

# Stand up to the Con-Dem government

## For councillors who refuse to implement the cuts!

On 30 November around two million public sector workers took strike action in defence of their pensions and against cuts in public services. This mighty strike demonstrated workers' potential power and shook the government.

However, to win the battle to defeat the Con-Dems is going to require an escalation of the struggle. This will mean further strike action, but it is also urgent that the trade union and anti-cuts movement begins to discuss making sure it has an electoral voice, otherwise we are fighting with one hand tied behind our backs.

New Labour does not offer a voice for working class people. Outrageously, Labour peer Lord Hutton, author of the attack on pensions, is urging workers to swallow the

"When I was a Labour councillor in 2005, I refused to vote for cuts on the council. The next week I was de-selected. Nothing has changed since then. New Labour in Southampton promise more cuts if elected. If Labour councillors won't put forward an alternative to cuts, we must."

TUSC candidate Perry McMillan

government's destruction of their pensions, while Shadow Chancellor Ed Balls has made it clear that a Labour government would also attack pensions.

At local level every single Labour-led council has wielded the axe handed to them by central government. This has meant that already an eye-watering £4 billion of cuts – 8% of total council spending – was implemented last year. Appalling cuts have taken place.

In Liverpool the cuts are equal to an average of £229 per head, in Manchester £190, Lambeth £150, Newham £227. For council workers this has meant wholesale cuts in jobs and in pay and conditions. For the poorest it has meant the destruction of the already patchy and inadequate safety nets that kept them from destitution. As a result the number of those officially registered as homeless has gone up by 30% in just six months.

These can all be stopped but unless we fight back, 2012 will be worse, with a further 7% cut in council spending planned. That is why the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) is calling on trade unionists and anti-cuts campaigners across the country to stand for elections to their local council in 2012, and also to take part in the TUSC list for the Greater London Assembly elections.

We have to make it clear to Labour councillors and assembly members that they will be punished at the ballot box if they continue to destroy public services. We need to tell them, unless you pledge to fight the cuts, we will stand against you.

The elections are not just a chance to make a one-day 'protest vote' against the cuts. They are also an opportunity to elect councillors who can actually stop many of the cuts from being implemented locally.

Even a minority group on a council, or a single councillor, can make a difference by using

their position as democratically elected local representatives to give confidence to and help organise community campaigns and trade unionists to fight.

TUSC is an alliance which includes individual trade unionists, community campaigners and different political parties. On 28 January TUSC will be holding a conference open to all those considering standing on an anti-cuts platform in the 2012 elections. The TUSC steering committee will be proposing that all TUSC candidates pledge to:

- Oppose all cuts to council jobs, services, pay and conditions – we reject the claim that 'some cuts' are necessary to our services
- Reject increases in council tax, rent and service charges to compensate for government cuts
- Vote against the privatisation of council jobs and services, or the transfer of

council services to 'social enterprises' or 'arms-length' management organisations, which are first steps to privatisation

- Use all the legal powers available to councils, including powers to refer local NHS decisions, initiate referenda and organise public commissions and consultations, to oppose both the cuts and government policies which centrally impose the transfer of public services to private bodies
- When faced with government cuts to council funding, councils should refuse to implement the cuts. We will support councils which in the first instance use their reserves and prudential borrowing powers to avoid passing them on – while arguing that the best way to mobilise the mass campaign that is necessary to defeat the cuts is to set a budget that meets the needs of the local community and demands that the government makes up the shortfall

## PCS assistant general secretary backs London TUSC campaign

The assistant general secretary of the PCS civil servants union, Chris Baugh, has, in a personal capacity, backed the call for trade unionist and socialist candidates to stand in the Greater London Assembly elections in 2012.

He has been joined by PCS members in Revenue and Customs (HMRC), on strike against privatisation and attendance management, all in a personal capacity: Alex McRae, PCS branch secretary North London revenue branch; Rose King, North London revenue branch; Dave Plummer, Revenue & Customs Euston, PCS branch organiser; L Shelley, Euston Assistant secretary; H Davis, Euston Health and safety rep; D Matthew, health and safety forum and union rep.

