

Solidarity, support and blisters

Extract from Jarrow Marchers Blog: Day 1 & 2

I'm writing this at one in the morning in a kitchen in St Clare's in Newton Aycliffe, County Durham. It's been hard going - stops to dress blisters are multiplying. But I don't think any of the marchers would change any of the experiences we've been through for anything.

500 people turned out to see us off from Jarrow. But the blunt figure doesn't do it justice. The RMT transport union arranged a brass band to march through Jarrow with us and Craig Johnston, northern regional organiser, spoke to our opening rally about the union's campaign among privatised cleaners on the Metro in the Newcastle area.

Overwhelming support

A former worker from the AEI cables factory in Birtley in Gateshead, among the first in line to be sacked, donated £20 towards the cost of the march from the platform.

Lizi Gray, descendant of one of the original Jarrow marchers, spoke brilliantly to explain the situation for young people today and why we're recreating the march. I know that I wasn't the only one with a tear in their eye while she was speaking. I also know for a fact that when Lizi gets down to join the march next weekend (she's at college and is doing the march at weekends and her half term) I'll get a punch for saying that in public!

We set off around Jarrow and the number of people coming out of pubs and stopping by the town hall to applaud us was fantastic. A whole contingent of PCS civil service union members from the region joined us on the march after we left Jarrow to head off towards Birtley.

We speed-walked the ten-odd miles from Jarrow to Birtley in three hours, which seems a lot easier than it is in

real life when you've got 40 or so who all need toilet breaks and chances to stock up at the shops. We're a bit of an unruly bunch but I guess you'd have to be to sign up for this, wouldn't you?

When we arrived in Birtley we met the sacked AEI factory workers and a number of journalists. We're having to be a bit tight on money to make sure that the march goes ok, but we'd decided that because of the solidarity that day towards our march, we had to offer exactly the same to the rest of the movement.

So Paul, our regional organiser up here, made a speech to the AEI workers supporting their struggle and offering to donate towards their hardship fund. But the workers weren't having any of it!

They stopped Paul mid-speech to refuse the donation, going on to explain that our march represented the fight for a new generation, that if they'd been offered decent pensions they'd have gladly retired and let young people take their jobs, safe in the knowledge that they'd fought for the best conditions for those following them into that job.

That night we had a gig, food and accommodation provided for us by the bar manager of the Three Tuns pub in Gateshead. Great local bands played for us, allowing marchers a chance to relax and, for those with enough energy left, even a bit of a dance. Then Sunday morning was back to a community centre in Birtley to eat a spectacular spread put on for us by the AEI workers before heading off to Durham.

While we were outside the community centre getting everyone together, I was called to one side by a woman who lives nearby. She thought it was a wonderful thing we were doing, and had asked her neighbour to lend her £10 so that she could make a donation towards the march.

These are just a few examples of the huge support that we've had from

people passing by, coming out to see us, stopping their cars to put money in the buckets and beeping their horns to show support.

Spirit of solidarity

As a young person (I'm 25), I've never lived through big battles such as the miners strike of the 1980s, when lorries of food and supplies were provided for miners and their families by other workers. But through the course of these few days I've realised that, although its not been called upon for a little while, that huge spirit of solidarity and support for others in struggle still exists throughout the country.

As this Con-Dem government forces more and more hardships on us and meets with more and more resistance, I'm convinced this magnificent spirit won't be found wanting.

When we arrived in Durham, after a brief protest in Market Square, we headed to our relatively luxury accommodation at the Travelodge. Durham County Council had very kindly provided us with rooms there, and a venue to cook the evening meal and hear a few local bands.

We're very grateful for all the support and solidarity that the march is receiving, and hope that the council's support for our march will also mean support and implementation of the demands of the march - restoration of EMA, a house building programme and an end to cuts.

There are a lot of events going on over the next few days and weeks. We're already excited about the 5 November demonstration when we arrive in London, even though whatever way you look at it there's a long way to go yet!

Ben Robinson, London marcher and Youth Fight for Jobs national chair



photos Paul Mattsson

For a full version of this post and to subscribe to updates from the march, including photos, see

www.jarrowmarch11.com

What we stand for

The Socialist Party fights for socialist change - a democratic society run for the needs of all and not the profits of a few. We also fight, in our day-to-day campaigning, for every possible improvement for working-class people.

As capitalism dominates the globe, the struggle for genuine socialism must be international.

The Socialist Party is part of the Committee for a Workers' International (CWI), a democratic, socialist international that organises in over 40 countries.

Our demands include:

Work and income

- Trade union struggle to increase the minimum wage to £8 an hour without exemptions as an immediate step towards £10 an hour. For an annual increase in the minimum wage linked to average earnings.
- All workers, including part-timers, temps, casual and migrant workers to have trade union rates of pay, employment protection, and sickness and holiday rights from day one of employment.
- An immediate 50% increase in the state

retirement pension, as a step towards a living pension. Reinstate the link with average earnings now.

- Reject 'Welfare to Work'. For the right to decent benefits, education, training, or a job, without compulsion.
- Scrap the anti-trade union laws! For fighting trade unions, democratically controlled by their members. Full-time union officials to be regularly elected and receive no more than a worker's wage.
- A maximum 35-hour week with no loss of pay.

Public services

- No to privatisation and the Private Finance Initiative (PFI). Renationalise all privatised utilities and services, with compensation paid only on the basis of proven need.
- Fully fund all services and run them under accountable, democratic committees that include representatives of service workers and users.
- Free, publicly run, good quality education, available to all at any age. Abolish university tuition fees now and introduce a living grant. No to academies and 'free schools'!
- A socialist NHS to provide for everyone's health needs - free at the point of use and under

democratic control. Kick out private contractors!

- Keep council housing publicly owned. For a massive building programme of publicly owned housing, on an environmentally sustainable basis, to provide good quality homes with low rents.

Environment

- Major research and investment into replacing fossil fuels with renewable energy and into ending the problems of early obsolescence and unrecycled waste.
- Public ownership of the energy generating industries. No to nuclear power. No to Trident.
- A democratically planned, low fare, publicly-owned transport system, as part of an overall plan against environmental pollution.

Rights

- Oppose discrimination on the grounds of race, sex, disability, sexuality, age, and all other forms of prejudice.
- Repeal all laws that trample over civil liberties. For the right to protest! End police harassment.
- Defend abortion rights. For a woman's right to choose when and whether to have children.
- For the right to asylum. No to racist immigration laws.

New workers' party

- For a new mass workers' party drawing together workers, young people and activists from workplace, community, environmental and anti-war campaigns, to provide a fighting, political alternative to the pro-big business parties.
- Trade unions to disaffiliate from the Labour Party now and aid the building of a new workers' party!

Socialism and internationalism

- No to imperialist wars and occupations. Withdraw the troops immediately from Iraq and Afghanistan!
- Tax the super-rich! For a socialist government to take into public ownership the top 150 companies and banks that dominate the British economy, and run them under democratic working-class control and management. Compensation to be paid only on the basis of proven need.
- A democratic socialist plan of production based on the interests of the overwhelming majority of people, and in a way that safeguards the environment.
- No to the bosses' neo-liberal European Union! For a socialist Europe and a socialist world!