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# Decisive action can defeat this government

**T**HE VERY successful lobby of the Trades Union Congress (TUC) in Manchester, organised by the National Shop Stewards Network (NSSN), points the way forward for the trade union movement in the looming conflict between the organised working class and the brutal Con-Dem government.

In the very commendable demonstration, the meetings and the speeches that took place, the growing anger and demands for action now against cuts which will slash to the bone the welfare state and effectively dismantle it was forcefully expressed.

The Socialist Party consistently stressed that this battle is a "new poll tax". Brendan Barber now agrees, which is a step forward. Unfortunately he has not drawn sufficiently clear or correct conclusions from this epic struggle. He ascribes the defeat of the poll tax to "pressure" exerted on MPs.

This grossly underestimates the colossal organised resistance, set in train by the All-Britain Anti-Poll Tax Federation, under the influence of Militant, now the Socialist Party. This body organised what was till then Britain's biggest demonstrations in history in London and Glasgow. More significantly, it mobilised 18 million people "illegally" not to pay the poll tax.

If it had been left to the official trade union leadership, never mind the cowardly Labour Party leadership of the time – the present multimillionaire 'Lord' Neil Kinnock – the tax would have been pushed through by Thatcher. Over 100 were jailed, 34 of them Militant supporters. A commentator in the Guardian reminded us last week that "a [nameless] Labour MP" was jailed and expelled from the Labour Party for not paying the tax. That MP was the heroic and never to be forgotten Terry Fields, a Militant supporter. Dave Nellist, also a supporter of ours, although not jailed, was thrown out of the Labour Party for similar reasons. But their courage and sacrifice, together with thousands of others, smashed the tax

and evicted Thatcher from office.

Let no working man or woman be under any illusions. Osborne and Cameron – with the backing of the overwhelming majority of the bosses – are absolutely determined to ram savage cuts through Parliament. They have already pushed through a law, without proper parliamentary scrutiny, reversing the PCS civil service union's legal victory on redundancy payments in the civil service achieved just before the general election.

Even the capitalist press now agrees with The Socialist that these cuts will be on the scale not seen since the Geddes Report attacks proposed in 1922, which were major contributors leading to the 1926 general strike. Brendan Barber takes one step forward – calls for opposition to cuts – and then two steps back when he ruled out immediate measures of a "general strike character".

## National demo

CONCILIATION AND prevarication, an attempt to convince Cameron to step back, is clearly the preferred option of the right wing of the trade union movement. The 'people' are not ready for action to oppose the cuts, argue those like the right-wing candidate for Unite general secretary Les Bayliss.

The same case could have been used in relation to the attacks in France. The pension counter-reforms have not been implemented as yet. This however did not prevent the trade unions in France from organising not just a huge demonstration but also an immense one-day general strike, which exceeded the previous one against the cuts.

'Sticks and stones will break my bones but names will never hurt me'. Name-calling against the coalition will have no effect. Rational argument and the outlining of alternatives will be water off the back of these case-hardened "deficit slashers". Only action, and

the most decisive action at that, can force this government to step back.

In the first instance this requires, not in the 'mists' of 2011 but now, a national demonstration. If the 'elephants' of the TUC do not respond to the lobby and the undoubted moods that are maturing in the ranks of the working class then further decisive action from below is necessary.

On 23 October an indoor rally has been organised at the TUC headquarters in Congress House. There should be a march of all trade unionists on that day – led by the NSSN, together with the left-leaning unions like the RMT, the PCS, the FBU, etc – to this rally demanding the immediate organisation of a national demonstration. Failure by the TUC to respond to this pressure must then lead to the NSSN together with the left trade unions calling the demonstration themselves.

The argument that the 'people' are not ready is belied by even the opinion polls themselves. They showed tremendous insecurity – 69% of the population believe their families will suffer from the cuts. A national demonstration will be a huge step forward. But it will not be sufficient in itself to inflict a defeat on this government. A one-day general strike must now be seriously prepared for, beginning with public-sector workers. If it is organised in a proper way this will invoke tremendous support also from private-sector workers.

The TUC itself has pointed out that most areas of Britain will not receive gains in private-sector jobs to compensate for those lost from the public sector for at least 14 years! In the case of the North East it will take 24 years for the losses to be made up! The very future of big sections of the working class, particularly in Scotland, in the North and in Wales – with young people severely affected – is at stake.

The coalition is hiding behind the anti-union laws installed by Thatcher which were untouched by Blair and Brown when in power.

But these will be nullified in a mass industrial uprising to defeat these cuts.

A 24-hour general strike either in the public or the private sector, almost habitually resorted to in other European countries, is 'illegal' here. But coordinated ballots for action on a similar day must be prepared for. Even then, as the experiences of the BA workers and others have shown, the bosses can still hobble us through legal injunctions preventing effective strike action.

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*[But] decisive action organised from below and above by the unions can defeat this government.*

No serious trade unionist would lightly jeopardise the resources of the trade unions through 'illegal' actions. But the threat of these cuts are so serious that the full might of the trade unions – if necessary by breaking unjust laws – must be mobilised. If one union, group of trade unions, a worker or group of workers, are then dragged before the courts then a 24-hour general strike should be called.

