

Resisting public sector cuts: the key issue of union strategy

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Document Version

Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

Citation for published version (Harvard):

Hodder, A & French, S 2010, 'Resisting public sector cuts: the key issue of union strategy', *Federation News*, pp. 6-7.

[Link to publication on Research at Birmingham portal](#)

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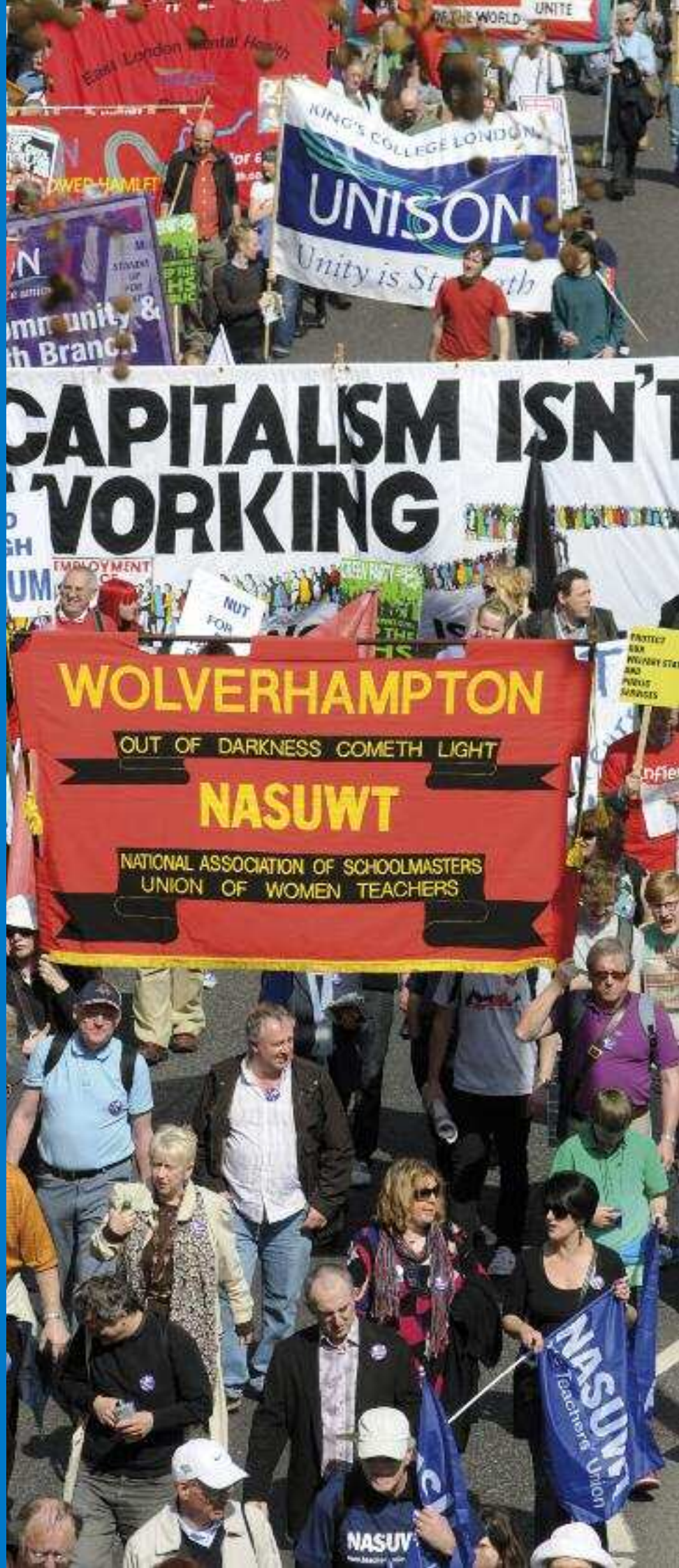
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volume 10 number 2

2010 Summer Edition

federation
news

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The Institute of Employment Rights was launched in 1989. As a labour law 'think tank', supported by the trade union movement, its purpose is to provide research, ideas and detailed argument. In 1994 the Institute was granted charitable status.

The results of the work of the Institute are published in papers and booklets and developed at conferences and seminars. Our aim is to provide the tools of analysis and debate for the trade union movement in the area of labour law.

We welcome the submission of articles for consideration for publication in future editions. Please send articles to the Institute of Employment Rights at the above address or electronically to cad@ier.org.uk.

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Editorial: Trade union responses to coalition cuts

Since 2008 a crisis of the private financial sector has been turned into a crisis of public finances. In turn that public finance crisis has become one of public expenditure only, and that means attacks on the pay and conditions of all public sector workers.

In labour intensive services, such as health and central government, the cuts tend to fall disproportionately upon workers. This is because the coalition government requires 'more for less' from these services, whether or not they are radically restructured as well.

The nature of the policies now being devised and implemented by the coalition are such as to try to force through the ideals of the 'big society' with its more familiar twin, the 'small state'. These 'neo-liberal' style programmes aim at privatising more state functions, removing democratic accountability from those that remain, and pushing the costs of services onto individuals, families, and communities.

There are alternative strategies in contrast to the coalition government's cuts programmes. These include a shift in tax burden and tax collection to the better off, the tax avoiders and evaders, and to aspects of corporation tax. They must also include reform of public services – these must be made more accountable and transparent, they need to rein in senior management salaries, and they have to be restructured to become more efficient. The labour movement must embrace the greater efficiency argument and make it their own.

The labour movement differs from the conventional wisdom on efficiency by emphasising in policy documents as well as bargaining agendas the need to measure it across time and organisational boundaries. The government's narrow business view of efficiency measures it within a particular unit of activity such as a school, hospital, civil service agency, local government department, fire and rescue service, and usually over a limited time period. So, for example, the number of: patients put through a ward, children achieving 5 A-C GCSE grades, and fires put out, are the building blocks of decision-making.

But we all know that education, health and social care, policing, and defending the common good do not start and

end at the door of school, hospital, and other units of institutionalised activity. Indeed in most cases it is also not relevant to measure this year on year, but over decades of change and improvement. We are saying two things here: one, that efficiency matters for all citizens as workers and users within public services, and policies should be developed to improve that efficiency. Secondly, that business-school definitions and measurement tools are inadequate and inappropriate when dealing with national provision of, for example, health and education, and we can deliver robust and convincing counter arguments based on a worker-centred socially realisable view of efficiency. This would not create the distortions in practice and outcomes now evident, would use scarce resources and labour skills more effectively and efficiently, and would allow a unity of purpose as between the citizen user and the citizen worker.

This edition of Federation News carries articles about the nature of the crisis, the form that the cuts agenda will take in specific sectors, and the nature of the union response. It is this latter that clearly needs urgent attention from the union and wider labour movement. It must embrace the reality of solidarity rather than just the rhetoric, it must involve planned and co-ordinated responses to both general and specific government cuts, and it must be able to convince the majority of union members and the wider working-class of the necessity to fight against the cuts and for a more rational, efficient and fairer distribution of income and wealth. It is this deep seated inequality that lies at the heart of the economic and social problems we all face, and it is the leaders of the political system and their apologists in the media and academia that defend and seek to strengthen this unequal and unfair regime.

The principles of the French revolution updated by James Connolly remain the most potent core principles for which all in the labour movement should strive: that every child born anywhere in the world has the right to a fair share of the world's resources!

Roger Seifert

Public service cuts – all pain and no gain

Frances O’Grady



Doubts have set in, the rows have started and vows have been broken. So it seems, with poll ratings slowly but steadily slipping, the honeymoon between the new Government and the British electorate is all but over.

