

TUC Build for action against cuts

THE FIRST day of the TUC opened with reports of the congress as the main item on the breakfast news, showing footage of the National Shop Stewards Network lobby as the backdrop.

Greg Maughan

The congress is taking place during the most serious attacks on the working class in Britain this side of world war two.

There is a weight of responsibility on the leadership of the trade union movement to do what their name suggests and give a lead in fighting these cuts. But also to arm our class with the political arguments against the cuts.

It was therefore disappointing when Brendan Barber stated in his opening address that cuts were "too fast and too deep". The implication here is that he would be in favour of cuts if the pace was slower.

Much better were the arguments put forward by the left trade union leaders in the debate on the composite motion on public sector cuts.

PCS general secretary Mark Serwotka explained how the cuts would affect all working class people. "The divide is not public sector versus private sector, it is the haves versus the have nots... We cannot accept one penny of cuts or one job lost."

This is the stance that the trade union movement needs to take and was backed by other speakers. Bob Crow of the RMT explained how "all of the gains that were made in so-



The National Shop Stewards Network lobby of the TUC.

photo Suleyman Civi

ciety have been on the basis of the trade union movement pursuing them." Bob talked about the solid strike action that members in the RMT and the TSSA took on London Underground last week and said: "It would be madness not to coordinate action" when unions were in dispute.

Matt Wrack of the FBU condemned the government and the media for trying to "shift the blame

for the economic crisis from bankers onto public sector workers."

A composite motion was passed overwhelmingly which commits the TUC to both coordinating industrial action and organising a national demonstration against the cuts.

Speaking in the afternoon session, Janice Godrich of the PCS underlined the importance of this commitment to a national demonstration and stated: "It is now up to us

to build for it and build confidence amongst workers."

The commitments in the composite motion against public sector cuts are important. It is now down to activists in the ranks of the trade union movement to hold their leaders to their word and make sure that a mass national demonstration takes place as soon as possible and industrial action against the cuts is built for and coordinated.

London Underground Action biting against job cuts

THE OVERTIME ban on London Underground is beginning to bite. In the last few days some stations have closed, including Charing Cross which had to be closed for 20 minutes over the weekend.

Reg Johnstone

RMT and TSSA's strike on 6-7 September was rock solid on every line. Even on the Northern Line only a special Sunday service ran. But the management gave the impression that a full service was running.

Well over 100 stations were closed and on a number of lines management were running trains through a series of unstaffed stations, a health and safety risk.

At Belsize Park station on the Northern Line, they told people that the station was open. But when passengers got off the train they were

The strike last week was rock solid on every line.

horrified to find they had to go up 219 steps. This included many patients visiting the nearby hospital.

Both unions being out on strike was historic and the mood amongst the workforce is very strong. There is also a growing realisation that there has to be a wider struggle for jobs, involving other trade unions and the community. This is not a strike for more money, it is a strike for keeping the number of staff needed to run a safe service for staff and passengers.

Even the overtime ban shows that they can't run the service on the numbers working now, let alone with the 800 jobs they want to cut.

The next tube strike is due to begin on 3 October.

Fight for jobs at GSK

THIS WEEK pharmaceutical giant Glaxo Smith Kline (GSK), a company that makes over £8 billion profit a year announced another 206 redundancies at its manufacturing site in Ware, Hertfordshire.

This follows on from redundancies since 2008 bringing the site number down from 1,800 to a proposed 739 in 2011, more than halving the workforce in less than three years.

Staff were briefed on 8 September by the site director, who gave no opportunity for questions or comments, from either staff or trade union representatives.

The company claimed that these further reductions were necessary to protect GSK's position in the market, obviously whilst still maintaining their enormous profits.

When at further departmental meetings management claimed

that these actions were necessary to safeguard jobs, workers pointed out that this was the same promise made two years ago yet this is another 20% cut of the workforce.

In the last two years workers have accepted permanent staff being made compulsorily redundant, while contract staff are kept. Large proportions of the workforce accepted no pay-rise and an increased workload and are expected to work longer hours.

