



Workers fighting back

- Prison workers prepare for action against privatisation
- Solidarity strike spreads over Saltend lock-out

See pages 4 and 11

Con-Dems declare war on essential services

CUTS WRECK PEOPLE'S LIVES

Like an arrogant bully, the Tory/Lib Dem coalition is pushing ahead with many of its assaults on the lives of working class people.

This government's plans for benefit claimants, if successful, will see misery piled high on the heads of disabled people, the unemployed and the old.

The government intends to privatise what's left of our diminished public services. Private contractors, like Serco, drool at the thought of the profits to be made.

However, the 26 March demo was a mass show of united opposition to all cuts by working class people. Building on that, a 24-hour public sector strike would be a shot across the bows of a weak coalition. Here, an Employment and Support Allowance claimant explains what is in store for people with disabilities unless this government is stopped.

From 4 April, the Tory/Liberal Democrat government has started a three year project to re-assess all 1.5 million incapacity benefit claimants. The brutal Work Capability Assessment (WCA) is feared by many disabled people. About one and a quarter million people, now on incapacity benefit, will lose £25 a week. Because of sanctions and compulsion, many will lose all their benefits.

Following a test, which looks at little more than a person's ability to do certain physical movements and everyday tasks, people will either be transferred onto Jobseeker's Allowance or the new Employment and Support Allowance (ESA).

The WCA was introduced alongside ESA in October 2008 as part of New Labour's misnamed welfare reform act, and is carried out by the private company Atos Origin for the Department for Work and Pensions.

This test has been strongly criticised by both Citizens Advice and a government funded independent review. The mental health charity Mind has warned that the fear associated with going through the WCA and its possible consequences is causing deterioration in the health of thousands.

The fact that 40% of those found 'fit for work' by a WCA went on to successfully appeal the decision illustrates how flawed this test is.

There is little chance of Ed Miliband's Labour opposition defending disabled people

on this issue. Miliband's first shadow chancellor, Alan Johnson, said in response to the billions of cuts announced in the government's autumn spending review: "Where changes are fair, proportionate and encourage work we will support them as we have shown in respect of incapacity benefit, a reformed gateway for Disability Living Allowance and on upratings."

The argument made by all the political parties that welfare 'reform' will help those currently on incapacity benefits by encouraging them into work is a smokescreen to hide the truth. It is simply a way of saving billions as part of the long-term attack on the welfare state, started under Margaret Thatcher in the 1980s.

The right-wing press are salivating with stories of incapacity benefit fraud based on a sprinkling of cases. But this hides the fact that the real fraudsters in our society are the fat cat bosses who find loopholes to avoid paying billions in tax and who profit from privatisation scams. In fact, this profit-driven capitalist system has left millions out of work and shattered people's lives.

On 14 April there will be demonstrations in many areas by disabled activists to oppose the government's attacks. The trade unions should publicly support these protests as part of the wider struggle to stop the Con-Dems' cuts in public services.

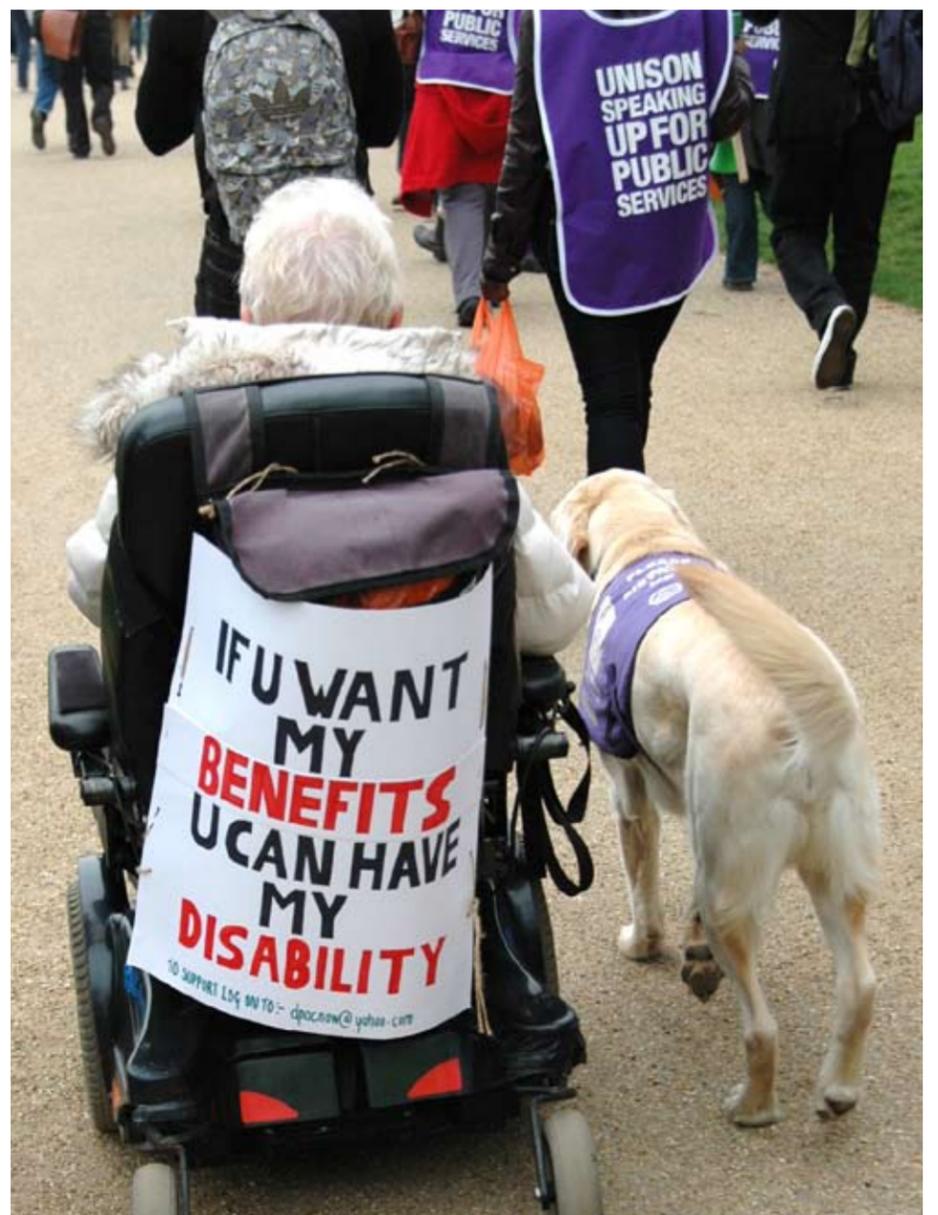


photo Dave Beale