For a time the “new politics” of coalition government appealed to the British people’s appetite for change. The public was persuaded that at least some of the blame for the deficit belonged at the previous administration’s door. And, they began to believe, perhaps there really was “no alternative” to the tough medicine that the Government said the public sector must swallow.

But the trillion pound question about fundamental reform of the finance sector – and when exactly taxpayers will get that bailout money back – never really went away. Realisation that “savage” public spending cuts will hurt ordinary hard working families hardest is growing. And, as bankers enjoy free rein to return to their bad old bonus habits while at the same time services are slashed, the election cry of “we’re all in this together” rings increasingly hollow.

Anger amongst Britain’s six million public service workers that their pay, pensions and jobs are deemed a price worth paying for a casino capitalist crisis that they had no part in creating is already strong. But the trade union movement still has to convince the wider public that there is a viable alternative to the neoliberal agenda that has dominated British politics for the last three decades. And to do that we will have to roll up our sleeves on a number of fronts:

1. Winning minds, as well as hearts.

While the previous Labour government’s commitment to investment in growth, including jobs and apprenticeship programmes, was laudable, as the TUC pointed out at the time, it conceded far too much ground to those on the Right who argued that cutting public spending at speed was the only remedy for a return to economic health. There was a failure to channel public anger with the bankers into support for constraints on the City, too much timidity in putting the case for a fair taxation system and an absence of new ideas to secure decent jobs and fair pay. Now the union

movement will have to play a bigger role in winning the intellectual argument for a fairer, re-balanced economy. To do that we will have to link up with think tanks and academia, and invest in the development of new ideas and well thought through practical policies that win the public’s imagination and trust.

2. Campaigning

Despite a fascination with the Obama campaign, application of modern campaign techniques by the British trade union movement is patchy. Trade unionists would do well to learn lessons from union campaigns around the world. Faced with the right wing Howard government’s “Work choices” assault in 2007, the TUC’s sister trade union centre, ACTU, ran what was described – even by their opponents – as “the most sophisticated political campaign Australia had ever seen”. The campaign is worth close examination, not least because its success rested on an unprecedented coordination of message, marketing, mobilisation and resources – people and cash. One other obvious but important point: what do public services workers, public services users and those who stand to lose most from the cuts all have in common? Answer: the overwhelming majority are women. The tone, language and presentation of this campaign must resonate with them if we are to succeed.

3. Alliances

Resisting an assault on social protection, benefits and services on this scale will take a social alliance, the breadth of which hasn’t been seen since the Stop The War Coalition. Unlike the 1980s, when unions could connect with ready-made grass roots groups of parents, health service users and benefit claimants, supported by a strong national network of law centres, trades councils and unemployment centres, this time we may have to help build community capacity too. Crucially, the union movement will have to reach well beyond our own membership and not just embrace old friends, to secure a mass impact. The key is to personalise and localise the implications of the cuts –

from parents who care about the future of the neighbourhood school, to local councillors worried about losing their seats and to businesses who know that cuts mean lost contracts.

4. Collective action

Unions always aim to resolve disputes through negotiating fair agreements and the current position in public services – from threats to national bargaining, to redundancies and pensions – is no exception; but equally, unions must be ready to take collective action, up to and including strike action, where members vote for it. Successful industrial strategies demand, as the old saying goes, cool heads and strong hearts. But to be effective they require strong workplace organisation too. The first and most fundamental form of collective action is to join a union. While union density in the public sector remains healthy, membership in parts of public services – especially those delivered by the private sector – is not good enough. And with workloads intensifying and facilities squeezed, reps are under pressure and need more support too. Stepping up a coordinated organising campaign to grow membership and recruit more reps must be a top priority.

The case for public services

Making the case for a properly funded, world class public services delivered by a well rewarded and respected workforce will be core to our campaign and it's important that we anticipate arguments that will be used against us. For example, we can expect to hear the line that, in an age of austerity, the priority for public services is to provide a (means-tested) safety net for the poor. But we believe that public services must be much more than that. Public services are the practical expression of collective values, an essential vehicle for social solidarity, security, and redistribution towards middle, as well as low, income families – what is sometimes called 'the social wage'.

Growing inequality and stalled social mobility should serve to underline the importance the role of public services in empowering citizens and communities, promoting social cohesion and placing limits on the role of markets. As the seminal study 'The Spirit Level' showed, more equal societies provide higher levels of health, happiness and well-being.

They can also deliver stronger economies. Business recovery and growth depends on maintaining investment in our public infrastructure. For example, firms need a greener public transport system to move freight around and get people to work; good schools and colleges are vital to secure a well educated and trained workforce; and investment in a world class NHS is crucial to keep staff in work and healthy.

While it's important to think about how to deliver our public services as efficiently as possible, deep cuts are a false economy. Cutting jobs reduces the tax take and, with five workers chasing every vacancy, ups the benefits bill. And pay freezes only serve to depress consumer spending on which – especially SME and local – businesses rely. A TUC commissioned study by the Association of Public Services Excellence (APSE), shows that for every £1 of public money invested in public services, a further 64p is generated in the local economy.¹ The 'public services industry' accounts for around six percent of total GDP, and 29% of public sector expenditure goes directly to the private sector with government, for example, being the biggest single customer of construction.

The cuts also offend a basic principle of justice – that those individuals and institutions who bear most responsibility for the crisis, and who have the deepest pockets, should contribute most to taking those public finances out of the red. And with £26b lost every year through tax avoidance alone, there are many other fairer ways to plug that gap.

Putting the workforce at the heart of reform

Protecting public services does not mean that they should be preserved in aspic, never to re-invent themselves to meet the new demands of a more diverse and ageing population.

But the TUC argue that staff and their unions must be placed at the heart of public sector innovation. Initiatives such as Drive for Change, and efforts to develop a joint set of principles of good employment practice through the Public Services Forum have demonstrated the value of government, public sector workers and employers working together to improve service delivery.² As Stephen Bevan of the Work Foundation has pointed out, '*In such a highly unionised environment ..[the workforce] can be a source of lucid common sense, innovation and great energy if well led and allowed to influence the way services are organised and delivered.*'³

Too often public sector workers have felt that reform is something done to them, rather than something in which they are genuinely engaged. But as the recent Macleod Review has argued, genuine employee engagement can deliver real benefits to employees and employers alike.⁴ Take pensions: as far back as 2005, unions and government were working together to agree measures to ensure public sector pensions remained affordable and properly funded. Far from being an example of public sector profligacy and trade union intransigence, most public sector pensions are modest and the approach taken demonstrates the value of mature industrial relations.

Any government committed to progressive public sector reform needs to be equally committed to engaging service users and staff unions, so they have a genuine voice in how

services are designed and delivered. This also means re-thinking skills and training strategies so that the talent and potential of the whole public service team is deployed in continuous innovation and improvement, to meet urgent challenges from the Carbon Reduction Commitment to equal pay for women.

Next steps

How unions respond will help determine the future of our public services for decades to come, and so the quality of the society in which we live and work. Cuts and privatisation may seem like a quick and easy way to balance the books, but they carry a much higher longer term price. And there is an alternative, not least in fair taxes, an industrial policy for decent jobs and growth, and reform of the finance sector.

