

Thousands march in Hardest Hit demos across the country

Hardest Hit marches and rallies took place in 12 cities across the UK on 22 October, as part of a campaign against the Welfare Reform Bill, which will significantly reduce support for

disabled people.

Full versions of these reports can be read on www.socialistparty.org.uk

Ronnie Job

The turnout of 1,000 in Cardiff showed both the huge anger developing against the Tories' proposals and the potential to build a mass campaign against the attacks on disabled people.

But it also showed the weaknesses of the cross-party, cross-class approach taken by many charities and politicians who claim to be the official leadership of the disability rights movement.

The official platform of speakers consisted of directors and executives of charities and three Welsh Assembly Members, including, unbelievably, Tory Mohammad Ashgar. When large parts of the rally booed and heckled, they were told to be quiet by the chair because the "support of all parties" is needed.

Les Woodward, the national trade union convenor for Remploy - which employs around 2,800 disabled workers and is threatened with closure by the same Tory party of which Mr Ashgar is a Welsh representative - was stopped from speak-



Les Woodward speaking on the Socialist Party platform photo SP Wales

ing on the grounds that he was "too political".

It was only actor and writer, Boyd Clack, who introduced some sense to the platform, telling marchers that the lesson taught to him as a

boy by his dad - "you can never trust a Tory" - is as true today as it has ever been. But he warned that his father would be turning in his grave to see what the Labour Party he had supported, has become.

He warned disabled fighters to rely only on their own strength and not the support of politicians. He could have added that we should not rely on the support of charities which rely on government funding and will do all they can to argue for their own slice of a shrinking pie, while doing everything in their power to prevent political discussion.

Thanks to the Socialist Party, Les did get to address the crowd on the importance of fighting for Remploy and the thousands of disabled workers that it provides with the dignity of training, learning skills and earning a wage.

He also exposed the shameful way that charities, including some of those participating in the Hardest Hit campaigns, have colluded with the Con-Dem government's plans to destroy Remploy.

He was joined by other Socialist Party members, including Andrew Price from Cardiff trades council. Andrew's message was that the opposition to attacks on disability benefits and services needs to be linked to the strike action of public sector

The Socialist Party leaflet distributed on the protests called for:

- No cuts in benefits, jobs and public services.
- Mobilise now to stop the Welfare Reform Bill through a united campaign involving disabled people and carers organisations, trade unions and the anti-cuts movement.
- Decent benefits, education, training or work for all, without compulsion.
- No privatisation of services. Take back in-house all privatised services.
- Sack Atos Origin and scrap the Work Capability Assessment.
- A living wage and provision of respite services for all family carers.
- Provide free health and social care services to all who need them.
- Central government and councils to stop using children and family members as a substitute for professional services.
- A national campaign to save the Independent Living Fund.
- Oppose the closure of the Remploy factories - expand them to create employment for both disabled and non-disabled people.
- Massive investment in social housing, services and infrastructure to create jobs and meet need.
- Support the 30 November strike as the next step in the campaign to defeat all the cuts.
- For a socialist society that puts the needs of the millions before the profits of the millionaires.

To find out about the disabled members' group in the Socialist Party, contact: info@socialistparty.org.uk

No alternative from Labour

Simon Conneff

Hyde Park and Headingley Socialist Party

Around 400 people gathered in Leeds city centre. The combined effects of cuts to benefits and public services will be particularly disastrous for disabled people, as many different types of support which enable them to get about, to look for work and to stay in work, to study and to live independent and dignified lives are coming under fire.

Not only are cuts being made to Disability Living Allowance and Incapacity Benefits, the scrapping of Education Maintenance Allowance disproportionately affects disabled students, 50% of whom relied on EMA.

Local MP Hilary Benn said the government's actions were unfair, that its economic policy isn't work-

ing, and spoke of the need to boost demand in the economy. "We need to persuade the government they've got it wrong and that they need to change their minds."

Though Labour's lobbying against the Welfare Reform Bill is welcome, their message of slower, gentler cuts is not providing a real alternative, and their leader's comments that working people should be given priority to social housing only serve to further stigmatise those who cannot work.

