

# Workers power

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# Save the NHS

**As health unions call a second strike on 24 November, NHS England's five-year plan demands more funding. But the plan is a trap for staff and patients.**

By Bernie McAdam

NHS ENGLAND Chief Executive Simon Stevens argues that the NHS needs a further £8 billion by 2020, as limited resources lag behind increasing patient demand. However, the Stevens plan envisages a huge change in service delivery, depending on greater “efficiency”, code for cuts and privatisation.

It is no wonder then that the main political parties have not contested his plan. Tory Chancellor George Osborne said that Stevens’ requested spending increases are “conceivable”. Liberal Democrat Care Minister Norman Lamb is calling for a funding increase next year and £1 billion the year after that, while Labour politicians say that it is in line with their pledge of £2.5 billion extra per year.

In fact, as thousands of healthworkers and millions of NHS users can testify, years of neglect and cutbacks mean that the NHS needs a far bigger injection than only a massive tax on the rich could fund.

## Smokescreen

Stevens’ seemingly cautious demand for £8 billion is actually a smokescreen for the planned dismantling and privatisation of our health service, which the 2012 Health and Social Care Act laid down the groundwork for.

Stevens may call for an end to top-down reorganisations of the NHS, but there won’t be an NHS when Lansley’s law kicks



in. The Health Secretary’s legal duty “to secure or provide health services” has now been replaced with the weaker and less accountable duty only to “act with a view to securing” comprehensive services.

The Health Secretary’s general powers of direction over NHS bodies are also now abolished. Clinical Commissioning Groups (CCGs) have inherited the task of spending the NHS budget, supposedly with doctors at the helm.

Stevens’ plan acknowledges this by expanding the role of General Practice, allowing GPs to employ consultants and sen-

ior nurses with a view to transferring outpatient work from hospitals. Private health companies and management consultants must be licking their lips as our money heads their way.

Lansley’s law will leave commercial enterprises and not doctors or health professionals in control of health spending. This is a colossal attack on the principle of free, universal and comprehensive healthcare. In its place will be a rapid programme of privatisation, in the form of Private Finance Initiative (PFI) contracts and the outsourcing of most of the NHS budget.

## More Cuts

Stevens “warns” that the rising number of admissions means that we need to take healthcare out of hospitals, with 17,000 additional hospital beds needed by 2022 on present trends. His plan puts the emphasis on care in the community, but there is no way that CCGs can accommodate this on a profitable basis.

His plan effectively also calls for deskilling, with staff taking more responsibility for patient care by treating conditions usually dealt with by doctors. Doing this properly would require thorough retraining and a phenomenal increase in

staffing levels, given the dramatic increase in community care to compensate for the running down of our hospitals. Stevens of course does not propose this!

The loss of an extraordinary number of hospital beds, the closures of Accident & Emergency departments, hospital mergers and so on are already happening daily without any corresponding increase in “care in the community”.

North West London Hospitals Trust is 100 beds short because the casualty department at Central Middlesex has been closed and Northwick Park A&E has to cover all of

Brent and Harrow. In the north of Ireland, wide-ranging cuts will see fewer beds and weekend ward closures.

This is a critical crossroads for the NHS. Either we accept a service based on commercial contracting with increasing charges and no equity of access, or we build a mass movement prepared to defend the principles on which the NHS was founded.

## Action

Labour must repeal the Health and Social Care Act if elected, and reverse all privatisations with no compensation for the privateers. Tear up the Public Private Partnership and PFI deals!

The private health sector should be nationalised and all hospitals brought back into a fully state-owned system, under the control of service providers and service users. The hugely profitable pharmaceutical companies should be expropriated and put to the benefit of the public.

Where local services are under threat, we should prevent their closure by occupying their premises and rallying the community to their defence. We should build strike action from the health unions and all unions locally.

The health unions’ strikes for higher pay are an excellent start. They should be escalated and linked to a mass political movement, using each and every struggle in the NHS to defend the service as a whole against all attacks.

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# Where we stand

**CAPITALISM** is an anarchic and crisis-ridden economic system based on production for profit. We are for the expropriation of the capitalist class and the abolition of capitalism. We are for its replacement by socialist production planned to satisfy human need. Only the socialist revolution and the smashing of the capitalist state can achieve this goal. Only the working class, led by a revolutionary vanguard party and organised into workers' councils and workers' militias can lead such a revolution to victory and establish the rule of the working class in society. There is no peaceful, parliamentary road to socialism.

**THE LABOUR PARTY** is not a socialist party. It is a bourgeois workers' party – pro-capitalist in its politics and practice, but based on the working class via the trade unions and supported by the mass of workers at the polls. We are for the creation of a genuine workers' party, based on a programme for the overthrow of capitalism and the implementation of socialism and workers' power.

**THE TRADE UNIONS** must be transformed by a rank and file movement to put control of the unions into the hands of the members. All officials must be regularly elected and subject to instant recall; they must earn the average wage of the members they represent. We are for the building of fighting organisations of the working class – factory committees, industrial unions, councils of action and workers' defence organisations.

**OCTOBER 1917** The Russian revolution established a workers' state. But Stalin destroyed workers' democracy and set about the reactionary and utopian project of building "socialism in one country". In the USSR and the other degenerate workers' states that were established from above, capitalism was destroyed but the bureaucracy excluded the working class from power, blocking the road to democratic planning and socialism. The parasitic bureaucratic caste led these states to crisis and destruction. Stalinism has consistently betrayed the working class. The Stalinist Communist Parties' strategy of alliances with the capitalists (popular fronts) and their stages theory of revolution have inflicted terrible defeats on the working class worldwide. These parties are reformist and offer no perspective for workers' revolution.

**SOCIAL OPPRESSION** is an integral feature of capitalism, which systematically oppresses people on the basis of race, age, gender and sexual orientation. We are for the liberation of women and for the building of a working class women's movement, not an "all-class" autonomous movement. We are for the liberation of all the oppressed. We fight racism and fascism. We oppose all immigration controls. We fight for labour movement support for black self-defence against racist and state attacks. We are for no platform for fascists and for driving them out of the unions.

**IMPERIALISM** is a world system, which oppresses nations and prevents economic development in the vast majority of third world countries. We support the struggles of the oppressed nationalities or countries against imperialism. Against the politics of the bourgeois and petit-bourgeois nationalists we fight for permanent revolution – working class leadership of the anti-imperialist struggle under the banner of socialism and internationalism. In conflicts between imperialist and semi-colonial countries, we are for the victory of those oppressed and exploited by imperialism. We are for the immediate and unconditional withdrawal of British troops from Ireland and all other countries. We fight imperialist war, not with pacifist pleas, but with militant class struggle methods, including the forcible disarmament of "our own" bosses.