1. *Speaking up for Public Services: the vital role of the public sector in and beyond the recession*, TUC, 2009.
2. See <http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/workforcematters/psf-fiveyears.aspx>
3. *Pre-election attacks on public service productivity are lazy*, The Times, January 8, 2010 –
4. *Engaging for Success: enhancing performance through employee engagement*, David Macleod & Nita Clarke, BIS, July 2009

Under the guise of fiscal responsibility, the government is proposing to marketise and fragment both education and the National Health Service, and shrink the welfare state. We need modern campaigns that mobilise our members, activists and the broader community to stop them in their tracks.

The stakes could not be higher: public services and the workforce can become a political battleground, with attempts to roll back gains made by working people over generations; or, as the TUC argues, the public sector can become a vehicle for greater social equality and help stimulate the economy towards a greener, more sustainable future, with the needs of human beings at its heart.

http://business.timesonline.co.uk/tol/business/industry_sectors/public_sector/article6979928.ece



Resisting public sector cuts: the key issue of union strategy

Andy Hodder and Steve French

The 'modernisation' of the public sector has been a consistent theme of all governments since 1979. The dramatic reforms proposed by the current coalition, described as 'more radical than Thatcher', threaten the jobs, pay and pensions of millions of public sector workers. While the reforms are linked to immediate public sector spending cuts, pursued ruthlessly by the coalition to reduce Government debt, the impact is predicted to stretch far beyond the initial period of deficit reduction. Economically, the speed and scale of the cuts could lead to a double-dip recession, creating more unemployment, cuts in terms and conditions and misery for (all) workers. Politically, it is apparent that cutting the public sector is part of the Government's ideological goal of reducing the role of the State in public service delivery, with David Cameron announcing his intention not to restore public sector funding once the budget deficit is under control.

The scale of this assault on the public sector raises critical questions about trade union strategies in resisting the cuts to defend members' terms and conditions and to protect public services. At one level there is a need for a co-ordinated political response from trade unions, particularly those representing public sector workers. Even before the general election, the eight unions (BFAWU, FBU, NAPO, NUJ, PCS, POA, RMT and URTU) that make up the Trade Union Coordinating Group met to plan a united response to the cuts in March 2010. However, the strength of such a group must be called into question while Unison, Unite and the GMB remain outside the grouping, even though these unions have combined with the ATL, the Education Institute of Scotland and the UCU to fight cuts across the education sector. Such activity at a national and European level (e.g. the ETUC's *European Day of Action* on 29 September) is central to the mobilisation of public sector workers and the public against the cuts, there is also a need to consider carefully what forms of resistance can be taken within the bargaining spheres of public sector unions.

We seek to analyse the responses of PCS and UCU within the bargaining arena to the latest attempts to modernise public services. While both unions' members face job cuts, pay freezes, pension reforms, work intensification and increasing casualisation, we analyse the scope for unified

responses to cuts in the face of fragmented and/or localised bargaining arrangements and a worsening economic and political climate.

The civil service

In the ten years between 1994 and 2004, restructuring led to extensive fragmentation of collective bargaining, moving from one bargaining unit to 229. The long-standing determination to cut jobs and attack the terms and conditions of those remaining has led to a number of high profile disputes across the civil service.

Industrial action has been mainly on a departmental basis, for example, the dispute over the removal of safety screens in Job Centres (2001/2), followed by industrial action in November 2004 after job cuts. Pay disputes occurred in the DWP throughout 2004/5, and in the MoD in March 2007. While pay has been an area where co-ordination of claims and action are extremely problematic due to the fragmentation, the PCS has also faced civil service wide attacks on pensions and the Civil Service Compensation Scheme (CSCS). In 2005, the union successfully defended government attacks on the pension scheme following the threat of co-ordinated action in conjunction with Unison, Amicus, TGWU, UCATT and FBU, though concessions were made on entitlements as part of the settlement.

More recently, the PCS was also successful, in defending proposals to reduce CSCS entitlements proposed by New Labour in July 2009. Despite the Government reaching an agreement with the five other civil service unions, the PCS responded with a two-day service-wide strike in early March 2010, followed by a further day of action to coincide with the Budget on 24 March. It was the union's success in gaining judicial review which stopped the proposed changes to the scheme. This proved to be a temporary reprieve. The coalition Government's Superannuation Bill (announced in July) aims at further reductions in CSCS entitlements. The proposed legislation will cap compensation payments for redundancies, and will amend the 1972 Superannuation Act, which states that such changes can only be implemented with union

approval. The PCS is calling for a day of action on 20 October, the day the Comprehensive Spending Review for 2011/5 is announced, and the prospect of further national industrial action remains.

The PCS has been willing to confront the government as the employer in the public sector and the left leadership has maintained strong support from members. Indeed, until the cuts began in 2004, the PCS was the fastest growing union in the country. However, while the action taken in 2005 is an example of how national action can be successful and can be delivered as part of a co-ordinated strategy with other unions, there is also a need to recognise the difficulties of maintaining such action in a worsening economic and political climate. While the campaigning of the union has been excellent at a national level, care must be adopted in response to the proposed cuts in the absence of a co-ordinated union position and with the prospect of protracted industrial action in a climate of job insecurity. The fragmentation of bargaining also raises additional problems in co-ordinating resistance to the proposed public sector wage freeze.

Higher and further education

In 2010 both higher and further education are situated within a landscape of cuts, and faced with the continuation of New Public Management practices such as the Research Excellence Framework, workload allocation models and Quality Assurance Audits has led to the increasing commodification of academic work. Indeed, both universities and colleges are increasingly operating as businesses, which have led to a growth in the tensions between the market pressures and professional autonomy.

Nevertheless, the AUT and NATFHE (merging to become the UCU in 2006) used national bargaining to win significant pay increases and were also able to resist periodic attempts to break national pay and grading frameworks. Indeed, since the merger, the UCU has sought to develop a more coherent strategy to defend education, working in tandem with other public sector unions.

Whilst the national bargaining framework remains, there have been a plethora of localised disputes over jobs, compulsory redundancies and course closures at a number of universities (e.g. Keele, Leeds, London Metropolitan, Westminster), and colleges (e.g. Manchester), and the temporary derecognition of the union at Nottingham Trent University. Although these disputes received a great deal of support from the union and the wider labour movement, they reflect the ways in which managers are seeking to reduce labour costs, increase casualisation, and determine which subjects are taught. They also highlight the difficulties for the UCU in addressing a growing number of problems on an institution by institution basis.

Recent negotiations on pay have resulted in meagre pay offers, therefore, UCU members are facing years of cuts in real pay. Furthermore, attempts by the UCU to negotiate a national framework to address redundancy and job security in higher education have been blocked by the employers. Proposed changes by the employers to the Universities Superannuation Scheme (USS) in higher education are now being pushed through. Amongst the changes, which include increased employee contributions, the main fear is that a two-tier pension scheme will emerge, with the final-salary pension being replaced by a career-average scheme for new entrants. In addition to the proposed changes to the USS, the Teachers Pension Fund, the other main pension fund for UCU members, is also under attack, pending the recommendations of the Public Sector Pensions Commission report later this year.

Conclusions

By looking at the PCS and UCU we can identify common areas where the cuts will bite. Both unions are currently seeking to resist changes to national terms and conditions, but it is difficult to ascertain the likely success of these campaigns. However, the change in government reflects a hardening of both political and economic attitudes towards trade unions. Crucially given the defensive position of both unions in the face of job losses at a local level, union leaders will need to adopt careful industrial strategies. The problems which fragmented bargaining in the civil service and localised restructuring and redundancy threats in both higher and further education create, the increased need for inter- and intra-union solidarity are clear.