All this when each employee worldwide contributes on average £80,000 towards the £8 billion company profit.

In the words of one worker "Enough is enough!"

The senior stewards are under growing pressure to call both an immediate Joint Shop Stewards meeting and a site Unite meeting.

The local Socialist Party and the NSSN will be actively supporting these workers in struggle.

inbrief

Strike threat at BBC over pensions

Members of Bectu, NUJ and Unite unions at the BBC are planning strike action on 5-6 October and 19-20 October. These coincide with the Tory Party conference and the public sector spending review.

This is because of the BBC's attempt to cut the pensions of 19,000 staff whilst paying the 15 most senior executives £4.76 million last year. Director general Mark Thompson has already made some concessions on this, following a majority for action in the strike ballot. These resulted in plans to strike during the Lib Dem conference being called off. There will be a ten-day period of consultation with staff from 20 September before the unions meet together on 1 October to approve strike action.

Hastings demo against management attacks

Civil service union PCS branch secretary Sam Buckley is the fifth union officer at the Child Support Agency office in Hastings to be sacked on trumped-up charges since 2007.

PCS, backed by Hastings trades council, have called a demonstration and rally for Saturday 18 September. Assemble 1pm, at Hastings Pier.

Postal workers say no to closure



photo Paul Mattsson

At a meeting in Stevenage last week over 70 postal workers met to hear from their branch officials, their regional representative and the secretary of Stevenage TUC. The issue was the threatened closure of the sorting offices in Stevenage, Watford and Welwyn Garden City.

All the work and jobs are due to go to Hemel Hempstead, only delivery would remain.

The meeting decided to launch a campaign including petitioning and having a march and rally in the town in six weeks time. It was clear the mood was 'enough is enough, we have to make a stand'. With that spirit the bosses will have their hands full in the coming months.

Stevenage TUC will discuss at its next meeting how to support the CWU.

Steve Glennon

UCU executive pulls out of strike ballot

ON 8 September the University and College Union (UCU)'s general secretary, Sally Hunt, announced that the union would carry out a ballot for strike action over pay and job cuts. In June UCU's congress voted overwhelmingly to ballot for industrial action if no better pay and job offer was forthcoming from university management body UCEA. UCEA's final offer remains unchanged from the 0.4% pay rise with no guarantee on job preservation.

But instead of running the ballot, UCU's Higher Education Committee (HEC) is preparing for fresh ACAS-sponsored talks with UCEA.

HEC's decision reportedly hinged

on the chair's casting vote. The executive members, who voted to ignore UCU's congress and defer a ballot, point to an unscientific poll of the membership, which found that only a narrow majority of members would probably or definitely support strike action. HEC say they will launch an additional survey of the membership.

UCU branches have led a series of strikes at individual universities over the past year. HEC's lukewarm response to their survey is a sign of members' lack of confidence in the HEC's ability to lead a strike.

Many UCU members feel the last national HE strike, in 2006, was poorly-coordinated and relied too

heavily on action short of a strike.

However HEC have dramatically under-represented the potential gains of industrial action. The 2006 action consisted of a one-day strike followed by extended action short of a strike, and won, among other things, pay rises that kept UCU members' pay up with RPI inflation from 2006 to 2009.

A well-led strike could win a huge victory for all academic workers.

HEC have only themselves to blame for squandering the enthusiasm of UCU's membership.

They have done nothing to show they have improved their willingness to lead action since the 2006 strike.

If HEC plan merely to defer the ballot in order to build during the autumn, rather than during summer holidays, their decision is justifiable, although they remain guilty of exceedingly poor communication with the membership.

If, however, HEC do not immediately take concrete steps toward a Yes vote to strike, then the UCU Left is justified in its call for a special sector conference.

The membership have mandated UCU to pursue a strike ballot. Strikes work. UCU should lead its membership in preparing for a national strike.

Socialist Party UCU members