Speakers like Sheila Banks, from Leeds trades council, were left to point out the need to oppose all cuts, and Socialist Party member Andy Smith got huge cheers when he demanded that the council stop making cuts to our services, including the termination earlier in the year of the Leeds Crisis Centre.

A smaller protest also took place in Bradford with around 60 people attending.



Part of the Manchester protest photo Hugh Caffrey

200 join Nottingham Hardest Hit protest

The Hardest Hit demo in Nottingham took place on the council house steps where 200 people gathered and listened to speakers who had been hit by some of the government's cuts.

It gained a lot of support from passers-by who were angered by the attacks on the services disabled people and many others rely on.

A local choir sang and read poetry and members of occupy Nottingham who are occupying the square outside the council house took part in a silent protest.

The protest was really successful and we sold over 40 copies of the Socialist.

Helen Pattison

10,000 public sector jobs lost in Wales and counting...

Dave Reid

Socialist Party Wales

Over 10,000 public sector jobs have been lost in Wales in the last year according to accountants PwC. And it will get a whole lot worse according to the Wales Audit Office (WAO) who expects 21,000 jobs to be lost by 2015.

So far the cutbacks have been less severe in Wales than the rest of the UK, but the worst of the cutbacks have merely been delayed.

The Welsh government delayed the cuts until after the Assembly elections in May this year, but fully intend to make them bite now. Already 1,000 jobs have been lost in the Welsh government. The NHS, education and councils are currently shedding jobs like leaves from the trees outside the Assembly offices.

The Con-Dem government claims that job losses in the public sector will be made up by job gains in the private sector. There has been a small growth in the number of employees, although not enough to stop a sharp rise in unemployment. But this is only because of a rise in part-time and temporary jobs. PwC estimates that over 50,000 jobs will go in Wales in the public and private sectors.

Health spending is due to be cut by 6.2% in three years in real terms. At the moment health spending per head is slightly higher in Wales than the UK average. However, compared to other areas with similar socio-economic characteristics like the North East of England, Scotland and Northern Ireland it is the lowest. The Welsh government proposes to cut it even further so that it falls even below the UK average. It pretends

to stand in the tradition of the NHS's socialist founder, Aneurin Bevan and plans the deepest NHS cuts in the UK.

The response of people in Wales to the cuts has already been angry. The Welsh Labour government has been able to shift the blame onto the shoulders of the Con-Dem government which controls the purse strings. It has shrugged its shoulders and said "what can we do?" before cutting services to the bone.

Years of cuts

The WAO points out that spending on public services has never been cut for more than two consecutive years. It will now be cut in real terms for five consecutive years. Real term funding will be cut by a massive 12.4% over that period.

Revenue from the Welsh govern-

ment to the councils will fall by £283 million by 2013, a 7% cut. Many council workers are being hit by a double whammy. Staffing levels are being cut and the extra workload heaped on the remaining workforce - and a substantial number are having their pay frozen and even cut by 'job evaluation'.

In Rhondda Cynon Taff and Neath Port Talbot councils the workers have been hit with a triple whammy as these Labour-run councils have threatened their workers with wage cuts or get the sack. Some councils are attacking union organisation, withdrawing union facilities to try and prevent the unions from defending their members.

The WAO has exposed the fact that it would have been just as bad if Labour was in power in Westminster. It calculated £1.5 billion cuts to the year 2013-14, based on the es-

timates of the outgoing Brown government's planned cuts. The actual figure was virtually the same at £1.6 billion. In other words Labour's cut to Welsh funding would have been as bad as the Con-Dems.

But while jobs are being massacred in Wales, young people are showing that a fightback is on the way. A delegation from Youth Fight For Jobs is following up the hugely successful Merthyr to Cardiff march by joining the Youth Fight For Jobs Jarrow march to London. A dozen Youth Fight For Jobs activists from Wales will join the march as it moves towards its arrival in London on 5 November.

This will bring home the burning issue of youth unemployment, running at over 30% in Wales. It will up the ante as we prepare for the one-day public sector strike planned for 30 November.