

Teachers' conference calls for strike ballot to defend pensions

The 2011 National Union of Teachers (NUT) conference, held over Easter, voted almost unanimously (with only two abstentions!) to start a strike ballot against the Con-Dems' attacks on their pensions.

The strike day is likely to be on 30 June - already pencilled in by other public sector unions like UCU, PCS and ATL. An indication of the militant mood of delegates to this year's NUT conference, was that the national executive committee's motion which called for a ballot was actually amended to strengthen it further - committing the union to escalate action into the autumn term and beyond if the government doesn't back down.

It also emphasised the necessity to coordinate action with the other unions on 30 June and reach out to those still weighing up action, calling for the TUC to organise a one-day general strike in the autumn.

Many speakers reported how the giant TUC anti-cuts demonstration on 26 March has given members confidence that they can fight the pensions' attack and win. The conference was clearly lifted by the decision of the smaller ATL teachers' union to ballot their members and

gave a standing ovation to the ATL general secretary, Dr Mary Bousted, the night before.

However, teachers also recognise that they cannot take members' votes for granted, not least in a traditionally moderate union like ATL. This was reflected in the second amendment which called for joint preparatory work with ATL before and during the balloting period.

Phillip Clarke, a teacher from Lewes and Socialist Party member, told the BBC: "What that means is demonstrations, industrial action and doing whatever we can to make a 24-hour public sector general strike a possibility to begin the fightback against this government."

Disappointingly, the leadership of another teachers' union, the NASUWT, managed to persuade its conference, to delay any ballot 'until negotiations are over' - which by then may be too late.

Unfortunately, NUT conference



The Con-Dem government wants teachers to pay an extra £100 a month towards a reduced pension photo SP

didn't take the third motion moved by Socialist Party and executive member Martin Powell-Davies which called for all unions taking action to organise regional demonstrations on the first strike day to reach out to workers not taking action as a concrete step to building for a 24-hour general strike.

Socialist Party member Jim Thom-

son raised this idea in his contribution in the debate.

However, the mood of the conference indicates that there is every chance that 30 June will see hundreds of thousands of workers on strike and solidarity demonstrations in many cities. NUT members should argue for these solidarity marches locally.

NHS cuts

Leeds: Save Yorkshire's children's heart surgery unit

Michael Johnson
Leeds City Socialist Party

Over the past few weeks, dozens of volunteers and activists have taken to the streets of Leeds in an effort to stop the planned closure of the Children's Heart Surgery Unit at Leeds General Infirmary. The closure threat is part of a planned national 'reconfiguration' of the NHS.

The Unit currently provides its services for all of Yorkshire, Humber and North Derbyshire.

If closed, thousands of seriously ill children (with 370 needing to undergo open heart surgery and 40% needing long-term care) and their families will be forced to travel huge distances to the closest heart unit.

Both their physical and mental well-being would be seriously affected by the closure, just from the stress of travelling alone. And this doesn't even take into account the financial costs of travelling these distances would have, not only on the families but also on the NHS!

The Save Our Surgery group is collecting 50,000 signatures. To sign the petition online go to: www.thepetitionsite.com/6/help-to-save-ward-10-childrens-cardiac-lgi/

Save Our Surgery is also asking

for people to lobby their MPs and to attend a public consultation meeting on Tuesday 10 May at 3-5pm or 6-8pm at the Royal Armouries (register online at the above website).

However, this is not the only action needed as the closure of this type of service is a clear part of the government's 'privatisation through the back-door' agenda.

We need united mass action to defend the NHS involving trade unions, anti-cuts groups and service users, including building support for a one-day public sector strike.

Stop the NHS cuts - see page 16



Stop the Connaught closure

Bob Severn and a Whipps Cross worker

The Con-Dem government claims that no frontline NHS services will be cut. But the Connaught day hospital, at Whipps Cross general hospital in north east London, is threatened with closure.

The day hospital provides specialist care to the elderly - how much more frontline can you get?

The axing of the day centre would be on top of a ward closure, and two wards being 'renovated' so that they

now have significantly less beds.

