

Tory conference farce Carry on cutting!



Demonstrating against the attacks on jobs and services in Manchester (report below) photo Paul Mattsson

Sarah Sachs-Eldridge

A Guardian editorial summed up chancellor George Osborne's conference speech as: "while the basic facts have changed, his basic script has not". The "basic facts" include that the world economy is in dire straits and unemployment is soaring, among others. The "script" is the usual Tory fare – attacks on workers and cuts, blandly seasoned with a few minor skirmishes over Europe and tax.

While insisting that it is not a 'plan B' for the economy, Osborne has proposed 'credit easing' as a way of getting money to small businesses denied it by the banks. Many will ask why the banks, with £65 billion of shares in two of them owned by the government, cannot be made to lend money. That over half of Tory Party funding comes from the banks and the City sheds a little light on this.

Treasury minister Justine Greening flailed helplessly in her attempts to explain the complicated plans in a BBC interview. The complexity is borne out of 'Boy' George's attempts to address the 'credit desert' where small companies complain they

cannot access cash, without adding to the deficit. The 'idea' is that the government borrows to buy bonds in small and medium companies (which at present do not exist).

But as Andrew Neil pointed out: "The bonds would have to be approved by credit rating agencies (that really worked with sub-prime!). The scheme would probably not touch the very small (where credit is scarcest)."

And, of course, on the issue of the negative effect of cuts and price rises on ordinary people's ability to spend they have no proposals.

Attacks

More concrete were Tory plans to ramp up anti-trade union legislation. John McDonnell, left Labour MP, tweeted: "Osborne's tackling unemployment by making it easier for companies to sack their workers. Is there no sense of irony left on the right?"

Plans floated in Manchester include charges for employment tribunals and doubling the time before a worker has rights at work from one to two years.

Eric Pickles attacked council trade unions for paid facility time, claiming spending on this had "got

out of hand". But it's estimated that MPs made 'voluntary repayments' following the expenses scandal valued at double the amount Pickles accuses the unions of costing.

And, as the Unison public sector union explains: "Research commissioned by the Department for Business in 2007 suggested that effective and engaged union representation saves the public purse between £170 million and £400 million a year by improving retention, training take-up, health and safety, and dispute resolution."

In September a leaked document revealed Tory fears that their cuts had exposed the lie in their claim to be the most family-friendly and they were losing support among women. The council tax freeze costing the guts of a billion quid was described as a 'family-friendly' move.

But according to the PCS union, lifting the public sector pay freeze would give the average civil servant's household 16 times more than the saving under Osborne's rehashed council tax freeze announcement.

Also facing the axe are pledges to be "the greenest government ever", as Osborne backtracks on policies to cut carbon emissions rapidly – and the Human Rights Act, as home secretary Theresa May gets it in her

Glasgow: Prepare for 30 November strike

On 1 October the Scottish TUC's "People First" demonstration in Glasgow took place where, despite the horrendous weather, around 15,000 marched against the impact of the cuts. The demo was made up overwhelmingly of public sector trade unionists. Large delegations were there from unions planning strike action on 30 November including Unison, PCS, the EIS, Unite and the FBU.

Workers involved in strike action including Remploy, Quarriers and Stow college staff were also out in force. Students from Abertay Uni and Angus College who are facing cuts to courses marched alongside students from Strathclyde who had been occupying the university in protest at sky-high tuition fees being imposed on students from England, Wales and Northern Ireland. Disabled rights campaigners demanded an end to the attacks on benefits and the services they rely on.

However, no public sector trade unionist was on the STUC platform – an incredible omission.

In contrast to the STUC leadership, who only oppose the speed, depth and timing of the cuts, and advocate a Labour Party type 'Plan B' with slower cuts, the Socialist Party Scotland put forward opposition to all cuts and for a one-day public sector general strike on 30 November.

Socialist Party Scotland leaflets also advertised a 22 October conference to discuss standing anti-cuts candidates in next May's local government elections.
Socialist Party Scotland members

cross hairs.

Francis Maude told unions they should "be in no doubt" that the government will reform public sector pensions. But his bluster was answered on 30 June when three quarters of a million teachers, lecturers and civil servants took strike action to defend their pensions. And it will be again.

It's little wonder the Tories want to attack the unions. The strike on 30 November, which could involve four times that number of public sector workers, with enormous public support in opposition to the cuts, has the potential to help unseat this government.

Fast news

Health Bill rubbished

Health professionals have weighed in against the government's destructive Health and Social Care Bill, which will spell the beginning of the end of the NHS as a national, publicly owned and run body.