In 1972 this forced the Tory Heath government to release jailed workers. The NSSN, in organising the lobby of the TUC, is in the tradition of organised resistance from below of the past, like the Liaison Committee for the Defence of Trade Unions in the 1970s and the Broad Left Organising Committee (BLOC) of the 1980s. This seeks not to replace the official trade unions but acts as a lever to force them into action at the base of the unions. Decisive action organised from below and above by the unions can defeat this government.

## National Shop Stewards Network lobby - Manchester

### TUC told to name the day

**I**DIDN'T WANT to get up at 6am in the morning on my Sunday off to make a four hour journey to Manchester and then a four hour journey back to ask the TUC Congress to name the day for a national demonstration.

Nancy Taaffe

The reality is for the public sector workers crammed onto the Waltham Forest mini-bus and for the 700 working and young people who participated in the rallies, march and lobby outside the congress the mood was that we really didn't have much choice, we had to go.

With budget cuts already starting to bite and a daily tirade undermining public services and particularly libraries (a service I work for) the reality is I could have lost my job by the time the first all Britain anti-cuts demo is organised if the TUC delays. Timing in the struggle is of the essence. A retrospective fight can be waged but it is not the best strategy and speaker after speaker on Sunday climbed the podium to address the crowd and say so.

In these days of sound bites, spin and airbrushing it was good to see two trade union general secretaries climbing onto a makeshift stage to speak to the crowd. Bob Crow and Billy Hayes both reiterated their support for a coordinated Trade Union Congress fightback.

It was good to hear leading members of the PCS along with firefight-

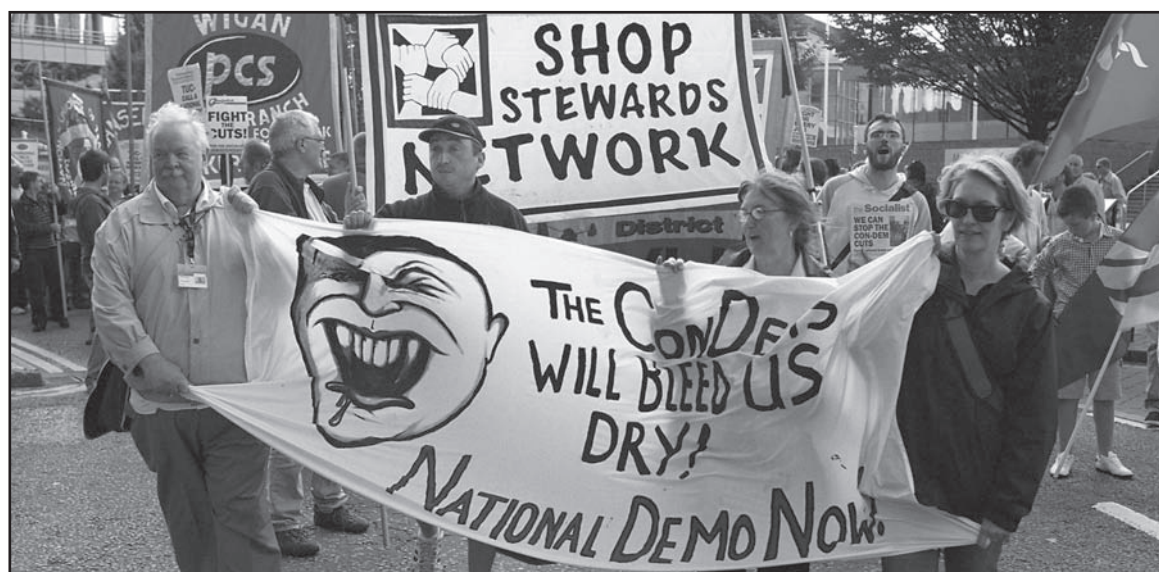
ers, BBC engineers, shop workers and young unemployed people adding their voice to the push for the TUC to name the day for a national demo in 2010.

The march seemed to pick up local youth and passers-by as we made the short walk to the Manchester Mechanics Institute. It's a long time since I've been in a labour movement meeting where there were not enough seats but people sat on the floor and huddled around the doors to hear the speeches. Time and time again workers' representatives got up and explained that the shock therapy which is being proposed in the October comprehensive spending review needs to have a resistance, like the anti-poll tax campaign, prepared now.

In the mini-bus on the way back workers from the local hospital were being sent texts saying we had made the national news. It is strange that sometimes 20,000 can march and there is a virtual media blackout but it seemed that this protest was covered on all the major news programmes along with the breakfast news the next day. This made the eight-hour round trip in a cramped minibus seem worthwhile.

Our job from this lobby is to build the momentum for action, for a united campaign spearheaded by the TUC drawing in families and friends that could break this shaky Con-Dem marriage.

A small fire was set under the seat of the TUC general council. Our job is to make this fire an inferno.



See [www.socialistparty.org.uk](http://www.socialistparty.org.uk) for more reports.

photo Paul Mattsson



RMT general secretary Bob Crow addresses the NSSN lobby of the TUC conference.

photo S.Beishon