

Fight the cuts with TUSC: more than just a 'protest vote'

Clive Heemskerck

Launching Labour's campaign for the English local elections last week Ed Miliband argued that families will lose an average of £182 worth of council services this year. "Cuts designed by David Cameron and Nick Clegg are coming direct from Downing Street to your street," he said.

The council elections would give voters a chance to 'make their voice heard'.

What Miliband didn't say, however, is that the cuts are being delivered in many areas by Labour councillors, who had the chance not to pass them on but choose to vote for cuts anyway. What type of 'protest' is it to vote for someone who is implementing what you are protesting against?

But in 55 local authorities there will be the chance to support candidates who will refuse to implement the cuts.

Over 180 candidates are standing on the 'no cuts' platform of the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC), the election alliance set up last year with the backing of the RMT transport workers' union general secretary Bob Crow, leading national officials of the PCS civil servants' union, the vice-president of the National Union of Teachers (NUT), Nina Franklin, and the recently retired general secretary of the POA prison officers' union, Brian Caton.

...in 55 local authorities there will be the chance to support candidates who will refuse to implement the cuts.

The TUSC candidates include the South West regional chair of the Fire Brigades Union (FBU), two FBU brigade chairs, an RMT regional secretary, a regional president and two branch officers.

From Unison, the public services union, there is a national executive committee member, three branch secretaries and five branch officers.

A PCS national executive committee member is standing, two Unite union branch secretaries and a NUT regional secretary.

A NASUWT teachers' union association officer has been expelled from the Labour Party after announcing his decision to stand for TUSC.

In total there are five current - or about to be expelled! - Labour Party members amongst the TUSC candidates - and four former Labour Party councillors.

In Stroud a town councillor has



TUSC gives an opportunity to vote for real anti-cuts candidates photo Paul Mattsson

resigned from the Green Party to seek re-election on TUSC's clear anti-cuts programme.

Millions of voters will turn out on 5 May to protest at the cuts and the Labour Party will undoubtedly

make electoral gains. But to end the cycle of one pro-cuts party replacing another, a stand has to be made.

The TUSC local election challenge is a modest start, but it is just the beginning.

For more on the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition go to TUSC.org.uk

United strike to defend jobs

Pete Dickenson
Tower Hamlets Socialist Party

The fight against the cuts in Tower Hamlets, East London, had a big boost on Wednesday 30 March with a joint strike of local teachers, who are members of the National Union of Teachers (NUT) in the East London Teachers Association (ELTA), and Tower Hamlets council workers in Unison.

There were dozens of picket lines throughout the borough and 1,500 took part in a march and rally, which received a very positive response from the people of the East End.

Speaking at the beginning of the march, Socialist Party member Martin Powell-Davies, who is on the executive committee of the NUT, called for a 24-hour public sector general strike as an essential next step in the struggle after the magnificent national anti-cuts demonstration on 26 March.

At the rally, messages of support were read out from NUT branches round the country, from Queen Mary University UCU, and the FBU firefighters' union, amongst others.

Speaking at the rally, secretary of Tower Hamlets Unison John McLoughlin said that Unison would defend every job under threat.

This was welcome since at an earlier meeting of the Tower Hamlets anti-cuts body, HOOPS, he had said that it would not be possible to defeat all the attacks, and the movement would have to pick where it could win.

Mark Serwotka, general secretary of the PCS civil service workers' union,



The 1,500-strong march photo Naomi Byron

ion, said that unions should strike together.

The PCS is currently balloting 90,000 members for industrial action, and is in discussion with the

UCU and NUT on coordinated strike ballots, but all the public sector unions should be balloting. He received a standing ovation with chants of "general strike!"

Pay cuts provoke strike

A Unison member

Unison members employed as housing support workers at Leeds Federated are taking industrial action in a dispute over pay and grading.

Last year, Leeds Fed told us that they wanted to restructure the service we provide. Instead of us continuing in our roles - salary £23,000 - they said they wanted to split the role in two.

They proposed that the 'senior' role - the one which they thought contained the more difficult aspects of our job - was to be regraded, with a £3,000 pay cut!

Worse still, those who were charged with doing the 'less de-

manding' tasks were looking at a pay cut of £8,000! Yet this role involves carrying out the bulk of face-to-face work with service users.

There are also strong signs that Leeds Fed bosses eventually want all housing workers to be on the lower rate of pay.

We have told management of our suspicions. They have said that they had considered paying us all at the low rate but decided to take it "one step at a time"!

A striking member told me that there has been subtle bullying to try and put members off from exercising their right to strike.

If they get away with this, it is likely that they will try a similar stunt with other Leeds Fed workers.

Leeds Unison - fighting the cuts

A Leeds Unison steward

Leeds Unison local government branch, jointly with the other council unions, has recently run a consultative ballot amongst the membership. This is over the employer's cuts packages.

But there was no clear mandate from the ballot. This is partially because the wording of the recommendation from the Joint Trade Union Committee (JTUC) said that the offer was the best that could be achieved through negotiations but we cannot positively recommend this offer. This was a confusing and defeatist message.

After hearing concerns from branch activists, Unison sent out a much stronger statement to recom-

mend a rejection. Yet the initial recommendation will have contributed to the low turnout.

The union leaders feel incapable of raising the confidence of activists and mobilising a genuine campaign to oppose all the cuts. Instead they have decided to jointly reject the council's proposals but also to continue negotiations "with the aim of avoiding compulsory redundancies".

It's clear that the unions want to engage with the employer with a 'softly softly' approach. But in doing so they are agreeing to 'smaller' cuts. We've already had consultation and we've been issued with another 90-day consultation period that ends on 3 May.

Socialist Party members believe that we need to move straight to a strike ballot against these severe cuts.