people with the appeals, and it is not easy, it is incredibly complex, actually. Sometimes the Citizen's Advice Bureau and lawyers struggle with the regulations. We have two test cases on the go right now. And we will make any evictions a political issue - because they are."

Damned if you do...

We understand that there is no legal limit for how much in arrears rent must be before landlords can attempt to evict. The bedroom tax has complicated things. Under normal procedures, a tenant of a social landlord will not be able to move to another social landlord or a property owned by their present Registered Social Landlord (RSL) if there are rent arrears. However, what does a tenant do if they have to downsize because of the tax?

There are also problems with deposits. I had a client on a Thursday who had to downsize and had a chance of a flat on the following Monday morning. The RSL wants a deposit of £20. However, the client is on benefits and does not get paid until the following Friday. If he cannot raise the £20, he will lose the flat, not be able to downsize - and then become liable for the rent shortfall on his current flat and theoretically be liable for eviction.

A benefits advisor

The Socialist Party demands:

- No evictions of tenants who fall into rent arrears as a result of austerity cuts. Organise local campaigns to oppose the tax and defend our homes, and link them to existing anti-cuts groups. Build anti-eviction armies in every area to protect people's homes
- Stand candidates against councillors who try to evict us. Build a new mass workers' party that draws together workers, young people and activists from workplaces and anti-cuts campaigns, to provide a fighting, political alternative to the pro-cuts parties
- Cap rents and build homes. Invest in a major programme of council house building and refurbishment to provide affordable homes for all and decent jobs
- End low pay! If workers were paid a genuinely living wage they would not need to claim housing benefit

- Fight all the cuts. Trade unions must build for a 24-hour general strike as the next major step in the campaign against austerity
 - Boardroom tax not bedroom tax. Make the super-rich pay for their crisis, including nationalisation of the banking system, under democratic control
 - For a socialist alternative to cuts and capitalism with a democratic socialist plan of production based on the interests of the overwhelming majority of people - not the 1%
-

Building a local campaign

1. Spread the word

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

2. Clog up the system

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

3. Prepare to prevent evictions

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

4. Put pressure on councils

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

Order your Anti-Bedroom Tax badges from East London Socialist Party. Five new designs - £1 a badge for £5 for ten (plus 50p p&p.) Order from bobsevern@socialistparty.org.uk or 07432 593 149

YouTube tip:

Search for 'F The Bedroom Tax - NtxGen' for a great rap about the bedroom tax, including the lyrics "Think of all the older mummies, in their three bedroom gaffes, kids have grown up and now they've moved out, home sweet home, she don't wanna lose out, she made it nice, so many memories that made her life, but wow, now she's gotta pay that price, how is that allowed, you can't say that's right."

- One woman in Liverpool has had to have a lift installed in her house to help her get around. It takes up most of her only spare bedroom but the council insists it still counts and she has to pay the bedroom tax!
 - In the north of England families with a spare room outnumber overcrowded families by three to one so thousands will be hit by the bedroom tax despite there being no local need for them to move
-

The Socialist will be carrying regular articles on the bedroom tax. Send your stories to editors@socialistparty.org.uk

Get in touch for campaign resources including leaflets and posters: info@socialistparty.org.uk 020 8988 8777

Bedroom tax non-implementation

Only mass action can defeat it

Linda Taaffe, Secretary, National Shop Stewards Network

It is a tribute to the determination of disabled workers to stop cuts ruining their lives, that many have taken to the road of struggle in their own right alongside other workers.

Direct action is not only for the able-bodied. Disabled workers have taken part in the big TUC demonstrations, and Remploy workers organise in trade unions to try to save jobs.

Since disabled workers make up a huge proportion of people affected by the bedroom tax, it is natural to turn to the trade unions to see how they could help stop this draconian measure.

Some have raised the idea of urging civil servants and local authority workers to refuse to participate in administering these new laws.

Some have suggested that PCS, the civil service union, should do this now as a trade union action. The reasoning is understandable, but every strategy needs to be thought out carefully and agreed that it is the best road to take and one that has a good possibility of winning the objective.

While this kind of action by PCS workers may sound attractive, it is fraught with pitfalls. Firstly, it would not be a strike.

The job of some PCS workers entails administering many disagreeable procedures to all kinds of people like welfare claimants, migrant workers, even those convicted of crimes.

To refuse as individuals to carry out their job, or part of their job, would put them immediately in jeopardy. In today's climate it could get them the sack.

There are many other jobs where workers have to do things that go against their principles. For example, teachers have to participate in SATs tests which are hugely unpopular and detrimental to children.

However, for a teacher to refuse to participate in the testing regime could lead to a charge of gross misconduct.

This does not mean, however, that no campaign is waged on the issue. To the contrary teachers are constantly campaigning.

Poll Tax

Secondly, to refuse to participate as a whole union is by no means straightforward. A case would have to be put that was generally agreed by PCS members as a realistic way forward.

Is this possible? PCS and Unison members might argue that, why should they alone bear the brunt of defeating this government on the bedroom tax and other benefits.

What about local councillors, could they agree not to implement the bedroom tax? What about the Labour Party - could they promise to reverse these cuts after the next election?

Even if PCS action was a popular idea, to get a legal ballot would most likely not be possible, as the issue is 'political' and not a strict trade union grievance - thanks to Thatcher's anti-trade union laws.

A similar strategy was raised during the mighty anti-poll tax campaign in the early 1990s. It was suggested that local government workers be asked to refuse to deduct the poll tax from employees pay.

Although the idea was tossed around in the labour movement, it never came to anything for quite similar reasons; and there never was a clamour from town hall workers.

In the end this hated tax was defeated by a campaign of mass non-payment, backed up by anti-poll tax federation activists carrying out mass information work and telling workers about their rights on not letting bailiffs into their homes.

Also attending the magistrates' courts as McKenzie friends with summonsed workers helped clog up the works.

Eventually the Tories had to withdraw the poll tax after Thatcher was forced to resign as prime minister.

Mass action against the bedroom tax should be part of action against all cuts. Trade unions should work with anti-bedroom tax campaigns locally and nationally to build an anti-evictions army to physically oppose, resist and prevent attempted bedroom tax evictions through all peaceful means necessary.

They can also campaign for the writing off of any debt incurred due to the bedroom tax and campaign to recover the shortfall for local authorities and housing associations from the Tory-led government at Westminster.

Disabled activists could help stop this bedroom tax for all by adding their pressure to the call for the TUC to organise the biggest joint action for generations - a coordinated public/private sector strike against austerity.

There are many direct attacks on workers by the Con-Dems and bosses - on pay, pensions, jobs, etc - that coordinated action can be taken against. All workers, all trade unions should act together to stop this Con-Dem juggernaut.

In the meantime, disabled campaigners could be key organisers of mass defiance - especially of the bedroom tax. But, disabled campaigners have marched together with trade unions, now is the time to strike together to beat austerity!

Editorial of the Socialist

Give us jobs, not Tory lies

We've been hearing this rubbish for years - British workers are lazy - and now Eton-educated Tory London mayor Boris 'the bankers' friend' Johnson has stepped in, accusing British workers of sloth, defined as a reluctance to work or make an effort.

New figures blow this bunkum out of the water. On average 45 people apply for every low-skilled job. When eight jobs were advertised at a new Costa café in Nottingham over 1,700 people applied.

In April a new Tesco received more than 4,000 applications for around 150 posts in Rowner, Hampshire.

And millions of people are struggling with bosses who won't give them the hours they need to earn an income you can live on. Underemployment has doubled since 2008.

