

# Swansea Council cuts must be fought

**L**IB DEM councillors in Swansea, only days after voting to shut Daniel James community school, had the nerve to join students in protesting about the vote on tuition fees. Then, having shown no shame for the betrayal by their party of all their pre-election promises to students, they went back to put the finishing touches to an all-out assault on the terms and conditions of their workforce.

A Unison member

A letter has been sent to all council staff detailing the list of proposals. The cuts are dressed up in terms of ensuring 'equality' and 'fairness' across the workforce, rather than saving money through attacking members' terms and conditions.

There are plans to:

- Penalise people who get injured or become ill. No sick pay to be paid for the first three days of any sickness and the maximum entitlement to be halved to three months on full pay, then three months on half pay.
- Cut maximum annual leave to



Students and workers join together to fight the cuts in Swansea.

28 days, including public holidays. Workers with long service face the prospect of losing 13 days holiday per year.

- Remove all unsocial hours, bank holiday, shift allowances etc. They propose to make the working week Sunday to Saturday, 52 weeks a year. All staff will be expected to work any five of the seven days at a single time.

Even if they were able to force these cuts through, the council will still be looking for large-scale redundancies. This is such a massive attack on terms and conditions that it must be met with an immediate, determined response to fight all cuts from the leadership of all union branches representing the council workforce.

We do not stand alone. Council workers in Labour-controlled,



photos Socialist Party Wales

Rhondda Cynon Taff and Neath and Port Talbot councils are facing very similar attacks. A strategy from our unions for coordinated ballots and industrial action would capture the imagination of union members, building a huge movement to defeat these cuts and prevent other councils, and other employers watching with interest, from taking the same road.

## Hands off the Forest of Dean!

**O**N 10 December, over 300 people attended a public meeting held at the Miners Welfare Hall, Cinderford, to show their anger and disgust at proposed closures of libraries throughout the Forest of Dean. They were also angry about the bill which Tory MP Mark Harper is attempting to put through parliament advocating the sell-off of huge swathes of the forest.

Lee Hyett

Gloucestershire Socialist Party

Harper declined the invitation to attend the meeting. It was probably a wise move, as the first item on the agenda was the decimation of the local library service. Tory chairman of Gloucestershire county council Mark Hawthorne got a roasting.

The Forest of Dean is not a rich country area - it has areas of social deprivation. Half of college students receive Education Maintenance Allowance.

Hawthorne explained that the county council has just enough money left to provide social care

for vulnerable adults and children. The implication that wanting to keep our libraries open would be selfishly stripping funding from the most vulnerable was insulting enough. But it was compounded by Hawthorne going on to state that community groups could buy these libraries and run them using volunteers, as part of Cameron's Big Society.

John Ewers from the Socialist Party asked Hawthorne if he could guarantee that the workers from closed public libraries would retain their jobs in these new 'community-funded' libraries. Hawthorne replied that all workers in the libraries earmarked for closure would lose their jobs.

A youth worker said volunteering was insecure and haphazard. What the council are calling for is not volunteering but conscription. Hawthorne was slow-handclapped as he left the stage, and his projector screen fell on top of him as he rose from his seat!

Item two on the agenda was one that arouses even more public ire in

the Forest of Dean - the proposed sell-off of forest land.

Labour peer Baroness Jan Royall is fighting Harper's proposals in the House of Lords, and whilst her speech received a standing ovation, she did mention in passing that she is not opposed to the principle of social enterprise. Nor will she fight to protect other forests from privatisation.

If a by-election could be forced on the basis that local people are in clear opposition to Harper's plans, and if the anti-sell off campaign could stand an independent, anti-cuts and anti-privatisation candidate, the mood in the Miners Welfare Hall indicated that such a candidate would have huge support.

The people of the Forest of Dean are prepared to fight cuts to public services, and to defend a forest which has resisted all attempts to place it in the hands of privateers. This forest is NOT for sale!

• The Hands Off Our Forest Campaign is organising a demo on 3 January. See [www.handsoffourforest.org](http://www.handsoffourforest.org).