**WORKERS POWER** is a revolutionary communist organisation. We stand in the tradition of Marx, Engels, Lenin and Trotsky and the revolutionary policies of the first four congresses of the Third International. Workers Power is the British Section of the League for the Fifth International. The L51 is pledged to refound a revolutionary communist International and build a new world party of socialist revolution. If you are a class-conscious fighter against capitalism, if you are an internationalist – join us!

## FEEDBACK

Workers Power is the British section of the League for the Fifth International.

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## ★ ANTI-WAR

# No to the bombing of Syria and Iraq – solidarity with Kobane!



By Marcus Halaby

AS THE WESTERN powers bomb Iraq and Syria under the pretext of fighting the Islamic State, attention has been drawn to the struggle of the Kurdish People's Protection Units (YPG) to defend the Syrian Kurdish enclave of Kobane. On the border with Turkey, Kobane has been besieged by the ultra-reactionary IS for months, with most of its population now displaced.

Our German section Gruppe Arbeitermacht is taking part in a movement demanding arms for the Kurdish resistance and the lifting of the EU-wide "anti-terrorist" ban on the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK).

The Kurdish movement in Turkey and its allies on the Turkish left have tried repeatedly to break the Turkish state's blockade on aid to Kobane. The PKK has suspended its participation in the "peace process" in response. They have sent volunteers and held demonstrations in many cities, which have met with violent repression from the Turkish police, leading to several deaths.

Kobane's struggle deserves the support of the labour movement in Britain and across Europe. It is no less justified because it has benefited, in the very short term, from the imperialist airstrikes. We should demand material and military assistance to the Kurds and other progressive forces in Syria and Iraq without any political preconditions, and that the EU open its borders to refugees.

A victory for IS in Kobane

would be a catastrophe, not just for the thousands of its remaining residents and fighters facing a massacre, but also for the self-government structures that they have built in Rojava, the Kurdish region in Syria. Their subjugation would mean a totalitarian theocratic dictatorship for those who remain and would be a blow to the Syrian revolution, and to what is left of the "Arab Spring".

The heroism of their popular defence demonstrates that the liberation struggle of oppressed peoples is still alive even in most unfavourable conditions: the superior forces of the IS pogromists, and the cynical politics of the regional and global powers.

### Anti-imperialism

Even so, for anti-imperialists in the West to give any endorsement or support to the war being waged by their governments in the region would be criminal. While the Kurds have every right to take whatever aid they can from where it is most readily available, to combat their most immediately deadly enemies, the Western imperialists are not their friends, and we oppose their intervention.

The USA and its allies are not legitimate global policemen or firefighters, but the biggest housebreakers and arsonists on the planet, as events in the Balkans, Afghanistan, Somalia and Iraq have repeatedly shown. Their bombings and invasions have killed far more civilians than IS could ever hope to achieve.

Their intervention, strategically, is aimed at stabilising a

Shia sectarian Iraqi state whose own atrocities and discrimination against its Sunni citizens have encouraged the rise of Sunni sectarian forces like IS. It is also strengthening the blood-soaked Assad regime, whose slaughter of hundreds of thousands and displacement of millions of its own people has created the conditions that allowed IS to consolidate. Our opposition both to IS and to the imperialist intervention against it should not in the least lead us to grant Assad any spurious "secular" or "anti-imperialist" credentials.

The USA's allies, Saudi Arabia, Qatar and the other Gulf states, for years fomented a bitter and destructive sectarian civil war in Iraq, one that the US tolerated, fostered even, to divide and rule the country. They have done all in their power to divert the Syrian people's legitimate uprising for democracy in a religious and sectarian direction, using their money and arms to promote the most reactionary forces among the anti-Assad Syrian factions.

And of course the Turkish state under President Tayyip Erdogan and his predecessors, whether Islamist or nationalist, has been the mortal enemy of its own Kurdish citizens' right to self-determination. Its obstruction of aid to the Syrian Kurds testifies to this, as does the covert support that Erdogan previously gave to the growth of IS.

Turkey allowed Iraqi Kurdish Peshmerga fighters to enter Kobane only because it has reassurances from Iraq's Kurdistan Regional Government that they will not support the Syrian Kurds' right to self-determination. If either Turkish or Western troops were to enter and occupy Rojava, then it would only be to disarm the Syrian Kurds and put them back in their place once the IS danger is removed.

We believe that there is a progressive alternative to the imperialist intervention: solidarity with the Kurdish popular defence and the Syrian revolution, and the lifting of the embargos that have allowed Western governments to deny them access to arms and supplies.

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## Editorial

# Vote Labour – and build a socialist alternative

By Marcus Halaby

AS NEXT YEAR'S general election approaches, working class people across Britain will be thinking about who to vote for, or whether to vote at all. Labour's abject failure to oppose austerity has allowed capitalist parties like the Scottish National Party and the middle class Greens to pose as a radical alternative to Labour's left, leading some labour movement activists to propose voting for them instead.

We should reject this outright. Labour's continued connections to the six million-strong trade unions joins its mass base to the workers' movement in a way that populist parties that do not have these structural connections to the organised working class do not have to worry about.

The millions who will vote Labour despite its inadequacies will do so out of a hope for protection from the Tories' assault on their living standards, a hope that socialists want to relate to and transform into concrete demands for change.

No one on the left should imagine that they can overcome Labour's hold on working class electoral politics by imitating the demagogic populism of the SNP or the Greens, which aims to destroy the idea of class politics altogether by dissolving the working class into "the people". In every constituency where there are no explicitly socialist candidates with real roots in local or national struggles, defending working class interests from a class standpoint, we will call for a vote for Labour in 2015.

All the same, we should criticise sharply Labour's neoliberal and pro-capitalist policies on benefits, privatisation, pay, immigration and war, and campaign for a new mass party of the working class. Such a party will have to avoid Labour's key vulnerability, of being locked inside a media and opinion poll induced consensus misleadingly called "public opinion", in reality manufactured by a capitalist ruling class.

It is this neoliberal consensus that produces the correct perception by millions of voters that, whatever the parties say in the hickhack of "party politics", their policies in government are remarkably similar.

### Placing demands on Labour

That's why we should place demands on Labour, to reject austerity and address working class needs for jobs, housing, and public services, in a way that can mobilise Labour's mass base in the unions and in working class communities.