The return of the privateers (aka pirates) Len McCluskey

Although the rationale offered by the ConDem government for its privatisation and cuts package seems almost non-ideological – they are necessary to tackle the budget deficit and as every citizen with common sense knows running a debt is a bad thing – this policy is on a continuum that started with Denis Healy’s surrender to the IMF in the late 1970s.

In a way today’s Tories are in a better position than Thatcher in the early 1980s, Cameron does not seem burdened with a Keith Joseph and the ideological baggage of the supply siders learnt bending the knee in Chicago to Professor Milton Friedman. Today the appeal is simple – we must reduce the deficit.

Yet the outcome of ConDem policy will be the same as Thatcherism – a massive shift of wealth from the people, represented by public holdings held by the government (the public sector), to private capital.

To put the ConDem policy in context, this shift from public to private has not come about by accident; it has been designed and worked for. In fact, private capital has been working on its come back ever since the victory of social democracy in Europe at the end of the Second World War.

These ideas were made popular in right wing circles by Thatcher’s favourite guru, Professor Fredrick Hayek, from the mid-1940s. To get a flavour of his thinking, his best seller at this time – *The Road to Serfdom* – portrayed trade unions not as membership led organisations but merely as monopoly suppliers of labour.

In 1947 Hayek founded Mount Pelerin Society – a secretive political project aimed at restoring to the elite the wealth and power that the New Deal and social democracy had and would take from them – Hayek said that it would take a generation to do so!

In this article I want to concentrate on the privatisation side of the coalition’s cuts and privatisation package because it seems to me that privatisation is a more permanent shift of wealth away from working people, cuts may be reversed by an incoming Labour Government but Labour’s track record from 1997 to 2010 shows a marked reluctance to take back anything sold off to the private sector.

Then ...

What the ConDem privatisations will do is consolidate the process begun by Thatcher when the great state corporations were privatised in the 1980s:

- the utilities – water, gas, electricity
- primary manufacturing – shipbuilding and aerospace
- the transport infrastructure – buses and railways
- mineral extraction and processing – British Petroleum, North Sea oil, National Coal Board, British Steel
- civil air transport – British Airways, British Airports Authority, air traffic control
- telecommunications – British Telecom and Cable & Wireless

coupled with the ‘the right to buy’ which represented the atomised privatisation of local authority housing stock.

There remains, despite years of perpetual tendering, outsourcing and moves to agency status, a mass of publicly owned and provided services, either by central government or local government, and in health, communications and broadcasting, which are seen to be ripe for transfer to the private sector. A process that the ConDems want to bring to fruition.

... and now

Health Secretary Andrew Lansley’s White Paper seems to indicate that the NHS will be among the first to be given to the privateers. It seems that NHS will be little more than a brand name and logo, providing cover for any number of private health care companies to fleece the public purse.

Many Trust and community health services may be turned into “social enterprises”, a process unfortunately dreamed up under the last government. Social enterprises, although defined as a company established to meet a social or environmental need will not be the NHS, they will be private providers and staff, our members, who are

transferred to social enterprises will lose NHS pay scales, pensions and other terms and conditions.

The government plans to abolish limits on Foundation Trusts working as a business maximising income from pay beds and private medicine with Trusts eventually going off "balance sheet", in other words leaving the NHS to become external providers. Again there would be inevitable downward pressure on staff terms and conditions as they ceased to be NHS employees.

Finally, there is the proposal that has caught most public attention, the transfer of the £70 billion commissioning budget from PCTs to local GPs or consortia of GPs. Although, as under the Tories' previous GP fundholding scheme, there may be a few entrepreneurial family doctors who really want to be moguls rather than healers, the reality is that maybe north American health care corporations will move in to manage the £70 million on behalf of the GPs, thus firmly establishing a "Kentucky Fried Health Service" in the UK.

Also among this first rank of privatisation is local authority education and the headlong rush towards academies. The indecent haste in which the Academies Bill was pushed through, in the last week before the Parliamentary summer break, means that the ten per cent of schools that have "expressed an interest" in becoming academies may make the change over the school holidays. Teachers and students may come back in the new academic year to what is to all intents and purposes a school in the private sector when they had left one that was in the public sector.

Many Conservative parents will be keen no doubt to restore the golden age of grammar schools with the ruling that any school OFSTED graded as "outstanding" will pre-qualify for academy status but that fact remains that this is a scheme to privatise the best and leave the remainder as the educational equivalent of so-called "sink estates", places where no one wants to go unless they have to. As a result of the selection process likely to be operated by academies it is our kids who may have to go to those schools deemed to be in the second rank.

Once a school is in private hands that's it, there is no provision in the legislation for reversion to local authority control.

Health and education are just two services in the immediate front line. The Government has shown every intention of legislating very quickly in favour of the privateers. The remaining heartlands of public service – the prisons, the BBC, local government, the Civil Service and the Post Office – must all be in the process of being sized up by private capital and the precise shopping list handed over to their pals in 10 and 11 Downing Street.

A trade union response

At the level of our activists it is clear that there is recognition of what has been going on and is about to happen. At Unite's inaugural Policy Conference in June, motions were passed calling for the renationalisation of rail, gas, electricity, water and steel and the union was called upon to "stand firm against and resist any attempts at ... privatisation of public services" and further "to oppose privatisation, the contracting out of public services to the private sector, the use of PFI to fund such services, social enterprise and the 'marketisation' and fragmentation in the public sector."

We know that the anti-union laws prevent lawful industrial action against a future (privatised) employer but this must not deter us. Our collective legal wisdom must be brought to bear to support members and workers who take action to keep their service public.

Most importantly, trade unionists and the general public must be mobilised to rally in support of public owned public services. The Anti Academies Alliance is a good example of this joint mobilisation resulting in an excellent event in Parliament in July.

Unions such as Unite that organise across both the private and public sector are in a strong position to start to build the necessary coalition. There can be no doubt that the privatisation and cuts package is not just a public sector issue, it is a whole union and therefore a whole community issue.

Most importantly, we must have an alternative to cuts and privatisation. The People's Charter may be good place to start which, for example, calls for the Government to regain control of the Bank of England; a ban on hedge funds; and, action on corporate tax loopholes that cost us £40 billion a year. A currency transaction tax, the Tobin Tax, would be an attempt to tackle the City speculators who brought the whole system crashing down.

We have two immediate tasks, to mobilise our members and to mobilise the public; perhaps under the slogan – Cuts Kill Communities.



Defend Comprehensive school education against the 'privatisation' of the sector

Christine Blower

The Academies Act and the forthcoming Education and Children's Bill are an attack on the very existence of democratically accountable, free state comprehensive education and the national pay and conditions service arrangements for teachers.

It is privatisation on a grand scale and it is unacceptable that such significant legislation was rushed through Parliament and not given the time to be properly scrutinized. The Academies Act could see hundreds of schools breaking away from the collective and equitable arrangements for education planning and provision provided through local authorities.

The legacy of Labour

When Labour opened the first Academies in 2002, its stated aim was to raise standards in schools in challenging circumstances. The NUT disagreed strongly with this structural approach to standards. We believe that the root causes of disadvantage have to be addressed – poverty, inequality and low aspirations. Schools play their part by focusing on teaching and learning and working within their communities to enhance pupils' self esteem, raise their aspirations and develop their social capital.

The previous Government commissioned a five Year study by consultants PriceWaterhouseCoopers on the impact of the Academies Programme on standards which concluded: "There is insufficient evidence to make a definitive judgment about Academies as a model for school improvement".

While some Academies have done well others have floundered, a picture that mirrors the experience in community schools. There is concern however that some Academies that have improved their GCSE results have done so by changing their intake rather than doing better with the same pupils. Additionally some have narrowed the curriculum, promoting subjects and qualifications where exam success is more likely and failing to offer some GCSE subjects, such as History or a modern foreign language.

