

Women: sick of sexism, discrimination and cuts? It doesn't have to be like this!

Eleanor Donne

Socialist Women steering committee

On 30 November millions of workers will participate in what is likely to be the biggest coordinated strike action since the 1926 general strike. We are saying enough is enough! Two-thirds of workers in public services are women and will bear the brunt of the job cuts.

In 2011 women are on the march to defend our jobs, benefits, pensions and vital public services, which are under attack. We gained legal rights to equal pay and against sex discrimination through past campaigns and struggles in the workplace. Yet the gender pay gap remains and so we are still fighting on this issue too.

Young women

Young women were on the frontline of the fight against the increase in tuition fees and abolition of EMA student payments. Half of graduates are currently women but many would-be students, especially mature students, will now be put off higher education, asking themselves if it is worth a lifetime of debt, as the chances of a job at the end are diminishing. 20% of graduates were out of work last year.

The situation will get worse as jobs in the public sector - social work, education, local government and health - where the majority of women graduates found work in the past, are cut to the bone.

'Big society'

Where care services are cut, day centres closed and meals on wheels costs go up, it is women family members in the main who will have

The Socialist Party calls for:

- A mass movement against all cuts
- Councils to refuse to implement government cuts and instead set needs budgets
- Support for the 30 November strikes - for further coordinated trade union action to oppose cuts in pensions, jobs and pay if needed
- Keep services public - no to privatisation
- Defend the NHS - no cuts to maternity and other health services
- Defend and extend abortion rights - no postcode lottery. NHS funding for all, end the need for two doctors' signatures
- No closure of domestic violence and rape survivors' support services. Investment to provide more refuges and safe houses not fewer
- Full help for childcare costs in tax credits - for affordable good quality flexible childcare

to step in as unpaid carers. It's a myth that vital frontline services can be run simply by volunteers.

Voluntary sector organisations such as the Citizen's Advice Bureau (CAB) will fold without adequate government funding. Women's refuges and rape crisis centres are under threat of closure as local authority grants are cut.

Protesters at St Paul's are questioning the greed and inequality inherent in a capitalist economy. In-



1,500 marched on the Fawcett Society demonstration on 19 November to tell the government Don't Turn Back Time on women's rights. Young women and men as well as trade unionists attended with many dressed in 1950s clothes. One group of young women had made their own placards saying 'It's the 1% stupid' and 'It's the feral overclass stupid!' The lively demonstration sang chants against cuts to benefits, maternity pay and tax credits and promising to fight every cut photo Sarah Wrack

creasing numbers are unhappy with how things are and want change.

Capitalism

A capitalist economy relies on the exploitation of the working class. Women are used by the system both as cheap labour in the workplace and as unpaid cooks, cleaners and carers in the home. A multi-billion pound 'beauty' industry profits from promoting anxiety and insecurity about how we look and hammers home the message that what we say or think is much less important.

Earlier in the year thousands of

women and many men took to the streets on the 'slutwalks' to protest against rape and the reactionary idea that women are partly to blame if they dress 'provocatively'. Rape, domestic violence and sexual harassment are symptoms of a deeply unequal society. This is reinforced by women's material inequality in society.

We demand change! We need a socialist society where society's huge wealth and resources are collectively owned. We want a society where women have financial independence, where everyone has a decent income in their own right.

Reactionary attitudes to women are very deeply ingrained and would not disappear overnight. But in the longer term a socialist society - one which is based not on exploitation but cooperation and genuine democracy and which has freed the family from its role as a social and economic institution - will develop a culture and ideology that removes women's oppression.

Say no to violence against women - Reclaim the Night demonstrations taking place across the country see www.reclaimthenight.org

Save Coventry Sure Start

Dave Nellist

Socialist Party councillor, Coventry

Earlier this year Coventry's Labour-led council proposed to remove £1 million from the annual £1.8 million budget for day care at Sure Start centres in the city. This was to plug a financial hole in other parts of the children's budget.

The proposal caused an outcry from parents and has resulted in a petition of over 3,000 in opposition. The parents' campaign was supported by local trade unionists, socialists, and other members of Coventry Against the Cuts.

