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Thousands march against cuts

London tastes working class power

THIS WAS a real workers' demonstration, a taste of the strength of working class people at the beginning of what needs to be an almighty anti-cuts campaign. 4,000 workers from at least ten different trade unions, led by 100 striking firefighters, marched through central London on Saturday 23 October.

Paula Mitchell
London Socialist Party

Banners from regional and local trade union branches were joined by placards and banners from community campaigns - in defence of the NHS, against academy schools and more. Young people formed a noisy Youth Fight for Jobs (YFJ) contingent.

The London region of the National Shop Stewards Network (NSSN) played an important role in initiating this demo with the London RMT, FBU, PCS and NUT trade unions, supported by the London regions of UCU and CWU. Left-led unions, currently at the sharp end of fighting the cuts in London, have taken a lead in drawing together workers across the city and linking them up with community campaigns. This is how a movement against the cuts can grow.

Not just workers

THIS POINT was emphasised by RMT leader Bob Crow who addressed the rally at the end, saying: "When London Underground workers take strike action it shouldn't just be about Underground workers, it should be about the three million people who use it. When firefighters take action, it shouldn't just be about the firefighters, it should be about the people who rely on their services."

Ian Leahair, FBU executive mem-



100 striking firefighters led the march.

photo Paul Mattsson

ber for London, and Matt Wrack, FBU general secretary, both expressed the absolute determination of firefighters in London to stand up to their bullying bosses.

Suzanne Beishon spoke from YFJ, summing up the "appalling future facing young people unless we fight". Socialist Party and NUT executive member Martin Powell-Davies spoke of the devastating cuts facing schools.

Labour

LABOUR MP Jeremy Corbyn, who has a long record of opposing the New Labour leadership, asked to address the crowd. NSSN chair Andy Littlechild, compering the event, introduced Jeremy by asking him if he would be prepared to campaign for

Labour councils to refuse to implement the cuts. This received great applause from the rally, but sadly Jeremy did not comment.

Socialist Party member Linda Taaffe, secretary of the NSSN, put forward the next steps, calling for a national demonstration before Christmas, linked to a one day public sector general strike. The NSSN had organised a lobby of the TUC in September calling for a national demo as soon as possible. The TUC has called a national demo in March 2011, but despite the carnage announced by government chancellor George Osborne on Wednesday, has refused to bring this forward.

The NSSN believes it now falls to the left-led unions to coordinate to call a demo and action before Christmas.

20,000 in Edinburgh

JUST THREE days after the Con-Dem government's spending review that proposed cuts of £81 billion in public spending, well over 20,000 people took to the streets for the Scottish Trades Union Congress (STUC) demonstration on Saturday 23 October in Edinburgh.

Philip Stott
Socialist Party Scotland

There were huge turnouts from public sector unions. Workers from the private sector, particularly transport workers, also came out to show support, as did significant groups of young people.

Saturday's STUC demonstration also exposed the scandalous decision of the British TUC to refuse to call a demonstration in London at the same time. If more than 20,000 people can march in Edinburgh, a TUC national demonstration would have seen at least 250,000 on the streets of London.

While the decision of the STUC to call the demonstration was welcome, the lack of a lead given at the main rally was not. The demo was called under the slogan "there is a better way" which is deliberately vague and can mean different things to different people.

Big screen video clips allowed Labour and Scottish National Party politicians to condemn the cuts, but both parties are making cuts in Scotland and only oppose the depth and speed of the cuts - not the need for cuts.

Shockingly, the STUC refused to let any of the trade unions who had mobilised for the demo speak at the rally. The main speakers were Grahame Smith of the STUC and Jack O'Connor, president of the Irish Congress of Trade Unions



The turnout showed that the TUC is wrong to delay a national demo until March.

photo Ray Smith

(ICTU). O'Connor, in reference to the huge attacks on the Irish working class by the Fianna Fail government, said: "Don't let them do it to you too." What he didn't point out was that ICTU failed to organise meaningful strike action to defend Irish workers.

Grahame Smith called on councils to do what "our colleagues in local government did in the 1980s and 1990s and refuse to make cuts". Was this a reference to the stand of the socialist Liverpool Labour 1983-87 council, the one council that refused to carry out cuts and won £60 million from Thatcher's government?

