

Defend the right to protest

Stop attacks on disabled claimants

ON 24 January police 'kettled' a peaceful demonstration outside the central London headquarters of Atos Origin. John McDonnell MP has since tabled an Early Day Motion (EDM) in the House of Commons that 'commends' the demonstrators and expresses concern about the actions of the Metropolitan Police.

By a Unison member

Atos Origin is a focus for disabled people's anger because its health care division is contracted by the Department for Work and Pensions to carry out the notorious Work Capability Assessment for people applying for Employment and Support Allowance and those on incapacity benefit.

Police stopped more than 50 protesters from entering Atos Origin's HQ and soon after used metal fences to surround them, restricting them to a small area with only one exit. This containment tactic was first used by the Met against members of the Disabled People's Direct

Action Network more than a decade ago.

Concerns were raised with the police by Linda Burnip of Disabled People Against Cuts about the impact on people with serious mental health conditions who were held behind the barriers.

The police also refused to allow disabled protesters to use toilet facilities in the Atos HQ or a local gym. This included a pregnant woman with a guide dog.

Atos' so-called 'assessments' are forcing tens of thousands of disabled people onto Jobseeker's Allowance who have no hope of finding employment. It is also exposing them to a strict sanctions regime that many will fall foul of; particularly those with mental health conditions and learning difficulties.

This will increase as the reassessment of incapacity benefit and Disability Living Allowance (DLA) claimants intensifies as part of the Tory/Liberal Democrat coalition's plans to save billions. These policies are supported by Ed Miliband's Labour Party and have their roots in the previous Blair and Brown La-

bour administrations.

As anger grows against Atos Origin, disabled people will continue to demonstrate against this company. Trade unions should demand that their sponsored MPs sign John McDonnell's EDM, publicly defend the right of disabled people to protest, and campaign to reverse Labour's support for the attacks on incapacity benefit and DLA claimants.

Disabled activists also need to play a central role in the developing anti-cuts movement and ensure that opposition to cuts means all cuts. Questions also need to be asked of the UK Disabled People's Council and the National Centre for Independent Living - their 'opposition' to the Con-Dem cuts makes Nero's fiddling whilst Rome burned look decidedly proactive!

● A protester outside Boots' Oxford Street store in London was subjected to CS gas sprayed by police on 30 January. She was part of a group protesting that big multinational companies like Boots avoid paying billions of pounds in taxes by registering abroad.



EDL thugs in Bradford.

photo Paul Mattsson

No to the racist EDL! Unite to fight the cuts

A GROUP OF people sit chatting and eating in a fast food restaurant; men, women, children. Out of the blue, bricks start hitting the windows, hundreds of thugs come running past, directing their racist chanting at the diners. Children start crying. Suddenly the thugs burst in the door to attack whoever they meet first...

Steve Score
Leicester Socialist Party

This is not 1930s Nazi Germany, this is Leicester 2010 and this kind of racist incident has been repeated at marches of the English Defence League (EDL) up and down the country over the last couple of years.

On their website the EDL have a "mission statement" claiming they are not racist, that they are only opposed to "Muslim extremism". But on the street demonstrations they have held up and down the country, the truth is revealed.

They do not wait to discuss religious beliefs before they attack anyone they see as not 'English'. They chant deliberately provocative slogans like "Muslims off our streets". Their leaders make statements on demos like "Muslims - burn in hell!"

They aim to blame all Muslims for terrorism, and all the other problems working class people face. Their anti-Muslim rhetoric is just the thin end of the wedge for a wider racism that divides working class people.

At a time when working class people of all religious backgrounds and none, and all ethnic makeups are under attack, when

all of our public services are being devastated, when jobs are being decimated and living standards slashed, we need a mass united movement to fight back. Whose interests are served by those who attempt to divide us?

It wasn't Muslims who caused the banking collapse that sparked the recession; it isn't Muslims who are attacking jobs and services to pay off the super-rich. It can only serve the interests of the ruling class to have attention diverted away from the real causes of our problems.

But it isn't only Muslims the EDL have attacked. They heckled Swansea Trades Council's May Day march and criticised students protesting against cuts and fees.

The EDL must be opposed. Local communities have a right to defend themselves from racist thugs. Trade unions and anti-racist campaigners have to support them. We cannot let the EDL go unchallenged.

There is a danger that some people, whose lives have been worsened by three decades of cuts and privatisation by the Tories, Liberals and New Labour, may believe the EDL's scapegoating. That is why, when opposing the EDL, we need to put forward an argument for jobs, homes and services, not racism.