For example, take Miliband's confusing and woefully inadequate pledge to build "200,000 homes a year by 2020". What does this mean? Would Labour not build any homes in the years 2015-19? And what sort of homes: council, rip-off housing association or private and for sale only? The pledge is deliberately vague because it's not meant to be delivered – and it won't be without massive pressure from below, whether from the unions still affiliated to Labour or from struggles outside of it.

We should demand Labour builds 200,000 homes every year – a million new homes during the next Labour government. They should be council owned, with affordable rents and secure tenancies. Direct labour teams should build them, with an army of young apprentices trained to use the latest, greenest construction technologies. And we should press our demands with working class methods: strikes, street protests, movements against cuts and against racism.

Key to this pressure will be a movement to break the unions from Labour and build a new working class party, one that can challenge Labour's monopoly on the working class vote. There is no contradiction in this, quite the opposite. Demanding Labour fights for the working class while in office only has leverage if it is coupled with the threat to break from it if it does not.

# UKIP: a racist, big business party

Andy Yorke is bemused and disgusted in equal measure by the airspace and column inches afforded to UKIP's Nigel Farage. Time to unmask the racist party

TWO BY-ELECTIONS in October saw the anti-EU, anti-immigrant UK Independence Party win its first MP in Clacton, and come a close second to Labour in Heywood and Middleton. Panicked Tories and Labour alike are falling over themselves to attack immigrants, as the Rochester and Stroud by-election approaches on 20 November. David Cameron, desperate to staunch the flow of MPs defecting to UKIP, throws out copycat policies nearly every week.

First he announced the Tories would restrict benefits for EU migrants. Then he proposed a quota on EU migrants and wrangled with Brussels over Britain's extra £1.7 billion contribution. The Eurocrats have rebuffed him on both measures, while his EU (Referendum) Bill collapsed, to the delight of UKIP leader Nigel Farage.

Tory Defence Secretary Michael Fallon claimed that there are "whole towns and communities being swamped by huge numbers of migrant workers"; what's worse, Labour politician David Blunkett supported him. Not to be outdone, Labour leader Ed Miliband pledged that a Labour government would introduce electronic monitoring of EU migrants' movements in and out of Britain and would negotiate longer restrictions on immigrants from new EU countries.



The public school boy turned stockbroker nurtures his populist façade

Meanwhile the drip-feed of UKIP politicians' bigoted stunts continues. The latest is former Radio 1 DJ Mike Read putting on a crap Caribbean accent for a racist "UKIP calypso" song about "illegal immigrants in every town".

Farage claims that UKIP is a "people's army" opposing a politically correct "Westminster elite". It's not; it's a racist, free-market party, funded by big ex-Tory millionaire donors and tax exiles. It blames migrants for poverty and unemployment to shield the millionaire capitalists who are really responsible.

Its pro-business policies on NHS privatisation and tax cuts for the wealthy take from the working class and give to the rich. Now Farage, to deflect questions about his position on the NHS, has said that the manifesto is out of date and that new policies are in the pipeline, allowing him to adjust his policies to fit the mood of the moment. Workers can't trust UKIP an inch, or rely on Labour to stand up to racism. The only way to push back racism and cuts is for the working class movement to launch a new mass workers' party that fights for socialism.

## Is UKIP a threat to Labour in 2015?

UKIP SLASHED a Labour majority from 5,971 in 2010 to 617 in Heywood and Middleton last month, setting the pundits claiming that UKIP could damage Labour's vote at the general election. Could UKIP block a Labour majority in 2015?

UKIP has made big gains since 2010, with a breakthrough in the May 2014 EU elections where it got 27.5 per cent of the vote. But the capitalist media, along with Labour's right wing, are hyping UKIP's prospects, in a calculated bid to push Ed Miliband to the right.

This leaves Labour pandering to UKIP's core racist vote, 74 per cent of which sees immigration as their key concern, twice the level of Tory voters. By contrast, polls consistently show the general population's biggest concern is the NHS, with only 20 per cent naming immigration as their key concern.

Jobs, prices and wages – the "cost of living crisis" raised in Miliband's

speeches – are in third place with 17 per cent, and education fourth with 9 per cent. There is plenty of room to fight anti-immigrant racism while taking a strong stance on health, jobs, wages, and education. Why doesn't Labour do that?

For the neoliberal thinking that dominates Labour, a commitment to Tory spending limits comes first. Shadowing Tory policies down the line, Labour tries to look "tougher" than the Tories on benefit claimants, and refuses to support workers on strike against pay freezes and pension cuts. But how can Labour afford to alienate so much of its working class base?

Quite simple, really. Labour strategists calculate that, so long as these supporters have no viable alternative to vote for, they'll even stomach the racist lies and the scapegoating of migrant workers in order to sweep the Tories from office. If by so doing they

poison working class communities with demagogy and race hate, then for Miliband and Ed Balls maybe that's a price worth paying.

More than half of UKIP voters in the Euro elections previously voted Tory, and the marginals where UKIP could swing things are generally Tory seats where UKIP could split the right wing vote. The party only gained 3 per cent of the national vote in 2010 and no seats. Their own leaders only expect to get two or three seats next year.

Any damage to Labour will therefore be self-inflicted. Indeed, Labour has a massive advantage in a general election, particularly with the Tories in government. Socialists and trade unionists should call on Labour to stop pandering to the racist right and instead point the finger at those who really are to blame for the NHS crisis, the housing shortage and low wages: the bosses and the bankers.

# Podemos: the new politics or old-fashioned populism?

Podemos has exploded onto the political scene in Spain and challenged the European left to 'do politics differently'. Dave Stockton examines the decisions of its first conference

ON 18 AND 19 OCTOBER, 7,000 people gathered in a Madrid basketball arena. Podemos, the Spanish party that embodies what it calls "the new politics", was holding its Citizens' Assembly.

Founded in February, Podemos gained 1.25 million votes (7.9 per cent) and five seats in the European Parliament elections in May. Opinion polls place its support at around the same level as the two main parties, the Socialist Party (PSOE) and the Popular Party (PP). It has 215,000 members.

Podemos' growth is the most dramatic expression of a sharp turn to the left in Spanish politics. Another was the rise of United Left (IU), an alliance including the Communist Party and the Greens, which obtained 10 per cent and six seats, with 1,575,308 votes, three times its tally in 2009.

The background is Spain's long and grinding economic crisis. Unemployment has been around 25 per cent since 2012, and is now 53.7 per cent for under-25s. Masses of young people have flooded abroad in search of work.

To this must be added the PSOE's betrayal of its supporters, initiating austerity and colluding in August 2011 with the PP to amend the constitution to prohibit budget deficits, locking future governments into permanent austerity.

