

Oppose the council cuts in Leeds!

LEEDS CITY council plans to make an estimated £150 million cuts over the next four years. Our jobs and services will be devastated, affecting hundreds of thousands of people.

A Unison steward

Although we knew that the austerity measures of the axe-wielding Con-Dem government would be severe, here in Leeds, despite much hand-wringing, it is a Labour-led council delivering the cuts.

I declared that we have a leadership for a reason, to give us a lead; to put forward a fighting strategy to defend members' pay and jobs and to save the services that the local population depends on.

I recently attended a stewards' meeting where I decried our leadership's position of calling for 'minimum redundancies'. I warned that this would be divisive as it implies we defend some members' jobs but not others. It is also a recipe for defeat.

But the message from the top table was 'we don't know what to do, you tell us!'

I declared that we have a leadership for a reason, to give us a lead; to put forward a fighting strategy to defend members' pay and jobs and to save the services that the local population depends on.

I argued that our branch needs to build now for coordinated strike action with other public sector unions for the new year, both at local and national level.

To build for industrial action we need to educate and raise the sights and confidence of the members.

Firefighters on the march

ON 17 November FBU members from Gloucestershire joined the 2,000 firefighters who poured out of their rally at Westminster and blocked the road outside Parliament. Cheers and whistles went up when the crowd realised Prince Phillip was in one of the cars surrounded by firefighters.

Chris Moore
Gloucestershire Socialist Party

Marching en masse down Whitehall, Ian Leahair, FBU national executive member for London, addressed the impromptu crowd in front of the gates of Downing Street. He warned the government they would be back if it did not back down from their proposed vicious cuts to the fire service, which could mean 7,000 job cuts, attacks on pay and pensions, fragmentation of the service and looming privatisation.

I spoke to the Gloucestershire FBU members as they travelled together.

Brigade secretary Mike Tully explained that the impact of £3.6 million cuts to fire services in Gloucestershire could mean "90 redundancies, including uniformed and non uniformed".

He called response times a 'post-code lottery' because national standards were abolished after the last dispute. "Gloucestershire aims to get one pump to a life threaten-



Prince Phillip surrounded by angry firefighters! photo Suzanne Beishon

ing instance within eight minutes on 75% of occasions, but what about the other 25% and there is no standard for arrival of the second pump."

FBU member Nick Sharpe was angry at plans to remove a specialist rescue appliance from Stroud, dealing with road accidents and trench and building collapses. It means at a road traffic accident "instead of seven people we'll have five on turnout, with less equipment."

FBU member Dave Smith added that: "Trench and building collapse

equipment for the whole county will have to be called from Hereford or Avon." But that day Stroud Tory MP Neil Carmichael refused to sign the FBU petition calling for this equipment to stay.

Gloucester FBU member Claude Elliott said it was "always those at the bottom that hurt the most" from the cuts. He supported a call for a 24-hour public sector strike. Because he "can't see them taking notice of anything short of that". Mike, Nick and Dave agreed.

Wales TUC special cuts conference

AT THE 2010 Wales TUC conference, a composite motion from Unite, PCS and RMT was carried unanimously calling upon the Wales TUC to lead the fight in Wales against government cuts. Following this, with some reluctance, the Wales TUC has called a special conference on the cuts on 26 November.

From the conference material it is very clear that the last thing the Wales TUC general council wants to do is lead such a fight. One proposal requires approval to hold this conference and cancel the 2011 Wales TUC conference. If this was carried it would mean that at this of all times the conference would not take place for two years. But delegates voting against might find the special conference wound up.

In Wales the Con-Dem cuts are hitting local government hard. Two councils, both Labour controlled, Neath/Port Talbot and Rhondda Cynon Taff are behaving scandalously in threatening a virtual lockout of their workforces unless they accept lower pay and longer working hours.

One document fails to even name these rotten employers, let alone condemn their behaviour. Instead we are offered: "Such employers are not acting in the spirit of constructive engagement nor displaying a professional approach to the conduct of industrial relations"! Thousands of workers facing a desperate future in these two areas will gain no comfort at all from these mealy mouthed words.

2011 will see elections to the

Welsh Assembly and clearly general council members are desperate not to offend their mates at the top of the Wales Labour Party. One could be forgiven for thinking that they do not wish to offend the Tories or the Liberal Democrats either.

Currently many trades councils are involved in building up the anti-cuts movement as well as the Wales Shop Stewards Network. Workers will organise to stop cuts in our communities regardless of the inaction of the WTUC.

From initiatives such as these we can begin to forge effective working class opposition to cuts the like of which Wales has not seen since the dark days of Thatcher.

Andrew Price, special conference delegate, Cardiff trades council

inbrief

Unison by election results

As the public sector faces the worst attacks in decades, two Socialist Party members recently stood in Unison NEC by-elections with a programme of fighting the cuts.

Hugo Pierre received 32,577 votes, just 259 votes away from winning the seat. He stood for the local government male seat which Socialist Party member Glenn Kelly originally held, until he was banned from holding any union position for two years following a vicious witch-hunt.

