

Fighting the cuts: Thousands protest, lobby and occupy

2,000 march in Hull

UP TO 2,000 angry local authority workers, trade unionists, students and people involved in the community and voluntary sectors demonstrated on Thursday 24 February in opposition to the council slashing its budget by £80 million.

As the Lib Dem-led council discussed the budget, the protesters marched around Hull city centre demanding that every job be saved in the local authority.

Later, as the council made its decisions, many of the protesters joined a 'street party' outside the Guildhall. There were numerous speakers, the majority of which called on those in attendance to "vote Labour" to "solve the problems". It was only Socialist Party member and NUT teacher's union divisional secretary Mike Whale who put forward a genuine alternative to all cuts. Mike received loud cheers for this.

After the wonderful spontaneous council invasion in January, at the request of the Labour Party and agreed to by right wing union leaders, the lobby was prevented from disrupting the council meeting.

However, the 30-at-a-time who were allowed to "observe the meeting" had a huge effect. Two 13 year olds, on their first ever demo, stood up in the public chamber, calling the councillors "disgraces" for the proposed cutbacks. When asked to leave, the teenagers refused. The meeting was suspended until they left.

One Socialist Party member commented that he had not seen scenes like these since the anti-poll tax campaign that led to Tory prime minister Thatcher's resignation.

Matt Whale
Hull Socialist Party

Go to www.socialistparty.org.uk for more anti-cuts reports and analysis, including Cumbria, Leeds, London, Northampton and Stevenage

Camden: locked-out by Labour

NEARLY 1,000 council workers, teachers, day centre users, parents and young people marched and lobbied Camden council on Monday 28 February to defend their services from £25 million cuts this year and up to £100 million over the next three years.

Cuts to elderly people's day centres, children's play centres and nurseries are among the savage attacks on Camden council services. The Labour council admits there could be 1,000 job losses resulting from their plans and they've built up a war chest - not to fight the cuts but for redundancy pay.

The entrance to the town hall was shuttered down. The deliberate attempt to shut out Camden residents and trade unionists from witnessing Labour councillors' abdication of responsibility was met with outrage as the very same councillors attempted to address the demo.

Though a deputation from the trade union Unison, and a petition from parents opposed to the effective closure of Camden's play service was heard by the councillors, the public remained locked out. A mass block of Euston Road led to a traffic jam all the way to west London.

Camden councillors sit on almost £84 million of reserves, including the £12 million redundancy fund. Unison demanded that if they attend the TUC demo on 26 March



Parents and young people marched on Camden council on 28 February.

photos H. Pierre

they should act like they mean it and refuse to make the cuts.

Socialist Party members believe that the council can use its reserves to not make any cuts this year, and then join with the existing hundreds of anti-cuts protesters to build a mass campaign across the borough against the cuts.

Hugo Pierre
Camden local government worker

Lambeth anti-cuts occupation

A LITTLE bit of Wisconsin came to Brixton on 23 February as over 100 protesters invaded Lambeth council's budget meeting after a lobby of 300 local people. The visitor gallery was full and looked down on a meeting, not of the Labour-majority councillors debating where to let the axe fall, but of anti-cuts campaigners holding an impromptu meeting on how to defeat the cuts.

Visitors heard from local trade unionists telling us about their dealings with the council and from members of the local community facing the decimation of services that they rely on.

Andy Tullis, the Unison convenor for children's services in the borough and Socialist Party member brought three young people in, who gave emotional speeches about the loss of their adventure playground.

Councillors should follow the example of Ted Knight, who was in the occupation, who led the Lambeth council into defying Thatcher in the 1980s along with the 1983-87 Liverpool council.

Shamefully the councillors, who had been blocked from the chamber, shuffled off to a side-room to vote through £79 million cuts.

Earlier in the week the local Labour leadership had disgracefully suspended councillor Kingsley Abrams who had declared his intention to vote against cuts. However, councillors be warned: implementing cuts is a different story - we'll fight them, library by library, if we have to.

Rob Williams

Haringey protesters occupy

YOUTH CLUB members facing 75% budget cuts, Asian people facing the closure of their community centre, and council workers were among the hundreds attending the lively protest and rally outside Haringey council's Civic Centre in north Lon-

stopcuts.net

The National Shop
Stewards Network anti-cuts campaign website

don as the Labour council made £41 million cuts for 2011-2012 at its budget meeting on Thursday 24 February.