During the 2010 general election, in the initial aftermath of the banking crisis, an unemployed young woman called Vicky Harrison committed suicide because of the hopeless situation she felt confronted by, after receiving over 200 job rejections.

Since the Con-Dem cuts coalition took power the jobs crisis has worsened. In response the Socialist has been demanding massive investment into a programme of socially useful job creation.

Now another tragic suicide has shown the impact of Con-Dem cuts on real lives - Stephanie Bottrill walked in front of a lorry after she was hit by the bedroom tax.

She had packed her belongings into boxes and was prepared to move but nowhere suitable was offered. In Solihull, where Stephanie lived, 1,200 social housing residents are affected by the bedroom tax, yet the council has only 20 one-bedroom homes available.

Labour and Tory governments have nurtured an enormous housing crisis by their failure to invest in decent council house building and renovation projects.

This is just one gaping need that could be met by investment in jobs and training and public services.

Reports of nursing shortages point to another area where investment in jobs and training could contribute, not only to reducing the unemployment figures but to meaningful improvement in public service provision and living standards.

But all we hear is that there must be cuts, that there is no money. More lies. Society has enormous wealth - but it's hidden away from the vast majority of us, even though we create it through the work we do - in the bank vaults and tax havens of the super-rich 1%.

Further evidence of the richest hiding billions of pounds in tax havens has been revealed in the Guardian.

British companies are sitting on an estimated £800 billion in cash, because they don't see a profitable investment opportunity.

A fighting socialist programme would include a major tax on the rich, nationalisation of failing and cash-hoarding industries, and linking this to the public ownership of the major monopolies which control the economy.

But no establishment party puts this forward. It needs a mass movement of the working class to fight for it.

Unsurprisingly the establishment parties are increasingly rejected; polls show a fall in support for all three.

Ukip is seeing a growth in support - this is a reflection of the disenchantment with all the three main parties but Ukip will also be exposed for what it is - another party of the 1%.

We need to build a political voice for the working class and all those suffering under austerity. The Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition is a step towards building this.

This is not a crisis caused only by the greed of the bankers or the fat-cat bosses - fundamentally it is a crisis of the capitalist system.

Capitalism is based on production for profit and not for social need. We have to fight every attempt to put the cost of the crisis onto the backs of the working class but we also have to transform the way society is run to put an end to cuts and crisis for good.

Capitalism is a chaotic system - a socialist plan for the economy, organised through democratic workers' control and management, would eradicate unemployment and mean we could start to build a society based on the needs of the billions and the environment, not the greed of the billionaires.

Stop the health cuts!

Trade union-led national action on NHS needed now

A London NHS worker

The chair of the National Health Service (NHS) regulator has warned that pressure on Accident and Emergency (A&E) units is "out of control... [and] totally unsustainable".

David Prior, head of the Care Quality Commission, was reported as saying it meant he could not guarantee against any future scandals similar to the highly publicised tragedy of Mid Staffordshire NHS.

This increasing pressure has led to a number of A&Es struggling to hit targets for waiting times. Bizarrely, Mr Prior's response to this appears to be to call for fewer, not more, resources.

He told the King's Fund health think tank that "if we don't start closing acute beds, the system is going to fall over". He believes that the increased pressure is due to people "misusing" A&E services for less serious health problems, which they would apparently be less likely to do if they knew there were less resources!

Anyone who thinks about this, even briefly, will see the lie in it. Clearly, those who do not actually need the services will never be sent on to acute beds; however if beds are cut it will be the patients who do need these services that will be left waiting for longer.

The BBC's health correspondent Nick Triggle, reporting on the story, mentioned some more believable reasons for the increased demand on A&Es, including: "A rise in the number of people with chronic conditions, such as heart disease, that end up having emergencies; the ageing population; and problems accessing out-of-hours GP care."

This shows the need for more staff and resources, not less. Triggle also made a fleeting but telling reference to "staffing problems". 6,000 nursing jobs across the NHS have been cut since the Con-Dems came to power, with that number expected to double by 2015.

Closures

This story also raises further concerns over plans to close four A&Es across north-west

London. Communities covered by Ealing, Central Middlesex, Charring Cross, and Hammersmith hospitals have been campaigning against the closure of their A&E services, which would mean in an emergency they would have to travel to one of the remaining A&Es at five other hospitals covering the wider area.

How five A&Es are expected to take on the previous workload of nine while maintaining waiting list targets is not clear, although perhaps a hidden agenda is revealed later in Mr Prior's speech when he blamed the NHS's apparent problems on the lack of a health market.

Aside from the fact that an internal market has existed, and has been undermining the NHS, for over 20 years now, this also hints at the future of healthcare in north-west London, and nationally.

When the remaining hospitals struggle with the additional demand and become "failing" hospitals, the bloodsuckers of the market will step in. This is so much easier now under the Health and Social Care Act.

No one who works for the NHS would claim it is perfect, but we must fight to defend and improve it, as opposed to running it into the ground to be replaced with a system that puts profits over patients, which is the true aim of scare stories like this.

The London demonstration (see box) can help pull together health workers and campaigners as we have seen in many other local demos.

However, these must be followed by a national demonstration to focus the defence of the NHS.

The trade unions must take the lead in this campaign, including building for coordinated industrial action and a 24-hour general strike, to stop the government's destructive agenda.

Defend London's NHS

All-London demo organised by trade unions and health campaigners.

Saturday 18 May. Assemble 12 noon, Jubilee Gardens, Waterloo.

National Shop Stewards Network (NSSN)

Defend the NHS - new bulletin

Downloadable resource - available at:

<http://shopstewards.net/wp-content/uploads/2012/08/NSSN-NHS-Bulletin3-1.pdf>

www.shopstewards.net

Fat cat tax-dodging: 200 lorry loads of lolly!

Tom Baldwin

Anger is rising at the companies and millionaires who pay little or no tax in Britain. They're very happy to make money exploiting people's hard work - but less keen to put anything back.

Over 100 of Britain's richest people are hiding billions of pounds in offshore tax havens, found out by the tax office with a massive paper trail that would fill over 200 lorries!

And 98 of the top 100 companies on the FTSE stock exchange are using tax havens, with firms such as Tesco and Barclays each owning hundreds of offshore subsidiaries.

As vital jobs and services are being slashed and the cold cruelty of benefit cuts begins to bite, the lie that "we're all in it together" has been shattered.

The PCS civil service union which represents workers in tax collection has estimated tax avoidance and evasion, mostly by the super-rich, totals £120 billion each year.

If collected this would wipe out the government deficit, used by Tory Prime Minister Cameron and Chancellor Osborne as an excuse for their attacks on the living standards of ordinary people.

No wonder then that they're now talking tough. At the recent G7 meeting of rich countries Osborne said it was "incredibly important that companies and individuals pay the tax that is due". The statement agreed by the G7 scores highly on rhetoric but low on real proposals.

This millionaires' government has bent over backwards to provide giveaways for the rich. In a budget he described as "unashamedly pro-business" Osborne cut tax for companies and rich individuals last year.

He's also cut the department responsible for collecting taxes. Already almost half of the staff have been axed since 2005 - a process started by New Labour.

Another 10,000 tax workers' jobs are now expected to be cut over the next three years in a

drive to 'save' £3 billion; a move that could cost far more in uncollected tax.

They're even letting the very accountancy firms who specialise in tax avoidance write the rules! Labour too is advised by one such firm, PwC.

