

TRADE UNIONISTS, community campaigners, students and socialists marched into the centre of Southampton on 5 February to protest at government, council and business attacks on jobs, pay and services in the city.

Southampton Socialist Party

Organised by Southampton Shop Stewards Network (SSSN), this march was an opportunity to put forward a clear message of opposition to all cuts in jobs and services.

"We have to nail the lie that these cuts are necessary. While the government picks our pockets with rises in VAT they hand over our money to the super-rich through cuts in corporation tax. Their policies are to protect the profits of big business at our expense," explained

Nick Chaffey, secretary of SSSN, at the rally.

David Rawlinson exposed how these cuts were hitting frontline services: "The Bitterne Walk-In service provides access to the NHS for over 500 people a week.

"Without any alternative but a long and expensive trip across the city to A&E, the plan to close the Walk-In during the day is a brutal cut to local services. Over 3,000 people have signed the petition to oppose these cuts."

The rally attracted support as shoppers stopped to hear the speakers, signed petitions and took leaflets.

After the demonstration council workers, postal workers, civil servants, Women Against Cuts, students and NHS campaigners heard from RMT Wessex regional organiser, Pete Gale, about the vital need to

organise mass opposition to the cuts not only industrially but also politically. "The Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition has been initiated by the RMT as a means to offer a real alternative to the three party unity on making cuts."

Alongside him Hugo Pierre, from the National Shop Stewards Network, highlighted the potential of the trade unions to organise national coordinated action to stop the cuts. "The TUC demonstration [on 26 March] will be massive but we must be there to raise the call for a one-day public sector strike to intensify the pressure on the government and demonstrate the power working people have."

The meeting unanimously endorsed a resolution from the SSSN to launch Southampton Anti-Cuts Union to take the fight against cuts out to every area of the city.



Hugo Pierre speaks to the Southampton demonstrators.
photo Southampton SP

AROUND 150 people attended a Unison-organised rally in Leicester on 2 February against council cuts.

Becci Heagney

The protest included council workers and a large number of service users from the Douglas Bader Centre. This day centre cares for adults with disabilities and, along with nearly all other centres in Leicester, faces closure as part of the council's cuts.

The local authority plans to make massive attacks on adult social care. The home care and meals-on-wheels services will be reduced with a look to ending them completely. Two elderly people's homes will be closed while services are to be cut back in others. There will be no new admissions to day care.

The council propose these attacks as an example of 'promoting choice and control'. They want to give service users 'personal budgets' so that they can choose which service to use from private companies or voluntary/charity organisations.

The rally called on the council to refuse to carry through the cuts.

This is the same as the Tories' idea of the 'big society' where public services are cut back and the private and voluntary sector are relied on to take up the slack. Rather than feeling empowered, service users feel that they are being doomed with the prospect of no care or support at all. It is clear that it is about saving money.

NEARLY 200 people came to a meeting in Bow, east London, on Thursday 3 February to protest against cuts in services. The event was organised by the Tower Hamlets council workers' joint unions.

Pete Dickenson

Tower Hamlets Hands Off Our Public Services

Tower Hamlets, which is now run by a newly elected mayor and his cabinet, is proposing to axe vital services, including closing whole departments, as well as cutting hundreds of jobs this year alone.

One section to be cut entirely is Housing Link that provides support for mentally ill patients to find accommodation when they leave hospital.

David Amery from Housing Link pointed out that only in December the council newspaper, *East End Life*, had run a feature on his sec-

tion explaining that without the vital service, people with mental health problems would be left on the streets to fend for themselves. Helen Granger who works in school support services said that everyone in her area is to be made redundant except for four senior managers who all earn over £70,000. This is despite the mayor's assurance that senior management positions would be first in line for the chop.

The organisers of the meeting invited the mayor, Lutfur Rahman, who stood as an independent in the election with the backing of Respect, to come along to answer questions from council workers and residents. He was no doubt hoping that he could pose as an opponent of the cuts even though he's voting for them.

However, Rahman was subject to angry workers and residents demanding that he take a stand to

fight the attacks and was heckled throughout his speech. His only defence was that it was better that he made the cuts than the council's finance officer, but he didn't explain why. Only one person in the audience spoke up to support this position.

The meeting organisers also invited the local Labour MP, Rushanara Ali, to speak even though she supports cuts, in line with Labour policy. She received a rough reception with many pointing out Labour's record, including the introduction of tuition fees and the axing of Education Maintenance Allowance bonuses.

No speaker put forward a programme to beat the cuts by, for instance, drawing on the lessons of the anti-poll tax and Liverpool council campaigns in the past. The only concrete proposal was to back the Trades Union Congress national demonstration on 26 March.

ON SATURDAY 12 February workers and community campaigners will march against savage cuts being proposed by Greenwich council.

Paul Callanan

The council plans to cut £90 million worth of our jobs and services over the next four years.

The council plans to save £30 million by closing libraries, cutting carer's allowance, raising allotment charges by 200%, closing advice centres for teenage mothers, closing Maryon Wilson Park in Charlton and cutting a whole host of other vital services.

This is on top of the 90-day redundancy notices that have gone out to all 8,000 council staff. The council is threatening that if workers on the council do not sign a

new contract on inferior terms they will lose their jobs.

The demonstration on the 12th has been called by Greenwich Save Our Services, an alliance of trade unionists and community campaigners, which was initiated last year by Socialist Party members.

We say that councillors have a choice. On Saturday's demo we will be calling for the council to actively oppose the cuts and set a 'needs budget'.

If the council did this then they could mobilise the whole community in defence of our jobs and services.

***Greenwich march
against the cuts
Saturday 12 February
Assemble 12noon
Riverside House, Creton Street,
Woolwich, SE18 6BU***

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