

Ditch the library cuts

fastnews

OVER 80 protests took place around the country as part of a national day of action to defend the 450 libraries earmarked for closure.

Nancy Taaffe

Library trade union convenor,
Waltham Forest, north east London

The action varied from genteel affairs like public readings to mass 'shh-ins' where protesters joined in a chorus of "shh" on the stroke of 11am. Around the country library shelves were emptied of books as mass borrowing was encouraged to drive home the message of just how popular our libraries are.

The libraries day of action attracted national press coverage and many well-known personalities signed up to support it. Celebrities such as Kirsty Young, Billy Bragg, and Anna Ford, along with well-known authors such as Philip Pullman, Julia Donaldson and Alan Gibbons gave public readings and held meetings to protest at planned closures.

However, apart from the glitz and glamour that is associated with these protests, there is widespread support amongst workers for librar-



450 libraries are threatened by spending cuts.

ies. There are more public libraries in working-class communities than there are branches of McDonald's

and on any Saturday more people will visit a public library than go to a football match.

Even if people don't use them much, they expect them to be there. Libraries, despite their shabbiness or inadequacies, represent possibilities to learn and for intellectual advancement for people who can't afford books.

When I asked my local councillor whether the library I work in was earmarked for closure he replied: "I'll die in a ditch before they close this place, there's nothing that fills my surgery up with angry people more than a library closure."

In the emerging anti-cuts movements it is often the library campaigns that are the more vocal and active, acting as a catalyst to other campaigns.

We must support all of these national coordinated events which attract big names and tonnes of publicity but we must also raise the necessity of library workers taking industrial action to beat off library closures and communities occupying sites and buildings that the council tries to sell off to property developers.

As I said to my local councillor: "You don't have to die in a ditch, you just have to vote against the cuts!"

NHS cuts

The Con-Dem government's latest disastrous reforms to the National Health Service come on top of at least £20 billion of 'efficiency savings' ie cuts, that health managers have been told to implement by 2014.

This has led to thousands of job cuts and hospital ward and department closures. Recently the West Midlands health trust announced that 1,600 jobs are to be axed, which will badly hit patient care.

NHS London, the capital's strategic health authority, is 'reconfiguring' its health services by closing Accident and Emergency departments and shedding thousands of hospital beds. According to the British Medical Association some £5 billion will be cut from London's health budget by 2017.

PFI rip-off

Private Finance Initiative (PFI) contracts for new hospitals, schools, etc. are costing the public purse a staggering £229 billion, yet the actual value of these projects is only £56 billion. PFI schemes typically involve a private contractor building a hospital and owning it for 25 or 35 years while leasing it back to the NHS for a tidy profit. For example, the Princess Royal hospital in Bromley, south London, built through a PFI contract, will cost the NHS £1.2 billion - more than ten times its actual value!

BA dispute

Trade unionists across the country will be angered that, yet again, bosses at BA have forced Unite cabin crew to re-ballot through a combination of intimidation and a 'legal blitz'.

Starting out as a battle over impositions to members' contracts, cabin crew were forced to take industrial action, as BA was unwilling to negotiate. In the course of the dispute the battle has morphed into a fight to maintain union organisation.

Unite cabin crew are calling for the removal of sanctions taken against union members as a result of participation in lawful strike action and for the right of the union to organise itself amongst the workforce.

This is clearly an attempt to prevent working-people legitimately using their hard won democratic rights to defend their jobs, terms and conditions and pensions.

Mubarak's friend

Egypt's beleaguered president Hosni Mubarak can't have many friends left after weeks of mass protests against his rule. However, it appears that he does still enjoy the support of Frank Wisner, president Barack Obama's envoy to Cairo.

The diplomat left White House staff flabbergasted after remarking: "President Mubarak's continued leadership is critical: it's his opportunity to write his legacy." It appears that this was no diplomatic slip of the tongue as Wisner is also employed for a US law firm that works for the Mubarak regime. Wisner's employer, Patton Boggs, also advises the Egyptian military and boasts that its attorneys "represent some of the leading Egyptian commercial families and their companies". No conflict of interests here then!

IoD bosses' organisation bares its teeth at unions

THE RIGHT-WING bosses' organisation - the Institute of Directors (IoD) - has called for trade union collective bargaining to be scrapped for teachers and NHS workers. Such a measure would enshrine the 'race to the bottom' in terms of workers' pay and employment conditions.

This blatant attack on workers' rights follows hot on the heels of government plans to stymie the ability of trade unions to fight spending cuts and low pay with new anti-trade union legislation, commonly referred to as the 'employers' charter'.

The IoD, the government and also the bosses' Confederation of British Industry claim that their anti-worker measures will 'lift red tape' and 'promote job creation'. In practice, the employers' charter will make it easier to sack workers and push through cuts in public services.

