

Labour Assembly Against Austerity

Conference Newsletter

Autumn 2014

A Labour government to end austerity



Katy Clark MP

Co-Chair,
Labour Assembly
Against Austerity

We expect nothing else from the Tories than an unrelenting ideological commitment to austerity. George Osborne's announcement that the Conservatives will look to make £25 billion in cuts after the next election dispelled any pretence that the coalition's cuts were a pragmatic response to difficult economic circumstances.

The biggest immediate challenge facing the Labour Party is fighting the coalition's argument that austerity is working. Unfortunately this has been accepted by large sections of the media following recent figures showing improved growth. Ed Miliband has made real political headway by highlighting the difficulties which so many families are facing with the cost of living. We now need to demonstrate to the public how this is inextricably linked to the coalition's cuts.

Despite the media focus on the improved growth, this should not be a difficult message to sell given the hugely unequal nature of the 'recovery'. The latest figures show wages declining in real terms - the cost of living crisis is not going away anytime soon. Cuts to in-work benefits, freezing public sector pay and consecutive real term cuts to the minimum wage are all contributing.

We must ensure the Tories with their failed austerity policies are held to account.

To do this, we need to offer a genuine alternative to the austerity agenda. The pledge to reintroduce the 50p tax rates represents a clear commitment towards progressive taxation. We must now make sure this a first step rather than an end point. The suggestion that a future Labour Government would be prepared to invest in capital spending, particularly in housing, to boost growth is very welcome.

Unfortunately, re-emphasising the previous pledge to use the coalition's 2015/16 spending plans as a starting point and committing a future Labour Government to further spending cuts will do little to differentiate us from the coalition parties. We need to explain to people what they already know - that we have huge and increasing inequality in wealth in our society.

And indeed between different parts of the country. But we also need to persuade people that this is not inevitable. That there is an alternative. We need very specific commitments on how we are going to hold the multinationals to account and how we will tackle the massive tax avoidance that has become the norm. We need to invest for growth in all parts of the country, put detailed proposals together to deliver on the green jobs and how we are going to invest in house building.

We need to offer hope and persuade people we have learnt the lessons of the past and that we have the courage and conviction to take on the massive challenges we face.

The fight for a genuine Labour alternative to austerity therefore continues.

Delivering a Pay Rise: Why Labour Should End Austerity to Stop the Cost of Living Crisis

**Rally in support of the TUC demo
Support public sector union pay claims**

**Katy Clark MP
Diane Abbott MP
Chris Williamson MP
and more to be confirmed**

6.30 - 8.30pm, Tuesday 14th October

Wilson Room, Portcullis House, Parliament

Register via
info@labourassemblyagainstausterity.org.uk



Britain needs a pay rise



Steve Turner

Labour Assembly's
Co-Chair & Unite Assistant
General Secretary on why
Labour members should
join the TUC demo.

According to this Government and much of the media, Britain is on the mend. Yet the reality of life for millions of people in austerity Britain is as bad as it's ever been. The spread of low pay, ever more insecure jobs, the cost of living outstripping wages and brutal cuts to our social security system - with the poorest being hardest hit - has created a more fearful society. One in five working families are struggling to afford life's most basic necessities, like food, a home or clothing.

Thanks to Mr Cameron's Cabinet of millionaires, only the rich are getting richer in Britain today, benefiting from generous tax cuts. The Sunday Times 2014 Rich List saw an increase in wealth of 15% this year alone. At the same time the Bank of England has cut its forecast for wage growth in half, with Britain's wage siege set to continue even longer - already the longest financial squeeze on living standards since the 1860s - and have said that 'average household real incomes have yet to stage a meaningful recovery.' The NIESR have calculated that the average employee is £2,000 worse off in real terms now than before the crisis.

David Blanchflower has noted that George Osborne has managed the worst economic recovery in over 300 years. The slow climb in headline GDP figures and the fall in headline unemployment hides the full picture of what our labour market is becoming. Self-employment has been responsible for almost half the rise of employment over the last year - it now accounts for 15% of the workforce or 4.5 million people. We have real concerns at Unite that this is hiding a large growth in 'bogus' self-employment. More than a million people are on 'zero hours contracts' where they have no idea how many hours they will work from one week to the next; this includes nearly a third of low paid women working in London. As TUC General Secretary Frances O'Grady said, "the combination of rising employment and falling pay growth suggests the economy is very good at creating low-paid jobs, but struggling to create the better-paid work we need for a fair and sustainable recovery".

The top 5 richest families own the same wealth as the bottom 20% of our population. There are 14 million people living in poverty after housing costs. The trend towards greater inequality, unacceptable poverty levels, stagnating wages and precarious employment didn't start in 2008, but Austerity Britain has been very helpful to the richest at locking in these long-running trends. This has been achieved by the drastic and wholly unnecessary spending cuts, political attacks on already weak employment rights and with broadsides on the trade unions that could organise and reverse this trend. These facts are blighting the so-called recovery, which is passing the overwhelming majority of people by.

