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TUC must name the date for strike action

THIS YEAR'S Tory conference provided a foretaste of what this government of millionaires is planning for us in the comprehensive spending review, which will be announced on 20 October.

An urgent response is required – the TUC must name the date for a national demonstration against the cuts this year as well as taking concrete steps to coordinate strike action between the unions. The cooperation between unions to organise the 23 October demonstrations must be built on. A date for a one-day public sector strike must be set now.

Despite 17 references to 'fairness' in chancellor George Osborne's speech, everything coming out of this Con-Dem government spells punishment for working and middle-class people. Meanwhile bonuses for bankers are up 25%.

It has already been estimated that the poorest 10% of the population will be hit five times harder than the richest 10% by these cuts. The UK is already one of the most unequal societies, with the poorest 10% owning 100 times less wealth than the richest 10%. Con-Dem plans will massively exacerbate this.

Proposed disability benefit 'reforms' will see 3.5 million people lose £9.2 billion in support by 2015. The cap on child benefit, designed to show that 'we are all in it together' is the thin end of the wedge. It is the beginning of the end of universal benefits, something which the previous New Labour government smoothed the way for.

Jeremy Hunt, with an estimated wealth of £4.1 million, had the temerity to defend the government's plans to cap all benefits to £500 a week. Low-earning households will be forced out of high-rent areas, even whole cities such as London, and large families will

suffer. What the cap does not address is the lack of council or other affordable decent housing. Those claimants who receive higher housing benefit payments do not live high on the hog, but the landlords who charge extortionate rents do.

David Cameron carried on plugging his 'Big Society' dream, even referred to by his own ministers as 'BS' apparently. They are struggling to catalogue their 'volunteering activities'. The sham of this plan, whereby we can all run our own schools, hospitals, drug treatment services, in reality a cover for cuts and privatisation, can be seen in the latest figures on what free time is available. On average we have eight and a half hours less free time than five years ago.

Massive opposition

THE FACT is that these cuts are about savaging the welfare state, rolling back universal provision and never a mention of how the rich should contribute through taxation. In fact they bragged about their tax cuts for big business, with corporation tax at its lowest rate since it was introduced in 1965. However, it would be wrong to think that this government can get away with all its plans. There will be massive opposition, which has the potential to stay the axe.

Former Labour minister John Hutton has published his review of pensions with the predicted call for workers to pay more, the usual 'race to the bottom' demand that public sector pensions be dragged down and that we all work till we drop.

In France the attack on pensions has meant older workers and young people have found

common cause. The Sarkozy government's proposed pension reform aims to extend total contribution years to 41.5 and to postpone the retirement age to 62, with a full pension only payable at 67. For many this is going to mean a much-reduced pension, and, for young people, fewer openings on the job market since workers will retire later.

Tuesday 12 October saw another national day of strikes and demonstrations in France, with millions on the streets in previous protests. Trade union leaders may say that we are 'not like the French' and that this won't happen here. But increasingly trade unionists report that government announcements are being met with huge anger and, where a lead is given, determination for action.

A recent example is the 300-strong meeting of members of the Public and Commercial Services union (PCS) who work in the passport office in Newport. The socialist-led PCS has been to the fore in providing its members with an argument against the cuts. Other unions have pledged support, showing how solidarity can be built.

With demonstrations in many areas following the spending review, 23 October is a very important date for all who oppose cuts. The demand that the unions coordinate for industrial action over the pensions attack is urgent and must be to the fore, as well as building the pressure on the TUC to call a national anti-cuts demonstration this year.

The brutality of the spending review could mean that many jobs have been axed before the TUC's proposed date of March 2011.

Such a demonstration will, as the demonstrations and strikes in France have, build the confidence that these cuts are not necessary

or inevitable and that, in our thousands and millions and, through the unions and anti-cuts alliances, they can be stopped.

Anger among students is also escalating. The Browne review has recommended removing the cap on student fees. The free market in education that will ensue from the lifting of the cap, will allow top universities to charge £12,000 a year or more, with other institutions cramming students into overcrowded lecture halls with overworked, overstretched teaching staff.