Another, KPMG, has been able to boast that: "As the new rules have been designed and enacted by the government, this should represent a low-risk tax-saving opportunity."

The only way we'll improve our lives is standing together and fighting for our futures. It is working people that make the profits for big businesses, yet under capitalism we have to struggle to get even some of this money back from greedy bosses.

A socialist society based on democratic public ownership of these companies would mean instead that every penny could be used to benefit the vast majority.

Con-Dems' benefit fact fraud

Ben Golightly

A survey carried out by the TUC earlier this year revealed that people believe, on average, that 27% of the welfare budget is claimed fraudulently.

This is thanks to lies peddled by the right-wing media and politicians. DWP preliminary estimates released on 9 May show that the true figure is closer to 0.7%.

Disability benefits have the lowest rates of fraud. Estimated rates for Incapacity Benefit and Disability Living Allowance are 0.3% and 0.5% respectively (£10 million and £70 million).

Fraud rates for the new Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) are not yet measured directly, but applying the DWP's estimated fraud rate for all "unreviewed" benefits to ESA expenditure gives a figure of £68 million.

The combined cost of fraud across these three benefits is approximately £148 million in total.

Atos Healthcare, the private company responsible for assessing disabled people claiming benefits, has a contract worth £400 million.

Clearly welfare reform has everything to do with slashing billions of pounds from the welfare bill and handing juicy contracts to big business.

The TUC survey revealed that support for benefit cuts was "dependent on ignorance".

Those who know the least about welfare were the most hostile. Support for the benefit cap rapidly turned into majority opposition when it was explained how it would affect low-paid workers.

The demonization of benefits claimants can be cut across if we had a mass workers' party willing to argue the case.

But the Labour Party is completely complicit in the scapegoating of benefit claimants.

The Socialist Party is working with others in the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) to stand up against the cuts.

Them & Us

Condition critical

Cuts in NHS staffing levels as a result of 'efficiency savings', and the drive to achieve Foundation Trust status, mean that patient care is at unsafe levels.

A survey by the Safe Staffing Alliance found that the number of nursing staff to patients was at dangerously critical levels.

The Alliance - which comprises of health service union Unison, the Royal College of Nursing and the Patients Association - surveyed 3,000 nurses at 31 hospitals and found that, on average, each nurse has to cope with eight patients for 40% of their time.

Despite identifying staff shortages as a contributing factor to 'excessive patient deaths' at the Mid Staffordshire hospital, the government and health authorities continue to make cuts.

Simon Carter

Cuts kill

Greece shows the results of health cuts and understaffing.

Greece's national health budget has been slashed by 40% since 2008 at the demands of the Troika - the International Monetary Fund, the European Commission and the European Bank. 35,000 health workers have lost their jobs, while hospital admissions have gone through the roof as patients missed out preventative treatment due to rising drug costs and soaring queues.

The decimation of the Mosquito spraying programme has resulted in substantial malaria cases for the first time since the early 70s. Infant mortality has risen by 40%.

High flyer

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu knows how to travel in comfort. He had a £83,000 bed installed on a plane for him and his partner Sara to travel to Margaret Thatcher's funeral.

They took the five hour flight on the same day that 10,000 people demonstrated against his government's cuts to jobs and services.

The Netanyahus' state funded household spending has increased 80% in the past three years, to £975,000 in 2012 alone.

Benjamin is feeling the pinch in some ways though. His £1,700 annual ice cream budget was ditched in February.

Top of the league

Maybe it's media excitement over Alex Ferguson's retirement but the papers all want to show how Britain is still top of many league tables.

London, it seems, still has more multi-millionaires 'worth' over £20 million than any other world city. There are 4,224 of these worthless 'ultra-high net worth individuals'.

Though in the Champions League of billionaires, London - with 54 - has slipped to third behind New York and Moscow.

Keith White

Golden Gove

In March, Con-Dem Education minister Michael Gove accused school students of "disturbing historical ignorance, with one teenage in five believing Winston Churchill was a fictional

character while 58% think Sherlock Holmes was real".

But it turns out the real ignoramus was Gove.

When a retired teacher tried to verify Gove's claims, the Department of Education's response to the Freedom of Information request was "unfortunately, I am not able to provide you with the details of the survey as it was commissioned and conducted by UKTV Gold".

The 2008 PR survey was used by the channel to show the strength of the UK's fiction, with teenagers surveyed as a subgroup in a poll that covered all adult ages.

Another of Mr Gove's credible sources was - Premier Inn! The PR poll was used by the hotel company to suggest that visiting landmarks could rectify such ignorance.

It has not been confirmed if the research used by Gove for his Mail on Sunday article was done by professional polling companies, or if it met British Polling Council standards.

Seems Michael should get an 'F' and some after-school extra tuition.

TUSC builds support in Leicester byelection

Tessa Warrington, Leicester Abbey ward byelection TUSC candidate

After more than a month's dedicated campaigning for TUSC, the Abbey ward byelection in Leicester was held on 9 May.

Abbey is a 'safe' Labour seat, on a city council where the party holds 52 out of 54 positions. However, the support of 11.5% of the ward's population is hardly a ringing endorsement for Labour - over 75% of the electorate didn't vote!

This shows not a general apathy, but the growing understanding that none of the main parties represent the people who elect them.

Even those who voted Labour have done so out of a desperate need for something other than the brutal attacks we face at the hands of the Con-Dems.

Yet our Labour city council has been complicit in the selling off of our elderly care homes, the cutting of council tax benefit by 20%, the implementation of the bedroom tax, the cutting of Leicester's homeless budget by a third, not to mention the cutting of adult social services as

well as support for FE students and children's services, among others. These are not the actions of a party aiming to end austerity.

Why should we pay anything to make up for the crisis caused by the gambling and deceit of big business and the banks? TUSC is the largest formation standing nationally against all the cuts.

In Abbey, where we have not previously stood, TUSC won 6.7% of the vote. With an overwhelmingly positive reaction received on the doorstep, we now have a base in the area for future action and campaigns.

The dent TUSC has made in the vote in Abbey ward has set down a marker. It shows that an alternative to the cuts is possible and that people are listening and willing to fight back.

TUSC is also contesting a 6 June byelection for the Walkergate ward of Newcastle city council, whose Labour majority passed a £100 million three-year cuts programme back in March.

TUSC candidate Bobbie Cranny was one of the participants in the 2011 Youth Fight For Jobs Jarrow March, backed by six national trade unions. Bobbie completed the whole route from the north east to London.

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

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

Don't Vote for Cuts - Councillors have a choice

How Southampton fought back against Con-Dem cuts and built support for a socialist alternative to austerity. Only £2, including p&p

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Swansea's food bank for students

Swansea Metropolitan University's student union has been running a food bank since April so its own students can get enough to eat.

Student Union sabbatical officer Michael Twitchen, who launched the scheme, says: "Students have come to see me about their finances for all kinds of reasons. Our aim is that no student should sacrifice food for education.

"Many students have to choose between paying bills, getting the rent in on time, buying books, and buying food. Food and healthy diets are often put last on the list of purchases."

The Welsh Assembly provides a small, inadequate living grant for full-time undergraduates but many Swansea Met students are part-time, mature students living off campus and with families.

The scheme is the first in UK universities, but food banks for students are already commonplace in the USA and Canada.

The day before this news broke, university vice-chancellors announced they want students to start paying back undergraduates' loans when their income is only £18,000 a year, far below the UK average.

With recent graduates only barely scraping by if they get a job, adding an additional £75 to their monthly bills could dissuade thousands from higher education.