The bosses' organisations and

government proposed measures include:

- Increasing the qualifying period from one year to two before workers can lodge unfair dismissal cases and implementing a charge of £500 to lodge an employment tribunal claim.

- Changing the already existing restrictive strike ballot laws by making strikes illegal if less than 50% of union members take part in an industrial action ballot.

- The CBI further insists that a strike ballot should only be valid if over 40% of those entitled to vote do so, instead of the current simple majority of those who vote.

- The IoD is calling for deeper cuts in public spending than even the current coalition government is pushing through.

- It also wants developers to be able to override local objections in the planning system for big infrastructure projects in the greenbelt around cities.

Public sector trade unionists response:

"The IoD pretend they are simply interested in the economy but they are really interested in the naked pursuit of profits by big business at our expense.

They know that the public sector trade unions have the strength to oppose the Con-Dems' spending cuts and clearly they want to break those unions. Instead, we have got to use our collective strength to break those who would ruin the economy and our public services in the interests of the super-rich."

Martin Powell-Davies, NUT national executive, (personal capacity)

"This threat by the IoD to crush the living standards of health workers in order to make us pay for the crisis in capitalism must be answered in the strongest terms by the trade unions. In particular, the leadership of the public sector unions must mobilise rank and file trade unionists in a coordinated programme of industrial action to stop cutbacks and attacks on union rights."

Len Hockey, Unison joint branch secretary, Whipps Cross Hospital, (personal capacity)

Solidarity with the Egyptian masses

Newcastle

UP TO 100 protesters gathered at Newcastle students union to demonstrate their solidarity with the Egyptian masses on 4 February. The messages on the banners, both in English and Arabic, were clear: "Mubarak must go".

One of the protesters, Rana Salem, a young woman from Alexandria, said she had waited all her life for this revolution: "People are being killed in Tahrir Square. We want the world to know we are standing with our people in Egypt. We want this rotten regime removed as soon as possible - before there is more loss of life. This regime has ruled for 30 years, but now we will not tolerate another seven months."

Similar views were expressed by Fatma Soliman who said: "We have suffered under Mubarak's regime for 30 years. Look at all the people who have died this week, especially last night when he gave the order to kill unarmed protesters."

Elaine Brunskill

London

SEVERAL HUNDRED people gathered at the US embassy in central London on Saturday 5 February to show solidarity with the revolution in Egypt.

After speeches from campaigns such as the Stop the War coalition and Palestinian Solidarity, they marched to the Egyptian embassy.

The big question on everybody's lips was what needs to happen next. Unfortunately none of the speakers

offered any way forward. No-one raised the vital role of the working class and trade unions.

Only Socialist Party leaflets put forward a working class programme, including: calling for immediate and free elections to a revolutionary democratic constituent assembly, and a majority workers' and rural workers' government.

Leeds

AROUND 200 people, mostly from Middle East countries, demonstrated in Leeds on Saturday 5 February in support of the ongoing revolt in Egypt.

As well as some professionally produced placards with vague slogans calling for 'freedom for Egypt', there were more radical hand-made ones. Several called for 'Mubarak Go Now' and another saying: 'We are all Egypt, We are all revolutionaries'.

One placard showed pictures of Mubarak side by side with previous British prime ministers who had supported him, both Tory and Labour.

After the main protest ended, many young protesters gathered to chant slogans calling for the end of the Mubarak regime. One young woman told The Socialist: "We wanted to chant slogans telling Mubarak out now, but we're being told that we have to be polite and chant for 'freedom'. But for that to happen Mubarak must go."

Leeds Socialist Party member

Egyptian revolution - see article on pages 6&7

EDL racists terrorise Luton

ON SATURDAY 5 February, the racist and hooligan English Defence League (EDL) marched through the centre of Luton. A Socialist Party member who attended the counter-demonstration to the EDL sent the following report:

"An eerie silence fell over Luton town centre on Saturday. The few shoppers were vastly outnumbered by

shop workers in the shopping centre; themselves vastly outnumbered by police from all over southern England.

Several thousand EDL supporters marched into St George's Square in the centre of Luton, surrounded by police. The town centre was divided into two sections by the police, with the EDL at one end and the counter-

demonstrators at the other end.

The silence was broken by music from the counter-demonstrators, who were penned in by thousands of police.

The counter-demonstration was comprised of members of the UAF (Unite Against Fascism), different socialist groups, Love Music Hate Racism, as well as a

large number of trade union activists from Luton and the surrounding area.

Platform speakers while exposing the racist nature of the EDL, unfortunately didn't put forward a programme of action to fight the government's jobs and spending cuts which could unite all communities and prevent the socially divisive agenda of the EDL."