Around 400 health experts have signed a letter which says "the Health and Social Care Bill will erode the NHS's ethical and cooperative foundations and that it will not deliver efficiency, quality, fairness or choice."

In a scathing criticism of the government's NHS Bill the letter further states: "It ushers in a significantly heightened degree of commercialisation and marketisation that will fragment patient care; aggravate risks to individual patient safety; erode medical ethics and trust within the health system; widen health inequalities; waste much money on attempts to regulate and manage competition; and undermine the ability of the health system to respond effectively and efficiently to communicable disease outbreaks and other public health emergencies."

Food handouts grow

As dark clouds gather over the UK's faltering economy chancellor George Osborne glibly remarked to Tory Party conference delegates that "together, we will ride out the storm." But not for the tens of thousands of families who are so desperately poor that they are dependent on charitable food donations to survive.

According to the charity FareShare, which redirects food trade surpluses to those in need, it has seen the largest annual increase in the number of charities asking for handouts to feed 35,000 people a day – up from 29,000 a day last year.

Alarming, FareShare reports that 65% of the charities it surveyed are having to slash food budgets to survive due to government cuts.

Paying the Tory piper

As if anyone was in any doubt, then the latest funding figures of the Tory Party from the Bureau of Investigative Journalism show that more than half of the Tory party's donations (a total of £12.2 million) came from finance capital in the last 12 months.

Of this amount, 27% (£3.3 million) was donated by hedge funds, financiers and private equity firms – with 50 City donors giving £50,000 each.

And does this largesse buy influence? You bet! The government is committed to reduce corporation tax to 23% by April 2014 and exempting UK resident companies from corporation tax on all profits for their foreign branches.

Their morals and ours

What do workers think of their bosses? The answers are mostly unprintable! However, Management Today reports that in a survey of 2,500 employees, half believe their employer puts financial goals above ethical considerations. And less than a third of chief executives of organisations with more than 1,000 workers are thought to put ethics at the heart of business decisions, according to their employees.

So 'money grubbing gits who couldn't give a monkey's about their workers' isn't just our opinion of capitalists.

Manchester: Thousands say no to cuts

Alec Price

Chester and Wirral Socialist Party

On Sunday 2 October, 35,000 people marched through Manchester city centre against the anti-working class policies of the Conservative party.

The Tory conference usually attracts a protest – but not on this scale. This is surely down to the increasing reaction to the £81 billion cuts package that the Con-Dem coalition is trying to push through, but also the decision of the Trades Union Congress to organise the march this year.

Many trade unionists were present – with a large Unison contingent. Workers currently facing battles over job losses also joined in, including a very noisy group of Remploy workers and from BAE Systems.

After marching to the rally point the Liverpool Socialist Singers gave a rousing rendition of The Internationale (a workers' movement song) while the Salford and education feeder marches arrived.

From the platform a wide range of trade union speakers and community activists spoke.

Len McCluskey of Unite, declared: "We need coordinated industrial action. If you want to call that a general strike then so be it."

"We need civil disobedience. That's the oldest form of democracy. We should take the lead from the students."

Unless anything drastically changes, the coordinated strike action McCluskey talks of will happen on Wednesday 30 November – when up to three million workers could join the action.

Looking towards this next step, Mark Serwotka, the general secretary of the civil servants' union, PCS, had a warning for the government: "We are now on the edge of the biggest strike in Britain in 80 years... If after 30 November they don't back down – if they carry on making cuts, carry on robbing pensions – then we have to strike again and again until we win."

Also speaking was Tony Lloyd, Labour MP for Manchester Central, who made no mention of the anti-strike rhetoric from his leader Ed Miliband or of Labour-run Manchester council, which is currently implementing the Tories' wish to cut £110 million from the budget this year. Perhaps this is why he was heckled by some!

Soon after his speech the impact of some of those cuts was mentioned

by Danielle Leadbetter of Save Manchester Sure Start.

After the rally the Socialist Party held a meeting in a packed room in a pub in Great Bridgewater Street. Judy Beishon (national committee) and Steve North (Salford Socialist Party) spoke of the importance of strike action, but also of the need for a political party to fight for socialism, before the audience asked questions and made some very important contributions.

As the cuts continue to bite and strike action escalates, more workers will be attracted to the ideas of the Socialist Party. Working class people should take heart from the numbers and the mood of this protest and go back to their workplaces and communities, confident and ready to build for the huge fightback planned on 30 November.