

## BACKLASH AGAINST CUTS GETS UNDERWAY

### Workers refuse to pay for bosses' crisis

National strikes in the civil service and elsewhere are showing that workers can stand up for themselves, and the public, against cuts and imposed changes in working conditions.

Civil servants were out in force in Kent and nationally on Budget Day, striking in a dispute over government plans to tear up redundancy agreements before making job cuts in the public sector. The stoppage, called by the Public and Commercial Services Union (PCS), saw 200,000 stay away from work, causing widespread disruption to job centres, courts, tax

offices, land registries and call centres.

The Socialist Party was at pickets in Canterbury and Gravesend, supporting workers taking a stand against the government's preparations for an onslaught on public sector spending and jobs. Our leafleting was well-received in Gravesend and distributed by a union representative, while at Canterbury a steward told us that the PCS had recruited 1700 as a result of the strike. It is thought, however, that managers and scabs were sent across the county out of Maidstone by the authorities.

The PCS is fighting proposed changes to its members' accrued compensation scheme rights that will rob many hard-working public servants

of tens of thousands of pounds if made redundant, put everyone's jobs under greater threat than ever before, and open the way to private companies seeking a quick profit by cutting jobs.

Carol Dodd, PCS branch secretary for west Kent told *The Kent Socialist* on the picket line in Gravesend: 'I'm on strike today because I'm a union member, the union have balloted for strike action, and I support the union 100 per cent. I have also been a civil servant for 23 years and I am one of those civil servants affected by the new rules regarding the civil service compensation scheme.'

She added: 'The new rules effect all our redundancy payments if we are going to get made redundant.

[Councils] are able to give figures about how much they are going to save. If they know how much they are going to save, they know who they are going to make redundant.'

Rail workers, meanwhile, were denied their democratic right to strike over cost-cutting by National Rail that will compromise passenger safety. Maintenance workers and signal operators were due to be out for four days from 6 April after a ballot that overwhelmingly backed action. The courts, however, as in the BA dispute at Christmas, sided with the bosses.



PCS members are among many workers fighting back the bosses' exploitation of the recession

## WHO WE ARE, WHAT WE DO AND HOW TO GET INVOLVED



The Socialist Party fights for socialist change: a democratic society run for the needs of all and not the profits of a few. We also fight, in our day-to-day campaigning, for every possible improvement for working-class people.

As capitalism dominates the globe, the struggle for genuine socialism must be international. The Socialist Party is part of the Committee for a Workers' International (CWI), a democratic, socialist international that organises in over 40 countries.

Our branch is active in a number of areas in Kent. Initially you should email [socialistpartykent@mail.org](mailto:socialistpartykent@mail.org) and we will be happy to introduce the nature of the branch and the party, and the things that we do and organise, to you. Anyone is welcome to drop into one of our weekly branch meetings in Gillingham.

Alternatively, you can find out more about the party, become a member, subscribe to our newspaper or support the party in other ways through the national website ([socialistparty.org.uk](http://socialistparty.org.uk)).

## DEFEND JOBS AND SERVICES: MAKE THE RICH PAY FOR THEIR CRISIS

For those who hoped that the current crisis of the Labour Party would mean a 'turn to the left' would have found this month's budget, presented by Alistair Darling, difficult viewing. For members of the Socialist Party, who have long argued that the Labour Party now represents the interests of big business and not working class people, the budget only reaffirms the need to build a new party to fight for working class people.

The budget pretends to appeal to the very people that the New Labour

project has turned its back on. It makes promises to limit the time young people spend out of work, reduce the time spent in work for over-65s to get work-credits, and to slightly increase child tax credits. If we dig a little deeper, however, we see that these are the scraps left after the feast for the super-rich and what is given with one hand is taken back with vicious cuts in the public sector jobs and in public services.

The timing of the cuts is not yet clear but the admission by Alastair

Darling that they will be 'deeper and tougher' than the cuts Thatcher imposed in the 1980s should be a warning to us all. Not that the Tories or the Lib Dems missed the opportunity to 'promise' their own vicious plans for cuts across the public sector. In fact, the budget once again emphasises the lack of difference between all three mainstream parties, and the interests they represent.

Ultimately, whoever ends up forming the Government after the election will attempt to pay for the

crisis created by big business by attacking public sector jobs and services across the board, including on health and education. We all need to follow the example of PCS members who manned picket lines all over the country as the budget was announced, fighting the governments attempts to cut civil service compensation agreements to make sacking civil servants cheaper and easier.

**They say cuts are inevitable, we say make the rich pay for their own crisis!**

guestcolumn

## RESISTING THE PORT SELL-OFF

*Dover's port is being privatised against the wishes of its population. We need to organise and fight back, writes secretary of Dover District Trades Council, Mike Sargent*

We recently reformed the Dover District Trade Unions Council. One of the reasons for this was that it was felt by local trade unionists that a strong union body was needed in order to resist the attacks on working people in the area, especially through privatisation. The port sell-off is the one big issue that most of us affiliated to the Trades Council can get involved with: we are all affected, either through employment or family connections or random government cutbacks.

As with all privatisation, though it is being touted as a voluntary decision, the elephant in the room is the EU Port Services Directive. The EU is a threat to workers that no one within the UK seems to understand or take seriously. But it gives us the chance in Dover to take on the Dover Harbour Board now and ensure that we as stakeholders establish an unshakeable beachhead within the upcoming negotiations. Rest assured this will be a long struggle, and if we fail privatisation will be enforced upon us.

