

National Shop Stewards Network All-Britain Anti-Cuts Campaign to be launched

JUST AS the student movement reaches Day X, the National Shop Stewards Network (NSSN) has set out the agenda for its anti-cuts conference on 22 January. On 4 December, the NSSN steering committee agreed that the conference will launch the 'NSSN All-Britain Anti-Cuts Campaign - unions and communities together to save jobs and services'.

Rob Williams
NSSN vice-chair

It was agreed to ensure the maximum amount of discussion time at the conference to encourage trade union activists, students and anti-cuts community campaigners to discuss the strategy needed to defeat the Con-Dem cuts.

There was a big debate at the meeting, which reflected the different views on the steering committee about how the NSSN should move forward. From its inception in 2006 as an initiative of the RMT transport workers' union, the Socialist Party recognised the possibilities of the network as a vehicle to revitalise the trade union movement.

In many ways, the launch of the NSSN was an anticipation of the hectic times over the last few months, which have begun to see fresh forces coming into the anti-cuts movement. Last year, we saw, albeit on a smaller scale, the NSSN prove to be a crucial organiser in Lindsey, Linamar, Visteon and Vestas.

This year, it has been a key component of the anti-cuts campaign. It held the first conference of the Con-Dem era in the summer, from which it organised the lobby of the TUC in September, which definitely had an impact in pushing the trade union leaders into calling the March 2011 national TUC anti-cuts demo in London.

On 23 October, we called for the TUC to organise a national march but in its absence, the NSSN was



NSSN members on the lobby of the TUC.

photo Paul Mattsson

one of the prime movers in getting local demos off the ground in London, Bristol and Cardiff. Its supporters have been involved in the setting up of countless anti-cuts campaigns all over the country.

Therefore, for those on the steering committee who tried to argue that, given the existence of the Coalition of Resistance (CoR) and the SWP's Right to Work campaign (RTW), the NSSN's anti-cuts campaign is 'divisive', is to ignore the successes of the NSSN in helping build the movement from the beginning. They also ignore that the NSSN actually pre-dates CoR and RTW.

The NSSN does not propose to declare ourselves as *the* anti-cuts movement, as is wrongly alleged.

We don't ignore the other organisations. In fact, the NSSN officers, on the advice of Socialist Party members, were the first organisation to write asking for a meeting to discuss how we can work together to ensure that we avoid clashing meetings, protests etc.

We participated in the RTW forum the day after the steering committee in this spirit and, along with CoR and RTW, we will attend the Trade Union Co-ordinating Group meeting on 14 December, with Labour left MP John McDonnell and the leaders of the left unions.

However, we are still at the beginning of this movement and while the NSSN is opposed to *all* cuts - including those of Labour councils and

the Labour/Plaid Cymru Welsh Assembly - we aren't convinced of the position of the other organisations. We believe that this will increasingly become a major issue of the anti-cuts movement as Labour councils start to implement Con-Dem cuts, like Neath/Port Talbot and Rhondda Cynon Taff in Wales who between them have issued 17,000 90-day notices to their workforces.

This has resulted in the threat of a 2% pay cut in Neath/Port Talbot on top of a three year pay freeze! Ignoring this and inviting such councillors into the anti-cuts movement is to give them a left cover and will divide the council workers from the anti-cuts campaigns.

We are in favour of practical unity on a step by step basis to build trust and confidence. There must also be a democratic process in the movement. We believe that the establishment of an anti-cuts committee can bring in fresh forces.

Healthy debate

A STRONG NSSN in the anti-cuts movement, is the best guarantee for the effectiveness of that movement. Yes there are sharp debates in the NSSN but that is a good sign, and something which we are not convinced occurs in the SWP-dominated RTW.

Some other members of the steering committee are opposed to the NSSN's involvement in the anti-cuts movement full stop, because they believe it distracts from the task of building a shop stewards' movement.

