

Workers' fightback

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BRUTAL BOSSES?

TIME TO FIGHT BACK!



photo Paul Mattsson

Thousands of firefighters show their anger

THURSDAY 16 September saw one of the most formidable demonstrations in London for some time. 2,500 uniformed firefighters marched with Fire Brigades Union (FBU) flags and placards, whistles, vuvuzelas and even a bagpiper to protest outside the London Fire Authority (LFA).

Paula Mitchell

All 5,557 firefighters in London are threatened with the sack if they don't accept new contracts. Contracts which not only threaten firefighters' jobs, conditions of work

and family lives, but will open the door to the destruction of the fire service as we know it.

London FBU regional secretary Joe McVeigh read out the LFA mission statement, to shouts of derision after every clause.

Amid chants (the song sheet for the protest included the traditional working class socialist song 'the Internationale') and boos for the Fire Authority members, speakers from the RMT, NUT, PCS, GMB and other trade unions pledged support.

A fiery speech from the London rep on the FBU national executive, Ian Leahair, laid bare what is at stake if these cuts go through. FBU

general secretary Matt Wrack announced that the London FBU has now given formal notice that it will ballot for strike action.

Socialist Party member Martin Powell-Davies, who is on the national executive of the National Union of Teachers, explained the risks for schools without adequate fire cover. Making it clear that working class people should not be forced to pay for the bankers' and bosses' crisis, Martin called for: "No cuts, No mass sackings, Solidarity with the FBU!"

See pages 6&7 for interview with Matt Wrack, FBU general secretary, and what we think

Birmingham: Solidarity with council workers



photo S.O'Neill

SOMETIMES THE bosses hesitate before attacking workers. Sometimes they proceed slowly. And sometimes they rush to strike a devastating blow.

Birmingham Socialist Party members

Birmingham city council struck just such a blow when every one of its 26,000 employees were told that their jobs were on the line unless they accepted reduced pay and conditions.

The move is part of a drive to slash costs in the face of brutal government funding cuts of £330 million. Any council worker who refuses to accept a new contract faces being sacked without compensation, and then may or may not be re-employed on forcibly reduced terms and conditions.

Chief executive Stephen 'Hatchet' Hughes made it clear that he would stand for no opposition to the cuts. "Tinkering round the edges doesn't work in this context", he stated. "We have to work out a plan and be ruthless in implementing it."

The Tory-Liberal administration in the city has had no qualms about following the lead of its Con-Dem counterpart in Westminster, having already announced 2,000 redundancies earlier in the year, along with cuts and closures in services such as care homes, nurseries, child protection and mental health support.

The 'phoney war' between the classes in Birmingham is over – the bosses have declared open class war. Workers in Birmingham and the West Midlands will not take this lying down. They will expect a fighting response from the trade union leaders to defend their terms and conditions and all public services in the region. Coordinated action by the city's trade unions can defeat these cuts, with industrial action by council workers backed up by solidarity action from workers elsewhere in the public and private sectors. Unions should unite to call a massive demonstration in Birmingham to defend public services, leading to a city wide public sector strike if necessary.

The spivs and speculators in the banks and stock exchanges caused this recession by gambling away billions. We say: let the rich pay the price for the crisis, not the workers!

See www.socialistparty.org.uk for more.