

30 November strike: a historic day!

A short summary by Socialist Party correspondents

The 60,000-strong demonstration in London was fantastic, with thousands of first-time strikers. First thing in the morning PCS members outside the Department for Energy and Climate Change said that they had workers joining on the eve of the strike after hearing George Osborne speak on the news. "It's the final straw," they said.

Mark Lione, a union representative in the London Ambulance Service, reported: "At the end of the strike day, at midnight, we still had 12 pickets on the line and were still getting support from the passing public!"

At a picket line rally at Whipps Cross hospital Len Hockey, a porter and Socialist Party member slammed the attempts by the government to divide low-paid private sector workers from those in the public sector. "The only real division is between the pay of ordinary private sector workers on the one hand and that of company chief executive officers and their shareholders on the other."

A lunchtime meeting at Wormwood Scrubs prison was addressed by POA branch chairman Alan Gourley, Vanessa Frake of the Prisoner Governors Association and Keith Dickinson of the Socialist Party.

Solidarity

At Cardiff University, one of the city's biggest workplaces, the mood was high as pickets from all 25 schools of the university converged on the chemistry department for a rally, where all 117 members of staff have been handed a warning of redundancy by management.

In Swansea over 2,000 workers marched through the centre of town. In West Wales over 400 trade unionists came to the march and rally in Carmarthen. At the rally, Socialist Party members were to the forefront with Scott Jones, a young Usdaw rep bringing fraternal greetings from Youth Fight for Jobs.

A series of rallies were held across north Wales. 200 gathered in Bangor town centre and 200 protesters in Mold. Following a demo of 400, a rally in Wrexham was packed out.

The centre of Bradford was vibrant as strikers ventured into town for the rally. In Sheffield, Socialist Party member PCS NEC member Marion Lloyd, the final speaker at the main TUC rally, called for further national strike action involving the private sector, and for a political alternative to Labour to fight for socialist policies.

In Huddersfield a demonstration of 2,500 people was the biggest in living memory in the town.

Around 4,000 public sector workers, students, unemployed and pensioners took part in an inspiring demonstration in Hull. Hull Youth Fight for Jobs activist Matt Whale spoke about the need to fight for increased funding, through the taxation of the super-rich, to fund not just public sector pensions, but to increase them and ensure a living pension for private sector workers also. Around 7,000 demonstrated in Leeds.

12,000 strikers and supporters marched from the Liverpool Pier-head to rally at St George's Plateau. This was the second largest of 14 demos in the north west.

Even the Liverpool Echo in its report of the demo reluctantly acknowledged: "... there was a palpable sense of disappointment with the Labour leadership amongst the demonstrators."

The Manchester march was at least a mile long. Certainly 30,000 but could be anything up to 50,000.

In Warrington the march was around 1,200. In Chester the demo through town with banners, vuvuzelas, whistles and musical instruments will be something participants will never forget.

The march in Bury had a carnival atmosphere, with plenty of children blowing whistles and supporting their families. There were 1,000 to 1,500 on the Oldham demo.

'Phenomenal'

On Tyneside the demonstration was phenomenal. Up to 10,000 strikers were applauded by onlookers, as they marched from Gateshead to Newcastle. Many on the march commented that they had never seen such a show of trade union strength on Tyneside before.

At the rally the loudest applause was for the rousing speech by Bob Crow. He denounced Ed Miliband for the lack of support, then made a thinly veiled swipe at unions still financing New Labour. Crow also pointed out the necessity of a 24-hour general strike, to include both public and private sector workers.

Socialist Party members visited picket lines across the region, starting at 4.30am outside the Tyne and Wear Metro Control Centre, where striking RMT and Unite members were picketing. The mood was buoyant and passing vehicles were tooting their support.

Nearly 1,000 people marched in Hastings, before holding a massive open air rally in the town centre. In Brighton around 10,000 people marched and three feeder demonstrations of between 500 and 700 people each joined the demonstration in town from Moulsecoomb, Whitehawk and Hove.

