

100,000 council workers given redundancy notices

DEFEND JOBS AND SERVICES

Coordinated trade union action needed

DURING THE first week of December local councils will be told in exact cash terms what the cuts will mean for them over the next four years. However, the reality is that for months senior managers and councillors have been preparing behind the scenes to unleash a wholesale attack on council jobs and services, the like of which has never been seen before.

A local government worker

The scale of it was bought home to me in recent negotiations with an education director. He said that youth service plans would mean the end of the service as it has existed since the 1960s.

He also warned that the cuts could effectively mean the end of the Local Education Authority, and that he may even have to alter his report proposing 40% cuts for even bigger ones once we see the new education White Paper.

What is also clear is that a growing number of councils, perhaps fearing the reaction to the outright closure of too many services, are seeking to frighten council workers into taking cuts in pay and conditions instead.

Nationally, 100,000 council workers have now been issued with 90-day notices which effectively put a gun to their heads to accept cuts in pay and conditions or face the sack.

Disgracefully, some Labour councils, such as Rhondda Cynon Taff, are handing out mass sacking notices to their entire workforce.

The latest council to use this bul-

lying method is Tory-led Southampton which, on top of 250 job cuts, is proposing a 5.4% pay cut by reducing employees' working week by two hours.

The council is also proposing a two-year pay freeze, stopping pay increments, and no sick pay for the first three days off sick. The workers have been told to take this or there will be another 400 jobs to go. But the reality is that councils will take the pay cuts today and come back for the job cuts tomorrow.

Coordinated action

IN RESPONSE, you might expect local government unions to immediately call together all the affected union branches to plan a campaign, including launching a coordinated ballot for strike action. Imagine a strike of 100,000 council workers all out together and what that would do for the confidence of workers everywhere to fight.

Unfortunately, there is no such lead being given and branches are being left isolated to fight alone. In fact some of the tops of the union are wrongly seeking to blame the members by saying that 'polls show that members are in favour of cuts'.

Local union branches need to offer a fighting alternative to the members, as in Kirklees, Telford, Shropshire and Nottingham councils. We need to be demanding, as a start, that the £2 billion sat in council reserves is spent to protect jobs and services as part of a massive campaign to force the government to retreat.



Every worker, trade unionist, service user and student should come to the January anti-cuts conference.
photo Paul Mattsson

Union leaders must begin to coordinate action and to plan for a one-day public sector general strike.

Where the union leaders fail to bring branches together to coordinate action then this must be done from below by the local branches and through the local and national

anti-cuts movement.

The National Shop Stewards Network conference in January will provide a key opportunity for such coordination. Every public sector worker, trade unionist, service user and student should put it in their diary now.

National Shop Stewards Network

National anti-cuts conference

Saturday 22 January 2011
11.30am - 3.30pm

South Camden Community School, Charrington Street, London NW1 1RG (by Euston Station)

The NSSN is the union rank and file body founded by the RMT transport union in 2007. It has organised annual national conferences since then involving hundreds of trade unionists. The NSSN is active locally, regionally and nationally, pulling together workers in struggle. We say not one job or one service should be cut. Never has there been a greater need for coordinated action.

whatwestandfor

The Socialist Party fights for socialist change – a democratic society run for the needs of all and not the profits of a few. We also fight, in our day-to-day campaigning, for every possible improvement for working-class people.

As capitalism dominates the globe, the struggle for genuine socialism must be international.

The Socialist Party is part of the Committee for a Workers' International (CWI), a democratic, socialist international that organises in over 40 countries.

Our demands include:

Work & Income

- Trade union struggle to increase the minimum wage to £8 an hour without exemptions as an immediate step towards £10 an hour. For an annual increase in the minimum wage linked to average earnings.
- All workers, including part-timers, temps, casual and migrant workers to have trade union rates of pay, employment protection, and sickness and holiday rights from day one of employment.
- An immediate 50% increase in the state retire-

ment pension, as a step towards a living pension. Reinstatement the link with average earnings now.

- Reject 'Welfare to Work'. For the right to decent benefits, education, training, or a job, without compulsion.
- Scrap the anti-trade union laws! For fighting trade unions, democratically controlled by their members. Full-time union officials to be regularly elected and receive no more than a worker's wage.
- A maximum 35-hour week with no loss of pay.

Public services

- No to privatisation and the Private Finance Initiative (PFI). Renationalise all privatised utilities and services, with compensation paid only on the basis of proven need.
- Fully fund all services and run them under accountable, democratic committees that include representatives of service workers and users.
- Free, publicly run, good quality education, available to all at any age. Abolish university tuition fees now and introduce a living grant. No to academies!
- A socialist NHS to provide for everyone's health needs – free at the point of use and under democratic control. Kick out private contractors!

- Keep council housing publicly owned. For a massive building programme of publicly-owned housing, on an environmentally sustainable basis, to provide good quality homes with low rents.

Environment

- Major research and investment into replacing fossil fuels with renewable energy and into ending the problems of early obsolescence and unrecycled waste.
- Public ownership of the energy generating industries. No to nuclear power. No to Trident.
- A democratically planned, low fare, publicly-owned transport system, as part of an overall plan against environmental pollution.

Rights

- Oppose discrimination on the grounds of race, sex, disability, sexuality, age, and all other forms of prejudice.
- Repeal all laws that trample over civil liberties. For the right to protest! End police harassment.
- Defend abortion rights. For a woman's right to choose when and whether to have children.
- For the right to asylum. No to racist immigration laws.

New workers' party

- For a new mass workers' party drawing together workers, young people and activists from workplace, community, environmental and anti-war campaigns, to provide a fighting, political alternative to the pro-big business parties.
- Trade unions to disaffiliate from the Labour Party now and aid the building of a new workers' party!

Socialism and Internationalism

- No to imperialist wars and occupations. Withdraw the troops immediately from Iraq and Afghanistan!
- Tax the super-rich! For a socialist government to take into public ownership the top 150 companies and banks that dominate the British economy, and run them under democratic working-class control and management. Compensation to be paid only on the basis of proven need.
- A democratic socialist plan of production based on the interests of the overwhelming majority of people, and in a way that safeguards the environment.
- No to the bosses' neo-liberal European Union! For a socialist Europe and a socialist world!