A socialist alternative can provide an answer on those issues. The EDL claim to defend the 'English' working class, but they actually hide the real causes of our problems. We need a real mass workers' party that can unite all working class people to defend ourselves and our living standards.

Liverpool: Jobs axe must be fought

AFTER 20 years of slashing jobs, privatising, and cutting services, by Liverpool's ruling parties - New Labour and Lib Dems - the local authority workforce is now faced with a catastrophe.

Tony Mulhearn

1,500 will lose their jobs and many will join an already high number of families without a wage earner. And in spite of Labour council leader Joe Anderson's pledge that the poor will be protected, services will be, and already are, suffering.

'There is no alternative' claims the Labour leader. But there is always an alternative to supine capitulation, and that is simply to fight.

Anderson also continues to falsify the policies of the brave 47 Labour councillors who, with a socialist leadership, refused to cut jobs and services after being elected in 1983, and successfully defied Tory prime minister Margaret Thatcher.

He told the council workforce that the 47 were responsible for Labour's decline in the city.

That is a complete falsehood. The 47 received magnificent support from the council workforce and the wider trade union movement and at the ballot box. If some fighting leadership was shown in this present crisis then that support would again be forthcoming.

On 29 January 500 people gath-



Liverpool's socialist council in the 1980s refused to carry out cuts.

ered on St George's Plateau, Liverpool, to hear how the cuts were going to be fought. There was the grotesque spectacle of the Labour group of councillors turning up, led by Joe Anderson.

Another platform speaker was Wavertree Labour MP Luciana Berger who offered a lame attack on the Con-Dem government, followed by speakers from the NUT and Unison.

None made any criticism of the Labour group, in fact one speaker read out a letter from Joe Anderson explaining why he had no choice but to sack workers and cut services. It was akin to reading a letter from the boss at a workers' strike meeting!

Unite convenor Dave Walsh got the biggest cheer of the day when he told the demo that the crisis was a crisis of capitalism, and he pointed to the record of the post-war Labour government which, in spite of the

country being devastated after the war, was able to rebuild society by vast swathes of nationalisation and the introduction of the NHS.

The demo exploded in cheers when he referred to the stand of the council in the 1980s when they refused to carry out cuts in jobs and services. That was the high-spot of the speeches from trade union reps who will be compelled to struggle once the full extent of the cuts reaches a wider layer of the working class.

**Liverpool Trades Council
Fight the cuts - public meeting
Thursday 10 February, 7.30pm
The Green Room, Duke Street,
Liverpool
Speakers include: Ricky
Tomlinson, film director Ken Loach
and Tony Mulhearn**

Tommy Sheridan

Political vendetta ends in draconian sentence

SCOTTISH SOCIALIST Tommy Sheridan was jailed for three years on 26 January having been found guilty on charges of perjury. This follows the longest and most expensive perjury trial in Scottish legal history. The unprecedented political vendetta and this draconian sentence will provoke anger and disappointment among many thousands of working-class people across Scotland.

The class nature of the prosecution and jail sentence was illustrated by the £4 million spent by the police and the Scottish Crown to secure this verdict.

This prosecution has only been achieved through an unholy alliance of the might of media mogul Rupert Murdoch's News International, the capitalist legal establishment, the police and the leadership of the Scottish Socialist Party (SSP).

Many will contrast the treatment of Tommy Sheridan with the way that the prosecutors and the police have allowed Andy Coulson and the News of the World to, so far, avoid charges over widespread illegal phone hacking.

Without the actions of the SSP leadership, a successful prosecution

of Tommy Sheridan would not have been possible. It is to their eternal disgrace that they were prepared to collaborate with and encourage the vendetta against Tommy Sheridan.

After the sentence was passed it was announced that Tommy Sheridan will be appealing the conviction and also taking legal action against the News of the World, the Metropolitan police and Glenn Mulcaire over the hacking of his phone.

Gail Sheridan, Tommy's partner, said: "Tommy has dedicated his life to helping others. The real reason why he's been imprisoned today is

because he has fought injustice and inequality with every beat of his heart."

● The Socialist Party Scotland statement can be read on: www.socialistworld.net

**Readers wishing to send letters/
correspondence to
Tommy Sheridan:
Tommy Sheridan
Prison Number 32057, HMP
Barlinnie, 81 Lee Avenue, Riddrie,
GLASGOW G33 2QX**