The Con-Dems future

However, our disagreements with Labour's approach pale alongside our opposition to the Tories' Academies plans.

The new Act gives all schools the option of becoming an Academy, including primary and special schools. Schools with 'outstanding' Ofsted judgments are able to become Academies from September. Schools that have been in special measures for over a year could be forced to become Academies from September 2011.

So Academy status is both a reward for outstanding schools and a punishment for schools not "making the grade". In practice it is a tool to fragment education, making it harder to plan and deliver resources to schools and communities fairly. It brings about direct Government control of schools, by-passing local authorities. Academy funding is removed from the local authority's budget so it has less to spend on other schools. Removing outstanding schools from the local authority family will have a detrimental effect on all schools.

Academies control their own admissions, curriculum and exclusions; the school's land and buildings, which have been paid for by the taxpayer, are handed over to the sponsor or Governors. Their Academy Governors are appointed not elected and there is provision for just one parent representative compared with a third of parent governors in a community school.

After extensive lobbying by the NUT and others, the Government has been forced to make significant concessions. One of which is the requirement for consultation, albeit limited. This concession makes the Government's rush to push the Bill through Parliament look even more questionable as schools that are seeking to convert may well have to start over again or leave themselves open to legal challenge from parents and staff who have not been consulted on such a significant change to their school.

Not so free "Free Schools"

Coupled with the Academies Act the Education and Children's Bill, due to be published in the autumn, will enable new providers to run state schools – so called parent or teacher led Free Schools.

We know that in practice most of these schools will be run by private companies, just as 75% of Swedish Free schools are. Free School Providers from Sweden are already jockeying for position to run these schools in return for a management fee from which they will extract their profit. Journalist Toby Young has admitted he is in talks with a number of these companies to run his school in west London.

Education Secretary Michael Gove has said that he has "no ideological objection" to these companies making a profit. Well the NUT does object.

Education funding should be enriching the education of young people, not the shareholders of private companies.

Unlike their state counterparts, Swedish Free Schools are not required to have libraries, gyms or lunch halls. Many use disused offices, banks or factories. The pupil teacher ratio is significantly lower and they employ higher numbers of unqualified teachers. In the 20 years since the introduction of Free Schools in Sweden, the proportion of teachers with a teaching degree has dropped 9%.

Premises and qualified teachers are less important because the children spend a large amount of time sitting at computers working on 'individualized learning programmes'. It's the educational equivalent of the Swedish flat pack, a do-it-yourself version of education, in which children with special needs and those from less well off families have been shown to be disproportionately disadvantaged.

And what is the evidence on standards? Sweden has experienced a 20 year decline in standards of educational attainment that coincides exactly with the introduction of Free Schools.

Faced with such devastating evidence, the Government is increasingly citing the US Charter School system as its model for English Free Schools, yet the evidence from the States is no better.

Researchers from the Center for Education Outcomes (CREDO) at Stanford University recently carried out the first national assessment of US Charter School impacts. This found that results in 83 per cent of charter schools are no better than or "significantly worse" than their equivalent local public schools.

Pupils before profits

The Government is intent on breaking up state comprehensive education and privatizing large chunks of it. That is what these pieces of legislation are really about.

What David Cameron describes as a "state monopoly" of our schools is in fact local democratic involvement in education. He fails to understand that the framework of local authorities enables schools to work together in an educational community which places the achievements of pupils, not profit, first.

The combination of privatisation and the cuts to come will leave schools with larger classes and teachers with deep concerns about how they can provide a high quality of educational experience to all the children they teach.

We must work across the trade union movement and with parents and Governors to make sure that all children have access to a good local school for every child. Education cuts never heal and will leave many children without access to the education which can help to bring greater social justice to our society.

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Keep the post public and safeguard all gains of the labour movement

Billy Hayes

The severity of the economic policy and budget of the Coalition Government seems to have taken many in the Labour and progressive movement by surprise. Despite Cameron's rebranding of the Tory Party, essentially the Coalition Government is pursuing an orthodox, neo-conservative policy. Forgotten is the reckless gambling of the banks and financial market. Instead the Cabinet of millionaires informs the rest of society that they are all in it together as job cuts, benefit cuts and the break up of the Welfare State begins. Far from being a 'new age of austerity', we are in a new age of cant and hypocrisy.

This would be easier to deal with had the Labour Government been more consistent before its election defeat. But it had given so much ground to business interests that the Tories are now claiming, in many areas, only to be better carrying through Labour's policy. This claim is a caricature too, but there is a big enough grain of truth to render many activists momentarily silent.

An alternative economic strategy

To prepare a counter political narrative to the Coalition Government, we must draw out the decisive features of the political economy. It is not enough to oppose the cuts; we must also outline a coherent economic policy.

The starting point is that the recession is above all a collapse of private investment. It is not a result of excessive State spending, or the feather-bedding of public sector workers.

In the OECD area as a whole, between the first quarter 2008 and the final quarter of 2009, OECD GDP fell by 1.04 trillion dollars. While personal consumption declined by 0.25 trillion dollars, this was almost entirely compensated for by government stimulus packages, as government consumption rose by 0.23 trillion dollars.

The bulk of the loss was a massive 0.99 trillion dollars decline in fixed investment. This is a huge failure of private markets.

In the UK, for example, from the first quarter of 2008 to the first quarter of 2010, GDP fell by 18.6 billion pounds.

Consumer spending did fall in the UK much more than in any of the other advanced economies. But, over 10.5 billion pounds of this fall was due to the decline of fixed investments – amounting to 56% of the fall in the UK's GDP.

It is the private markets that failed society – not the other way round. The deficit of public spending then is the product of this fall. There has been a collapse in the tax revenues to the Government, an increase in Government spending due to the stimulus packages and increased unemployment. As a result of these two processes moving in opposite directions, the deficit in public spending rises.

But it is just pre-Keynes economics to insist that the deficit must be cut during the recession and early recovery.

If the Government were to continue investing in the economy, then tax revenues would expand, along with GDP leading to a rapid narrowing of the deficit. The Coalition Government rejection of such a policy, and insistence upon cuts, may well lead to another round of recession.

Certainly the most recent economic figures demonstrate that Government investment works when the markets fail.

Thanks to the Government's stimulus under Gordon Brown, the British economy expanded at its fastest rate since the recession ended, up by 1.1% in quarter two 2010, according to preliminary data. This bounce is a result of the depreciation of the pound, and the 2009 budget.

But the Coalition Government's cuts will threaten to reverse this growth.

This may be apparent to many Labour movement activists. But it is not generally understood in society at large. The relentless assault from the pro-Tory media has taken its toll. A recent ComRes poll on July 20th, found that 64% of those questioned agreed that "the scale of cuts is essential for the Government to balance its books". There is, of course, huge public unease – the same poll shows 56% agreeing that "the scale of the cuts is likely to threaten the economic recovery".

But this demonstrates that our tactics have to both include practical steps against the cuts, but also demonstrate a policy which provides a feasible alternative for the movement to organise around.

Some do not see this latter point at all. David Miliband, in an article in the Financial Times on the 23 July, simply defends the policy pursued by Alistair Darling to "... halve the budget deficit and remove the bulk of the structural deficit in four years". This confines the difference with the Tories to matters of pace, not principle.

Ed Balls is much closer to the solution when he writes in the Guardian on the 19 July, "... there is no precedent to believe that with strong growth in our main trading partners and companies de-leveraging, public sector retrenchment will stimulate private sector growth. The 1930s and 1980s proved the opposite".