This prolonged crisis has caused waves of protests against what are now seen, especially by the young, as the two parties of a corrupt establishment. This has produced a "crisis of democracy", a recognition that democracy, as practiced in Spain and indeed across Europe, produces parties that offer no real choice.

Eventually, it became obvious that protest alone would not change things. At the European elections, Podemos offered a voice to the frustrations of former PSOE voters, youth and trade unionists who had struck, marched and occupied over the preceding three years.

## Enter Podemos

The people who played a critical role in its launch were nearly all members of the Political Science and Sociology faculty at the Complutense University of Madrid. Pablo Iglesias, Juan Carlos Monedero and Inigo Errejón became celebrities thanks to a local TV programme, "La Tuerka", which went viral on social media.

Most had spent time in Latin America, observing Venezuela's Hugo Chavez and his allies, Bolivia's Evo Morales and Ecuador's Rafael Correa.



Pablo Iglesias acknowledges the applause at Podemos' Citizens' Assembly

From them they learned the power of cross-class mobilisations: "the People against the Oligarchy", which they reproduced in Spain as "the Citizens against the Caste" (of professional politicians).

They also decided to junk Spanish libertarianism's hostility towards "leaders". Errejón said that:

"We also challenged the leadership taboo. According to certain liberal ideas – but also those rooted in the left – a charismatic leader is incompatible with real democracy. For Podemos, the use of the media leadership of Pablo Iglesias was a condition *sine qua non* of the crystallisation of political hope that allowed the aggregation of dispersed forces, in a context of disarticulation of the popular camp."

Clearly what they really learned was "caudillismo": the elevation of a charismatic leader who speaks for and relates to the masses, not through any elected party structure but directly via the media. The leader's validation is popularity, expressed in votes.

The people in this equation are atomised, not collective. The leader and his team have the privilege of publicly representing, developing and initiating policies, and of choosing which proposals from below to highlight. Organised political tendencies are thus made vulnerable to the charge of factionalism, of not representing "the people" but their own little groups.

Iglesias and company are also determined to avoid the "old" language of socialism, class and the workers in favour of "citizens" and "the people". Consistently with this, Iglesias rejects

characterising the party as either left or right wing. He told the Assembly: "We will tell them [people who put Podemos either on the left or the right] we want to occupy the centre; where a political majority exists which believes in decency."

This blatantly contradicts the policies that have propelled Podemos forward. During the European elections, Iglesias talked of cancelling Spain's debt. Podemos supporters endorsed this proposal in October, but already there is talk of backtracking, with finance spokesperson Bibiana Medialdea saying: "The objective isn't to not pay the debt, but to return to a level of indebtedness and a sustainable approach which would allow for a recovery in the population's welfare."

## Organisation

It is no surprise that a leadership election conducted online gave Iglesias, a national media celebrity, 80 per cent of members' votes. His main rivals are Teresa Rodríguez, Pablo Echenique (both Podemos MEPs) and Jesús Rodríguez, whose tendency is called Sumando Podemos (Together We Can).

They come from Anticapitalist Left (IA), an organisation with about a thousand members led by the Spanish section of the Fourth International. Alongside the Complutense academics, they were main founders of Podemos, providing half the signatories for the original appeal and drafting the European election programme.

Rodríguez defined their objectives, saying: "We have the support of many people who want to maintain the plu-

rality of the project. And there are many people who want a leadership with very diverse and plural counterweights." They argued for a three-person secretariat and for a quarter of the 71 member Citizen's Council (which controls the party between two-yearly Assemblies) to be chosen by lot.

Iglesias however wanted no counterweights. His proposals, for a one-person leadership and a ban on dual membership for candidates for the Citizen's Council, were clearly aimed at weakening the far left. He rubbished the IA proposal of a three-person secretariat with the words, "The skies are not captured by consensus but by assault", and mocked the proposal for election by lot by saying that you would not choose a basketball team that way.

He also made clear that he would not serve on a collective leadership. By taming the far left, Iglesias hopes to make himself an unassailable "líder máximo". Already the bourgeois media compare him to a "rock star" on account of his six bodyguards.

## Is Podemos a model?

Podemos' rise poses important questions for the far left. Is this young party's "new politics" any model for others? Does it represent a real alternative in the struggle against capitalist crisis and austerity? What does it mean for the workers' movement and for revolutionaries?

The rapid growth of Podemos, for all the defects of its leaders' strategy and politics, points to the potential for explosive changes in people's ideas,

among the middle classes as well as workers. However, if Podemos continues to orient towards elections alone, diluting its programme to be more acceptable to the "centre ground", then this will disorient popular resistance to austerity.

The general election takes place in December 2015, giving Rajoy's government plenty of time to press home its attacks on living standards and public services. There is a crying need for effective resistance now. Additionally, Rajoy's rejection of an independence referendum in Catalonia creates a constitutional crisis for the Spanish state. Addressing these issues requires not electoralism, but direct action and mass strikes.

A party whose militants do not try to lead popular struggles and who avoid united action with workers' organisations, decaying them as part of the establishment, will inevitably disappoint the hopes placed in it.

But even if Podemos makes it to the election, it faces difficult choices. Without a majority in the Cortes, it will have to choose between forming a coalition or a minority government, and waiting in opposition for another five years. This will test the limits of Iglesias's rejection of compromise with "the caste".

Even with an absolute parliamentary majority, there is still the inevitable sabotage of any radical measures by the banks, the markets, the EU, international financial institutions, and finally by the police chiefs, the army high command and the state bureaucracy.

If Podemos enters government without having behind it a power to counter not just the ideas of the ruling class, but also the bourgeoisie's repressive forces, then it will either back down ingloriously or be ejected from power, as soon as a financial or fiscal crisis gives its enemies the opportunity. Podemos will be utterly unprepared for this reality so long as it is committed to its classless democracy mantra, its neither-left-nor-right electoral populism.

Here only the politics of Marxism, its recognition of the state's class character and the combat readiness of a Leninist party will do. If Podemos seriously wishes to struggle for power then it will have to acquire these characteristics urgently. Revolutionaries in Podemos (and in IU) should take the initiative, fighting not just for an anticapitalist electoral programme but also for a programme of action in the class struggle here and now.

# South Africa: fight for a revolutionary workers' party

The giant metalworkers' trade union Numsa has been campaigning for the labour movement to break with the ruling ANC and form a new working class party. Now union federation Cosatu is threatening its expulsion. **Jeremy Dewar** reports

AS WE GO to press, the South African labour movement faces a historic crisis. Cosatu, the 2.2 million strong trade union federation that played a decisive role in bringing down apartheid, is on the verge of expelling its largest affiliated union, the National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa (Numsa).

