

Only socialism and class struggle can end austerity

The Socialist Equality Party (UK)

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The newly re-elected Conservative government is intent on imposing a yet-more devastating offensive against jobs, wages and essential welfare and social services on which millions of people depend.

The Tories are committed to slashing £15 billion in welfare cuts, as part of an additional £38 billion in cuts. They are to extend the right to buy to housing association tenants in a move that will eliminate most of what remains of social housing.

Next month, Chancellor George Osborne will outline an immediate £12 billion in spending cuts across all departments including the National Health Service and schools.

However, this is only the beginning.

Osborne has complained, “We have got 1 percent of the world's population, 4 percent of its GDP, but we undertake 7 percent of the world's welfare spending” and that this is “unsustainable”.

What is planned for the UK is to plunge workers into the appalling levels of poverty now prevailing in Greece. After five years of the most savage attacks and the biggest decline in living standards seen outside of wartime, Greece now faces fresh demands for escalating cuts—targeting workers who have seen their incomes slashed by 40 percent, and who face mass unemployment and the denial of basic services such as healthcare.

Look at Greece and see the future planned for Britain and the rest of Europe. Millions of people want to fight back against this offensive being mounted on behalf of the super-rich, the banks and corporations. But they will not find this under the programme and leadership offered by the People's Assembly.

The People's Assembly is led by political apologists for the trade unions and for the Labour Party. Together these organisations have demobilised every single

struggle against the destruction of jobs, wages and essential social services and have handed power back to the Conservatives thanks to these betrayals. The other main political beneficiaries have been the Scottish National Party (SNP).

After the Conservatives were first elected in 2010, it took a year until a national demonstration was called by the Trades Union Congress. The unions then sold out one strike after another, including the public sector pensions dispute that was touted as the focus of opposition to the government. Hundreds of thousands of jobs were destroyed, and tens of billions in cuts were imposed.

It was under these conditions that the pretence of opposing austerity was taken up by the People's Assembly—made up of the Communist Party/ *Morning Star* Stalinists, what remains of the Labour Party “left”, the Green Party and the pseudo-left group Counterfire. Their job is to cover the exposed rear of the trade union leaders who fund the group.

Since the re-election of the Conservatives on May 7, national strikes by rail and steel workers have been called off in rapid succession—with the rail strike called off twice.

Yet Steve Turner, assistant general secretary of Unite and co-chair of the People's Assembly, has the gall to declare that “the trade unions are, and will remain, at the heart of the anti-austerity movement”, Len McCluskey, the head of Unite—Labour's biggest donor at £2.5 million this year—will head today's platform in London.

The People's Assembly states that it is “linked to no political party,” before adding, “We need a government to reverse damaging austerity... We can no longer tolerate politicians looking out for themselves and for the rich and powerful.”

Who then is to provide such a government?

The People's Assembly claims that what "blocks" progressive policies is the "the tiny millionaire class that do so well from austerity, and their current overwhelming political power." But political power is exerted through political parties that do the bidding of the super-rich—the Tories, Labour and the SNP alike.

The PA's leadership almost all support the Labour Party—unless they want to build relations with the SNP government to secure access to the corridors of power north of the border. But they cannot state this so openly because Labour is so discredited and hated.

Even as today's demonstrations in London and Glasgow take place, Labour is holding a leadership contest in which Jeremy Corbyn, the nominal "left," only secured a place on the ballot thanks to a handful of right-wing MPs wanting to maintain the pretence of a "broad-church" party that at least includes someone formally opposing Tory policies.

Corbyn is now being touted as the "saviour" of Labour. But the contest will be won by one of the three candidates now insisting that Labour lost the election because its central message of support for big business and austerity was diluted with rhetoric about poverty, zero-hours contracts, etc.

Andy Burnham, Yvette Cooper and Liz Kendall, one of whom will be the next leader of the Labour Party, have all refused to even attend today's demonstration.

Once again, it is Greece that provides the most devastating indictment of the People's Assembly's perspective for opposing austerity.

Today's demonstration is being advanced as a contribution to "a European bottom up mobilization" in defence of Greece, based upon an appeal signed by Greek trade union bureaucrats and activists. It calls for "pressure" to be placed upon the European Union (EU) and the International Monetary Fund to end their "unacceptable behaviour" because the "Greek people decided, by voting a left government to support them, to break the neoliberal consensus."

This refers to the election of Syriza in January, which claimed that austerity could be ended through an appeal for an "honourable compromise" with the European Union while leaving Greek capitalism untouched.

The result has been an unmitigated disaster. The only deal being offered to Syriza is one where they agree to impose the next tranche of austerity measures dictated

by the EU, the European Central Bank and the International Monetary Fund. This too is a foretaste of what faces the working class in Britain if they do not break from the bankrupt politics of the People's Assembly.

The only genuine means of combating austerity is the independent political mobilisation of the working class. The only government that can reverse austerity is a workers' government, pledged to implement socialist policies based upon planned production for need and not profit.

Above all, the working class must join and build the Socialist Equality Party to challenge the parties of big business and create new organisations of class struggle through a political break with the trade unions. This offensive must be waged as part of a continent-wide mobilisation against the EU and all its constituent governments and for the United Socialist States of Europe.



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