We don't believe, however, that the NSSN can achieve its goals in a vacuum. The best trade unionists will be involved in fighting the cuts. The role of the NSSN is to reach them, organise them, put them in touch with other activists and also re-orientate them to transform the unions as fighting organisations. It is in the anti-cuts movement that

these activists will come up against the conservatism of the trade union full-time officials, many of whom will be encouraging workers to accept concessions. The class struggle isn't static but fluid and the NSSN like all organisations must adapt to survive.

The NSSN steering committee agreed to organise this anti-cuts conference on 22 October, a direct follow-on from the statement agreed at its annual conference in June to get involved in the anti-cuts movement. The NSSN is in a unique position to be a unifying force for everyone who faces these brutal cuts because it will ultimately be the organised workers who have the economic power to stop the Con-Dems in their tracks.

About 100,000 have marched in the countless local demos since the cuts were announced on 20 October and of course a student movement of perhaps 200,000 and counting has exploded onto the streets to raise everyone's sights that our class can win this battle.

Tell your workmates, your friends and family and your classmates - get in touch with every union branch and workplace, every fighting student group and every anti-cuts campaign. Get organised and come to the NSSN anti-cuts conference on 22 January.

NSSN National Anti-Cuts Conference

22 January
11.30am - 3.30pm

South Camden Community School, Charrington Street, London NW1 1RG (near Euston station)

See: www.shopstewards.net

Health workers need help to fight multinational

AS WE reported last week, workers employed by Medirest at hospitals in Buckinghamshire are balloting for strike action to achieve their rightful terms and conditions. These low-paid ancillary workers are working for a company, part of the Compass Group, who make £ millions in profits but won't pay their workers the agreed

rates under the Agenda for Change agreement.

Please send messages of support and donations to their hardship fund to: Bucks Health Unison, Room 42, Tindal Centre, Bierton Road, Aylesbury, HP20 1HU, tel: 01296 565568. Please make cheques payable to Bucks Health Unison Hardship Fund.

TUSC calls election campaign conference

THE TRADE Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) will be standing candidates in the May 2011 local council elections that are taking place in every area of England except London. TUSC is also involved in discussions to organise an election challenge for the Scottish Parliament and Welsh Assembly elections.

The TUSC draft policy platform starts from the basis that councillors can refuse to pass on the cuts.

Local groups, trade unionists and anti-cuts campaigners who want to stand candidates under the TUSC banner are invited to a conference on 22 January 2011 to discuss and finalise the platform.

The conference is scheduled to follow the NSSN conference against the cuts also being held on 22 January 2011.

For more information email: electioncoalition@btinternet.com

Scotland

Unison votes for fighting cuts strategy

UNISON'S SCOTTISH council, made of delegates from all branches in Scotland, voted on 3 December to raise with the other public sector trade unions the need for a Scottish industrial action strategy beginning with a one-day Scottish public sector strike to fight the cuts. The meeting of over 100 delegates also supported a call that the Scottish Parliament and local councils should set "needs budgets" that protect jobs and services.

Brian Smith,
Glasgow Unison branch secretary
and Socialist Party Scotland
member

The motion on industrial action was moved by Glasgow City branch and supported by the Scottish Unison leadership, with the caveat that any action must be within the law. Speakers from several branches spoke in favour of the motion which was passed unanimously.

The motion calling on elected politicians to stand up to the Tories by setting "needs budgets" was jointly moved by Glasgow City and the North Ayrshire branch, with Dundee City lending support in the debate.



On the 23 October demo in Edinburgh.

photo Ray Smith

A section of the leadership opposed the motion on that basis it was 'gesture politics' and councils would not agree to it. The movers made the point that Unison must have a 'no cuts' position and that the concept of setting needs budgets was a political tool to deliver that in the short to medium term. It would mean that Unison had a clear position of encouraging Scotland's politicians to fight the Tories.

Earlier in the meeting Unison general secretary Dave Prentis had called on political parties to "oppose the cuts" and stand with working people. The movers of the motion suggested that the call for needs budgets was in tune with this demand. The motion was carried by a clear majority.

Scottish Unison must now use these decisions to step-up the fight to defend jobs and services.