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Mass organised action can stop cuts

“IRELAND WILL have to cut fast and deep”. These were the words of the Dutch finance minister describing the ‘strings’ that come with the IMF and EU loans to Ireland. The population of Ireland has already suffered horrendous cuts – public sector pay has been cut by 15%, unemployment has soared to 14%. The misery suffered by the Irish population has deepened rather than alleviated the economic crisis. Now, yet more misery is being demanded.

The working class in Britain will learn the lessons of what is happening across the water. The economic crisis in Ireland was not caused by a bloated public sector but by a fundamental crisis of capitalism triggered by the bursting of the huge bubbles in the Irish property sector. When the so-called ‘Celtic Tiger’ was growing the capitalist parties of Britain – including the Tories – welcomed the money-making frenzy in Ireland without a thought for the consequences. In 2006 George Osborne described Ireland as “a shining example of the possible in long-term economic policy making”.

No wonder – the same policies were followed in Britain. The City was deregulated by the last Tory government and that policy was continued by New Labour. As Philip Stevens rightly says in the Financial Times the closest comparisons to the Irish economy are with Iceland and Britain.

Just as in Ireland, the working class in Britain is being told that it must pay for a crisis that was not of its making. The debts of the banks have been ‘nationalised’ and hung around the necks of the working class. Meanwhile the money making frenzy is back in full

swing for a few at the top. Bankers’ bonuses have once again reached £7 billion, the same amount that the government is planning to cut from the benefit bill.

The government says it has no choice but to make the cuts, that ‘the money isn’t there’, yet overnight found £7 billion to help bail out Ireland. This is not done out of an altruistic desire to ‘help a neighbour’ but because Britain’s banks are Ireland’s biggest creditor. Once again this is about bailing out the banks while heaping misery on the working class.

In Britain and Ireland we should refuse to pay for the capitalists’ crisis. We demand the nationalisation of the banks and top finance as a means of controlling all inward and outward movement of capital! We should not pay a penny to the bond-market bloodsuckers! The ‘debt’, which is not ours, should not be paid.

On 27 November hundreds of thousands of Irish trade unionists will be taking to the streets to oppose the cuts. A demonstration is only the starting point. A year ago the Irish trade union leaders organised a massive demonstration, and then a one-day public sector strike, against the first round cuts, only to then betray the movement.

This time there will be immense pressure on the trade union leaders to prosecute a serious struggle in defence of the working class. The Irish working class’s burning desire for a serious fightback needs to be mobilised and democratically organised through mass meetings in public sector workplaces and in the local areas.

Here in Britain, the movement is at a much earlier stage. Although the comprehensive

spending review was now over a month ago there has not yet been a national trade union-led demonstration against the cuts.

The students, with their 50,000-strong demonstration on 10 November, and with the walkouts on 24 November, have shown what is possible. So have the many local trade union demonstrations against the cuts; on Saturday 20 November over 1,000 marched in both Gloucester and Nottingham.

Yet the trade union leadership (TUC) is refusing to call a national demonstration before 26 March next year. The Socialist Party will campaign to make 26 March an immense trade union-led working class demonstration against all cuts in jobs and services, but we should not have to wait until then. That is why the PCS civil servants’ union, supported by other left unions, has consistently campaigned for an early demonstration.

The TUC however, has refused to budge despite the pressure. The Socialist Party argued that if one union had called a demo in the immediate wake of the cuts announcement there would have been an enthusiastic response from many thousands of workers. But, in the face of the continued intransigence of the TUC, the leadership of the PCS felt that, if they alone called an early demonstration, it would not have been possible to mobilise a sufficient turnout.

Despite the lack of a national demo, the struggle will continue to develop in the run up to Christmas. On 3 December local councils will learn how little money they will receive from central government. Shortly afterwards they will hold meetings to discuss their response.

Unfortunately, it seems that in every case councils’ response will be an acceptance that they will carry out brutal cuts. Lobbies and demonstrations against those cuts need to take place in every town and city.

The TUC and trade union leaders should flood the protests with leaflets, posters and details of transport to the 26 March demo. As the situation develops the question of a national demonstration early in the New Year may again be posed.

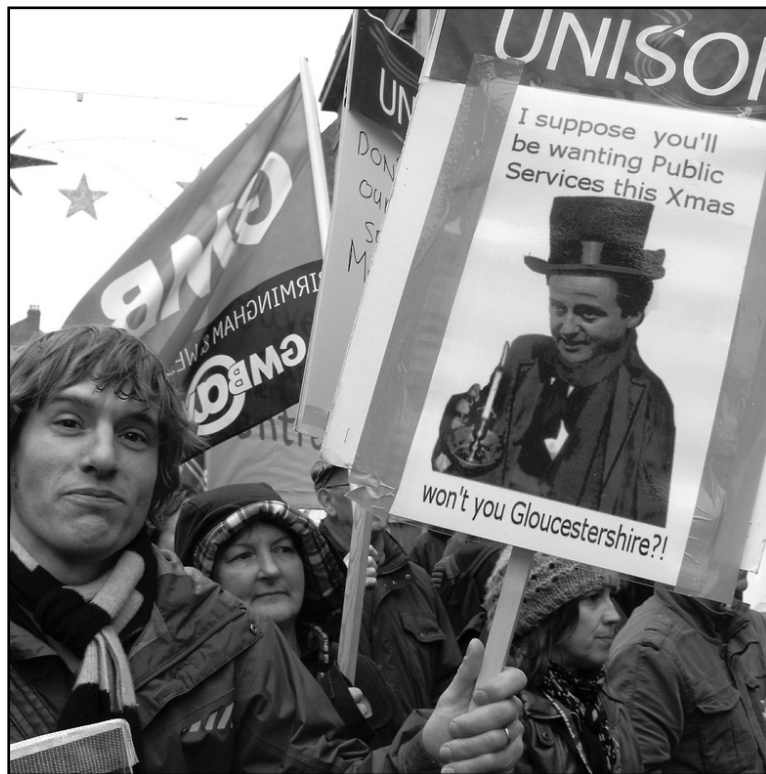
But as important now is also the campaign for a one-day public sector strike. Certainly all public sector unions planning strike action for the new year need to try to coordinate so that action takes place simultaneously.