## Come to the TUSC conference

**T**HE TRADE Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) will be standing candidates in the May 2011 local council elections that are taking place in every area of England except London. TUSC is also involved in discussions to organise an election challenge for the Scottish Parliament and Welsh Assembly elections. The TUSC draft policy platform starts from the basis that councillors can refuse to pass on the cuts. Local groups, trade unionists and anti-cuts campaigns who want to stand candidates under the TUSC banner are invited to a conference on 22 January 2011 to discuss and finalise the platform.

The conference is scheduled to follow the NSSN conference against the cuts also being held on 22 January 2011.

• For more information email: [electioncoalition@btinternet.com](mailto:electioncoalition@btinternet.com)

## Medirest workers on strike

**A**FTER FOUR years of waiting for nationally agreed terms and conditions to be paid by Bucks Healthcare and the Medirest/Compass group, Medirest workers at Amersham and Wycombe Hospitals have had enough and voted to take strike action.

As we have reported in The Socialist, Medirest workers have been waiting patiently for a number of years while Unison has tried to negotiate sick pay and other terms and conditions that the Department of Health, bosses in the CBI and unions have agreed to for workers working for private companies in the NHS.

The Department of Health funded this agreement and money was put into hospital trust budgets. Despite this, the hospital trust denies that they have ever had the money and refuses to fund the contract.

The workers have voted over-



NHS workers in privatised services have had to fight for every penny owed to them.

photo Paul Mattsson

whelmingly to strike and are taking 48 hours of strike action from 10am on 15 December.

Bucks health branch of Unison fully supports this action.

• Please send messages of sup-

port and donations to the hardship fund (Bucks Health Hardship Fund) c/o Steve Bell, Unison, Union Office, Tindal Centre, Aylesbury, Buckinghamshire HP20 1HU.

## inbrief

### Scrooge Northern Rail bosses in Christmas pay pantomime

Rail union RMT have slammed Northern Rail for issuing deliberately misleading statements over Christmas working arrangements. They are trying to claim that there is an agreement that forces staff to work the additional public holidays on 27 and 28 December at a flat rate with no enhancements. Craig Johnston, Manchester and North-West RMT council of executives member, told The Socialist: "Northern Rail have turned negotiations into a Christmas pantomime in which they are happy to play the part of Scrooge."

"We don't want a strike, we want to do everything we can to avoid any disruption. However, the company needs to accept that we are only asking for an enhanced rate of pay for coming to work on the compensation days for the Christmas holidays."

"We are asking for fairness at a time when this company is making millions in profits, paying out millions in shareholder dividends and giving mega bucks to faceless directors."

"We are frontline staff who provide the service. We deserve better."

"Northern Rail already pays some of the lowest wages for conductors across the whole of Britain's rail network. The issue of low pay in this company and excessive profits is a national disgrace."

• A ballot for strike action will close on 20 December.

### Heinz workers take action over pay

Heinz workers in Wigan are striking for 24 hours from 15 December for an improved pay offer. The 1,200-strong workforce is demanding a real-terms pay rise from this highly profitable company.

In the industrial action ballot, workers voted by 9:1 for strike action. If management can afford big bonuses for themselves then they can afford to pay their workers better.

Unite convenor Ian Wright told me: "Heinz is a great brand, and it's a great brand because our workers have made it that. The greatest asset of the company is the workers, not the machinery."

• Please send messages of support to [ian@wrightian5@sky.com](mailto:ian@wrightian5@sky.com)

Hugh Caffrey,  
North west Socialist Party

### Drivers strike at London Midland

Train drivers working for London Midland have voted 410 to 62 in favour of strike action in a dispute over harmonisation of pay and conditions from the two previous franchises, Silverlink and Central Trains.

Some drivers are being paid £1,200 less per year than others for doing the same job.

The company have been informed that drivers' union Aslef members will not book on for duty between 00.01 and 23.59 on 23 December 2010.

Further dates are to be advised.