

No to nuclear power - nationalise the environment-unfriendly energy giants

Ben Norman

After the tsunami hit on the reactors at Fukushima power plant, the Japanese government is raising the nuclear alert level to seven, on a par with the horrors of Chernobyl a quarter of a century ago. Before that, in scenes reminiscent of BP's desperate attempts to stem last year's oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico, emergency workers took emergency measures.

They resorted to pouring sawdust, absorbent polymers and newspapers into a pit connected to the damaged nuclear reactor in a desperate attempt to stop leaking radioactive water pouring into the ocean.

Tragically the bodies of two workers have been recovered from the site, yet as workers from towns in the shadow of the plant face lack of food, water and shelter and the invisible threat of radiation, the world has been split on the issue of nuclear power.

In Germany mass protests have led chancellor Merkel to close seven of the country's oldest reactors and



Angry protesters in Tokyo on 10 April.

announce a freeze on the development of future power stations. But in the UK the Con-Dems' energy bill is due to underwrite nuclear power stations with yet more public

money. And liberal environmentalist George Monbiot has said: "As a result of the disaster at Fukushima, I am no longer nuclear-neutral. I now support the technology."

Monbiot believes that renewable energy is not a realistic alternative under capitalism. Coal, Monbiot argues, is "100 times worse" for the environment and industrial health than nuclear power.

If the world's energy is left to the anarchy of the profit-driven free market, then Monbiot may be right. Profits from carbon and nuclear fuels mean there has been relatively minimal investment in renewable energy. Yet why should the issue of energy, fundamental to modern society yet potentially disastrous for the environment, be entrusted to a system which puts millionaires' profits before the needs of the millions?

Consider Tepco, the Tokyo Electric Power Company that owns Fukushima nuclear plant. It holds the monopoly over power to Tokyo and eight of Japan's prefectures. Tepco, the world's fourth largest power company, has a deplorable record of placing short term profits before safety.

In 2002 it was revealed that Tepco had forged safety inspection reports for its nuclear plants while, claims

CNN, the seismologist Yukinobu Okamura warned Tepco safety executives that the ageing Fukushima plant was vulnerable to damage from a tsunami.

The solution is to reject the free market in favour of a socialist plan for energy as part of a wider, democratically planned economy. The nationalisation of the energy giants, under democratic workers' control, would allow for a massive investment in renewable energy.

We should reject the technology which has threatened and failed communities from Chernobyl to Three Mile Island. We should also reject the mismanagement of our energy supply, inherent under capitalism, in favour of a socialist alternative which fulfils the needs of both our society and the environment.

Nationalise Tepco and the giant energy corporations under democratic workers' control and management.

For huge investment in renewable energy, based on needs not profit.

For a socialist plan for energy as part of a wider democratically planned economy.

Hands off our services

Westminster

Elizabeth O'Hara

'Save Our Children's Services Westminster' organised a lively and effective protest on 8 April against Westminster council's cuts. At 7am campaign member Finola Inger was interviewed on BBC Radio London - she criticised Westminster councillors for voting through a 20% cut to children's services whilst rejecting a proposal to cut their own expenses by 10%.

Then at 8am, BBC Radio London questioned Nicola Aiken, Westminster cabinet member for children and young people, about the cuts. She was forced to answer questions on the generous expenses councillors receive. Aiken argued that central government had made cuts, so Westminster must do the same. There was no reference to the needs of the borough's children and parents.

At 10.30am, about 50 campaign supporters, including children, gathered outside City Hall, wearing 'hands off' t-shirts and carrying banners and placards. We created a children's play area on the pavement with chalk, musical instruments and balloons. Passers-by took leaflets and signed our petition.

Our message was that we do not accept that there is no money to fund children's services in West-



Outside Westminster City Hall photo E. O'Hara

minster. There is still money for things like expensive consultants and executive pay.

We presented 500 petition signatures to Michael O'Connor, Director of Children's Services, as Ms Aiken herself was unavailable. Parents invited O'Connor to come and speak to the children who would be affected by the cuts Westminster plans. He declined.

Campaigners were supported at the lobby by Westminster Anti-cuts Alliance and Westminster Unison.

The support for our protest shows that many Westminster residents do not agree with the cuts and want properly funded children's services in the borough. The campaign continues.

Please send protest messages to Nicola Aiken, cabinet member for children and young people, 64 Victoria Street, London, SW1E 6QP or to info@westminster.gov.uk, copying them to the campaign: socswestminster@gmail.com or SOCSW, 3A Lydford Road, London W9 3LU.

repeatedly push back planned closure dates.

The chairperson of the city-wide Mental Health Service Users' Involvement Group, Norman Forsythe, said there has already been an increase in reports of attempted suicide and self-harm by service users since the announcement of the council's plans.

These centres are essential to the well-being of very vulnerable people

who attend the centres, build up their confidence and learn new skills, which they can use when seeking jobs. Closing the centres, however, would mean their health could deteriorate and they could end up in hospital or living on benefits.

The long-term cost for the local community, both financially and socially, far out-weigh any savings that could be made. The fight to save the day centres continues.

Chauvinist 'thoughts' from David Willetts

Claire Laker-Mansfield

Universities minister David Willetts, a prime architect of this government's slash-and-burn higher education policies, recently revealed his thoughts on social mobility in Britain today.

You might assume that the disadvantages working class people face in education have something to do with sky high tuition fees, the squeeze on university places or the systematic underfunding of state schools and education. Oh no, Willetts explains, what really holds back working class men in education is feminism!

According to the Guardian, Willetts says the problem is that "women who would otherwise have been housewives have taken university places and well-paid jobs that could have gone to ambitious working class men". The small detail that 50% of working class people are female seems to escape David 'two brains' Willetts.

Perhaps Willetts' privileged background, educated at the prestigious £10,000 a year King Edward's School, contributed to his ridiculous position on the issue.

There are deeply entrenched inequalities within education. At least 45% of students attending Willetts' old Oxford University were educated privately (compared to 7% of the general population). Shockingly, in 2009, out of over 11,000 Oxford undergraduates, only one British black Caribbean student gained admission!

Looking more broadly, young people getting free school meals are around 20% less likely to attend university than their peers who do not receive them. Clearly, the enormous inequality in society is expressed, and often reinforced, by the education system as it stands.

As was the case with all working class people, women won the



Willetts - looking pleased with himself

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right to an education and to attend university through mass struggle. These crucial steps forward must be defended. But today working class and even middle class women and men face huge attacks on their ability to gain an education from David Willetts and his Tory and Lib Dem cronies.

Willetts' comments show that they will try to divide our movement, to weaken it. Youth Fight for Education is building a movement to defend education which, unlike Willetts, we believe is a right and not a privilege.

But as the student movement and the 26 March TUC demonstration show, education is a right which men and women are prepared to fight for.

Leeds

Dave Younger,
Leeds City Socialist Party

Local mental health service users and mental health workers lobbied Labour-controlled Leeds city council against its plans to close mental health day centres across the city without serious consultation with workers and service users. Angry opposition has forced the council to