On the surface, the dispute is about Numsa organising outside of engineering and manufacturing. But as Numsa has pointed out, "virtually all Cosatu affiliates at some factory, industry or sectoral level do organise across industries and therefore stray into other affiliates' areas," but this "has never been the basis either for admission into Cosatu or cause for dismissal".

In fact, everyone in South Africa understands that this is a political dispute. Numsa's expulsion is motivated by its campaign to break Cosatu's alliance with the African National Congress (ANC) and the South African Communist Party (SACP).

## New party

At a special congress in December 2013, 1,200 delegates representing 338,000 Numsa members made this call on Cosatu and voted unanimously to establish "a new united front that will coordinate the struggles in the workplace and in communities in a way similar to the UDF [the legal front established by the ANC while it was banned] of the 1980s. The task of the front will be to fight for the implementation of the Freedom Charter", the ANC's apartheid-era programme, and to struggle against neoliberalism.

The resolution went on: "Side by side with the establishment of the new United Front, we resolved that Numsa would explore the establishment of a Movement for Socialism, as the working class needs a political organisation committed in its policies and actions to the establishment of a socialist South Africa."

In short, Numsa has initiated a process towards forming a mass socialist party based on the trade unions, organising a Conference for Socialism next month.

This comes not a moment too soon. The last year has seen two huge mass strikes. The first was the longest strike in the country's history, a five-month long pay battle in South Africa's strategically important platinum mines, which won a significant pay rise. This saw many miners abandon the 300,000 strong National Union of Mineworkers (NUM), seen as corrupt and too close to bosses and to the ANC government, for the new breakaway Association of Mineworkers and Construction Union (AMCU), which now claims 50,000 members.

Numsa itself led the second strike in the manufacturing sector, involving 220,000 members. Again it was over pay and lasted five weeks, achieving another partial victory. Clearly, workers are recovering from the shock of the financial crisis and the Marikana massacre, and are on the march once again.

When the media denounced the strike as being "political", Moses Mayekiso, who led the union in the 1980s, responded that, if anything, strikes should be more political, and encouraged the founding of a new workers' party.

Alongside mass strikes, community struggles in the townships remain as buoyant as ever. In addition to boasting one of the best-organised and most militant union movements in Africa, South Africa also has heroic social movements, against the privatisation and extortion demanded by the ANC government's neoliberal programme. "Struggle plumbers" and "struggle electricians" regularly reconnect households whose utilities have been cut off by private corporations.

The latest campaign is against "e-tolls" charged to motorists by the companies that maintain privatised motorways. A mass campaign of civil disobedience and non-payment, supported both by Cosatu and Numsa, has caught the public imagination.

It is these two sides of South Africa's working class – the disciplined, organised workers in more permanent jobs, and the militant township-dwellers who survive on the margins of society – that need a party to unite them politically.

## Economic Freedom Fighters

Another development is the emergence of the Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF), who gained 6.35 per cent and over a million votes in the May 2014 general election. This gave it 25 MPs, led by Julius Malema, the expelled former leader of the ANC's Youth League.

Malema has adopted the iconography of the US Black Panthers, with a self-styled "Marxist-Leninist" ideology, military-style berets and himself installed as "Commander-in-Chief". The EFF's manifesto calls for the nationalisation of the land without compensation, and of the mines, industry and banks. These are burning issues; for example only 7 per cent of white farmers' land has been redistributed since 1994.

On closer reading, however, the EFF only calls for 60 per cent of the mines to be nationalised, for most industry to be left in private hands and for a state-owned bank to stand alongside the private banks. This "mixed economy" model in practice always



First day of Numsa strike: red as far as the eye can see

tends to offload the effects of capitalism's periodic crises onto the working class.

Malema also stands accused of harassing journalists, money laundering, tax evasion and accepting kickbacks from state tenders in Limpopo province. He openly admires Zimbabwe's Robert Mugabe, brushing aside criticism of his regime's killing of trade unionists and supporters of the opposition Movement for Democratic Change.

South Africa's working class does not need populist "heroes" like this, but collective and accountable leadership. Many EFF members are undoubtedly sincere in their opposition to corrupt ANC capitalism; they need to be won to a united front of struggle against it, which will put Malema and his entourage to the test.

## ANC's record

For 20 years, the ANC has presided over an increasingly unequal South Africa. "Black Empowerment" has not increased the majority black population's share of the country's enormous natural wealth, only that of the ANC elite. The grossest example of this is Cyril Ramaphosa, who rose to fame as the leader of the NUM and has since become a board member of Lonmin mining company. He is currently worth \$700 million, according to Forbes Rich List.

Indeed, deputy ANC president Ramaphosa has come to symbolise everything that is corrupt and rotten about the ANC. The Marikana massacre in August 2012, in which police shot dead 34 striking miners at a Lonmin platinum mine, was a turning point. Ramaphosa's own involve-

ment in it became clear from his words in a leaked email sent to Lonmin on the eve of the shootings:

"The terrible events that have unfolded cannot be described as a labour dispute. They are plainly dastardly criminal and must be characterised as such. In the line with this characterisation there needs to be concomitant action to address this situation."

Twenty-four hours later, 34 miners lay dead. Blood is on Ramaphosa and the ANC's hands.

## Where next?

Cosatu's leadership will almost certainly expel Numsa this month. It might even expel its General Secretary Zwelinzima Vavi, another leading critic of the ANC. The trigger for the expulsions seems to be Numsa's collection of enough signatories from other Cosatu affiliates to convene a Special Congress to discuss and vote on the alliance with the ANC. So what should Numsa do?

As its National Executive resolution in response to the expulsion threat says, "the crisis in Cosatu today is in fact about whether or not Cosatu should continue to be a socialist trade union federation or it should simply become a yellow capitalist federation of the workers or a labour desk of the bourgeoisie".

Workers do not take division in their movement lightly, but the blame for it here lies squarely on Cosatu's leadership. Far from retreating, Numsa must press ahead with its Movement for Socialism agenda, by calling a conference before the end of the year.

There are many questions yet to answer:

- What kind of party do South African workers need – one in which leaders have all the power, or that demands full accountability and no corruption?
- What should be the focus of its activity – elections, or the struggles of the workplaces and townships?
- What should its goal be – a democratic South Africa, or a workers' state that can overturn capitalism?
- And finally, what programme should it adopt – one based on winning elections, or one that sets itself the goal of revolution, winning power through workers' councils? One that accepts the straightjacket of the capitalist state, or one based on smashing it and replacing it with the armed working class? In short: reform or revolution?