Maybe we should not worry. We have been told by the trust that the service is not being axed, it is being 're-provided'. That gives little assurance to day hospital staff and patients.

Further talks between the trust and the unions are due as the Socialist goes to press. An emergency protest has been called for 28 April and the Waltham Forest anti-cuts union will be campaigning against the closure.

Socialism Today

The Socialist Party's magazine
May 2011 issue includes:



Libya: the no-flyzone and the left

Imperialist powers have implemented a no-fly zone over Libya to protect their own strategic and economic interests. Incredibly, some on the Marxist left support this military intervention. Peter Taaffe writes.

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Bristol 'Tesco riot' reveals anger

On Thursday night, 21 April, disturbances took place in the Stokes Croft area of Bristol when police clashed with anti-Tesco protesters and the local squatting community.

A local campaign to prevent the opening of another Tesco store in the area has been running for a couple of years, organising demonstrations and direct action. Following the opening of the store protesters have been calling for a boycott of the supermarket, which it is argued will have a negative impact on the area.

Peaceful protests developed into a riot when 160 police with shields and

batons descended on the area, allegedly following reports that local squatters intended to petrol bomb the store. The police response was heavy-handed and confrontational.

Stokes Croft is known as a hub of artistic endeavours, with a strong sense of independence and difference from the increasingly homogenised high streets in much of the UK. Some have suggested that the police actions smacked of trying to clean up the area ready for gentrification.

Events continued through the evening as people left bars and clubs and saw

what was going on.

There was a sense that the violence came about, not only as a result of Tesco opening, but also of people's continuing frustration with the Con-Dem government, bankers' bonuses and the billions of spending cuts.

When ordinary people are not listened to, anger grows and can boil over into violence. We need more than ever a strong political voice that can take on the neoliberal agenda of the government and their friends in big businesses like Tesco.

Stokes Croft resident

Fast news

Torture camp

The latest tranche of WikiLeaks documents covering prisoners at the US base in Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, reveals what has long been suspected, ie that many of those incarcerated were completely innocent people, not terrorists.

Some 150 people, including farmers, cooks and drivers, were snatched from Afghanistan and Pakistan and handed over to US forces (and in some instances sold to US captors) before being transferred to Guantanamo.

Hundreds more, low level foot soldiers snatched from the battlefields in Afghanistan, were held for years and tortured despite the lack of intelligence obtained by their US captors.

These human rights abuses took place under the watch of US president George W Bush who has refused to even apologise for these outrages. Current president Barack Obama has failed to close down the camp despite his election pledge to do so.

Women's rights attack

Nadine Dorries, the Tory MP behind the '20 reasons for 20 weeks' campaign, is continuing the charge on a woman's right to choose when and whether to have children.

She has proposed two amendments to the government's Health and Social Care Bill. Dorries suggests that women seeking abortion are referred to 'independent' counselling groups rather than those who provide abortions. This clearly opens the door for religious and 'pro-life' groups to pressure vulnerable women to change their minds.

She also calls for the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists to no longer be the body that draws up clinical guidelines for abortion (having previously criticised it for publishing studies showing that abortions are medically safe and that the impact on mental health is likely to be minimal).

Both amendments patronisingly assume that women need 'moral guidance' because they are unable to make their own decisions based on medical fact alone. The women's and trade union movements need to ensure these amendments are defeated and step up the campaign to defend and extend a woman's right to choose.

Rough sleepers

Because of government spending cuts, Nottinghamshire probation service is giving out tents to ex-offenders to live in. Last year five people were given tents and sleeping bags because no hostel accommodation could be found. This scandal resulted from spending cuts causing the Nottinghamshire-based Framework Housing Association to close two hostels this year.

Research by Homeless Link revealed that there were 1,169 fewer bed spaces available for homeless people in 2010 compared to 2009.

Royal despots

Being subject to the nauseating spectacle of a royal wedding costing millions, at a time when our services are being cut to the bone, is bad enough, but the establishment has heaped further indignity onto the public by inviting representatives of various bloody dictatorships including Saudi Arabia, Zimbabwe, Swaziland and Bahrain to attend this royal knees-up.