All of these issues will be discussed at the National Shop Stewards Network (NSSN) anti-cuts conference on Saturday 22 January. This conference will play a vital role in bringing together trade union activists and the many local anti-cuts campaigns that are springing up in order to discuss a strategy to defeat the cuts.

Later on the same day the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition will be holding a candidates’ conference to discuss standing anti-cuts candidates in the local elections next May. Alongside trade union and community campaigning against the cuts we also need to fight on the political front.

Local anti-cuts campaigns up and down the country are faced with fighting cuts from central government and from local Labour councils. Anti-cuts campaigners will welcome any councillors that are prepared to defy the cuts, but where they implement them, should stand against them on a clear anti-cuts platform.

1,000 march in Gloucester against ‘scorched earth policy’



1,000 people demonstrated.

photo Gloucester Socialist Party

“HOW WOULD you like your cuts?”, the ‘consultations’ by Gloucestershire County Council’s (GCC) Road Show asked, mainly when working people could not attend. Allegedly, 5,000 people (out of 600,000 living in the county) opted for cuts in youth services and libraries.

Gloucestershire Socialist Party

However, they got a different answer when scores of county employees lobbied a GCC Cabinet meeting on 18 November. Then on 20

November, 1,000 protesters joined a march and rally in Gloucester, organised by Gloucester Districts Trades Council.

The GCC cuts are a scorched earth policy for many services. Scarcely a youth club will remain, library services face 43% cuts, legal aid and trading standards will be ransacked. 1,000 county council jobs will go, plus police officers and firefighters.

Gloucestershire is a rural county so 40% cuts to bus transport and road maintenance will have a dire effect, especially if people need to travel further for other services.

Trade unionists, library staff,

youth workers and people eager to save their libraries, youth clubs and centres for the disabled turned out with placards and colourful banners. Trevor Hall, regional organiser for the Unite union, told us: “The crisis is not of our making ... why should we pay? The super-rich must pay their taxes like you and I do. This is just the start... the first of many big protests”.

Billy Hayes, general secretary of the Communications Workers Union, praised the big response. He said his members are not just facing Tory cuts but Royal Mail is also under renewed threat of privatisation.

He urged us to show the coalition government what we think of it at the ballot box. People around us muttered “too late”, we can’t wait nearly five years for the next general election.

Fortunately, John McNally, vice-president of the PCS civil servants union, spoke next. Echoing what previous speakers said about the nature of the crisis, he also reminded us that cuts and privatisation had been on Labour’s agenda too. Now Labour authorities in Wales threaten to dismiss 10,000 council workers if they refuse new contracts.

John said the government could be defeated but it would require coordinated strike action linked to community initiatives and local anti-cuts unions. His words struck a chord and every point he made was applauded by angry marchers.

All fighting speeches - and there were several - got support. But Parmjit Dhanda, Gloucester’s former Labour MP, looked forlorn - it wasn’t the weather, he’d got the message. And he’s aware that his broken pledge to defend the post offices is not forgotten.

A campaigner from the Forest of Dean spoke. Half of the forest

Scarcely a youth club will remain, library services face 43% cuts, legal aid and trading standards will be ransacked.

(owned by the state since nationalisation in 1924) is to be sold off and people are livid. Strong local resistance thwarted Thatcher’s attempt to privatise the forest in the 1980s, so this campaign will be big and militant.

At a meeting after the rally to discuss how to set up anti-cuts unions, 45 people heard John McNally, Phil Jordan, trades council secretary and firefighters’ union regional chair and Sue Powell from Gloucester-

shire Socialist Party, speak.

Anti-cuts groups are being set up across the county. Gloucester districts trades council must provide effective coordination through the anti-cuts alliance it founded in October. Community action will be crucial in defending youth services and libraries.

Gloucestershire county council leader Mark Hawthorne has an appetite for cuts, clawing even more money back than the county lost through Westminster’s local government cuts.

In September the Road Shows were hailed as the “community’s chance to meet the challenge”. Judging by last week’s protests and the mounting campaign in the Forest of Dean, they might soon regret that offer!

Socialism Today

The Socialist Party’s magazine
December 2010 issue includes:

- **Just the beginning**
Peter Taaffe assesses the significance of the 50,000-strong student demonstration and the potential to build an all-Britain movement against the government’s cuts plans.



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