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**Britain:**

# June 21 - a brilliant day

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**Tens of thousands joined the demonstration in central London on Saturday 21 June against austerity called the People's Assembly. On the longest and hottest day of the year, trade-union and campaign activists assembled to demand an alternative to austerity based on taxing wealth to invest public services, and a living wage and decent pensions for all.**

The biggest contingent was that of the teachers union the NUT which is preparing for industrial action on the 10 July. UNITE, Britain's largest union and the civil service union, PCS had also mobilised their activists in large numbers, while the fire brigades union, the FBU had brought along its decommissioned fire-engine, flanked by its members currently on strike over proposed changes to their pensions.

There was also a wide array of local and national campaign groups, such as Keep Our NHS Public and Disabled People Against Cuts. A new mood of optimism and solidarity was present throughout the day, and not just because of the brilliant weather and festival in Parliament Square!

The size of the demonstration establishes the People's Assembly as the national coalition against austerity. It also prepares the ground for mobilising popular support for the day of co-ordinated strike on 10 July by public sector unions. The NUT and the FBU are likely to be joined by public service union UNISON, UNITE and the PCS in their fight over pay and pensions. These unions will be announcing the result of their ballots in the coming days. Even the Royal College of Midwives is talking about industrial action as the Health Minister, Jeremy Hunt, refused to accept the 1% pay rise recommended by their pay review body.

The People's Assembly demonstration kicks off a summer of protest which will continue after the 10 July public sector strikes with the People's March for the NHS which leaves Jarrow for London on the 16 August, the anti-NATO protest in Newport on the 30 August and the TUC march and rally on the 18 October calling for a pay rise in Britain. The possibility of further days strikes looms in the autumn if there is no settlement for the disputes involving the public sector unions.

The campaign has begun for an alternative to austerity to be heard in the run-up to the general election. However, in order for the government to retreat from its attacks, the size of the demonstrations and the scale of the industrial action will have to be considerably greater than they are now. There is a way to go yet before we are in a period of "mass strike". The TUC demonstration in March 2011 was 500,000 strong, the largest since the anti-war march of 2003. Last year, 60,000 marched in Manchester outside the Tory party conference. All the forces of the trade-unions and campaigns should now be mobilised to make the TUC demonstration on 18 October at least as big as the one three years ago.

Large demonstrations and industrial action are absolutely necessary to make the government and employers back-off. But we also need a political alternative. The disquiet in the Labour Party about Miliband's personal appeal is totally misplaced. The disquiet should be about the policies of the party, and not the personality of its leader. Minor gestures about the minimum wage, modest controls on private rents or not renewing the contracts of the private rail companies, however welcome, are not sufficient. The Labour Party has totally embraced austerity and neo-liberalism. If elected, a Labour government under Miliband would be no different to that of the Hollande Socialist Party government, or that of the Samaras coalition government in Greece in which PASOK participates.

The democratic channels of the Labour Party, which might have given the hope that the course of the party could be changed, have been totally destroyed. To argue that it is possible to reclaim the Labour Party from the austerity-lite

New Labour lacks credibility and leads the movement down a dead-end. We need to lay down today the basis for a socialist political alternative, which is as loyal to the working class as New Labour is to the bankers and big business. That means taking the steps today to create a new mass broad political organisation, which takes its inspiration from Syriza in Greece or Podemos in Spain. Leaving the political field on the left open, hoping that Labour can be reclaimed or that something will turn up in better times, is not an option. It is leaving people to be driven through fear into the arms of UKIP.

Instead, Left Unity has the ambition to become the anti-austerity party that gives hope.

Fred Leplat, 23 June 2014