

Reject TUC's phoney war

Socialist Equality Party (UK)
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Today's demonstration was billed by Trades Union Congress head Brendan Barber as the start of a fight-back against the coalition government's austerity measures. This is a fraud. The TUC will not lift a finger to oppose the most severe cuts in jobs and social services since the 1930s.

Barber has said that until now the TUC had been involved in a "phoney war", with the unions deliberately delaying action because "It was important for the cuts to be real". Now he claims the phoney war is over.

That he can speak in these terms only underscores the indifference of the entire trade union bureaucracy to the appalling situation facing workers and youth.

In the past 10 months, 132,000 jobs have been lost in the public sector alone. Unemployment has climbed to a 17-year high of 2.5 million and is expected to top three million in the near future. More than one in five young people are out of work.

University tuition fees are to be tripled, the Education Maintenance Allowance has been abolished, and front line services are being withdrawn from the most vulnerable—single parents, those on low incomes, the disabled and elderly.

In addition, 170,000 workers for local authorities across the country face the threat of immediate sackings unless they accept worse terms and conditions. Not since the 1920s has there been a comparable fall in real wages—by around 12 percent over the past six years. The imposition of pay cuts and freezes and rising inflation will make this even worse.

The trade unions have not merely been keeping their powder dry, but have collaborated to the hilt in a one-sided war waged against the working class.

Not a single significant strike has been organised. Instead the TUC has reached out to the Conservative/Liberal Democrat coalition and its big business backers. Prime Minister David Cameron was

even invited to address the TUC congress, but was replaced on the day by Mervyn King, governor of the Bank of England—one of the authors of the austerity measures. King was amongst friends. Barber sits on the Bank of England's Court of Directors and has been involved in numerous secret talks with government ministers.

The TUC has also lined up behind the imperialist bombardment of Libya, led by Washington, London and Paris. Even before operations began, Barber had written a "Dear William" letter to Foreign Secretary Hague pledging his backing for whatever action the Tories decided to pursue against Libya. This echoes the bogus claim that the western government were motivated by concerns for the democratic aspirations of the Libyan people.

In reality, at least £100 million has been set aside to pay for yet another war of aggression, no less criminal than those waged in Iraq and Afghanistan. The war is the first step in a campaign by Washington and its partners in crime to strike back against the popular movements in countries long regarded as spheres of influence for British, French and US imperialism. By establishing a base in Libya, they hope to "shape" the Arab revolution, or more truthfully suppress it, so as to maintain their control of strategic oil and gas reserves in the region.

There is a direct relationship between the neo-colonial intervention in North Africa, and the austerity measures now being imposed on working people in the UK.

It is no accident that the coalition's austerity agenda is described in language such as "shock and awe" or "precision-guided".

Across Europe, the ruling elite is seeking to use the economic crisis that it created to destroy all the social gains won by the working class. To do so they rely entirely on the trade unions. In Greece, Portugal, Spain

and elsewhere there have been countless demonstrations similar to that organised by the TUC. They have not prevented a single attack. Their sole purpose has been to provide a cover for the collusion of the union bureaucracy with the diktats of the international financial institutions.

The first step in opposing the austerity drive is a fight to bring down the government implementing it. Instead, the trade unions hold out the possibility that the Liberal Democrats can be persuaded to abandon the Tories and form a coalition with Labour. To this same end, pride of place has been given at today's rally to Labour leader Ed Miliband.

This is a dead end. None of the major parties are in any way answerable to the demands of working people. They are all the political representatives of big business, differing only as to the best means of imposing the cost of capitalism's crisis on workers and youth.

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 bailed out its banker friends to the tune of £1 trillion and instigated the cuts continued by the coalition since taking office. The political complexion of local authorities up and down the country makes no difference whatsoever to their readiness to slash jobs and services and rip up workers' contracts.

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 sections of workers 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.

Against the war-mongering and austerity measures dictated by the banks and corporations, workers in Britain must unite with their fellow workers throughout Europe against the common enemy.

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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