Underemployment is now epidemic and many students wouldn't even make use of their degree in their first job after graduating.

Society produces enough wealth to eliminate tuition fees and provide every student, full-time or part-time, with a maintenance grant, as was done before Thatcher.

We need a mass movement of workers, students and the unemployed to build a democratic, socialist education system: free at the point of use and accessible to all.

Ed Schluessel

British government supports murderous Sri Lankan regime

International workers' solidarity needed

Prime Minister David Cameron's decision to lead Britain's delegation to the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting is a kick in the teeth to Tamil-speaking people.

The meeting, to be held in November in Sri Lanka, gives a seal of approval to President Mahinda Rajapaksa's murderous regime that was responsible for the deaths of tens of thousands of civilians in the closing months of the war against the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE).

The Queen tried to sidestep controversy by sending Prince Charles in her place as head of the Commonwealth.

The Tamil Solidarity campaign is stepping up its activities to stop this showcase meeting going ahead in Sri Lanka's capital, Colombo.

On Saturday 8 June we are co-hosting with the British Tamils Forum an event bringing together Tamil community activists with trade unionists and others to launch this initiative.

Solidarity Day

Saturday 8 June, 4pm to 8pm. School of Oriental and African Studies, Vernon Square Campus, Vernon Square, Penton Rise, London, WC1X 9EW

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

Manchester Socialist Party meeting against cuts

Matt Kilsby, Salford Socialist Party secretary

On 8th May a well attended meeting, called by the Greater Manchester Socialist Party, discussed the socialist programme for local government and how trade unionists, activists, students and community campaigners can unite to beat the cuts and the Bedroom Tax.

Kevin Bennett, the 'rebel' councillor in Warrington who has been suspended by the Labour group for taking an inspiring stand against the cuts, spoke on the pernicious impact of the cuts

on jobs and services for the most vulnerable.

In standing up against the cuts, Kevin has been ostracised by his former Labour colleagues; a damning indictment of the Labour Party and its failure to mount any opposition to the Tories' attacks on local government.

Speaking after Kevin, Steve North the Salford City Unison branch secretary explained (in a personal capacity) the latest threats to privatise vital public services.

Unison members in Salford have helped lead a fightback against the cuts and have won some notable successes in saving jobs, services and fighting privatisation.

However, with 1.3 million members in Unison, it is clear that we need a fightback on a national scale, coordinated with other unions, in the form of a 24-hour general strike.

Discussion

After a lively discussion, Terry Simmons, TUSC candidate (Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition) in an upcoming Salford council byelection, and Lawrence Maples from Manchester Socialist Students society spoke of the need for a united campaign to beat the cuts.

The meeting was also clear that a new mass workers' party is needed more than ever to defend us against the government and Labour councils that implement cuts without a whimper.

That is why TUSC is so important if we are to build an alternative to the three main cuts parties and the politics of despair, offered by Ukip and the far right.

A number of contributors spoke of the inspiring example of the Liverpool 47. Not as a history lesson on the 1980s' struggles but as an example of what can be achieved by militant working class action.

The meeting raised over £100 for the Socialist Party fighting fund and there was real interest in our ideas.

We recruited two new party members on the night and a number of people would like to get involved with TUSC.

So much so that there is a real possibility that we will be standing anti-cuts candidates in every ward in Salford at the next local elections.

This version of this article was first posted on the Socialist Party website on 11 May 2013 and may vary slightly from the version subsequently printed in The Socialist.

Gloves off in Mid Yorks hospital battle

Adrian O'Malley, Secretary, Unison, Mid Yorkshire Health, personal capacity

As the government continues to do all it can to dismantle and privatise the NHS, workers' pay and conditions are under constant threat.

In Mid Yorkshire, the gloves are now well and truly off in our battle against the health trust's attacks on workers.

The Trust is pushing forward with more downbandings (pay cuts of thousands of pounds) and job cuts in other departments.

Clinical nurse specialists, dental nurses and more admin staff are at risk of job and pay cuts.

But at the same time the Trust is employing more senior managers and has given over £4 million to private management consultants Ernst and Young.

After a series of well-supported strikes by admin and clerical staff at the end of 2012 and the beginning of this year, talks with the Trust broke down in March.

Now we are holding a branch-wide strike ballot which was agreed on the last day of the strike on 1 February. This affects 3,000 Unison members across Dewsbury, Pontefract and Pinderfields hospitals.

The ballot forms went out with a message from Unison general secretary Dave Prentis urging members to vote 'yes'.

We also sent out an update on the discussions and why a 'yes' vote is needed to resist the Trust's attacks on our terms and conditions.

Unison regional officials have been meeting the workforce in the last few days and discussing with them about the need to vote 'yes' in the strike ballot. They have had a very good response and have been recruiting to the union as well.

The Trust has responded by attacking the branch in the press and workplace, including massive attacks on trade union facility time. They are clearly attempting to destroy union resistance within the Trust.

They have gone to the local press with their propaganda. But this has backfired, particularly when people see the attacks on staff alongside reports about the millions of pounds being sucked into the PFI scheme for Pinderfields hospital.

This has resulted in our stewards becoming even more keen to get the 'yes' vote out.

A massive 'yes' vote is vital not just to reverse the pay cuts but also to defend our union.

The ballot ends on 28 May.

Brighton bin workers fight pay cuts - this time from the Greens

Jon Redford

Brighton and Hove staff at Hollingdean bin depot staged a two day sit-in last week in protest against cuts to their allowances.

A significant chunk of take-home pay is made up of these allowances. Many stand to lose up to £4,000 a year. 260 members at the Green Party-controlled council's Cityclean department would be particularly badly affected, with an average loss of £2,000 a year.

Disgracefully the council is trying to justify this action by saying it needs to implement equal pay for its workforce.

It is clear that just like the Tories and Labour councils elsewhere, the Green version of 'equal pay' means the driving down of workers' wages and conditions to the lowest level rather than improving the pay of women workers in particular.

The GMB union walked out of negotiations over a threat to sack and re-engage a handful of park staff on the new terms and conditions.

On 8 May this threat was extended to the entire affected workforce. Instead of waiting for the end of the ballot process, workers staged a spontaneous unofficial two-day strike and have

attracted significant support from within the city and further afield.

This has led to large splits in the Green Party, with the party branch passing a resolution that condemns the plans if they result in a loss of pay and calling on the council to consult alternative lawyers.

Caroline Lucas, the Green Party MP, has likewise come out against the council and visited the workers to express her solidarity.

Fire has been directed at council leader Jason Kitcat in particular, with calls for his resignation. The workers have now returned to work (working to rule) after receiving a guarantee that the proposals would be re-examined, GMB has initiated a ballot for all-out strike action.

Since their election in 2011 the Greens have tried to square the circle of 'opposing' the cuts while refusing to try to build a mass movement against the government.

The next round of cuts will go very deep, with an estimated £120 million reduction over the next five years.

Disappointment with the timidity of the council has been steadily growing. The present strike has brought questions over the council strategy to a head. However there is no genuine opposition to these plans.

Will Labour support the strikes? Will they oppose the government and call for them to reverse funding cuts? Or will they try to play a similar game to the Greens and invariably fail, gambling away the population of Brighton and Hove in the process? They have voted consistently in favour of cuts. How can they now present themselves as standing up for the working class?

This dispute highlights the important and powerful role of the organised working class. The refuse workers are the best organised workforce in Brighton and Hove with a long proud record of fighting back.