More immediately, I was in Great Yarmouth and spoke to locals about the recent privatisation of their port. I was told that the first thing the private equity company who bought the port did was to renege on their agreements, dismiss existing staff and casualise any employment needed. At Sheerness, also recently privatised, there are none of the promised plethora of jobs and little if any benefit to the local community.

In Dover, my union, the RMT, represents over one thousand transport workers. Most of them are seafarers who, under a privatised port, we fear would swiftly lose their jobs as foreign ship owners would move to undermine terms and conditions and cut rates. Almost everyone in Dover has some connection to the port.

Business people have to be made to understand that this is not just an asset for sale, not just another fast-buck get-rich-quick scheme, but a real flesh and blood community – a community that has fought and died against the oppressor, and now more than ever needs to stand together to resist a race to the bottom that would mean ruin for us and our children any hope for the future of this most historic and ancient town that is, still, the gateway to Europe.

If you read this please, get involved – stand up – take part!

### WHAT WE STAND FOR

- ★ To increase the minimum wage to £8 an hour without exemptions as an immediate step towards £10 an hour. For an annual increase in the minimum wage linked to average earnings.
- ★ All workers, including part-timers, temps, casual and migrant workers to have trade union rates of pay, employment protection, and sickness and holiday rights from day one.
- ★ An immediate 50% increase in the state retirement pension, as a step towards a living pension. Reinstate the link with average earnings now.
- ★ Reject 'Welfare to Work'. For the right to decent benefits, education, training, or a job, without compulsion.
- ★ A 35-hour week with no loss of pay.
- ★ No to privatisation and the Private Finance Initiative (PFI). Renationalise all privatised utilities and services, with compensation paid only on the basis of proven need.
- ★ Free, publicly run, good quality education, available to all at any age. Abolish university tuition fees now and introduce a living grant. No to academies!
- ★ A socialist NHS to provide for everyone's health needs - free at the point of use and under democratic control. Kick out private contractors!
- ★ Keep council housing publicly-owned. For a massive building programme of publicly-owned housing, on an environmentally sustainable basis, to provide good quality homes with low rents.
- ★ Major research and investment into replacing fossil fuels with renewable energy and into ending problems of early obsolescence and unrecycled waste.
- ★ A democratically planned, low fare, publicly-owned transport system, as part of an overall plan against pollution.
- ★ Oppose discrimination on the grounds of race, sex, disability, sexuality, age, and all other forms of prejudice.
- ★ Repeal all laws that trample over civil liberties. For the right to protest! End police harassment.
- ★ For a mass workers' party drawing together workers, young people and activists from workplace, community, environmental and anti-war campaigns, to provide a fighting, political alternative to the pro-big business parties.
- ★ Trade unions to disaffiliate from the Labour Party now and aid the building of a new workers' party!
- ★ No to imperialist wars and occupations. Withdraw the troops immediately from Afghanistan!
- ★ Tax the super-rich! For a socialist government to take into public ownership the top 150 companies and banks that dominate the British economy, and run them under democratic working-class control and management. Compensation to be paid on the basis of proven need.

## LEFT COALITION FIGHTS TO DEFEND WORKING-CLASS



The Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition has begun preparations for its election campaign in earnest.

The general election is approaching and in reality there is no choice amongst the main political parties. New Labour, Tory or Lib Dem – they all support cuts, cuts and more cuts after the election. Working class people and their families in Kent and the rest of the UK will suffer whoever is in power. As reported in February's *Kent Socialist*, the newly formed Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) has been formed as a workers' electoral alternative to the capitalist parties.

TUSC is standing around 30 candidates throughout England and Wales and ten in

Scotland. General election votes will not come tumbling towards the coalition, but that is not the point. TUSC is necessary in order to prepare for future class battles that will take place over the coming years. In Kent TUSC is not standing, but Kent Socialist Party members have taken the initiative to set the groundwork for a post-election TUSC.

The need in Kent for a trade union and workers' formation to oppose the draconian cuts that the next government carries out is paramount.

Further information:  
[www.tusc.org.uk](http://www.tusc.org.uk)

## UCU VICTORY AT KENT UNIVERSITY

The threat of redundancy has been lifted from Biosciences staff at the University of Kent due to pressure from lecturers and students.

University management crumbled under anger from the teachers' union UCU, the Student Union and other student groups on campus, reversing a decision made last year.

A strike ballot had been due to go ahead, with a student march also planned, when a joint statement between the union and management confirmed that 'the threat of compulsory redundancies has now been lifted from UCU members'.

Lecturers have hailed the power of collective action, and warned of the need for vigilance in future attacks. Union membership has grown as a result.

## NEWS IN BRIEF

- Members from throughout the region attended the Socialist Party's south-east regional conference last month. Comrades from Brighton, Crawley, Canterbury, Medway and elsewhere gathered to discuss political perspectives for the region and nationally.
- Sean Figg, the regional secretary of the Socialist Party in the south-east has announced he will be vacating his position to work exclusively at the Party's national centre, where he will continue to lead the Youth Fight for Jobs campaign.
- The scheduled political discussions for our upcoming meetings are as follows: 'Socialism: Utopian and Scientific' (8 Apr), 'The Right to Strike' (15 Apr), 'The Politics of Sport' (22 Apr), 'The Chartist Movement' (29 Apr). Meetings, where we will also plan our activities and campaigning for the weeks and months ahead, are held on Thursdays, 6.30-8.30pm at the Sunlight Centre, Richmond Road, Gillingham.