That is why we in Unite, the Labour Assembly Against Austerity and the national movement against cuts - the People's Assembly Against Austerity - believe Britain's workers need to receive a pay rise. It is an important component as part of a wider package of measures of investment - not cuts - in key areas of our economy to generate positive economic activity, make workers and their families more secure and to lift thousands out of reliance on benefits. A government serious about job creation would be investing to create work and skilled, decent jobs, through a mass house-building programme to tackle the chronic housing need and be part of rebalancing the economy away from dependency on the low-wages service sector. Longer term, we need greater rights for workers and trade union freedoms that support organising and collective bargaining as well as workers rights to collectively withdraw their labour. We need structures and regulation supporting sector level collective bargaining, addressing the 'race to the bottom' and the exploitation of millions as workers terms and conditions are driven down as a result of relentless competition, outsourcing, privatising of services and use of agency and short/zero hours contracts. We need to challenge head on corporate irresponsibility and regulate for genuine and effective industrial democracy at workplace and corporate level as part of a strategy that moves us towards a more equal society where living standards are driven up, not remorselessly down.

If you agree, join us on Saturday 18 October to tell this government that Britain needs a pay rise, jobs, homes, health and hope.

The Labour Assembly Against Austerity will be organising for Labour Party banners to march together with other parts of the People's Assembly Against Austerity on October 18. Email us if you can join us!



CC BY-NC Kirstin Hay

Stop the scapegoating - Stand up for migrants



Diane Abbott MP

says blaming migrants for low pay was wrong in the Victorian era and it's wrong today.

There are few more toxic political debates than the current one about immigration.

Hatred and fear of immigrants has fuelled much of the rise of Ukip. Too many people seem convinced that eastern Europeans are responsible for their failure to find a job and are the cause of workplace insecurity in general. This reflects the daily propaganda pumped out by the Tories, Ukip, much of the media - and even some Labour politicians.

Progressives must insist people are told the facts, so their anger is pointed in the right direction - not at eastern European workers.

Anti-immigrant feeling is not new. In Victorian times it was directed against Irish and Russian Jewish migrants - both were accused of lowering wages. In the 20th century the same was said of West Indian and other immigrants.

The truth is migrants have never been the cause of low wages. Predatory employers, deregulated labour markets and the diminution of trade union rights and freedom

are the underlying causes of low wages and labour market insecurity.

Far from being a drain on the economy, immigrants make a net contribution to our economy. Recent migrants from Europe also put far more into the public services than they take out. The narrative of the immigrant drain on the National Health Service could not be further from the truth. Without women like my mother, who immigrated to this country from Jamaica as a student nurse in the 1950s, Britain would not have an NHS.

Labour market conditions have gone backward in this country, not forward, and the Tory-led coalition has empowered employers to proliferate zero-hours contracts.

Workers need strong trade unions and politicians who will legislate for a level playing field. The Labour Party needs to ensure justice in the workplace; so should introduce a national living wage, strengthen the factory inspectorate and actively enforce these measures.

There are no votes for Labour in trying to out-do Ukip on immigration. Instead we need to combat the lies of the Tory Party, Ukip and the mass media about immigration. And there needs to be action to remove the bias in current legislation against trade unions. Strong unions and effective labour market regulation are the way to combat the low pay.

Trying to make immigrants the scapegoat for ordinary people's economic woes was wrong in the Victorian era and is wrong today.

Join with Labour members on

SATURDAY
18 OCTOBER
MARCH AND RALLY

Bring your CLP banner

Assemble I I am, Blackfriars Embankment, London



britainneedsapayrise.org

@payrise4britain

#18oct



Labour Assembly Against Austerity



Support the Labour Assembly Against Austerity

Labour Assembly Against Austerity brings together party members from across the labour movement - MPs and PPCs, councillors, local activists and trades unionists.

Launched in May 2013 in support of the broad-based People's Assembly Against Austerity, we held our own 200-strong founding conference in November last year.

We believe the cost of living crisis is inextricably linked to austerity and reject the public spending cuts programme. Instead, we support a plan for public investment and jobs that can get the economy growing.

We believe that only a Labour government can deliver this and that by offering a progressive economic alternative to austerity, Labour can best reach out to a broad coalition of voters suffering the cost of living crisis under this the Coalition government.

- If you wish to hold your own local Labour Assembly meeting at your branch, constituency or council group, get in touch.
- Support Labour Assembly Against Austerity by signing our statement on our website.



The People's Assembly Against Austerity - get involved!

Founded in the summer of 2013, the People's Assembly Against Austerity has unified and electrified the movement against the cuts and austerity. As well as having 100 local groups across the country, initiatives such as the Labour Assembly and Student Assembly Against Austerity have brought together specific sections of the movement to further broaden its appeal. It has also been supported by the TUC Congress and numerous trade unions. Local PAAA groups are keen to work positively with their local Labour parties. It:

- is a broad united national campaign against austerity, cuts and privatisation in our workplaces, community and welfare services, based on general agreement with the signatories' Founding Statement.
- is linked to no political party, committed to open non-sectarian working and dedicated to supplementing, rather than supplanting, trade union, student, pensioner and community opposition to austerity measures.
- is based on affiliation by individual supporters, unions nationally and locally, anti-cuts campaigns, and other student, pensioner, unemployed, disabled people's, women's, Black people's, youth and LGBT campaigning organisations.
- aspires to support, coordinate joint action, and facilitate a transfer of experience rather than to command.
- vehemently opposes all proposals to "solve" the crisis by discrimination or scapegoating on grounds of disability, race, religion, ethnic origin, nationality, gender, age, sexual orientation or identity.
- If you like the sound of the People's Assembly Against Austerity, get involved.

Labour Assembly Against Austerity

www.labourassemblyagainstausterity.org.uk
info@labourassemblyagainstausterity.org.uk
[@labourassembly](https://twitter.com/labourassembly)



www.thepeoplesassembly.org.uk
office@thepeoplesassembly.org.uk
[@pplassembly](https://twitter.com/pplassembly)