GMB and Unison, many of whose members will also lose out under the pay proposals, should make it clear that this fight is not just about a savage attack on their members' pay packets.

It is part of the wider struggle against the cuts: political measures which demand a political response.

The union subs of low-paid council workers are still used to campaign for the election of Labour councillors who (with a handful of honourable exceptions outside of Brighton) vote for cuts and job losses in Brighton and elsewhere.

Every council election should be contested by a candidate committed to oppose all cuts and defend working people.

The Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition has been standing working-class candidates since 2010. How much more could be achieved if powerful public sector unions like GMB, Unite and Unison threw their weight behind a genuine electoral struggle against the cuts?

Wales TUC: no fight against austerity

Ronnie Job

There is a myth put out by the leaders of Labour-affiliated trade unions that the Welsh government is protecting Welsh workers from the worst of the cuts.

Yet as delegates gather for the Wales TUC (WTUC) Conference, communities are anxiously waiting to see if their local hospital's A&E is one of those marked for closure or downgrading as part of the South Wales Plan.

Since the Con-Dems came to power, 8,500 jobs have gone in Welsh local authorities, around 6% of the workforce.

But cuts in Wales have been back-loaded and there is a further 25,000 jobs at risk. The Welsh government's FE/HE Bill opens up Further Education in Wales to the risk of privatisation.

Welsh Labour councils pass resolutions against the Con-Dem government, while carrying through their cuts to services.

There is a lot of anger building up among trade unionists in Wales but it may not show itself at the WTUC conference because of the role of the general council, heavily influenced as it is by the big Labour-affiliated unions.

They have tried to prevent the growth of trade union opposition to the Welsh Labour government ever since the election of the Con-Dems.

This year's conference is only a one-day affair; they finally, at the third attempt, got it through conference last year to replace the annual three-day, resolution-based conference with a full conference only on alternate years.

In between, like this year, there is just a single-day event with complex rules on what can be

the subject of a motion.

These rules are so restrictive that there are only five motions on the agenda for this conference. Two of these come from Swansea trades council.

Three times as many motions were ruled out of order. We can't debate a general strike because that is not a devolved issue.

The general council don't want action, they don't want demonstrations, particularly in Cardiff where it might imply criticism of the Welsh Labour government. Instead they propose having a bus to go around Wales calling on Welsh politicians to sign up to opposing the Westminster government cuts, while 'reluctantly' carrying them out of course!

This is just like the way Welsh Labour councils have passed resolutions condemning the bedroom tax, while refusing to offer any guarantee of 'no evictions' for its victims.

It seems that if rank and file trade unionists want to organise effective action against cuts to services, jobs and the NHS, they will have to come to the Welsh Shop Stewards Network, meeting in Cardiff on 8 June.

We also need a political alternative and the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition Wales will be holding a fringe meeting at the Wales TUC to outline a political alternative, one that involves fighting all cuts not just Tory ones.

National Shop Stewards Network

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 PO Box 54498, London E10 9DE

www.shopstewards.net

Unison leader 'gets it wrong' over action on

pay

Local government workers have had three years of pay freeze, as well as facing cuts in pay and conditions of service and massive job losses.

That is why many members welcomed Unison general secretary Dave Prentis' photo shoot at Unison conference in June 2012, when he took a hammer and smashed an ice sculpture in the shape of 0%!

In reality however the Unison bureaucracy's campaign to fight the pay freeze was born out of the need for an excuse to end the pensions struggle rather than any desire to seriously fight for decent pay for workers.

Unison activists began to get ready for a fight over pay anyway, nowhere more so than in the North West, where the right-wing regional leadership are keen Prentis loyalists.

At the beginning of February a blow was struck to this fighting spirit by Prentis himself! Addressing a meeting of the North West regional council in Liverpool, Prentis shocked the delegates by telling them that he had got it wrong over pay, this was not the year to fight, members were more worried about jobs than pay. At least one full-time officer and some right-wing activists left the room at this point, presumably in disgust!

Shortly after the Prentis bombshell the local government employers made their first offer: 1% for the lowest paid members and 0.6% for the rest or 1% across the board with 'strings', mainly attacks on the sick pay scheme.

The North West region opposed this offer, got the support of branches in the region for this position and lobbied other regions. The offer was rejected at national level.

This offer was followed by a second 'final' offer of 1% across the board with no strings, which was also opposed by the North West, along with the greater London and Southern regions.

Other regions were split with the result that by a vote of 14 to 13 it was agreed to put the offer to members via branch ballots as "the best that can be achieved by negotiation" with no recommendation and saying that only sustained all-out strike action could bring about any improvement.

This strategy is clearly designed to pour cold water on any fighting mood while attempting to scare people off strike action.

The leadership in the North West, however, prepared to defy this position, having successfully

argued at a regional delegate meeting that branches should campaign to reject the offer and call for an industrial action ballot.

The priority for Unison now is to campaign in the ballots for a clear rejection of the 1% offer and to build the confidence of the members to fight for a decent pay settlement.

Left activists are best placed to carry out this campaign, having been doing it against the opposition of the bureaucracy and their right-wing lay allies for years.

Clearly Unison is in a critical situation, facing threats that could do lasting damage to the union. This shift in the North West reflects increased dissatisfaction among the rank and file with the union's ability to defend them.

A strong united and successful fight over pay will help transform Unison, move it away from passive acceptance of and acquiescence to cuts, to being a fighting organisation, worthy of the name of a trade union.

PCS conference 20-23 May

Campaigning works: Action gets results

John McNally, National vice-president Public and Commercial Services union (PCS), personal capacity

The re-election of the Democracy Alliance national executive committee is a real blow to the government's attempt to break PCS members' resolve.

The re-election of a fighting left leadership is a mandate to continue with the strategy of industrial action of varying duration and timing which is causing disruption and real concern among management. It is also an endorsement of the union's campaign against austerity.

The alternative promoted by PCS is now widely supported and is gaining further endorsement throughout the trade union movement and beyond.

Austerity isn't working, except of course for the tiny ruling elite who are enriching themselves at the expense of the vast majority in society.

The millionaire Coalition cabinet hate PCS, mainly because we have exposed the great lie that

there is no alternative to austerity.

Rather than setting out a clear alternative, Labour is campaigning with an austerity-lite programme. This could mean another inconclusive general election result.

Some are already calling for a coalition with the Liberals, who are now universally despised for their collaboration with austerity.

If the TUC implemented its policy of coordinated joint industrial action against the attacks on pay and pensions we could get rid of this government.

Some union leaders, the worst being the leadership of Unison, are operating a de facto no-strike agreement with Labour leader Miliband in order, they imagine, not to upset Labour's chances of winning the election.

Right-wing union leaders are prepared to see vicious attacks on their members and workers generally, including the full-scale privatisation of the NHS, rather than organise to build action to get rid of this hated government.

Last year, Unison leader Prentis promised a 'Unison spring' when he would break the pay freeze. It's nearing the end of spring and he is nowhere to be seen.

The TUC are organising to bring together those unions prepared to coordinate their disputes. PCS, as always, will be at the forefront of any such initiative.

The PCS strategy is based on building the widest possible alliance in society, in the trade union movement and in our communities to combat the government's austerity policies, including the hated bedroom tax.

The key though is to build joint coordinated strike action across the public and private sectors.

A strike by the teachers in the North West in June may well be followed by more action. PCS will do all it can to coordinate with such initiatives.