Lib Dem MPs, who signed up to oppose student fee rises during the 2010 election campaign, now find themselves asked to vote for this proposal by their very own Vince Cable. He claims 'fairness' will be achieved through bursaries to students from poorer backgrounds, but these are complicated and unreliable to access. And the less well-funded universities, where more working class students tend to study, have a smaller pot to share between more applicants.

The leadership of the National Union of Students, despite admitting that it has no principled opposition to charging students for their education, has been pushed to call a national demonstration on 10 November. Socialists will both mobilise for this and participate in it to put the case for free education and how to fight for it.

Across the country anti cuts alliances are providing a vehicle in which young people, workers, claimants and all opposed to cuts can build a fightback.

Faced with a determined working class, the pro-big business politicians can be forced to retreat, as New Labour was when it attempted to cut our pensions in 2005.

Labour shadows show: We need a new workers' party!

WHAT DO the results of the election to Labour's Shadow Cabinet tell us about the direction, or even likelihood, of Ed Miliband's party leading a fightback against the coalition cuts?

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In a sense - not much. Outside their own constituencies, many of the new frontbench spokespersons are hardly well-known - nor could they be, since 22 of the new team have only been MPs for five months.

The most prominent decision by Labour's new leader, which exercised the media, was the choice for Shadow Chancellor, the MP who would lead Labour's argument against Tory chancellor George Osborne's cuts package.

Alan Johnson, former Communication Workers Union (CWU) general secretary before going into parliament, came sixth in the shadow cabinet elections, but was chosen by Ed Miliband for the 'top job' over Ed Balls and Yvette Cooper. Johnson, a prominent supporter of defeated leadership challenger David Miliband, is unlikely to inspire trade unionists in coming cuts battles; indeed, he didn't even get the backing of the CWU when he ran for Labour deputy leader three years ago.

Miliband won't be taking Labour into general, or principled, opposition to the cuts. In his first TV interview as Labour leader, shortly after the shadow cabinet was named, he



Miliband.

warned he would not support public sector strikes over pensions, and that industrial action would alienate the wider public and undermine Labour's efforts to fight other spending cuts.

"I don't think we should be talking about industrial action. I think it is very premature to be talking about that," he said. Didn't take long, did it?

So when would be the 'right time' for Labour to respond? When would supporting workers and communities resisting the cuts be the "right thing to do"?

In Coventry, Labour is pre-empting the coalition government's cuts, starting on 19 October (the day before the Comprehensive Spending Review), by formally beginning procedures for over 1,200 jobs to go on the council - without that party producing a leaflet, petition or meeting in protest.

Rumours that Neil Kinnock is preparing to make a major speech attacking "the grotesque spectacle of a Labour council, a Labour council, scurrying around the city handing



Johnson.

out redundancy notices by taxi," as he did against the socialist Liverpool council in 1985, appear unfounded!

The election of Ed Miliband and his shadow cabinet, even if containing many of 'the Next Generation', has not fundamentally reversed the direction that Labour has taken over the last 20 years. Labour is a party now happy to manage the market economy, and accept all its limitations, even if that means being embroiled in the sacking of thousands of workers across the country.

The coming cuts battles will be the catalyst in town after town, for the idea and building of a new party, firmly rooted in the organisations and communities of working people. The idea will grow that, let down by the three main parties, working people need their own party that will properly defend the idea of public services and public ownership against the current common agenda which accepts that the victims of the recession should be further punished, rather than the culprits.

23 October - what's happening?

Protest against the Con-Dem's comprehensive cuts on 23 October

London.

Assemble 11am, RMT HQ, 39 Chalton Street, NW1 1JD. March to Bedford Square for a rally, then to the SERTUC rally in Congress House at 12 noon.

Cardiff All-Wales demo.

Assemble Cardiff City Hall, 12 noon.

Manchester NSSN demo.

Assemble St Peter's Square, 11am. Public meeting after the demo: 2pm, Peterloo Room @ Mechanics Institute, 103 Princess Street, City centre. salfordtuc@hotmail.co.uk 07904 965 780

Bristol and district anti-cuts alliance demo.

Assemble 11am, Castle Park, Broadmead. Rally: 12 noon, College Green.

Portsmouth demonstration against public service cuts.

Assemble 11.30am, Guildhall Square.

Also on 23 October: demos in Lincoln and Wigan.

For more details see www.socialistparty.org.uk

To publicise action in your area email editors@socialistparty.org.uk