

Mood of defiance in Huddersfield

OVER 300 angry, defiant marchers took to the streets of Huddersfield in a joint trade union demo against cuts and job losses on 11 September. Unison, Unite, NUT and trades council members were joined by rank and file Unison members who sent the Labour council a message, loud and clear, that we mean business.

Mike Forster

Spirits on this noisy, enthusiastic demo were high and hundreds of shoppers applauded us, so we took the march around the town centre for a second time. Many people joined in for this 'lap of honour'.

Just as significant was the support from young people. Over 50 protesters marched with the Youth Fight for Jobs contingent after active campaigning outside all the local colleges. More young people joined in as we passed through the town. The meeting after the demo attracted 30 young people.

Unfortunately little mention was made of the looming industrial action since the Unison officialdom postponed the strike ballot at the eleventh hour. The council had agreed to postpone some, but not

all, of their proposals for cuts and to enter into 'meaningful talks'. That was enough for regional officials to agree to postpone the ballot.

Negotiations begin on 15 September. Pressure from below has clearly forced a change of heart on the council's part. However, activists in the branch believe the ballot should have still gone ahead but were not given any opportunity to have a say.

Unfortunately the branch leadership agreed with the postponement, but the unions' chief stewards voted to condemn the postponement and to demand the ballot's reinstatement.

This dispute will be crucial to the future of any organised opposition to these vicious cuts. The demo showed that ordinary members will respond to a call to action where a clear lead is given.

Postponement must give heart to those in the TUC who believe we should wait before we act. Jobs, services and conditions are under attack now and we cannot afford to wait any longer.

The next few weeks will show whether this council is serious about talks or just trying to buy time. A strong fighting strike committee in the Unison branch is playing a critical role in giving a



First blood to the workers!

photo Huddersfield SP

lead to members in the dispute. Over 30 workplace meetings have taken place which also helped

build for the demo.

We are all clear that more demonstrations and ultimately strike

action is going to be necessary - but this demo was first blood to the workers!

Hull park rangers protest



On the 13 September protest.

photo Hull SP

ON 13 September, about 50 park rangers, members of the GMB union in Hull, marched to the city's BBC buildings. They were protesting against the cuts which would mean halving the park rangers service in Hull, with the loss of over 20 jobs.

The cuts would represent the death knell of the park rangers service in Hull, depicted by the coffin carried on the demonstration. The park rangers are responsible for maintaining security and general well-being in the city's many parks.

Hull Youth Fight for Jobs supported the demonstration, and were well received by the park rangers.

At the rally outside the BBC buildings, Les Dobbs (GMB full-timer) outlined the park rangers' case. Mike Whale (Hull NUT secretary) brought greetings from the wider trade union movement in the city, and got a warm round of applause, when he called for a return to old-fashioned trade union solidarity and a socialist alternative to the Con-Dem cuts.

Alex Humphreys,
Hull Socialist Party

Nottinghamshire

Campaign saves vital service

A CAMPAIGN GROUP has been fighting to save The Big House, in Edwinstowe, Nottinghamshire, which provided short-term respite care for families of young people with very challenging behaviour and learning difficulties.

The County Council wanted to close it, claiming it would cost £1 million to repair. The alternatives suggested were in the families' opinion, unsuitable for very mentally disabled children, or were many miles away.

On 8 September the County Council voted that a new, purpose-built facility should be built on the site of The Big House, with the house

and much of its land being sold to private developers, but remaining open while the new facility is built.

The best outcome would have been to keep the house open with money spent on its renovation, but the families see this as a victory. It will mean less distress for the children, and peace of mind for parents, who will be able to use this facility for years to come.

This campaign showed that battles can be won against the cuts. Users of The Big House did not create this huge deficit! Make the bankers and the rich pay instead!

Karen Seymour

Lobbies warn councils of workers' action

Bristol

AT A mass lobby of Bristol councillors on 7 September, several council trade unions warned of impending industrial action should the Lib-Dem council try to carry through compulsory redundancies.

Robin Clapp

A petition from the local Unison branch highlighted the position apparently taken by councillors in Blackburn who say they will not implement cuts which could lead to financial destruction of their city. The Unison spokesperson was applauded when he demanded that Bristol's elected representatives make a similar declaration.

This echoes the defiant note initially promised by many Labour local authorities in the 1980s when Margaret Thatcher tried to take the axe to public

spending. Then, only Liverpool council, courageously led by supporters of the Socialist Party's predecessor, Militant, transformed words into deeds to become 'the city that dared to fight'.

National Union of Teachers (NUT) senior vice-president, Nina Franklin, warned that teacher redundancies would be likely to lead to industrial action in Bristol schools.

The GMB union attacked a 50% cutback in the city's 'rat catcher' provision. Previously Bristol's rat population had been reduced though curiously, the speaker said, there appears at present to be an explosion of rats in the council chamber, a fact enthusiastically endorsed by anti-cuts protesters!

As this phoney war comes to an end, the battle lines, here and everywhere else, are being drawn up for a life or death struggle to protect public services.

Bolton

ON 1 September, hundreds protested at Labour-led Bolton council's plans to cut 40% off its budget at an estimated cost of 1,400 jobs, not to mention the effects on services.

Kieran Grogan,

Bolton Metro Unison young member officer
(personal capacity)

Bolton's Trades Union Council brought together community groups and members of the public under the banner 'coalition against cuts'. Each councillor attending the council meeting was being paid

£936 to attend and pass off 40% worth of cuts to frontline services. They were greeted with well deserved boos.

Socialist Party members replied to their claims of 'no alternative' with: "What about Liverpool between 1983 and 1987? Do what the socialist council did there!" The councillors of Bolton decided first of all to congratulate each other on the A level and GCSE results. Well done, guys! Now where do we send them? Oh that's right, there aren't enough college and university places due to more cuts!

This well-attended and well-planned demo must be a starting point in fighting these savage cutbacks.

How do we vote to stop the cuts?

THE TRADE Unionist and Socialist Coalition's (TUSC) steering committee met on the eve of the TUC congress. They heard reports on where the participating organisations and leading trade unionists now stand in relation to TUSC, set up this year to contest the general election.

RMT transport union executive member, Craig Johnston, on TUSC's steering committee in a personal capacity, reported on June's RMT conference decision to endorse the executive's backing of 21 TUSC candidates at the general election. The job now, he said,

was to promote TUSC in anti-cuts campaigning, ready for elections next year.

Clive Heemsker reported that the Socialist Party still saw the TUSC coalition as an important part of the anti-cuts movement. Nothing that has transpired since the election answers the question: 'what do we do at the ballot box to fight the cuts?' The Socialist Workers Party (SWP) representative said they were committed to TUSC and would seek to run candidates under its banner in May 2011.

PCS civil service union vice-president, John McNally, present in a personal capacity, reported on

efforts to create the broadest possible trade union resistance to the cuts. He also gave an update on the PCS consultation process underway on how to develop the union's political campaigning.

The meeting also discussed how participants saw TUSC developing, including how structures could be created to allow local campaign groups and individuals to participate in national decision-making.

A conference for local groups planning to stand candidates in the 2011 council elections will be held in January. A draft local elections policy statement will be circulated to local groups for discussion.