Industrial action by PCS in the various departmental groups over the past year has resulted in some significant gains, on issues from staffing increases to protecting workplace nurseries. The lesson is simple - Campaigning works: Action gets results.

One Housing

Unite the Union has formally notified One Housing Group (OHG) of its intention to ballot its members over pay cuts and downgrading.

This follows a three-year pay freeze amounting to a 13% cut. Workers are now being asked to accept massive cuts and wages lower than what they earned 15 years ago causing genuine hardship.

Management believes that because a few housing associations pay less than OHG, support workers' wages should slide downwards.

But they never apply the same logic to themselves. They say 'there are managers and chief executives being paid more than us so our wages must rise accordingly'.

The chief executive has accepted a £31,000 hike in pay and bonuses while asking 200 staff to accept cuts of up to £8,000 a year averaging £2,000.

These cuts will affect staff and their clients and communities as skill and experience is driven out of the care and support sector.

OHG has been awarded dozens of contracts by local authorities worth millions, the bulk of which covers workers' wages. If they cut wages the question is 'where is the money going?'

Strike action is likely to take place in mid June.

Workplace news in brief

Fighting blacklisting

Workers in GMB and Unite at Runcorn Thermal Power Station walked out unofficially on 13 May to support ladders.

They believe that management are renegeing on agreements on hiring local labour. This amounts to blacklisting.

Other workers on the site respected the ladders' picket line and there is a feeling among many that until the issues are resolved, there should be no return to work.

This action shows how blacklisting can be fought on the sites. Unite are currently fighting victimisation and blacklisting of their sacked shop steward Frank Morris.

- STOP PRESS: The dispute has been resolved. More details next week.

BT pay

The Communication Workers Union is recommending BT's 'final' offer of a 2.8% pay rise with a £200 pensionable lump sum.

The right wing executive claims that this will mean that members will receive a pay offer above the rate of inflation.

CWU members know that the rate of inflation on essentials such as rent, food, fuel and petrol is well above the figure the government claims.

The offer to CWU members compares very poorly with the chief executive's 6.2% and chairman's (one of his three jobs that is) 5.3%.

More disturbingly the union has agreed to talk to BT about their desire to allow members to 'share more in the company's success' as determined by various performance indicators.

In other words the performance related pay that the CWU has always been opposed to. This represents a new depth of the CWU telecoms leadership.

Telecoms CWU supremo Andy Kerr said that the union had explored all possible avenues open to it... except industrial action that is! The union never even considered consulting the members over industrial action.

CWU members in BT will continually be taken for a ride as long as we have a leadership who thinks that they share the same interests as BT.

A new leadership is required which can be changed by voting for Broad Left candidates in the executive elections due next month.

Clive Walder, CWU Birmingham, Black Country and Worcester Branch, personal capacity

Kiln workers

Kiln workers in Cambridgeshire are still fighting against cuts in holidays.

Their employer, Heidelberg Cement (profit: £500 million last year), part of the Hanson conglomerate, have reneged over a deal whereby a cut in pay would be compensated by holidays.

The workers have already seen cuts in pensions, share scheme, and bonuses over the years. But they have had had good support for their strikes from trade unionists all over the country.

Negotiations were proceeding on 14 May.

- Messages of support can be sent to the Unite rep: stanleydow41@me.com and financial assistance is welcome: cheques to 'GMB' (write 'Hanson strike' on reverse of cheque) to 542 Woodborough Road, Nottingham NG3 5FJ.

Steve Cawley

Japan's 'Abenomics'

Capitalist crisis: 'Desperate times call for desperate measures'

On stock markets Japanese company shares have climbed in recent weeks; even shares in Tepco, which owns Fukushima's stricken nuclear plant.

However, this rally is likely to be temporary and due to Japan's central bank flooding the economy with money, rather than signifying an end to the country's 'two lost decades' of economic stagnation as Carl Simmonds of Kokusai Rentai (CWI, Japan) explains.

On 4 April the new governor of the Bank of Japan, Haruhiko Kuroda, took the world of finance completely by surprise when he launched an unprecedented stimulus package cash injection.

He announced the government would increase purchases of government bonds by ¥50 trillion (\$520 billion) a year.

To put this into perspective, when adjusted for GDP (total output) size this is twice as large as the US Federal Reserve's stimulus package.

Kuroda's move has been cautiously welcomed by the heads of both the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and Japanese bosses' organisation - the Keidanren.

But there is a broader recognition by the more sober representatives of capitalism of what an extremely risky strategy the Japanese government has embarked upon.

As little as six months ago, Keidanren representatives were warning of the dangers of this policy, defending the independence of the Bank of Japan and orthodox financial policies.

What lies behind this stunning reversal of policy? Desperate times call for desperate measures as the adage goes.

What was originally described as the "lost decade" of low growth and deflation has since become the "lost 20 years".

By some measures, prices have fallen by as much as 17% since 1997. For most of that time, the value of the Nikkei stock market index has stood at less than a third of the value it hit at the height of the economic boom.

The interest rate has been at 0.5% or less since the end of 1995. Post-1980 Japanese economic growth has averaged a measly 0.52%

For the last 20 years almost every instrument of capitalist economic policy has been tried by a succession of conservative governments.

The monetarist policy of 'qualitative easing', in normal language, cutting interest rates to the present low levels, has done little to lift the economy. 'Keynesian' attempts to use government expenditure on infrastructure and fiscal deficits to spend their way out of low growth were tried extensively up until 1997 and brought little relief.

From 1992 until 2008 there were no less than 18 stimulus packages estimated at ¥205 trillion. Still these policies failed to bring back the high growth era.

This policy was then thrown into reverse and we have seen the disastrous austerity policies pursued by successive governments and in particular that of former PM Yoshihiko Noda, increasing sales tax in a period of stagnation.

The failure of these policies to boost growth led to the return to power of the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) led by the right-wing nationalist Abe.

"Abenomics", as it has been dubbed by its critics, could be likened to gambling the family silver on the roulette table.

Confronted by the complete failure of the predominant schools of capitalist economic doctrine

to explain the present situation and provide policies to end the stagnation, Abe in ecumenical fashion, proposes, on an unprecedented scale, to adopt all of their 'solutions' simultaneously in a desperate rush for growth.

These policies include a 2% increase in fiscal spending - mainly on repairing and expanding infrastructure, a doubling of the money supply (Kuroda's package) and a target of 2% inflation.

Abe is hoping that this increase in the money supply will lead to a fall in real interest rates and encourage companies and individuals to start spending.

The threat of inflation means that if they don't, the real value of their assets will fall. He is also hoping that this will lead to a fall in the value of the yen and boost exports by Japanese companies. What are the prospects for the success of his policies?

Prospects

With the election of the Abe government, the value of the Yen has declined by 27% over the last six months, though this has so far failed to do much to reverse the trade deficit.

With most of Japan's nuclear power plants lying idle in the aftermath of the Fukushima disaster, the yen's fall has simply added to the cost of increased imports of fossil fuels.

It is likely to take time before it filters through to boost exports. And there is also the likelihood that a fall in the yen will lead to devaluations by Japan's competitors.

'Abenomics' has, however, led to a recovery of the stock market with the Nikkei index finally passing the 10,000 mark.

The short-term boost to the economy will probably be enough to ensure Abe's victory in the upper-house elections in July and allow Abe to push ahead with his policy of constitutional revision.

Will the measures be enough to pull the Japanese economy out of its period of stagnation?

Firstly, the present situation is not due to Japanese banks and corporations being short of cash to invest.