He went on to write that "... the idea that the UK faces a financial crisis if we do not cut the deficit faster is a fiction. Outside the Euro zone and with low long term interest rates, Britain faces no difficulty in servicing its debts. The main worry in financial markets is not in bonds but equities as fears of a double dip recession grow".

Vulnerable pay the price for cuts

It is important that we recognise the Coalition Government is playing on current prejudices when making extra attacks upon the position of women, disabled and black people. Yvette Cooper has highlighted that more than 70% of the revenue raised from direct tax and benefit changes in the budget is to come from female tax payers.

In addition, disabled people are seriously disadvantaged by the budget. Cuts in the Disability Living Allowance alone will result in £1 billion being taken from disabled people. This is also likely to result in reductions in associated benefits like the Independent Living Fund and Attendance Allowance.

Black people are likely to suffer disproportionately from the cuts in public sector employment and housing benefits. The distinct disadvantage that Britain's black community suffer already is likely to be worsened by the impact of the cuts. There will inevitably be a rise in racism and Islamophobia as many communities experience fights over the allocation of scarce resources.

CWU response

Many union activists will want to simply concentrate on dealing with the effects of the Coalition Government policies and there is much to commend in this. For our part, the CWU has launched a new campaign, the "Keep the Post Public Coalition" in order to defeat the Coalition Government's proposal to privatise Royal Mail.

Our members expect the union's leadership to concentrate on this, and secure the widest support from the public. This we will do. But even with this limited perspective, we have to develop a new policy model for how Royal Mail may prosper in the public sector in the future.

So an opposition which confines itself to a simple rejection of Coalition policies is insufficient. Of course, the cuts will lead to many local and individual campaigns opposing particular measures. This is good, and the Labour movement would be fully committed to supporting such actions.

Yet there are very few activists who are capable of showing how the Coalition's fundamental assumptions are wrong, or how the economic crisis can be resolved differently. There is then a distinct job to be done of debating out our alternative economic strategy and educating a new generation of activists in how to fight for this.

In this light, I greatly welcome the initiatives undertaken by Jon Trickett MP to pull together a new Coalition of politicians, trade unionists, economists, NGOs and others to develop progressive economic alternatives to the Coalition's cuts. We have a big agenda in front of us, but I believe the Labour movement is capable of rising to the challenges it faces.



There is an alternative to ideological cuts Dave Prentis

Ever since the general election, the mood music from the coalition government has been designed to lead the public to one conclusion: Every speech, every announcement, every media interview has one aim. And that is to create a narrative that public sector spending cuts and, therefore, job cuts are necessary and inevitable.

They talk of Labour's legacy and say the country can no longer afford "the luxury"; the private sector has been cut, now it's the turn of the public services; they talk about waste and say the public sector is bloated; they cite bureaucrats and pen-pushers and drip-feed stories about so-called "non-jobs".

They use emotive, and reasonable sounding terms, such as "we are all in this together" and "we can't go on like this". And always they talk of the public sector "debt" with the implication that it was caused by the public sector.

They are hoping to build it up to a fever-pitch where the public are calling for job cuts. Or, at the least, the public complacently accepts that public spending cuts are not going to affect them.

And they want to drive a wedge between the public and private sector. There are no such things as private sector households and public sector houses – most are a mix. But to put it into perspective – local government workers already have a pay freeze this year and face another 2 years of no pay increases – despite rising costs. Nurses and other health staff have also been told they face a 2- year pay freeze.

Don't blame the dinner ladies

To hear the Government and media speak, you would think the economic crisis was caused by the nation's dinner ladies and bin men speculating the nation's money on the stock market. And not the fault of the greedy bankers or the city whizz kids for whom bonuses are making a come-back big-time.

The UK spends a smaller share of its national income on public services and social security than most other rich countries. Up until 2008, public borrowing was under control, at less than 40% of GDP. Private sector debt was

out of control at almost 300% of GDP. That huge debt was transferred to the public sector, with the bail-out, to stop the economy plunging into deep depression.

So the government spin is necessary because the electorate sent a clear message to politicians in the election. While they were not going to give Labour a fourth term, they weren't buying into the Tory agenda either and refused to give Cameron the clear mandate that he wanted. The Lib Dems have gone along with the cuts agenda, that they opposed during the election, for a crack at power and the promise of a vote on an alternative voting system.

I don't believe that the public are that gullible, but being bombarded daily by such propaganda, aided and abetted by the right-wing media, it's very difficult for the alternative narrative to gain a hearing.

Draconian cuts and ideological agendas

The cuts being spoken of are as draconian as any I have lived through. This is not about getting the economy back on track, this is about an ideological agenda that says the public sector should be shrunk to an enabler, a commissioner, an emergency centre. Volunteers buying into the Big Society will do the rest.

Deliberately setting out to throw people out of work is harsh, cruel and inhuman. And that is what this coalition government is doing. Predictions of up to 750,000 public sector job losses could come true, if they succeed. What sort of Government would want to deliver that fate on any one of its citizens?

It is also closing down job chances for a generation of young people. Who could not fail to be shocked by the huge percentage of young people out of work? 28% of young white people out of work, rising to a devastating 48% of young black people. While, Connexions – the organisation that helps them find work – faces deep cuts.

And, what of the people – usually the most vulnerable, the sick, the elderly, the young, the disabled – who rely most on our public services? Does our government not care what happens to them?

The public relies on its public services and its public servants. They keep the streets clean and safe, they look after us when we are sick, they teach us and they protect us from harm. That is at risk.

Worthless pledges and platitudes about protecting “front-line” services are trotted out ad infinitum. If you cut 25% to 40%, the front-line collapses.

When non-frontline hospital cleaners were cut under the Tories, we saw a massive rise in MRSA and C difficile which has cost hundreds of thousands of lives as well as costing the NHS millions.

If human misery doesn't move the coalition government, perhaps they should take a microscope to the effects of their cuts programme.

If we lose 725,000 public sector jobs, it would cost the UK economy £6.6 billion in lost tax revenue and would add an extra £8.8 billion to the state benefits bill – hitting any chance of economic recovery and making the deficit worse.

And the private sector, on which the Government pins so much hope for creating jobs, would take a further battering, leading to a double-dip recession.

Already construction and related companies are losing out from the government's plans to scrap the Building Schools for the Future programme. Work on the majority of the 1500 schools in the final wave of BSF will not now go ahead. That is a lot of work lost, a lot of work opportunities closed and a lot of children left working in outdated buildings.

Local businesses rely on councils and public sector workers to keep spending in local shops, hairdressers, bars and other businesses. Every £1 spent by local councils can generate up to £1.64 in the local economy.

The exchequer recoups 92% of the cost of employing a public sector worker though increased tax revenues and reduced benefits payments – so putting people out of work does not make sound economic sense.

There are better ways of making savings than cutting jobs and hitting services. As well as saving lives – £1bn could be saved every year by eradicating superbugs in hospitals – the extra cleaners needed would cost half this amount.

Fighting for a popular alternative strategy

There is an alternative. An alternative that the public will support; an alternative that will start to deliver fairness and help our economy recover. We will make sure that we fight these cuts all the way. We will work with other trade unions, taking joint strike action if necessary, and work with community organisations and groups to show that alternative.