These are exciting times in South Africa. Numsa – aided by all revolutionary socialists in South Africa and internationally – must keep to the path that it has bravely set out upon.

'34 miners lay dead. Blood is on Ramaphosa and the ANC's hands'

# Which way forward for the unions?

As the Autumn's coordinated strike action stalls, **Jeremy Dewar** reviews the unions' record and asks how we can stop the retreat

UP TO 150,000 marched in London, Glasgow and Belfast in October in response to the TUC's call, "Britain needs a pay rise". There was wild applause in Hyde Park for our leaders' speeches, none more so than for Unite leader Len McCluskey, when he said that Britain "needs more than a pay rise. It needs a government that fights for working people like the Tories fight for the rich".

He argued that there is "an alternative to Tory misery... building homes, bringing banks under real public control, freezing energy prices, renationalisation of rail, a boost to the minimum wage - £8 an hour now".

Saying to the rich and the corporations "pay your taxes, you greedy bastards", he went on, "It needs strong fighting trade unions" and "a Labour Party that offers a clear socialist alternative at the next election".

Millions would agree. What McCluskey didn't say, though, is that there is not a cat's chance in hell of the Labour fighting for this alternative in 2015.

Instead, Labour offers more of the same: low pay, benefit cuts, privatisation. And with Ed Balls' pledge to keep to Tory spending limits until May 2017, when Britain will probably be back in recession, this austerity-lite could turn out to be rather heavy.

Ed Miliband is so far off from doing any of the things McCluskey demanded that he hasn't even supported Doncaster Care UK workers in his own constituency, who have taken 90 days of strike action to beat back a 35 per cent pay cut.

So when the head of Britain's biggest union says we need "strong trade unions", he should back this up by making the millions that he donates to Labour conditional on them offering a "clear socialist alternative". Otherwise, his fiery speeches mean absolutely nothing.

## Militant minority

While most appreciated McCluskey's verbal fireworks, a significant minority could see through them. Amongst them were some of the 300,000 local government workers who had just seen their leaders (Unison's Dave Prentis, GMB's Paul Kenny and McCluskey himself)



The TUC demonstration in London on 18 October: a lot of hot air, very little action

call off their strike that very week.

If this had been to consult over an improved offer, then we might have been disappointed but understanding. As it was, it was for 2.2 per cent from January 2013 until April 2016, with an insulting £100 Christmas bonus to compensate for the big fat zero from April this year, barely enough for a Christmas tree and a turkey. With inflation at 2.3 per cent and forecast to climb above 3 per cent next year, this is a pay cut in real terms.

With the UCU calling off action when a Tory judge decided their ballot was faulty, and the RMT cancelling the tube strike claiming progress in negotiations, all this "Autumn of Action" has achieved so far is a PCS walkout and a four-hour NHS strike. Good for them, but this will not halt the decline in wages, let alone the destruction of the NHS.

No one really wants to say, "I told you so". But we did. Only last month, our front-page arti-

cle predicted that this would be "the trade union leaders' 'last hurrah' before the election, before they call off all action on the grounds that they must not 'embarrass' the Labour Party". Our only error was to imagine they would muster a "hurrah".

## Balance sheet

The last five years have been a massive defeat for our class. Wages have fallen for the longest period since records began in the 1860s; hundreds of thousands of skilled and semi-skilled, permanent, full-time, decently paid jobs have been replaced with unskilled, temporary, part-time or zero-hours contract, low-paid and minimum wage jobs. Women, youth, black and ethnic minority workers have fallen further behind.

And as the table below shows, this is not because a combative union movement has gone down fighting, but because a timid leadership has failed to call action commensurate with the tasks it has faced. Once you strip out the set-piece one-day

public sector strikes, which go nowhere, the figures are pathetic.

The biggest share of the blame lies with the right-wing union leaders, who have repeatedly dragged their heels and then broken ranks at the first opportunity, most notably former TUC head Brendan Barber and Unison's Dave Prentis during the pensions dispute. But the more "left-wing" leaders like Mark Serwotka (PCS), Christine Blower (NUT), Len McCluskey and Billy Hayes (CWU) have not provided any alternative strategy.

They have either been locked into a pattern of one-day strikes, held months apart (PCS and NUT), or have spectacularly failed the big tests. McCluskey "negotiated" disastrous deals at British Airways in 2010 and Grangemouth last year, while Hayes saw Royal Mail sold off (or given away) without even a strike.

That's not to say there's no difference between the left and right wings. The lefts can take initiatives that open up the possibility of struggle, and we should support them against union right-wingers when they fight.

But "Broad Leftism", the strategy of replacing right wing leaders with lefts, does not work. And by extension, the Socialist Party's National Shop Stewards Network and the Socialist Workers Party's Unite the Resistance also fail to lead the way.

The former explicitly rejects

the idea of rank and file organisation to intervene in the unions' internal politics, while the latter claims to be a "hybrid" between a rank and file movement and a Broad Left. Because workers are apparently not yet confident enough for a rank and file movement, all we are left with is a toothless Broad Left at key moments, like the pensions sell-out. How this is supposed to build "confidence" is anybody's guess.

Equally unconvincing are arguments that deny a crisis of leadership in favour of the idea that workers are not willing to fight. Why then have the big one-day strikes been supported so magnificently? How come when workers gain control over their disputes, like at Ritzy Cinema, Hovis and the Tres Cosas cleaners, they have won real victories?

## Five preliminary steps

The time is right for rank and file activists across the unions to discuss these problems. A national meeting on 8 November will hopefully provide a forum to debate the issues and take some steps in the right direction.

Here are five things we could discuss immediately.

### 1. Strikes of more than one day's duration

We need a revival of serious strike action: escalating, week-long and all-out indefinite strikes. Wherever strikes take place we can raise funds, get down to the picket lines, invite speakers and report on their progress. Of course workers lack confidence after years of ineffective action and defeat, but to break this cycle we need to convince trade unionists to

raise the stakes.

### 2. Unionise the low-paid, temps and part-timers

Union leaders have turned their backs on the most vulnerable and impoverished, the millions at the bottom end of the labour market. Local campaigns, especially amongst retail and fast food workers over the Christmas period, could draw in young workers who want to join fighting unions, as they have done in the USA.

### 3. Unite the disputes from below

Union leaders have left us high and dry time and again partly because we lack real coordination at workplace, town and city level. Trades councils could play this role. Then if individual unions back out of action, we can argue for continuing united struggle from below.

### 4. Rank and file control

The best way to win workers to sustained strike action is to let them control it. Workers who have control of their action have been prepared to extend their strikes and not call them off for minor concessions, winning victories as a result.

