

Tory cuts hit children and young people

A leading think tank has estimated that the Con-Dem coalition's spending cuts could push another 300,000 children below the poverty line.

Tory work and pensions secretary Iain Duncan Smith justifies the cuts in benefits and services on the

grounds that Labour's anti-poverty spending had failed to narrow the gap between rich and poor.

Of course, the Tories' attacks on the low-paid and poor will certainly make a difference – they will vastly increase the wealth gap and the class gap in

education.

Articles on this page look at policies that will hit children and young people – in education and in local services.

Coventry teachers strike against academies

Sunara Begum

Teachers at Tile Hill Woods secondary school in Coventry held their third strike on 13 May against plans to turn their school into an academy. Their determined fight has gone from strength to strength.

Their first strike had 20 members of the NUT teachers' union on strike, the second had 70 teachers, as members of another teachers' union NASUWT joined them. Teachers at Woodlands Secondary School have now joined in, striking against plans to turn Woodlands into an academy. NUT members from Derby visited the picket line in solidarity as did members of Unite, Unison and CWU unions.

Many teachers told us they were striking against academies to oppose the divide in education that the academies would create and the two-tier system it would establish.

Striking teachers from both schools later held a rally that heard speakers from the Anti Academies Alliance and residents from the local Charterhouse fields campaign. Teachers feared the financial disaster that academy status would spell for our schools. This would lead to a lack of resources, as well as abolishing public accountability in our schools. Crucial rights of teachers, such as maternity leave and long term sick pay, would be abolished,



photo Suzanne Beishon

as businesses step in to run the academies.

After emergencies such as fires, schools would be at the whim of insurance companies, well known for dragging their heels for months on end. Under the current system local education authorities can and do step in straightaway with funds and facilities to help schools continue immediately after an emergency. All this support and funding is directly under attack.

No doubt education will suffer, as academies siphon off money and resources to consultants' salaries and shareholders' dividends. Our children's education would be secondary to making profits for fat cats playing in the casino of capitalism.

The rally ended very positively, with a discussion on how to build

the struggle against academies. Teachers discussed drawing support from the local communities that the schools belong to – parents, school pupils and trade unionists.

Teachers want to get as many people as possible to show their support and join the campaign. Young members of the Socialist Party and Youth Fight for Jobs offered to help build support for the anti-academies struggle amongst Coventry's school students and young people.

The Socialist Party stands shoulder-to-shoulder with teachers fighting to maintain and improve our comprehensive education system. **Public meeting: "Trust teachers - say no to academies!". Wednesday 25 May, 7pm at the Standard Social club, Herald Way, Canley (opposite Sainsbury's).**

Warning from Blue Coat school

Socialist Party councillor Dave Nellist told strikers that Blue Coat School in Coventry had also applied for academy status and wants to take 60% of the Charterhouse public park under its control.

The local community and school shared the park for 45 years, but Blue Coat now wants absolute control and only seems willing to allow limited use by the

neighbourhood.

Dave said that if a Board of Governors treated its neighbours like that, then once governors gained greater control over staff terms and conditions, union members were right to ask how their pay and conditions would be treated in future as an academy.

Blue Coat school had also borrowed money from other Coventry

schools' reserves and bought old allotments next to the school, clearly to provide further room for expansion.

If it became an academy, more of a business than a school, its expansion and increased student numbers would come at the expense of other schools. Competing academies are bad for education across the city.

Teachers strike and parents picket at Shorefields

Dave Walsh

Strike action by the NUT and NASUWT unions closed Shorefields secondary school in Dingle, Liverpool for the second time in a month on 11 May. Teaching staff fear that their pay terms and conditions would come under attack once the school opted out of local authority control. Pupils and parents, equally concerned about these plans, joined them on the picket line.

Dingle is one of Liverpool's most deprived areas but Shorefields produces consistently good academic results. Its latest Ofsted report said it had outstanding features.

Most pupils there are from black and ethnic minority backgrounds but community activists fear that once it becomes an academy it will stop providing education based on the community's needs and will concentrate its efforts on academic

results and bus in pupils from around the city.

The school's headteacher hasn't concerned herself with the community's feelings, failing to consult and providing them with a fait accompli. And just in case the board of governors opposed her plans, she saw to it that they voted themselves out of existence, replacing them with trustees appointed by her and not answerable to the parents.

A community-based committee has already held two public meetings. A third is planned on 23 May and a lobby of the town hall is planned on 24 May.

The lobby should demand that the Labour controlled council should call in the proposals, which would give campaigners more time to block this privatisation. Liverpool Trades Council has actively supported the Shorefields campaign and invited them to attend their next meeting.



On the picket line

Campaigners put pressure on Lambeth council

Tory-run Wandsworth council hit the headlines recently with its outrageous plans to charge children £2.50 to use the local playgrounds at weekends. Councillors in its Labour-run neighbour Lambeth hypocritically criticise this while making plans to cut adventure playgrounds across their borough to reduce the council's deficit. Lambeth's plans however are meeting resistance from local trade unions and community campaigners. ANDY TULLIS from Lambeth Unison reports.

Following the launch of Lambeth Unison's Save Children's Services Campaign, parents, staff, children and local anti-cuts activists lobbied the full council meeting on 11 May, together with Lambeth Save Our Libraries and the Save Park Rangers

campaign.

100 campaigners gathered on the Town Hall steps were joined by successive waves of parents and children from different adventure playgrounds around the borough, who kept up a noisy protest throughout the evening with vuvuzelas and

whistles.

The council had very heavy security arrangements, closing the main town hall doors and putting security barriers and a police guard on the side entrance. As a Unison steward pointed out: "That is not a sign the council are in control, it's a sign of weakness because they fear you, the workers and community".

Deputations from the three campaigns went in to address the council meeting; the 'Save Children's Services' deputation told Labour councillors they had broken their promises to children earlier this year when they said they wouldn't be closing adventure playgrounds (APGs). Under their proposals, the

APGs would hardly ever be open!

Worse still, because opening hours have been so vastly reduced and staff can't live on the wages, this will create a mass exodus of staff, threatening to collapse the APG service almost overnight.

We called for alternatives like using some of Lambeth's unallocated reserve funds (the fourth highest in London) or using £1.9 million of new government money to stave off the worst cuts.

Our deputation warned the Labour group of what happens to parties that break their promises and betray the trust they had; reminding them of the Lib-Dems' recent election meltdown.

The Labour group were dismissive of our alternatives but did make some 'concessions' around APGs, agreeing to extend staff contracts until after the summer holidays, and then make them redundant! This only adds insult to injury but does show there is still everything to fight for.

The Labour group also seems to be very rattled over the libraries and park rangers campaigns so now we have to increase the pressure. Lambeth Unison is holding an indicative ballot to decide on industrial action against cuts and redundancies. Strike action united with community campaigns can force the council to retreat and will save many services and jobs.