Our alternative could include the following measures:

£4.7bn could be raised every year by introducing a 50% tax rate on incomes over £100,000;

£10bn could be raised every year by reforming tax havens and residence rules to reduce tax avoidance by corporations and ‘non-domiciled’ residents;

£14.9bn could be raised every year by using minimum tax rates to stop reliefs being used disproportionately to subsidise incomes over £100,000;

£30bn could be raised every year by introducing a Major Financial Transactions Tax on UK financial institutions – the Robin Hood Tax;

At least £1.5bn could be raised this year by bringing back the windfall tax on bankers' bonuses;

£4bn could be saved this year by cancelling Trident, the project could cost as much as £100bn;

£500m could be saved every year by eradicating healthcare acquired infections from the NHS – the extra cleaners would cost half this;

£495m could be saved every year by adopting measures to improve the health and well-being of NHS staff, thereby reducing sickness absence;

£1bn could be saved every year by halving the local government agency bill, as has been achieved by high performing councils;

£5bn could be raised every year with an Empty Property Tax on vacant dwellings. This only exaggerates housing shortages and harms neighbourhoods;

£2.8bn could be saved every year by ending the central government use of private consultants who bring little discernable benefit;

£3bn could be saved in user fees and interest charges every year if PFI schemes were replaced with conventional public procurement.



Organise on every front to defeat the cuts – and challenge the anti-worker laws

Bob Crow

Fighting unfair cuts

THE ConDems' government of millionaires has launched an all-out war on working people – of that there can be no doubt. The wholesale attack on welfare, public services, transport, pensions, jobs and our communities signalled by the most vicious budget for decades threatens to eclipse the ravages of the Thatcher era. The ConDems have decided, simply and brutally, that workers, pensioners, children and students will pay for the financial crisis created not by them, but by the unregulated greed of bankers and parasitic speculators.

The government – and, in truth, almost the whole Westminster circus – says there is no alternative to deep public-spending cuts, yet dismisses out of hand the very real alternatives proposed by the labour movement. The government is using the deficit as a thinly-veiled excuse to engage in an ideological and systematic dismantling of the welfare gains that working people have won since the second world war, targeting the most vulnerable in our society.

The attack also has a global dimension, with the European Union, the International Monetary Fund and other neo-liberal institutions driving cuts and 'liberalisation' of markets. Yet there is resistance: in Greece, Ireland, Portugal, Spain and elsewhere, working people, community organisations and political progressives have joined forces to resist, with strike action and mass demonstrations.

And it is that level of resistance that needs to be fostered here in Britain. That is why RMT has called for a summit of unions to discuss how best to co-ordinate industrial action to defend jobs, pensions and conditions, and for a broader conference uniting unions with community, service users', tenants' and pensioners' groups, to establish a broad alliance against the cuts.

That is why I have added my signature to the initiative taken by Tony Benn and other labour movement figures to convene an organising conference for a coalition of resistance, to be held at London's Camden Centre on November 27.

Its aim is to organise opposition to cuts and privatisation, fight rising unemployment and build support for alternative ways to promote economic recovery based on investment in people and services.

Just as we have seen people take to the streets elsewhere we also need, as a start, an urgent national demonstration, aiming for mobilisation on the scale of the great anti-war and anti-poll-tax demonstrations.

And given the acceptance of the cuts agenda by the entire capitalist and state-run media, we need to use every channel available to us to present clear alternatives to the cuts, including public ownership, higher rates of tax for the rich, closing corporate tax loopholes and scrapping the Trident replacement.

Resisting unjust laws

The trade-union movement has the key role to play in what will be a crucial battle to defend the fabric of our society – it is the last line of defence for working people targeted to pay for the economic crisis created by bankers and speculators.

But just as Thatcher set out three decades ago to disarm the trade-union movement in order to impose her swingeing cuts, so today's ConDems are muttering about even more anti-union curbs, egged on by their trough-mates at the CBI.

There is no doubt that Britain's anti-union laws are highly effective. They were designed to make it as difficult as possible for working people to take industrial action to defend their interests – and as the judges in successive cases have added their own interpretations, the noose has been made ever tighter.

Employers now routinely go to the courts, knowing that they can use minor technicalities to overturn democratic votes for industrial action. RMT has seen the inside of more courtrooms than anyone could wish to.

A couple of years ago the freight company then known as EWS created a new company (imaginatively called EWSI) and quietly transferred RMT members into it – and then

sought to overturn a ballot because we hadn't balloted employees of the right company. More recently Network Rail used technicalities on the matrix of members supplied during our recent ballot of signallers – technicalities that would have made no difference to the outcome.

'Matrix discrepancies' are the most common challenge under the anti-union laws, but the NR challenge also saw the dangerous development of the use of arguments about the proportionality of proposed action. That opened up a disturbing new avenue of challenges based on subjective views about what is proportionate in a dispute and what is not, rather than the simpler, though still restrictive, test of whether a genuine trade dispute exists.

Legal challenges at the European Court of Human Rights

Trade unionists have long argued that Britain's anti-union laws are a denial of our human rights, and RMT is challenging them in the European Court of Human Rights. The union will argue that its ability to organise industrial action is restricted by UK law, in breach of Article 11 of the European Convention on Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms.

Specifically, we are challenging the legality of the statutory requirement for the union to give employers notice which must fulfil onerous conditions such as providing specific job descriptions of the intended voters, as well as the ban on organising solidarity industrial action – even where the secondary employer is closely associated with the primary employer in dispute.

RMT's case centres on two disputes in which RMT members were balloted for industrial action last autumn. EDF Energy Powerlink was granted an injunction by the High Court restraining RMT members from taking industrial action on the grounds that the notice of ballot had not sufficiently particularised the job descriptions of the members who were to be balloted.

In the second dispute, around 20 RMT members who had been transferred from Jarvis PLC to Hydrex Equipment (UK) took industrial action against attempts to impose new terms and conditions, but those still working for Jarvis were not able to take solidarity action because of the absolute ban on 'secondary action'. RMT will be represented in the court by our standing counsel, John Hendy QC, and Marcus Pilgerstorfer, instructed by Thompsons Solicitors.

Of course no court case is any substitute for workers organising to defend their interests, but we are in no doubt the fundamental human right to withdraw labour has been systematically undermined, and the outcome of this case will have implications for the entire movement.

Political challenges at Westminster

At the same time, it is imperative that the trade union movement swings behind moves being made by John McDonnell MP inside our own parliament to stop employers using minor technical errors to stop industrial action that union members have voted for.

The Lawful Industrial Action (Minor Errors) Private Members Bill, (co-signed by Kate Hoey, Tony Lloyd, Dave Anderson, Michael Connarty, Austin Mitchell, Frank Doran, Kelvin Hopkins, Jim Sheridan, David Crausby, Ian Lavery and John Cryer) is timetabled for its second reading on October 22, and we need to ensure that as many MPs as possible remain in the House so the Bill gets its second reading.

To that end there is a lobby of parliament on October 13, which will begin at 12:30 at the House of Commons. As John McDonnell says: "The courts are being dragged into disputes and used as weapons in the hands of bullying employers. This cannot be right and in the interests of good industrial relations needs to be addressed."

If adopted, John's Bill would significantly improve unions' ability to defend their members and would be the first step towards the full restoration of trade union rights. And at a time when working people and their gains are under attack as never before, it is an effort that needs the broadest possible support.



Global crisis and a global union response

John Stirling

To weather the recession, now is the time for unions to do what the government refuses to do and that is invest. Invest in the rapidly emerging trade union strategies that focus on building new alliances, organising and representing the vulnerable and taking action that supports workers and our unions beyond our national boundaries. Invest, too, in the education and training that other organisations always ditch first when cutting costs and invest in the enormous human resources that unions have through their networks of workplace representatives and activists.