Rallies and marches involving over 3,000 striking workers and supporters in Medway, Canterbury, Maidstone, Thanet and Dover in Kent were absolutely unequivocal in the message to the architects of this pension robbery - we will strike again and again until this government is forced to back down or is forced out altogether.

Enthusiasm

In Surrey, 1,500 attended rallies across the county. 600 marched through Kingston, 600 in Woking and 300 in Leatherhead.

We saw the highest turnout of trade unionists in Reading and Bracknell since the 1980s or even longer. The Socialist Party had stalls at the start and conclusion of the march, with many new and enthusiastic members getting involved.

In Aylesbury and Wycombe the demonstrations and picket line strength exceeded organisers' expectations. The Aylesbury demo must have been 400 or more. They couldn't all fit in the venue for the rally.

Over 5,000 trade unionists were applauded by the public as they marched through Southampton. And the Bournemouth march and rally was attended by approximately 1,500.

There were at least 30,000 on the Bristol demo, where PCS vice president John McNally gave a rousing speech. It was the largest trade union demo in Bristol since 1932! Some other estimates in the South West are: Taunton - 2,000, Gloucester - 3,000, Truro - 4,000. In Exeter over 4,000 people marched through



Marching through London photo Paul Mattsson

the city centre to a packed rally.

The streets of Hertford had not seen anything like it since the anti-poll tax movement, just under 2,500 marched to County Hall. This followed pickets all over Hertfordshire.

200 gathered for a rally in Basildon town centre, followed by an impromptu march to the council offices. This was the biggest demonstration in this town since Thatcher was in government.

Way forward

A sea of colour and a flood of people - over 10,000 marched through Birmingham. Thousands then poured into the rally. Brendan Barber TUC leader, Unison general secretary Dave Prentis and others rightly exposed the hypocrisy of the government and the lie that 'we're all in it together'.

Brendan Barber left with a clenched fist salute. Unite general secretary Tony Woodley added that we can't just say 'no', that we need an alternative.

But it was left to PCS president Janice Godrich to explain the way forward, saying that the problem wasn't that the government was 'going too far, too fast' but that they were cutting at all. She said we have to prepare for more action.

In Coventry there was a 2,500-strong march through the city. A magnificent march of 600 trade unionists marched through Worcester and in Stoke there were about 500 at the rally with over 20 different union banners on display.

Determination

Scotland witnessed a massive outpouring of anger at the Con-Dem government as over 300,000 public sector workers took part in the strike. With almost one in four workers in Scotland employed in the public sector, N30 took on many of the features of a general strike.

35,000 plus marched in Glasgow. Well over 20,000 marched to the Scottish parliament in Edinburgh. 10,000 in Dundee in a city of 140,000 people. There were 5,000 in Aberdeen, 2,000 in Paisley, 1,000 in Inverness and many other massive rallies across the country from the



On a picket line in Manchester photo Hugh Caffrey



At the Swansea rally photo Socialist Party Wales

Western Isles to the Borders.

Steve Geekie, a Ucatt shop steward at the public works in Dundee, summed up the mood by saying: "We're construction workers, we've got a hard job, we work in all weathers. They are endorsing the Hutton report that says our guys have got to work until they are 68... When we joined the public sector we signed up for the pension scheme we've got. We're not getting that now. That's why the guys are here."

In Northern Ireland 10,000 attended the Belfast rally with about 2,000 to 3,000 in Derry. Smaller

rallies took place in other towns. Speakers at the Derry rally included assistant general secretary of the PCS, Chris Baugh.

The new anti-cuts Network of Trade Union Activists held a meeting in the evening in Belfast which was well attended (the main room was packed and more were downstairs), with Nipsa president Maria Morgan and vice-president Padraig Mulholland speaking, and also Chris Baugh.

See www.socialistparty.org.uk for more reports