Overall, corporate Japan has an excess of savings. Seeing a market that cannot support expansion of production, they have chosen to pay off interest-bearing debts rather than make the productive investments necessary for capitalism to achieve equilibrium. Where they have

invested, it has often been to shift production overseas.

This situation seems to be understood by Abe; at a recent meeting of the cabinet's Council on Economic and Fiscal Policy he even went as far as to exhort employers to boost wages.

A similar idea has also been suggested by the economist, Noriko Hama. However, under capitalism these calls are completely utopian. Why would Japanese capitalists voluntarily accept a reduction in profits?

It is by no means certain that even a stimulus of this size will achieve the target of 2% inflation. As Marx pointed out, if money circulates more slowly, then even a dramatic increase in money supply is not going to achieve an increase in demand.

In the USA 'money velocity' has fallen to a 60-year low, and there is evidence that it is at historic lows in Japan too.

Even if it were to succeed in pushing up prices, the new policy would be more likely to create a new bubble in the financial markets, rather than promote productive investment.

Hitting the inflation target would not necessarily spell the end of the troubles. As billionaire investor George Soros put it: "What Japan is doing is actually quite dangerous because they are doing it after 25 years of just simply accumulating deficits and not getting the economy going."

Highest debt

Government debt in Japan is now the highest in the world. As long ago as 2011 it stood at 230% of GDP.

That this has not led to a Greek-style crisis is due to the fact that most of the debt is owed to Japanese lenders rather than foreign financial institutions.

Interest on debt is currently 25% of government expenditure. Should interest rates rise with the development of inflation, this could be the trigger for a debt crisis.

If inflation were to push interest rates up to as little as 2.8% then payments on the debt would equal total government revenue.

Abe's gamble appears to be a long shot. It is a risky strategy that would not normally be contemplated by the sober representatives of Japanese capital.

However, these are not normal times and to continue with previous policies also carries with it major risks.

One thing is clear, a collapse of these policies will prove disastrous for the living standards of the people of Japan and in particular the Japanese working class.

The Japanese ruling class fear above all the social explosions that economic collapse would bring. There will be no return to the relative social stability of the past.

Letter to the Tories who tell me to 'work hard and strive'

Dear Public School Boys,

My five brothers and sisters and I worked harder in our first 16 years of life than you have your whole life through.

I then trained as a nurse. It was hard physical grind. Once I left home there was nowhere to go back to and, in my case, no loving supportive family to provide comfort, finance or any other support.

I discovered I had a congenital spinal problem so looked to find something less arduous as a job. I took A-levels by correspondence course getting an A and C and managed to get a place at a Polytechnic to take a degree, thinking I could use it to get into a more theoretical side of nursing. I became the first graduate in my family's history.

I later became a single parent just as Thatcher's original reforms came in and found myself with a six month old baby and £7.25 a week to feed us both on.

I struggled alone with my daughter with no support from anyone in an overpriced private flat unable to work to earn enough to live on although I have always worked when I could.

I managed to get her through to University and now she works very hard and has built a decent life for herself.

Me? I have fought a constant battle against penury, recurring depressive illness and ignorant people through my life.

I became increasingly tired and disabled as have many other members of my family, we started working hard and striving much earlier than you and your friends and without your taken for granted comforts.

I was due to retire next year at 60 but you have moved the goalposts and I have to seek work for another five years despite being disabled.

I have worked whenever I could, often part-time to fit with childrearing, most recently in 2010 I was on a zero-hours contract and the hours dried up plunging me into an anxiety disorder. Now again my disability benefit is up for review next month.

Don't talk to me about striving and hard work!

Teresa Stuart, Plymouth

When mass action defeated Thatcher's poll tax

Launching the battle in Scotland

Ronnie Stevenson, Socialist Party Scotland, previously secretary Mount Florida Anti-Poll Tax Union, Glasgow

Margaret Thatcher was dubbed the Iron Lady. She wore this description with pride as, like her successors today, she ruthlessly tried to solve British capitalism's difficulties by launching brutal attacks on the working class.

But she was not invincible as the socialist-led Liverpool City council of 1983-87 and the All-Britain Anti-Poll Tax Federation demonstrated.

Some common themes unite these organisations - a clear set of demands, a clear strategy to achieve them and the involvement of the mass of working class people in active defiance and socialists playing a leading role.

Thatcher introduced the poll tax in Scotland first. It was a standard charge on rich and poor alike. It was levied on each person over 18, including the unemployed, students and those with no personal income at all, who had been exempt from the poll tax's precursors, the rates. In fact a rich person could end up paying far less than a poor family.

Militant, predecessor of the Socialist, pointed out: "The Thatcher family in Dulwich will save

£2,300 per year... an average family in Suffolk will pay an extra £640."

Defiance

In 1987 supporters of Militant organised a conference in Scotland. This followed discussion throughout the ranks of Militant supporters in Scotland, England and Wales about what kind of programme and organisation was needed.

At the conference, Glasgow Labour councillor Chic Stevenson moved that we begin to organise for total defiance of it.

These decisions shaped the campaign over the next few years. The ideas of a mass campaign, for building anti-poll tax unions, for non-compliance by local authorities and council trade unions, for mass organised non-payment and for industrial action to defend those victimised for non-payment or non-implementation were brought together in a Militant pamphlet in April 1988.

Militant began to set up anti-poll tax unions and then federations. These attracted thousands of people to meetings.

The Strathclyde federation was set up in July 1988. Vice-chair Chic set the tone: "I'm having nothing to do with Thatcher's poll tax.

"I am voting against Glasgow district council setting its part of the tax at £92 per person, along with five other councillors.

"A mass non-payment campaign will still have to be organised. It has the support of local Labour parties and the mass of people in the housing schemes.

"With that support, Labour councils could make the poll tax inoperable if they called on people to refuse to pay.

"It is not the job of Labour councils to do the Tories' dirty work. I was elected to fight Thatcher, not to bow the knee to her poll tax."

Against this background the Scottish Anti-Poll Tax Federation was set up and the All Britain Anti-Poll Tax Federation in November 1989.

The initial community meetings consisted of explaining the tax and the collection methods, including the forcible methods which could be used, and then moving on to how to defeat the tax.

When it was explained the difficulties the state would face in collecting the tax if the mass of the people refused to pay, support for non-payment gathered apace.

But, one by one, the councils in Scotland began to bow the knee. When people did not pay, Sheriff's Officers were sent to get the debts paid.

This was Labour at its worst - all talk and posing but no action other than sticking the boot into the poor.

Involving masses of the non-payers in activity was a key part of the strategy. There were marches and demonstrations.

The first large one was the Scottish Federation organised demonstration in Glasgow on 18 March 1989.

More than 10,000 people attended. A 'Red Train' came up from London with 600 on board. Coaches came from all over England and Wales. The poll tax non-payment army was here.

Occupations

There were many innovative features of the campaign - occupations of council offices and Sheriff's Officers' offices. Sheriff's Officers' cars became well known and they were constantly hounded.

There was a week-long hunger strike in George Square, Glasgow, to highlight the plight of the poor having to choose between paying the tax and feeding their bairns.

There were mass demonstrations outside the homes of people threatened with 'poundings' (labelling of possessions for selling to pay debt).

Very few poundings actually took place but the sale of possessions became the scene of one of the most famous episodes in the poll tax struggle.

The Sheriff's Officers had given up even trying to arrange the sales in their normal salerooms and they set up a sale in the courtyard of a court.