We have been aware of globalisation at least since the Thatcher era when whole industries were destroyed, so we should not be too surprised that when the recession arrived it was delivered by a world-wide casino economy and that it has impacted across the world. While our first reactions might be to defend workers in the UK this can only ever be part of a strategic response. The environmentalist's slogan to 'think globally and act locally' is halfway there but we also need to 'act globally' too if the trade union response to recession is to have any impact. There are a number of reasons for this and an equally diverse set of ways to facilitate action. The first reason is a simple one – trade union membership is growing across the globe and we in the Northern economies have much to learn from the strategies developed elsewhere. We tend to forget that global union membership of the ICTU is now 176m – an expansion of a further 21m since the demise of the ICFTU and that independent trade union organisation is the first direction in which workers turn when their livelihoods are under attack. Witness the surge in membership and the recent wave of strike activity in China as workers seek to share the benefits of the country's economic expansion.

The second reason is that trade unionists and workers in the majority world continue to live on poverty wages where they are paid at all and are the first hit by rising food prices and land grabs by countries seeking food security by depriving others of the means to live. Acts of solidarity in these circumstances support those trade unionists least able to resist the global recession but they also reinforce the strength of all workers by constraining multinational capital from shifting its investment around a deregulated global market place.

The third reason for acting globally is 'because we can'. It used to be the prerogative of capital to move and the problem of labour that it had to stay put. This was never the whole story as we witness migration across borders as workers follow work or move to escape oppression. Now that movement and action can be virtual and solidarity generated through the easy access of the internet. Workers and unions are rapidly responding to global social networking, on line campaigns and the simple expedient of e mailing each other. Even in severely disadvantaged countries on line access can be available and the mobile phone is becoming the ubiquitous message carrier in the developing world. It is no longer sloganising to call for 'international solidarity' but a necessity that can be developed at all levels within the trade union movement.

Organising across borders is a necessary strategy but it is the local where the recession impacts on the jobs of individuals, the lives of their families and the future of all our communities. It is here that we see trade unions engaging in new strategies and exploring new ideas. Vulnerable workers fall outside the protection of legislation, collective bargaining and union representation while those in 'secure' employment find their ability to take action ensnared in a tangle of legislation ending us up in court rooms rather than at the negotiating table. Two things emerge from this in relation to the workplace. Firstly, the continuation and strengthening of the organising strategies now commonly adopted in policy statements but still needing investment and training on the ground. Secondly, a review of campaigning strategies in the ways that have been undertaken in the USA and been part of life for trade unionists in the global South. If 'conventional' industrial action is going to be strangled in the courts then the 'vulnerability' of corporations can be just as important as that of workers. Companies like to talk about customers and stakeholders but they can just as easily be effective and engaged supporters of union campaigns. Cuts in schools and hospitals and job losses in firms that supply the public sector affect people well beyond those whose wages and conditions might be hit. Stakeholders and shareholders are suffering from the recession too.

Both the GFTU and the TUC have extended their

campaigning beyond the workplace and, in particular, developed projects that focus on 'vulnerable' workers. To say that we are all vulnerable now gives a glibness to a real truth as precarious employment begins to bite. In these circumstances, vulnerability is not some unfortunate personal characteristic or something facing migrant workers far from home but a deliberate employer's strategy. At its heart is to shift risk from the employer to the individual as one Hungarian trade unionist recounted on a recent course. A large multinational was trying to persuade its drivers to lease their petrol tankers and become owner drivers. You might ask why anybody would want to do that and the carrot was, of course, keeping a higher proportion of earnings. The other side of this dirty coin was a whole list of issues around holidays, sickness, insurance and a 24 hour responsibility. Effectively employers are seeking to shift the burden of risk to the individual and cut costs at the same time. The outsourcing, agency work, temporary contracts and bogus self-employment that undermine collective organising are distinct employer strategies in both the public and private sectors.

The outcomes of vulnerability are perhaps better defined by the use of the more European term of 'precariousness' which draws attention to the issue of job loss and a shift to reliance on meagre and reducing state benefits. Unions have to engage with families and communities if they are to challenge the impact of the recession. In doing so the emerging strategies of 'community unionism' become not just an add-on to workplace representation but a core trade union activity. Learning to work with other organisations that share our aims is essential and this will mean being flexible about ways of organising and innovative in the actions that trade unions are prepared to take. The links with London Citizens and living wage campaigns elsewhere in the country show what can be achieved in influencing even a Tory mayor of London and engaging thousands in active campaigning.

How can we support members and union officers in renewing their ways of working and building effective resistance to the ravages of the banker's recession? One of the first things that companies do in 'straightened times' is to cut the training budget. It is here that trade unions must do precisely the opposite. Developing training that supports innovative strategies is essential and so are different ways of delivering it. On line courses can get to a much larger audience but face-to-face allows the sharing of experience and the building of solidarity. Shop stewards, full time officials and community representatives need to be in the same room so they can understand each others problems but also share solutions. While we may all share the idea behind the easy sloganising of 'why should we pay for their crisis?', we should also recognise a real opportunity to develop a trade unionism that takes us beyond our own workplaces and into the local communities that exist on the ground and the international communities living on the internet and waiting for your E Mail.

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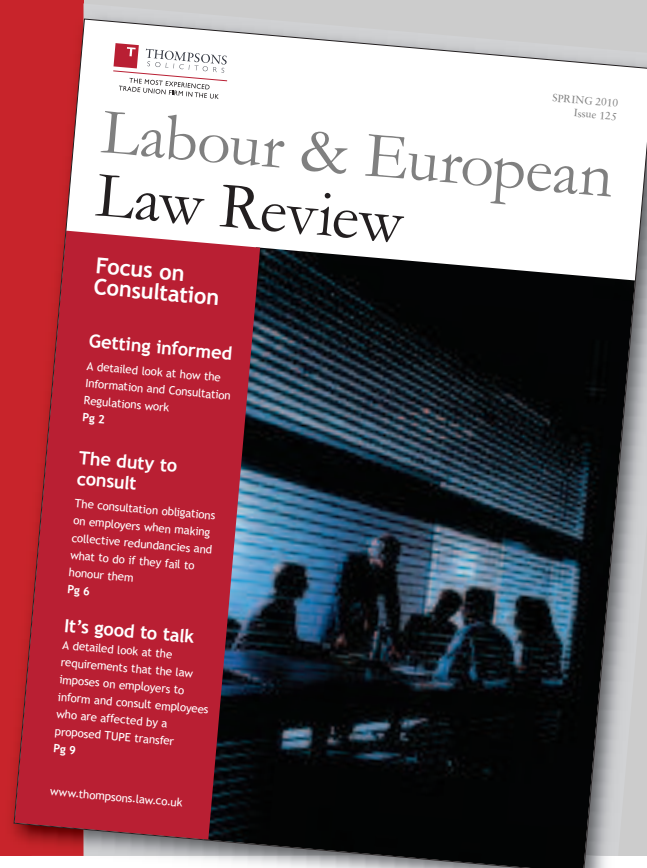
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Published by the GFTU Educational Trust
4th Floor
Headland House
308/312 Grays Inn Road
London WC1X 8DP

in association with
The Institute of Employment Rights
4th Floor
Jack Jones House
1 Islington
Liverpool L3 8EG

THE
INSTITUTE
OF
EMPLOYMENT
RIGHTS

Produced by IER
Printed by Upstream
Cover pic of a national demonstration in
support of state investment in public
services and against cuts in provision
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Price £8 to IER subscribers and members
(£30 others)

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