

Oppose all cuts in public spending

# Build rank-and-file committees to lead the struggle

**Socialist Equality Party (UK)**  
**10 February 2011**

The cuts being imposed by the Conservative/Liberal Democrat government in Britain represent the most sustained attack on the living standards and social rights of the working class in over 80 years.

In addition to a public sector pay freeze and cuts in welfare, health, education, pensions and housing, central government funding to local authorities will be slashed by nearly a third over the next four years. Vital services relied upon by millions of working class families, young people, the elderly and those with disabilities will be destroyed.

Every European government, whether nominally “left”, liberal or conservative, is imposing austerity measures. To defeat this onslaught, the Socialist Equality Party (SEP) calls for the building of a politically independent, mass social movement, based on a socialist programme, uniting working people in Britain with workers across Europe and internationally.

We reject the mantra of “equal sacrifice” used to justify cuts. Working people are not responsible for the economic crisis. It is the result of the reckless and largely criminal actions of the financial institutions and the super-rich. The official parties—Labour, Conservative and Liberal Democrat—do their bidding. Their call to “resuscitate” Britain’s economy means a further massive transfer of social wealth from those at the bottom of society to those at the top.

Since 2008, the world’s banks have received handouts from taxpayers equivalent to a quarter of global GDP. In the UK, the banks have received £1.5 trillion in financial aid and stimulus programmes. The banks are now entirely dependent on public funds to survive, yet they are the only ones to be “ring-fenced” from the austerity measures. While the bankers continue to award themselves bonuses worth billions, the cost of the bailout is being clawed back from working people.

Hundreds of thousands of jobs are being eliminated in the public and private sectors, and frontline services scaled back or scrapped completely.

Official unemployment has already topped 2.5 million and is expected to reach 4 million by next year. Hardest hit are the young, with almost 1 million under the age of 25 already

unemployed; 20 percent of university graduates find themselves jobless. Denied a livelihood, young people face social conditions worse than their parents and even their grandparents.

The driving up of unemployment and the cutting of welfare benefits are aimed at creating a pool of cheap labour that can be used to undermine pay and conditions. Young unemployed aged 18 to 21 are to be placed on an eight-week work experience programme, to provide free labour for employers.

## Council job cuts

A jobs cull by local and public authorities is under way. There are already 150,000 known job cuts, but the final figure could reach half a million across the public sector. Hardest hit will be the former industrial towns and cities where local councils and the National Health Service are the main employers.

Government grants to local authorities will be cut by £6.5 billion over the next two years, with some of the most deprived areas losing the most funding—including Liverpool, Manchester and Hackney, which will lose more than 20 percent. More-affluent Surrey loses just 6 percent and Buckinghamshire 8 percent.

In Birmingham, where a third of the workforce is employed in the public sector, the Tory-run local authority aims to reduce the council workforce by 37 percent—some 5,000 jobs.

The attacks are being faithfully administered by Labour authorities, too. Lambeth council is slashing 2,000 jobs, in the borough that tops the league table for unemployment in London. Liverpool and Manchester councils have announced plans to cut one in six jobs.

In Scotland, nearly 10,000 local and public authority jobs are already known to be on the firing line, with at least 2,000 more in danger in Wales.

Local authorities are threatening workers with the sack unless they sign new employment contracts containing pay freezes,

wage cuts and attacks on pensions.

Nationally, public sector workers face a three-year pay freeze, with inflation and VAT and National Insurance rises eating away at workers' living standards.

Frontline services are being withdrawn from the most vulnerable—single parents, those on low incomes, the disabled and elderly. Some 250 Sure Start centres are to close and hundreds of jobs in residential and elderly care axed. Citizen Advice Bureaus are to be cut, and redundancy notices have been issued to 900 debt advice workers.

Hundreds of jobs are also under threat in health care and fire rescue across the UK.

### **No confidence in Labour and the unions**

No confidence can be placed in the Labour Party and the trade unions to fight these attacks, as the Socialist Workers Party (SWP) and Socialist Party (SP) claim. Not a single Labour-controlled authority is prepared to oppose the cuts. Labour's empty protestations about protecting the "poor" and "vulnerable" are a sham. During 13 years in office, Labour encouraged a feeding frenzy for the financial oligarchy and the major corporations, while working people were forced to take on massive debt to offset a decline in real wages.

When the banks and financial system faced collapse in 2008, Labour gave them the keys to the treasury and set the agenda for the public spending cuts now being made.

Labour Party leader Ed Miliband has condemned "irresponsible strikes", a signal to big business that Labour will ensure nothing jeopardises profits.

The Tories, Liberal Democrats and Labour all rely on the services of the trade unions, which have prevented any mobilisation against the government. Public sector unions Unite, UNISON, GMB and PCS have a combined membership of over 4 million, but have not lifted a finger against the attacks on jobs and conditions. Where it has not been possible to prevent strikes from going ahead, they have been restricted to local issues, isolated and wound up as quickly as possible.

The Trades Union Congress (TUC) demonstration on March 26 is another token gesture to cover the unions' collusion with the cuts on a day-to-day basis. Events in Ireland, France, Portugal, Spain and Greece show that even where millions of workers are involved in militant action, as long as the trade unions remain in control they will strangle and dissipate opposition.

The trade unions do not function as defensive organisations of workers, but as management's fifth column. TUC head Brendan Barber sits on the board of the Bank of England. Only last September, the TUC invited Bank of England Governor Mervyn King to its annual conference.

### **A socialist programme to fight the cuts**

The Socialist Equality Party rejects the claims of the Coalition of Resistance (CoR) and other "anti-cuts campaigns" that mass pressure can force the Labour Party and the trade unions to fight for the working class. The role of all the fake-left groups is to uphold the authority of these anti-working class organisations, under conditions in which they have become increasingly discredited, and block the fight for a new political party based upon a genuine socialist and internationalist programme.

Everything depends on working people breaking from the Labour Party and trade unions and building new democratic organisations of working class struggle. The Socialist Equality Party calls for the formation of rank-and-file committees in the workplace and committees of action, to unite all sections of the working class—the employed and unemployed, students, those trapped in unions and those not in unions.

Such organisations must unite all the struggles in a political and industrial offensive to bring down the government. A workers' government pledged to socialist policies is the only means of opposing the vice-like grip over society exercised by big business. The banks and major corporations must be turned into public utilities under democratic control, to ensure that their vast resources are used to meet social need, not private profit.

An emergency programme of public works must be implemented to rebuild schools, hospitals and public housing and maintain roads and other critical infrastructure on which modern, mass society depends. This would provide the basis for decent-paying jobs, housing, education and health care for all.

Above all, workers in Britain must ally their struggles to those of workers throughout Europe, who confront the same banks and corporations dictating the austerity measures.

We urge all those who agree with this perspective to attend the meetings being convened by the Socialist Equality Party, join its ranks and begin preparing the fight back.



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