### 5. New workers' party

Behind the union leaders' timid strategy is the idea that only a Labour government can stop the bosses' offensive. They use this as an excuse not to strike in the run-up to elections or when Labour is in power. And it is disastrous, not least because a Labour government would undoubtedly continue the Tories' attacks. The unions should break with Labour and hold a democratic conference to create a new working class party.

Year	Days lost to One-day public strike action sector strikes	
2009	455,000	
2010	365,000	
2011	1,390,000	1,225,000
2012	249,000	130,000
2013	444,000	293,000
2014 (to August)	625,000	482,000

The TUC's shameful record of inaction

## NATIONAL CROSS-UNION RANK & FILE MEETING

8 NOVEMBER

12 noon to 5pm

THE COCK TAVERN  
23 PHOENIX ROAD  
LONDON NW1 1AB

# Low paid fight for \$15

As the fight for a living wage begins to take off here in Britain, **Chris Clough** takes inspiration from the Fight for \$15 campaign in the US



Some of the thousands of low-paid workers who walked out in 150 cities across the US on 4 September

FAST FOOD WORKERS are causing a storm at the heart of the world's most powerful nation. A movement for a \$15 an hour minimum wage has spread like wildfire across the country. In May it was even able to coordinate one-day strikes in 30 countries across all continents.

A national conference of 1,500 in Chicago, held in July, adopted a strategy of civil disobedience: demonstrations, blockades, pickets and street occupations. Strikes on 4 September took place in 150 cities across the USA.

The campaign is hugely inspirational and reaches beyond the fast food sector. The poorest workers, often ignored by the trade unions, have shown themselves to be militant activists and ferocious fighters. Their demand is for a dignified existence, something that is impossible on the \$8.75 wages offered by companies like McDonald's, KFC and Burger King.

Their movement has not only sparked a nationwide debate about inequality and poverty wages, it has begun to make a difference for working people across America. A key tactic used to protect corporate profits and hold down wages is to argue that the workers are actually employed by the small businesses that run outlets as franchises. Now, in response to a campaign by workers in 40 different outlets, the General Counsel of the National Labor Relations Board, Richard Griffin, has ruled that McDonald's is a "joint employer" and therefore has a responsibility for conditions and wages along with the franchise holders. If that ruling is upheld, it will strengthen the position of millions of workers.

The Fight for \$15 campaign had modest beginnings. The first big action, in 2012, brought out just 200 workers from 60 restaurants across New York. Two years down the line, thousands have joined the movement, striking at

peak times, occupying stores, blocking roads and taking the fight to the CEOs by targeting their head offices.

The main organiser is the Service Employees International Union (SEIU), which led the initial recruitment drive around a series of rallies. From the outset, however, it has been clear that workers from the restaurants themselves have embraced the campaign and made it their own.

Every report is full of confident workers, mainly black or Hispanic and often women, who are eager to spread their message. The vibrancy and success of this movement is a testament to the deep involvement of the rank and file in pushing the campaign forwards.

In many ways, this is not so surprising. Under the surface, the USA is bubbling with tension. The suffering caused by home repossessions and poverty wages, alongside the extreme wealth flaunted by the rich, has made the country a tinderbox.

Nowhere is this more the case than in the fast food sector, where those at the top can "earn" in a day twice what a worker earns in a whole year. The wages they pay are not enough to keep even a single worker with no dependants, let alone those with families to support.

Every year, US taxpayers pay out \$7 billion to top up these wages. More than half of all workers, 52 per cent, have to claim this support just to survive. Nor is this restricted to fast food. All across the USA, people face similar hardship; since the recession a million better paid jobs have disappeared and the much publicised increase in jobs largely comes from an extra 1.8 million low paid jobs. Today, the top 20 per cent own 84 per cent of all the wealth.

That is why, when the fast food workers stood up, so many others joined them. Walmart workers are campaigning for \$15. Seattle council has implemented the \$15 minimum,

and popular pressure has meant pledges of \$13 or more in New York, Chicago, Washington DC, San Diego, San Jose, Los Angeles and Oakland. San Francisco will vote this month to join Seattle at \$15 an hour. Even Obama was forced to go half way towards one of his election promises, raising the minimum wage to \$10.10 for federal contractors.

This of course is an outrage to bosses who have gotten used to having everything their own way. They have used their influence in the media to attack the movement, starting quite predictably with claims that there were no strikes, only rallies by "outside agitators" who were paid \$500 to attend.

## Wages and profits

When this failed to make any impact on the growing movement, they turned to the "it's just economics" argument; higher wages would eat into profit margins and they would be forced (forced!) to sack staff or raise prices.

This is a more dangerous line of argument for them because there is a grain of truth in it. An increase in wages would mean lower profits, but whether that would lead to job losses or higher prices would depend on the balance of forces within society. An effective fight for a wage increase could also be strong enough to force the bosses simply to accept lower profits.

The tension between wages and profits is what drives the trade union struggle, but it is also a starting point for the struggle for socialism. The bosses' argument actually makes it clear; either they enjoy high profits or the working class has decent living standards. Their economic system, capitalism, cannot support both.

That is why, although militant trade unionism can force the bosses to pay higher wages, such gains will always be liable to counter-attack until their control of the economy as a whole is

removed.

That is why the Fight for \$15 is not just a trade union issue, but also a political issue. It raises the question of control over society's resources. To enforce a minimum wage requires legislation and, in the USA, it would mean federal legislation that overcame the divisive effects of individual states' "rights".

These political issues are not completely separate from the burning questions of how to win the campaign for \$15. To win, workers need to escalate the strikes. In particular, they need to draw in other sections of low paid workers, using the weight of numbers to force the bosses to climb down.

There can be no doubt that such a movement will come under attack not just from the bosses' media but from the bosses' state. As the campaign has already shown, its great strength lies in the determination and energy of the workers themselves. This must be given organisational expression through a democratically controlled network of action committees to control the strike

itself and any negotiations.

The political implications of the movement are clear for all to see, not only in the context of the mid-term Congressional elections but with a view to the next Presidential election.

The leaders of the SEIU are already looking towards the likes of Democrats Hillary Clinton and Elizabeth Warren for promises on a minimum wage and other protective legislation. Like Obama, in whom even greater hopes were placed, they will not deliver, because they are tied hand and foot to the corporations and institutions of US capital.

Just as the fast food workers need to build their own organisations to wage an effective pay campaign and take control of their trades unions, so all the workers of the USA need a political party of their own that can fight for control of the resources of this richest of all countries. Only then will it be possible to plan the economy so that it guarantees decent living standards instead of threatening them.