John Malcolm stood for the northern region male seat receiving 2,211 votes, 30% of the vote. Both Hugo and John put forward a fighting strategy to defeat the cuts. Hugo demanded that Labour councillors stand alongside the workers and their communities and refuse to carry out the cuts.

John referred to the destruction of manufacturing in his region and the reliance on the public sector for jobs. John also stressed his opposition to Unison funding New Labour.

Next year Unison members will get the chance to vote for all the NEC seats and Socialist Party members and other lefts will be standing.

London Underground strikes

In the battle to defend jobs on London Underground, the next strike will start on 28 November for 24 hours. An overtime ban is also in force.

Talks are still proceeding but no progress has been made so far. Further talks begin at ACAS on 24 November. London Underground are now trying to argue that if a ticket office sells less than 30 tickets an hour, it should be closed.

LU harasses activists

At the same time London Underground have started to harass RMT activists. Health and safety rep Eamon Lynch has been sacked and tube driver Arwyn Thomas is facing trumped-up charges. RMT members in the depots concerned are being balloted for strike action in defence of these workers. The ballot will close on 7 December.

Police staff face cuts

Nearly 3,000 jobs at Greater Manchester Police (GMP) are under threat. This is part of the government's generalised attack on public services, as implemented locally by an alliance of all three main parties, and should be opposed as such.

Both 'civilian' staff and police officers will lose their jobs, many of these will be compulsory redundancies. 1,377 police officer posts will go, through a combination of not replacing officers who leave, and forcible early retirement.

The Unison union which organises the civilian workers has slammed the announcement. There needs to be a swift move to action. GMP employees should join with other public sector workers taking action and marching against the cuts, such as on the lobby of Manchester city council on 8 December, and forthcoming national trade union demonstrations.

Hugh Caffrey, Manchester Socialist Party

McCluskey elected Unite general secretary

LEN MCCLUSKEY has been elected as the general secretary designate of Unite. He will take over from Tony Woodley and Derek Simpson by the beginning of 2012.

Kevin Parslow

His election and the combined vote for Len and Jerry Hicks are a massive rejection of the right in the union. Almost two thirds of members who voted, in a turnout of about 16%, opted for the left candidates who wanted to fight the Con-Dem government's attacks, and those of the Irish government, where Unite is also organised.

Len said following the declaration: "My first task will be to bring our union together and unite it in a campaign against the devastation the government is unleashing against working people and their communities throughout the land."

This result will be welcomed by socialists throughout the union, the largest in the TUC. The United Left (UL) ran a campaign explaining the importance of getting a left candidate elected. It was never certain that Len would win, given the large number of ballot papers going to inactive and pensioner members who

might have received Bayliss's material and seen 'red scare' articles in the press. But Bayliss's anti-strike comments, aired in many papers, generally repulsed union activists and would have been a signal to the government and the bosses that the union would roll over and accept the attacks. A general hatred of the policies of the government and the need for a fightback have led to Len's election.

As general secretary and hopefully with a left executive to be elected next spring, Unite's leadership will now be in a position to align itself with those unions such as PCS, RMT and FBU already in the forefront of attacks and leading struggles. Unite's participation on the 23 October demonstration in London against the cuts was a welcome development and hopefully the shape of things to come. This is the best way to prevent a comeback for the right, who may be down but are not totally defeated. Len and the UL must also consider the union's relationship with New Labour, given some of the comments by Labour spokespersons supporting elements of the government's cuts package.

Jerry's vote should only reinforce the struggle for fighting policies. He gained a slightly smaller percentage

of the vote than in last year's Amicus election, although still a good vote. But his result raises the question of how to take the left forward in the union. Those UL supporters who chose to back Jerry were excluded from that organisation for the duration of the election.

So now there is talk of Jerry setting up a new 'network' to rival the United Left. Similarly, many UL supporters are angry that Jerry stood following the hustings from which he walked out and could have jeopardised the election of a left general secretary. Some would like to see Jerry's supporters excluded permanently from UL.

Socialist Party members feel that both those positions would be a mistake. It would be best for the left in the union if Jerry and his supporters rejoined the UL, put forward socialist policies and demands like the election of officials and for them to receive only a workers' wage, as the Socialist Party has been doing. This would help to consolidate the UL as a body fighting our enemies outside and inside the union. Jerry and Len's supporters should also consider whether it is in the interests of the left to have two competing organisations.

It is not beyond the realms of pos-

sibility to create a strong left slate for the executive council elections. UL regions are already selecting territorial candidates and the sectoral and national candidates will be selected at the UL meeting on 4 December. It would be a setback if, having won the general secretary election, two 'left' slates were to appear in some or all constituencies, leading to the election of a right-wing executive by default. That would be an obstacle to the needs of the union's members.

Nevertheless, the election of Unite's first general secretary will be seen as a shift to the left in Unite and the trade unions as a whole; however it must be used to lead the struggle for fighting, socialist policies throughout society. The TUC resolution for co-ordinated action to defeat the attacks would receive a resounding boost if its largest union was actively to implement it.

Results:

Len McCluskey	101,194	42.2%
Jerry Hicks	52,527	21.9%
Les Bayliss	46,786	19.5%
Gail Cartmail	39,363	16.4%