

# The Lords won't save us! Fight the Tories' Welfare Reform Bill

**Ben Robinson**

Tory Iain Duncan Smith's vicious Welfare Reform Bill, which the government aims to make law by May, will leave thousands destitute.

One measure alone, the capping of benefits a household can receive to £500 a week, is estimated to push 80,000 children into homelessness. A family with four children in London would have a measly 62p per person to live on after paying bills.

IDS, by contrast, struggles by on a salary of £145,492, with £94,000 expenses and a pension contribution of £43,825.

The bill will affect those with disabilities particularly badly. The cap on benefits will cut additional support currently provided for those with disabilities, despite government promises. Even on the government's own figures, 5,000 households with someone with disability will lose on average £87 a week.

The Personal Independence Payment (PIP), which under the bill replaces the Disability Living Allowance (DLA), is much harder to get and will lead to more disabled people losing out.

Even under the present system, judging who is eligible for disability benefits has been made much harder, outsourced to the notorious private firm Atos that uses staff with five days training that do not require any previous medical experience.

Atos are questioning around 11,000 claimants a week. Questions that can only be answered 'yes' or 'no' can lead to benefits being

stopped. Over 400,000 appeals have been made against such test decisions since October 2008. 39% have been successful.

The inadequate 'social fund' - which can provide loans to those in dire need - will be abolished, with part of the funding reallocated to local government budgets, but without being ring fenced. This will push more people towards loan sharks, legal and illegal, on top of the estimated one million people who amass huge debts just to get by.

## £87

a week will be lost by 5,000 households due to the Welfare Bill according to the government

As job cuts continue, the impact of the Welfare Reform Bill will affect wider sections of society, and Tory mayor Boris Johnson's warning of 'social cleansing' in London will become a reality - not that he put forward an alternative. Part-time and temporary jobs are increasingly replacing permanent contracts. Last month's figures showed that there was a 75,000 increase in part-time jobs, and a loss of 57,000 full-time ones.

Pushing unemployed families out



**A demonstration against disability cuts in Leeds** photo Iain Dalton

of high-rent areas, where there are generally more jobs available, will create unemployed ghettos across the country.

Rent is often a major cost for families, especially in inner city areas. But housing benefit is a direct subsidy to landlords charging astronomical rents. The housing benefit bill, that Con-Dem and Labour MPs complain about, could be reduced

massively by capping rents at an affordable rate. A massive public housebuilding programme could provide employment and cheap rents.

The House of Lords has passed a number of amendments to the bill, which Cameron and Clegg have pledged to overturn when it returns to the House of Commons. But even these changes do little to blunt the

axe being taken to provision for some of the most hard up. Guardian commentator Polly Toynbee described the amendments as 'minimal'.

But what lies behind the parliamentary bluster is the huge anger that exists among unions, campaigning organisations and disability activists. This will explode when the real effects of the bill become clear to the majority of the population.

## Pontefract hospital: Army withdrawn - now kick out PFI!

**Adrian O'Malley**

Unison Mid Yorkshire Health branch secretary (personal capacity)

At Pontefract hospital in West Yorkshire NHS bosses had been in discussion about using army medics to help run the accident and emergency unit. The trust has now said it won't use the army, but the A&E will remain closed at night.

In October last year, Mid Yorkshire Hospitals NHS Trust announced the "temporary closure" of the emergency unit between 10pm and 8am at the new hospital due to a 'national shortage of medium level doctors'.

The closure was implemented in November and was met with a barrage of outrage from the local community which culminated in a public meeting where the trust board attempted to explain their decision. Hundreds of people demanded the resignation of the board and the immediate reopening of the unit overnight.

The local MP, shadow minister Yvette Cooper, has opportunistically jumped on the bandwagon attempting to blame Tory cuts for the closure. But it was New Labour's Private Finance Initiative (PFI) deal which turned Pontefract hospital into a glorified out-patients department.

The new £60 million Pontefract hospital is part of a £310 million PFI also covering Pinderfields Hospital in Wakefield. The new PFI meant approximately 300 beds moving



photo Paul Mattsson

from Pontefract to Pinderfields along with all 'blue light' emergency services. The New Pontefract was left with a rehab ward, day surgery and out patient services.

### Labour hypocrisy

Unison members campaigned against the run down in services in Pontefract, including public meetings and a march through the town centre at which the local Labour MPs were all conspicuously absent.

We said that the PFI would be the end of the Pontefract as a district general hospital and that the exorbitant cost of the PFI would lead to cuts in the NHS throughout the district.

I was interviewed on the local news about our thoughts on army

doctors working in the hospital. I said that the army is usually called in when natural disasters occur not when the NHS can't cope due to staff shortages. The lessons of Pontefract hospital are that PFI and service reconfigurations are a man-made disaster which could and should have been avoided at all costs.

Mid Yorkshire Unison is calling for the immediate reopening of the A&E and the restoration of NHS services to the people of the Pontefract area.

We also call for taking the PFI scheme, which is costing the Trust £40 million a year, back into public hands and an end to the £60 million cuts package imposed by national government between 2011 and 2013.

## Llanelli: Save Prince Philip's A&E

**Rob Owen**

In Llanelli, south west Wales, the threatened closure of Prince Philip accident and emergency unit will not be accepted without a fight.

The proposals will put more strain on other hospitals and see a worse service for people in Llanelli, Carmarthen and Swansea.

The cutting of hospital services is an attempt to provide lower quality health treatment on the cheap. Community based treatment could be supported if it was properly funded and in place before hospital reconfiguration, with no job losses.

Instead, reconfiguration plans will follow the fate of the underfunded mental health care in the community, where vulnerable patients have been left isolated.

Already the NHS in Wales is struggling. In September, 33,312 people in Wales had been waiting for six months or more for hospital treatment. This figure is set to soar as more cuts begin to bite.

Llanelli and West Wales Socialist Party, alongside Llanelli Against the Cuts, has been campaigning against all cuts, from Westminster, Cardiff and Carmarthenshire administrations.

The health cuts have to be fought, but they also need to be linked into the fight against all public sector cuts. A united struggle mobilising the growing anger developing can succeed in forcing health boards, local authorities and governments to back down over their cuts agenda.

A Socialist Party public meeting on 31 January at 7.30pm in Stamps, John Street will be followed by a demonstration organised by Llanelli trades council on 11 February at 11am, gathering at Llanelli town hall.

- **No to the proposed cuts at Prince Philip hospital**
- **Stop the Welsh government cutbacks in the NHS!**
- **Get private profiteers out of our health service**
- **Make the billionaire bankers pay for their crisis!**

**Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition election conference**

**Saturday 28 January, 11am-4pm**

University of London Union, Malet Street, London, WC1E 7HY

Open to all TUSC candidates, agents and supporters, and those still considering whether to stand in the local elections on 3 May. The conference will be divided into two sections: 'How can local councillors fight the cuts?' and 'Organising an election campaign'.

Email tusbulletin@yahoo.co.uk if you are planning to come.