## Ferguson: the cops re-arm



By Peter Main

NOVEMBER IS expected to see a Grand Jury decide not to indict Darren Wilson, a white policeman, for the shooting of the unarmed black teenager Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri on 9 August. To undermine the well-known eyewitness accounts that Brown had his hands in the air when shot, highly selective quotes from expert witnesses have been leaked to the media.

The decision not to indict is practically a foregone conclusion. Anything else would require proof of "intention" by Wilson who, of course, claims to have acted in self-defence. Since no

amount of forensic evidence can disprove Wilson's claim "beyond doubt", so he is likely to walk free.

Media misinformation is not the only preparation, however. Local police have spent \$172,669 re-arming themselves with gas grenades, rubber bullets and pepper bombs in order to suppress the inevitable – and justified – protests that will greet the verdict.

Since August, there have been more police killings of unarmed black people, showing that anti-police brutality movements like Black Lives Matter have to go beyond protest to organising community self-defence and demanding the withdrawal and disarming of the racist police forces.

# Workers power

## Free education – our future to fight for

By KD Tait

A demonstration for free education has been called for 19 November by a coalition of student campaigns under the slogan “No to debt, no to fees – yes to free education”.

The march will be followed up by nationwide protests on 6 December. In the run-up to an election period, students need to mobilise to put free education back on the agenda.

### Marketisation

The Tory-Liberal coalition came to power with one overriding ambition – freeing the bosses from the “burden” of financing the welfare state.

Education was the first to face the chopping block. Tuition fees were tripled, EMA was scrapped. Students will now graduate with a crippling debt burden.

Thousands of school students are corralled into “free schools” and Academies run by capitalists whose purpose is to allow bosses to have more control over the training of the workforce they require.

This means an inexorable move towards schools geared to the creation of a disciplined, low-skill workforce, with the reintroduction of “streams”, “sets” and other forms of social and academic stratification.

Unemployment among 16-24 year olds has reached 20 per cent. Among black youth the figure is 50 per cent. One million young people are not in work, education or training. Half of recent graduates work in non-graduate jobs and the unemployment rate for recent graduates is twice what it was before the recession.

While sky-high unemployment rates have boosted university numbers, the future remains bleak. 40 per cent of graduates work in the civil service, health or education – but 600 public sector jobs have been cut every single day that the coalition has been in power.

### Action

The fabric of comprehensive, universal education is being shredded by the intrusion of market forces.



Despite the scale of the threat and widespread opposition to the government's “reforms”, an organised defence of education has not materialised. Only the student revolt of Winter 2010 came close to defeating the government.

Since then there has only been sporadic, localised resistance. Apart from a few high profile campaigns at Birmingham, Sussex and the London #suffcampus campaign, nothing has been able to halt the retreat in the student movement.

Can this be turned around? The continued existence of some kind of national coordination is largely due to the work of NCAFC, which continues to provide important leadership for the militant wing of the student movement.

However, the collapse of the campus-based anti-cuts groups and the hollowing out of student union democracy means the student movement remains confined to small networks of activists.

National demonstrations are important rallying points for those committed to free education – especially since the cowardly NUS refuses to back it. But we need to do more to break out of the cycle of annual protests and defensive actions.

The extortionate cost of education will create a trend amongst students to see the university solely as a place of competitive training for employment. But university's role as a training

ground for future professionals and politicians means students benefit from a degree of autonomy to critique, organise and struggle against the dominant ideological trends in society.

To turn this potential into action means drawing in much larger numbers of students. This means fighting to democratise student unions by replacing their bureaucratic and careerist leaders with mass participation in student assemblies, which can democratically debate and vote on policy and campaigning priorities.

Students today can draw on the militant traditions of democracy and mass action from 2010 and the recent experience of direct action and solidarity between students and workers expressed in the UCL cleaners' campaign for sick pay, holidays and pensions: Tres Cosas.

The struggle to defend education and fight for free university tuition cannot be separated from the challenge to the system whose crises and domination by an economic and political elite guarantee that education will always be subordinated to the interests of the ruling class.

The class of 2010 has graduated. The class of 2014 has more reason than ever to take up the banner of resistance, putting students and youth on the frontlines of the struggle for a new, better society. It's our future – let's fight for it.

## £10 minimum an hour – now!

By Joy Macready

THE CAMPAIGN for a £10 an hour minimum wage is gaining momentum – and it's about time. Everyone deserves a decent wage.

Following a unanimous vote at the TUC's congress, it is now official trade union policy. Let's give a huge cheer for the Bakers, Food and Allied Workers Union (BFAWU), which tabled the motion.

BFAWU's motion said that this would lift five million people out of poverty. Research shows that one in 20 workers earned only the minimum wage in 2013, the highest proportion ever, with a further 10 per cent earning within 50p of the same hourly rate.

The bosses' creation of a working poor is an even bigger scandal given they have seen a huge increase in their living standards. A TUC report has found that in 2012-13, Britain's highest paid director, Simon Peckham of investment firm Melrose, earned a year's worth of the living wage of £7.65 an hour in less than one hour.

Today, the Green Party, the Socialist Party and even New Labour pressure group Progress support the call for £10, while measly Labour leader Ed Miliband pledges to raise the minimum wage to a paltry £8 an hour – and that by 2020, which is also the Greens' preferred timeframe.

But we need to fight for £10 an hour now! We can't wait for the trade union leaders – who are definitely not on the minimum wage – to launch a campaign; it

is up to us to start the fight here and now.

We should take inspiration from the Ritzy workers, who won a 21 per cent pay increase over two years after 13 strikes, a consumer boycott campaign, mass and flying pickets, unionising other outlets and direct action, as when their supporters invaded the Ritzy cinema.

And they have just seen off another attack; after conceding their staff's pay rise in the summer, Ritzy bosses tried to sack almost a third of them. Only the threat of more strike action forced a hasty retreat.

The Ritzy workers then inspired workers at Curzon Cinemas – who have now won the London living wage.

And it's not just in the UK where people are fighting for a decent wage; the “Fight for \$15” in the US is another inspirational struggle. The trade union and the labour movement in general have to focus on the millions living and working in precarious conditions if they are to stay relevant to a new generation of class fighters.

We should mobilise the rank and file in the unions in our localities, pulling in all low paid workers to build the campaign for £10 an hour. This upsurge of action has already begun; 21 October saw the successful launch of the Lambeth Living Wage campaign, putting forward ideas for unionisation, supporting the Ritzy workers and organising a tour of shame.

Everyone should be asking: what can I do in my area?