1,000 Haringey council jobs, over 20% of the total workforce, are due to be cut during 2011-2012. This will be followed by a further £43 million in cuts.

As the protesters entered the Civic Centre to go to the public gallery there was a spontaneous occupation of the council chamber, which delayed the council meeting for two hours.

The protest inside the chamber remained overwhelmingly peaceful and good natured. Not surprisingly the council and media focussed on a staff member who was unfortunately injured when the protesters entered the Council chamber, a damaged glass door, and graffiti - written with chalk! - rather than the details of the effects these massive cuts will have on Haringey. There was also a heavy-handed response by the police, including the Territorial Support Group, to remove protesters.

Haringey Council may have formally voted through its cuts - but they still have to implement them in practice. The fight against the cuts goes on!

John Dolan
Haringey and Enfield Socialist Party

Birmingham opposes cuts

ON 26 February, 700 people marched through the centre of Birmingham city on a demonstration against cuts by the city council.

The anti-rich nature of these demonstrations is becoming well-known as all the big banks, mobile phone shops and Tesco had police guards on the door as the demo wound its way through the city centre.

The chief target of anti-cuts demonstrators, Vodafone, had its shop closed for the duration of the demo. There was a small anti-tax dodging picket outside flanked by police officers who just let the picket remain there!

Clive Walder
Birmingham Socialist Party

Hundreds lobby Swansea

HUNDREDS OF public sector trade unionists and users of council services lobbied Swansea's city and county budget setting meetings on 28 February.

As well as cutting council services, the council is proposing an all-out assault on local authority workers' terms and conditions. Included in a raft of 30-plus proposed changes are reducing annual leave to 28 days, including all bank holidays and other closure days and not paying sick pay for the first three days of any sickness absence.

Labour party speakers, including the leader of the council's Labour group on the council and the local MP, opportunistically used the fact that Swansea council is led by the Liberal Democrats to portray Labour as the defender of local authority workers.

Yet in Rhondda Cynon Taff Labour has used section 188 notices that threaten redundancy, to try to force its workforce into signing new contracts. Labour Neath and Port Talbot used the same threat to bully its workforce into accepting an average 2% pay cut.

Ronnie Job
Unison steward
(personal capacity)

Anger at Bradford council axe

ON THURSDAY 24 February Bradford council set the 2011-12 budget

Lewisham election: There is an alternative!

VOTERS IN the Bellingham by-election in Lewisham, south east London, have a clear choice. They can either vote for a candidate who will push through massive cuts to local services, or they can vote for Socialist Party/Lewisham People Before Profit candidate Ian Page.

Ian has a proud record of fighting against all cuts to public services. Local members of public sector union Unison have said they will be voting for Ian and window posters are now starting to go up in the ward.

The by-election takes place on 24 March. For more information, or to help in the campaign phone 07906 591794.

Chris Newby

in front of an angry, packed out public gallery.

Bradford People's Coalition Against the Cuts has tirelessly campaigned for the council to defy central government and set up a deficit budget. Instead, the council agreed £47 million of cuts, including 2,000 job losses and an attack on vital disability and community services.

Green Party councillor Martin Love and Labour councillor David Green both made apologetic speeches but made it clear they weren't going to stand up to the government.

Councillor Green said it was better that Labour swing the 'little' axe than let Eric Pickles come in wielding a much bigger one. This was met by fierce heckling from the gallery, suggesting that he may as well let Pickles in as he was doing the Tory local government minister's job for him!

David Green responded to the heckling by stating he will defend his position. Green has been invited to do that at the next Bradford Socialist Party meeting - we shall see if he turns up.

Matthew Leek

STOP PRESS: In Waltham Forest, east London, two Labour Party members put forward a motion at the Unison local government branch to end all links with the Waltham Forest Anti-Cuts Union, that has challenged the borough's Labour council. After discussion, the meeting rejected this motion. Only the two people who proposed the motion supported it!



Camden's Labour council is using its reserves to sack people, instead of preventing cuts.