Are you a trade unionist in London? If so, add your name to the statement: "We, the undersigned, support the call for trade unionist and socialist candidates to stand in the Greater London Assembly elections in 2012, committed to opposing all cuts, privatisation and PFI"

Go to [www.tusc.org.uk](http://www.tusc.org.uk) or email [jjpreidie@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:jjpreidie@yahoo.co.uk)

# Unacceptable! Draconian sentences for Dundee 'Facebook riot' teenagers

Matt Dobson

Socialist Party Scotland, Dundee

There is anger and disbelief in Dundee at the jailing of teenagers who were involved in joke Facebook pages 'organising riots'. Four youth, the youngest being 14, were arrested by Tayside police in August as riots swept across cities in England.

A cursory glance at these web pages would have informed anyone sensible and without a preconceived agenda that they had no intention of organising a riot. Joking about the riots at a time when people were being burnt out of their homes was insensitive but these outrageous sentences have to be understood in the context that in Dundee and the rest of Scotland, no riots took place.

These young people are victims of a politically motivated miscarriage of justice, they are being punished for events they did not cause that occurred hundreds of miles away.

### Politically punished

The four were kept in police custody for the maximum duration and were initially refused bail. Two have been banned from any form of internet use. Shawn Diven, 16, and Jordan

McGinley, 18, who did not set up a group but were added by others as administrators, were jailed on 12 December after pleading guilty, expressing regret at what they had done, and having been incarcerated on remand for months awaiting trial.

It is clear from the sheriff's remarks on sentencing that Shawn and Jordan, like others jailed for being caught up in the rioting and the recent cases of the student protesters, are being politically punished in an attempt to obscure the real causes of the riots.

Sheriff Elizabeth Munro called the riot that didn't take place "the most serious breach of the peace, I have ever come across". The justification for the severe sentences was based on the fact that the Facebook groups were set up at a time of "widespread disturbance and civil unrest".

But as the Guardian's Reading the Riots report shows, social networking sites were not widely used by people who actually rioted.

A local trade unionist made the point in a Facebook discussion after the sentencing that the authorities are out of touch: "Jeremy Clarkson can joke about shooting public sector workers in front of their families and nothing happens, these lads

make a silly joke on Facebook and they get three years in prison." A school student activist expressed the sentiments of young people and the wider community: "It's not okay to ruin their lives to make an example."

During the riots in England politicians, both Scottish National Party (SNP) government ministers and Labour in opposition, boasted that they were responsible for creating a different society in Scotland. The Scottish Sun carried an article claiming the main cause of a lack of unrest in Scotland was that the police were more polite - the students and young people attacked on protests at Glasgow universities recently would beg to differ!

### Social conditions

The reality is that brutal social conditions similar to those behind the riots in England exist in cities like Dundee and across Scotland and young people face just as bleak prospects for a future.

Students still receive EMA payments, but hundreds of places have been cut and courses slashed at both local colleges. The SNP government is embarking on a programme of merging colleges and universi-



No riots took place in Scotland photo Paul Mattsson

ties across regions that will shut the door on thousands hoping to go into education.

A recent survey by Citizens Advice Scotland found that the majority of Dundee's young people are trapped in poverty and, in many cases, in unemployment. There are 1,000 NEETS (not in education, employment or training) who are under 19 in Dundee.

The Youth Fight for Jobs and Education campaign demands Shawn and Jordan are immediately released and internet sanctions on young people are immediately lifted. The widespread anger in the communi-

ty at these sentences shows that the criminalisation of young people in the city will not be accepted.

Recently Dundee's streets have been filled with young people organising and protesting, not rioting. School students walked out in April against the setting up of a city campus and cuts. Young people had a visible presence on the 10,000 strong demonstration on 30 November.

Young people are enraged by the conditions they face but they also want to organise and fight back. Youth Fight for Jobs and Education fights against education cuts, unemployment and for democratic rights.