British press calls for election debate on budget cuts

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With the May 6 British general election approaching, press commentators have identified the massive budget cuts the next government must implement.

The opinion of these commentators is that the current election debate has not done nearly enough to frighten the public into accepting cuts. Writing in the *Guardian*, John Lanchester calls for an end to "guff about change and fairness," adding, "None of the parties is anywhere near the necessary volume of bad news or level of detail about what's going to be cut."

The *Financial Times* notes that the cuts so far identified by the Conservatives, Liberal Democrats and Labour—ranging from £7 to £10 billion and slated to come largely from painful reductions in public sector wages, pensions, and welfare programs—will still do little to reduce a budget deficit that currently stands at £163 billion. It gave a proposed break-down of a potential £37.4 billion in cuts, hoping to "stimulate the debate that is missing from the election campaign."

The *Financial Times* declared, "The next government will have to cut public sector pay, freeze benefits, slash jobs, abolish a range of welfare entitlements and take the axe to programmes such as school building and road maintenance."

It added that such plans were already being developed, behind the backs of the public: "Packages of measures such as these are already under consideration in the Treasury and will be needed if further big tax rises are to be avoided."

Its April 26 editorial noted that the election campaign had been "economical with the truth."

Such comments underscore the fraudulent character of the British election. An angry electorate faces three big business parties of social austerity and war, each misleading the public about the policies they would pursue once in office. What one sees on the surface is three well-oiled media machines, marketing candidates that are airbrushed until pleasantly bland.

The worried press commentators are unanimous in insisting that there is no alternative to social cuts, such as tax increases on the wealthy. They all support and take for granted the dictatorship of the banks.

Citing the British government's need to borrow money by selling bonds, Lanchester writes, "The most powerful force in UK domestic policy are not politicians, but the international bond markets." He adds that if "the bond markets were to lose confidence in Britain" because a government refused to carry out cuts, they would "start to demand a higher rate of return on the money they're lending."

Lanchester forecasts that this would make it impossible to finance the British government's debt, requiring a bailout funded by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and capitulation to massive cuts demanded by it. He adds, "These cuts are going to happen. They will be the most severe that modern Britain has experienced."

It should be noted that Lanchester's scenario has already come to pass for debt-stricken Greece. As bond markets drove up interest rates on the Greek government's bonds in the early months of this year, Athens sued for a bailout from the IMF and the eurozone countries. While the bailout terms for Greece has not yet been disclosed, one gets an idea of the IMF's methods from its bailout package for Latvia last year. It included 45 percent wage cuts in the public sector, and 5 to 30 percent wage cuts in the private sector.

Lanchester's explanation omits one highly significant point: Who exactly are these "international bond markets" that dictate political life and are preparing to ruin the public? The major international banks that

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arrange the sale of government bonds are those that received hundreds of billions in public funds from taxpayers in Britain, the United States, and throughout Europe—and who have become the target of widespread public hostility.

Budget deficits are, to a significant extent, the product of these bailouts, which the banks aim to extort once again from the working class—this time through a catastrophic collapse of its living standards.

The articles in the *Guardian* and the *Financial Times* are motivated primarily by the expectations of a coming revolt by workers against the next government, as it rapidly moves to carry out draconian cuts that were not discussed in the election campaign.

The *Financial Times* writes that in a FT/Harris poll, "only half—including fewer than a third of public sector workers—agreed the public sector should be cut back... The apparent lack of a clear mandate explains the main parties' refusal to detail how they will tackle the deficit, beyond giving a few, relatively small-scale, examples of proposed cuts."

In maintaining this politically criminal silence on the coming cuts, the ruling class has relied on the trade unions and their supporters in the middle-class ex-left. The *Financial Times* notes that leading parties are "wary of appearing to gear up for a confrontation," quoting Conservative Party leader David Cameron as calling for a "more consensual" approach.

For their part, trade union officials are indicating their intention to collaborate with the banks and mount no serious opposition. Dave Prentis, head of the Unison public-sector union, said, "It is unlikely that we would take national industrial action over jobs, but we would keep it to where employers at a local level refuse to do deals with us."

He added that strikes were a "last resort."

Even though figures of 500,000 job cuts in the public sector are circulating among top state officials, Prentis held out the hope that the isolated actions he is proposing could limit job losses to "less than 100,000." Such lies aim only to disarm the working class.

In the *Guardian*, Lanchester writes, "The huge risk here is simple: it is that the winner of the election will have no real mandate to govern. ... How will the sweeping job losses and trashed public services go down with an electorate that didn't vote for them? It's difficult to imagine a better recipe for mass social unrest. The new government will go direct from the honeymoon period to the poll-tax riots."

Such comments paint a stark portrait of the political situation that will emerge after the election, as a government without a mandate, acting on behalf of a discredited banking system, demands unprecedented cuts from a restive population whose objective interests require socialist policies—the expropriation of the banks, and production for the social needs of the population.

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