Socialist Party Scotland members gave out 5,000 copies of a leaflet calling for the trade unions to name the day for a one-day public sector general strike. It also called for 'needs budgets' from councils and the Scottish parliament, and advertised the 6 November Scottish anti-cuts meeting.

Wales says: don't break the poor

WORKERS IN Wales were buoyed up by seeing 600 trade unionists marching through Cardiff city centre and making it clear that we would stand up and fight any cuts in Wales.

Katrine Williams
PCS Wales Chair

The demonstration was backed by the PCS, CWU, UCU, FBU and RMT unions, as well as the Wales Shop Stewards Network and Cardiff and Swansea trades councils.

Trade unionists from Napo Cymru, the NASUWT teachers' union,

Unite and Unison branches also attended.

GMB members in Remploy organised a mini-bus to the march. Les Woodward, the Remploy joint convenor, made a powerful speech attacking this government's offensive against the poor and those on benefits.

There was disappointment that the Wales TUC had failed to call and organise this demonstration because of their lack of confidence that workers would turn out.

Fortunately, trade unionists have taken the initiative in Wales and will continue to do so if the Wales TUC

continues to abdicate its duty.

The rally voted reluctantly to hear the Plaid Cymru deputy leader of Cardiff county council, Neil McAvoy, speak, with the view of 'let's listen to what he has to say'.

But he got a hostile reception when he said there was no choice at council and Welsh Assembly level but to make cuts because of the Con-Dem government's decisions.

Shouts of "it's better to break the law than break the poor" interrupted his excuses and he was reminded that the law has changed, so councillors can no longer be surcharged.

Police attack Bristol demonstration

TWO THOUSAND people from across Bristol protested on 23 October against the Con-Dem government's latest cuts.

Frankie Langeland
Bristol Youth Fight for Jobs

Bristol Youth Fight for Jobs (YFJ), who a week earlier had started fortnightly branch meetings, formed the liveliest group on the demo. Young

people on the demo marched with us, chanting our demands for jobs and free education. As we marched through the city, more young people joined us.

Socialist Party members helped steward the demo and counter a provocative stance by the police on two different occasions. Thanks to the stewards and the demonstrators, who largely kept their cool, the police were unsuccessful in attack-

ing the demo.

We marched to the Bristol council house and had a rally on College Green. PCS vice-president John McNally spoke about how the cuts will affect not only workers from the public sector but also the private sector.

RMT president Alex Gordon and speakers from the NUT, GMB, Unison and other unions and community groups also spoke.

Northern Ireland: build a new party

THOUSANDS OF workers took to the streets of Belfast on 23 October in probably the largest non-sectarian demonstration in Northern Ireland since the anti-war movement. They marched in opposition to the £4 billion cuts to public spending in Northern Ireland which were contained in the comprehensive spending review.

Daniel Waldron
Socialist Party Belfast

These cuts will have a devastating impact on an economy heavily reliant upon the public sector, which directly employs a third of the workforce and props up the private sector. Researchers have suggested 40,000 jobs will be lost as a result of the cuts, although this could turn out to be a conservative figure.

There was an angry and determined mood among the workers who joined the protest. Some of the local politicians who support cuts had the gall to join the march, including SDLP leader Margaret Ritchie and the Minister of Education, Sinn Fein's Caitriona Ruane.

All the main parties have been implementing cuts and privatisation since the Assembly Executive was established and accept that workers and young people must pay the price for the bankers' economic crisis.

Unfortunately, these politicians were given credence by representatives from the Northern Ireland committee of the Irish Congress of Trade Unions. Speaker after speaker appealed for 'our' politicians to unite against cuts, despite their track record. This clearly was not the mood of workers on the demonstration, who replied with boos and jeers.

Instead of sowing illusions in the sectarian, pro-capitalist parties, the trade unions should be preparing their members for a fightback against the cuts, including moving towards a new, anti-sectarian party of the working-class. The Socialist Party raised this demand on the march and called for a one-day public sector strike as the beginning of a campaign of industrial action to smash the cuts.