A young Tommy Sheridan, secretary of the Scottish Anti-Poll Tax Federation with a very strong base in Pollok, was served with an interdict, banning him from doing anything to stop the sale.

In defiance he organised hundreds to be there and ripped up the interdict as he led them into the courtyard.

The police read the writing on the wall and instructed the Sheriff's Officers to cancel the sale.

That way of recovering the debt became unworkable and arresting bank accounts, wages and benefits became the weapon of choice of the state.

Tommy was jailed for six months for breaching the interdict. From there he stood in elections for the council and parliament.

He achieved a fantastic vote in the parliamentary election and was elected as the first Scottish Militant Labour councillor in Glasgow.

The mass defiance spread to England and Wales where Militant spearheaded the mass non-payment campaign.

Many others were jailed including the late Terry Fields, the Militant supporter elected Labour MP for Liverpool Broadgreen. As defiance spread, the Tories realised that the poll tax was finished.

On 31 March 1990 50,000 marched in Glasgow. After speaking in Glasgow Tommy Sheridan flew down to London to address the 200,000-strong demo there.

Much was made of the violence in London but the size and composition of the demo and the growing mass defiance was the real reason for the backing down by the Tories.

By the end, 18 million were not paying - an army which could not be resisted, even by Thatcher.

The 40,000 strong demo in London in October 1990 greeted the young people who had marched from all over Britain spreading the message.

In November 1990 Thatcher was forced to resign as prime minister, a victim of the campaign to abolish the tax she had introduced.

The fight to defend the non-payers continued for many years after that.

The last two large demos in March 1991 in Glasgow (15,000) and in London a few weeks later (50,000) were an indication of that determination to continue. The Tories brought forward plans for a new local government tax.

Labour's response to this victory was to attack those who resisted. They began to expel

Militant supporters who had led the fight to get rid of it.

When the question was posed: 'Whose side are you on?' they made it clear - the bosses and the Tories.

The struggle against the poll tax is a landmark in the history of working class activity in Britain. It is full of stories of innovative actions, heroism and solidarity which makes me proud to have been part of a working class capable of such a mass act of defiance.

We in the Socialist Parties in Scotland, Wales and England are proud of the part we played in leading such a resistance.

Isle of Wight 1 June 1990: The mass campaign comes to court

Alison Hill, Previously secretary South-East Hants and Isle of Wight anti-poll tax federation

When you're fighting an unjust law or government attack, you can't tell at the beginning of the campaign how every detail is going to work out. You have to engage in the battle and build from there.

Once the mass campaign of poll tax non-payment took off we knew the government would have to fight back somehow.

When Medina council on the Isle of Wight issued thousands of court summonses in May 1990 we had a fight on our hands.

1 June was our day in court and we spent the weeks leading up to that persuading as many people as we could to turn up on the day.

This was a big operation, for a start we had to raise a lot of money so people could pay the ferry fares to get to the Island to help out.

On the day, the court was surrounded by hundreds of people - who listened enthusiastically to the speakers from the anti-poll tax federation.

Sonia Branson, a member of Ryde anti-poll tax union told the Militant at the time that the demo was: "Marvellous, absolutely marvellous!..."

"If it wasn't for Militant we wouldn't have had this here. I think the Militant people have actually done a marvellous job to get this organised."

The old-fashioned court room was packed with press. The magistrates' bench was high up so they could intimidate those below.

Initially we had a hard job encouraging people to speak up and challenge the summonses. But as more people packed into the court, chinks in the magistrates' and the council's armour started to appear.

All day long you could hear singing and chanting outside, which built people's confidence.

Basically we exhausted the court and they gave in over a technicality. They even had to pay everyone's expenses, which people gleefully lined up to collect.

The Guardian described the court as a "revolutionary tribunal" where it "seemed as if the magistrates and the council were in the dock as defendants and public barracked them".

You could hear the cheering in Portsmouth as people celebrated the victory. There was still a long way to go but it was a huge blow to the government's strategy and another step nearer the exit for Thatcher.

The Rise of Militant by Peter Taaffe

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Yeadon Mill strike 1913

Striking back at greedy bosses

Iain Dalton, Yorkshire Socialist Party

One hundred years ago, mill workers in Yeadon and Guiseley, West Yorkshire, took heroic strike action over pay and working hours.

The textile industry adopted a system that Cameron's Tory ministers are trying to revive for the public sector.

Pay varied wildly by district, and when employers sought to negotiate rates they sent scouts out around West Yorkshire to find where similar workers were paid the lowest and used that as their benchmark.

The period from 1911-14 is known as 'the Great Unrest'. Workers across many industries fought to improve stagnating living standards. Some textile workers hadn't seen a pay rise in 18 years.

Fierce class battles included the first ever national rail and coal strikes, alongside major political debates over women's suffrage and Irish home rule.

Yeadon was just one of 1,497 disputes in the textile industry in 1913, affecting 93,510 workers.

A pay claim by the Yeadon, Guiseley and District Factory Workers Union (YGDFWU) for finishers, dyers and warehousemen sought to establish a flat 28 shillings (£1.40) a day wage for all workers over the age of 18.

Instead the employers offered a one shilling increase to all warehousemen and finishers earning under 25 shillings a day, while the dyers would get nothing.

This divisive offer was rejected and a strike began across the district on 19 May 1913. All factories with union membership were solid, except Nunroyd's Mill in Guiseley which was picketed.

After two days of police escorting scabs into work, the employers threatened a lockout - perhaps motivated by fear of a repeat of the widespread rioting that followed aggressive police protection of scabs in the Old Dog Mill strike just four years earlier.

By the end of the week 2,000 were locked out and a mass meeting of 1,000 was held in Yeadon Town Hall square.

The following week, 1,500 workers marched from the town out to Yeadon Moor and within a few weeks the willyers, fettlers and cloth millers were also out, closing Crompton's Mill, one of the few still working in the area.

With the employers convinced if they stood firm they could starve out the workers and break

the union, a compromise didn't seem likely soon.

Marches

Preparations were made for a protracted dispute as contingents of strikers were sent off on hunger marches to factory towns across the north of England, with one contingent reaching as far away as Blackpool.

Weekly marches into Leeds of up to 300 people involved strikers' families. Other union branches they had supported in the past - including textile workers in Manningham, Bradford - donated generously to strike funds.

The union secretary, Herbert Lockwood, was also a local Independent Labour Party (ILP) councillor on Yeadon Urban District Council.

This working class political representation proved vital to the strikers. A year earlier Lockwood established a distress fund for striking coal miners, and used the remaining money to support impoverished strikers and their families.

The capitalist Liberal and Tory parties tried, through the council, to set up mediation bodies to force the workers on to the old pay scales. These attempts backfired, building further support for Yeadon ILP.

After nine weeks on strike, a deal was struck giving a general agreement between the unions and textile employers in the area for the first time ever.

The deal meant a reduction in the working week without loss of pay, pay increases for various groups of workers as well as increases in night work pay.

The union compromised on some points, including not getting a pay rise for the finishers, dyers and warehousemen, although the reduction in the working week offset this to some degree.

Unlike the 1909 Old Dog strike, the employers hadn't been able to starve the men back to work. While not perfect, the deal helped the union to further build and organise, recruiting 247 more members by the end of 1913.

In November's elections, the ILP stood more candidates than before and came first, fourth and fifth in the polls for the three available council seats.

Just as at Manningham Mills 22 years earlier, where the ILP was set up after the strike,

workers in struggle discovered the value of independent organisation and political representation and fought to secure them, as workers will do as a result of the coming battles against austerity.

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