From the Floor – 23rd March

This week’s budget was ‘the world according to George’. The Chancellor’s Britain, where happy people skip to their secure jobs to celebrate their rising living standards, is not one that many will recognise.

But it’s what he did not say that is most significant. He did not spell out where, if re-elected, he will make the huge spending cuts he plans for the next parliament, nor did he tell Britain’s low paid workers which of their benefits he will cut.

Nor did he address the big problems faced by those not living in the Chancellor’s Promised Land – the chronic shortage of housing, an NHS in crisis and the huge growth of zero-hours and other insecure jobs.

Osborne should come clean to working families that he’s sharpening his axe for them. The lion’s share of welfare cuts since 2010 has been to benefits that support working families, and he's ruled out so many other options that it's as clear as day they are his main target again.

It wasn’t forgetfulness that caused the Chancellor to leave the NHS out of his Budget speech, he was burying bad news. The crisis-hit NHS is set for double trouble if Mr Osborne has his way – firstly from the austerity squeeze on NHS budgets, and secondly because cuts to social care will turn hospital wards into substitute care homes.

Most workers are still not getting a fair share from the recovery, and these figures suggest that decent wage growth is still not on the horizon.

In fact last week the Office for National Statistics reported that wage growth is slowing down, so it looks like under the government’s current economic plan the bad news on pay is set to continue.

The Chancellor claimed this week that his economic plan has worked. But figures published last week are a timely reminder of the truth, which is that he’ll run a deficit £50 billion deeper this year than originally planned.

The Chancellor is borrowing so much more because his plan failed. And his plan failed because wages stagnated, leading to the longest decline in living standards since Queen Victoria was on the throne.

This has left the public finances in a mess because he hasn’t collected nearly as much income tax and national insurance as he thought he would.

For all the warm words, austerity is set to continue year after year.

Beth Farhat – Northern TUC Regional Secretary