The consultation has now finished. In addition to attending the local consultation meeting in Hillfields, I submitted a response in support of the parent's campaign:

"I am fundamentally opposed to the reduction from full-time care to sessional care, and the ending of any care to the under-tuos. At a time of rising unemployment, placing a further barrier in front of working parents is wrong.

I also think it is a fundamental mistake to limit services to those said to be the most disadvantaged. I believe bringing together children from mixed backgrounds and abilities would continue to be beneficial to all the children and parents attending. That, in fact, I understood to be the main ethos of Sure Start.

I do not agree that the council



Councillor Dave Nellist

should withdraw from this area of provision and place its hope in the private or voluntary sector filling the gap. I believe the experience, qualifications and commitment of our own [council] staff should be recognised, valued and preserved - not cut in this way.

The resources exist to 'hold the line'. The city council currently has £11.5 million in unallocated reserves - half "to cover unforeseen financial problems" and half "to help manage further unforeseen issues". The council could allocate £0.5 million in 2011/12 from those reserves and, if necessary, £1 million in 2012/13, while engaging with the parents, staff and local communities as part of a joint campaign to pressurise the government to fully fund this essential frontline service.

That would be the inclusive approach - passing on the government's cuts without challenge will end up with the council rightly sharing the blame."

Update: Occupy

Cardiff

Occupy Cardiff outmanoeuvred both police and Cardiff council by starting a camp in the grounds of the Unite union offices in Cardiff.

On Friday 12 November police armed with tasers succeeded in breaking up the Occupy camp at Cardiff castle. Six people were arrested, including Socialist Party member Ed Schluessel, at the behest of the 'Liberal' council which claimed falsely that damage was being done to the castle.

On Saturday the Occupy movement returned to Cardiff city centre. After many hours of surveillance and harassment police said that not only would a camp be disallowed,

but even a peaceful march to the statue of Aneurin Bevan. The protesters insisted on a demonstration.

The movement set up camp in the grounds of Transport House, the Wales HQ of Unite the Union. Police were powerless to act unless asked to.

Andy Richards, regional secretary of Unite said: "From our point of view, we know that these people, who are engaged in a peaceful protest are supporting the very campaign that Unite is engaged in and that's fighting the effects of the Tory and Liberal Democrat government in Wales. They are most welcome to camp out on our lawn and can use our facilities for their comfort."

Pensions protest in Maude's constituency

Derek McMillan

Mid Sussex Socialist Party and a WSTA (NUT) member

West Sussex Teachers' Association (WSTA), with the backing of Unison and other public sector unions, is holding a protest in Horsham, Sussex. The protest in Francis Maude's constituency is against a cut to all pensions.

Our N30 strike action is portrayed by the millionaire government and the gutter press as teachers looking after 'gold plated' pensions. That is

a pack of lies.

The government intends to cut all pensions by reneging on a promise to link pensions to average earnings or the rise in the cost of living. Prices will go up and the current plan is that pensioners will receive nothing - zero - to cope with it.

Hilariously, the Labour Party has tried to hijack the protest. We have suggested they hand over Lord Hutton, who proposed the attacks on pensions, alive! Of course we welcome individual Labour supporters coming along to support us. They want workers to support Labour.

Leeds

Over 200 people turned up at Occupy Leeds on Friday 18 November to hear folk rocker Billy Bragg play a short set in solidarity with the camp. New people are drawn into the movement every day. The camp has regular general assemblies, as well as functioning working groups for various tasks. Everyone within the camp is united in opposing the corruption within the political elite, the banks, big business and tops of the media, the 1%. But further discussion is needed to clarify the way forward to replace what is rotten within society and transform it into a society free from exploitation, poverty and economic slavery.

They would be better occupied getting the Labour Party to support the working class.

The protest will assemble at 10am at the bandstand in Horsham Park and go to the bandstand in the Carfax via Madeira Avenue where Tory Party HQ is. We hope Maude will come into the garden with us for 15 minutes so that we can ask him about this broken promise, the government's plans for pensions in 2012 and the impact of the changes on education.

See our blog for more information - wsta1.org.uk