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Britain

# Over 4000 at People's Assembly Against Austerity

- News from around the world -

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**The political context for a gathering of 4000 activists and campaigners in London on June 22nd was set by the following statement that same morning by Ed Miliband, leader of the opposition Labour Party: “So when George Osborne [finance minister] stands up next week and announces his cuts in day-to-day spending, we won’t be able to promise now to reverse them.”**

The initiative was a massive success. It was the largest gathering of trade unionists, representatives of community organisations and people from the whole spectrum of society which is looking for an alternative to cuts, poverty and social misery. Everyone who was there seemed enthused both by the size of the gathering, the level of discussion and commitments to further activity. Overhanging the event was also the question of political representation, a topic addressed by both film-maker Ken Loach and PCS [trade union for national government employees] general secretary Mark Serwotka.

Writer and Labour Party member, Owen Jones, set the scene in the opening session by outlining the impact of austerity and the government’s success in redirecting anger away from the bankers to the poorest people in society. He offered an alternative programme, which was echoed in various forms through the day, of home and infrastructure building; paying a living wage to all workers; democratic public control of the banks and clamping down on rich tax dodgers. Like many speakers he refused to limit campaigning activity to lobbying politicians to be kinder and offered the example of the Chartists, Suffragettes and anti-Poll Tax movement as examples of British working-class traditions which should be reasserted. [1]

Frances O’Grady, TUC general secretary, was well received. Whatever we make of her claim that she’s proud to be leading a movement that’s fighting austerity, she said that the Bullingdon Club Tory millionaires are waging class war. Using a line that would have reminded some listeners of Arthur Scargill she said that “we will fight as hard for our people as they do for theirs” and went on to pledge support for any group of workers who vote to strike.

For more see *Socialist Resistance* [“People’s Assembly – success, challenges and politics”](#).

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[1] The Chartists was a nineteenth-century movement for political reform and notably male universal suffrage. Suffragettes is the common name used for the movement for women's right to vote in the early twentieth century. The poll tax movement in 1989-90 resisted and defeated an attempt by the widely unpopular government of Margaret Thatcher to impose a "community charge" tax on each individual, regardless of income.