



Newsletter N^o1 ◊◊◊ November 2010

NOTTS SOS

Defending jobs, services, welfare & education against cuts in Nottingham and Nottinghamshire

ALL TOGETHER AGAINST AUSTERITY

THE ROAD TO SUCCESS

Notts Save Our Services is a recently formed campaign bringing together people and organisations in the City and County who will be negatively affected by all aspects of the cuts and who want to take action to stop them.

Welcome to issue 1 of our newsletter!

This affects all of us; ordinary people who need work, welfare, healthcare, education and other services, for us and for the next generations. We are angry that these things are being taken away as a supposedly 'sensible' and 'unavoidable' response to the recession.

Nationally the ConDem government has picked up with a vengeance where the Labour one left off: backing the bankers against us and making us pay for the economic crisis that capitalism has resulted in. They tell us the cuts will be deep but that the crisis is temporary and that we are all in it together. So why are they demolishing *our* services, jobs, education and benefits whilst *they* and their friends get richer and richer? The global recession, which they are responsible for, is being used as an excuse to keep us down.

Locally, the Labour-led City and Tory-led County Councils are dancing to the tune of the national parties and have already given in without a fight. In refusing to stand up to the cuts, they make it clear that it is people like us who have to take action. We must refuse to back down until they back off. Our councillors and MPs tell us it isn't realistic to stand up to the cuts. They told us the same about the Poll Tax. They told us we had to obey the law and pay. We didn't pay: we had no choice! We were right – the Poll Tax died. Let's remind them how powerful we can be!

This time will be harder though. Ordinary people have been betrayed and lied to so often by successive governments that they feel ignored and powerless. This time we have to show the rich and powerful the consequences of what they have done: their greed and contempt for us is uniting us against them, and that is something they are afraid of. Let's use our power!



School support staff lead the way

Nottingham City Council has delayed plans to move school support staff onto term-time contracts with massive pay cuts after a huge demonstration in the Market Square last month.

Around 1,000 members of the public services union, Unison, took part in the protest against the Council's proposals, which would mean that teaching assistants could lose as much as 25% of their pay and midday supervisors' pay could fall by as much as 8%.

"The original plan was for this to start on April 1st 2011 without any pay protection. But such was the uproar among staff, as well as a teachers and school governors that even before the protest the city council had backed off and delayed the implementation," said Nottingham City Unison Chair, Jean Thorpe. *"The Council has delayed implementation of these proposals but they have not actually been withdrawn. Our campaign will continue until we see off these proposals completely."*

Many of the workers have asked Unison when it will ballot for strike action.

For regular updates, visit the Notts SOS web site www.nottssos.org.uk

AN APPEAL FOR UNITED ACTION

Workers, service users, welfare and disability claimants, pensioners, students and community groups will all be affected

On 20 October, the ConDem government announced billions of pounds of cuts in its Comprehensive Spending Review. Chancellor George Osborne set out an average cut of 19% across all governmental departments, increases in public sector pension contributions and a cut of £7 billion from the welfare budget totalling £81 billion. The government estimates that nearly half a million jobs will be lost over the next four years. Here are just a few areas being threatened.

Benefits

Some of the toughest consequences of the cuts will be caused by the changes in benefits. Big headlines have already been made by the cap in housing benefit, which could force hundreds of thousands of people out their homes. But the Spending Review is a vast bundle of measures targeting those which are already forced to live at the fringes of society. The removal of the mobility component of Disability Living Allowance from those in residential care will contribute to keeping people stuck in there while 'saving' the equivalent of less than four percent of the cost of a single 'Astute' submarine (that precision instrument which got stuck off the Scottish coast). All these measures are part of yet another transformation of capitalism. This time in an age when the system is seemingly unchallenged and can therefore shed its welfare components, introduced to pacify workers during the cold war.



Supporting People

Supporting People funding provides help to enable some of the most vulnerable to continue living in their own homes rather than being institutionalised or becoming homeless. The government is cutting this funding by 11.5% over the next 4 years – so much for “all being in it together”.

And Notts County Council is intending make cuts amounting to a staggering 50 & 70% overall over the next four years. They are not cutting all these services equally. Cuts to services for people with learning disabilities or care leavers. for instance, would mean increased costs to other services. Some organisations are already fighting back. Framework Housing Association, which provides support to many of the most vulnerable, has organised a protest as the whole organisation could be closed down if we do not stop this vindictiveness.

SOUNDS FAMILIAR? NEWS FROM EUROPE

We know that the economic crisis is global. Workers, service users, people accessing welfare and students are facing the same issues across the world. We can be inspired by the way people are responding in these other countries.

In France, alongside massive demonstrations against a rise in the pension age from 60 to 62, roads and refineries have been blockaded for weeks. Unions called strikes all on the same day, creating a General Strike situation. Strike assemblies have been meeting on a regular basis to plan action in a democratic way. Community assemblies were set up, with people taking over town halls to plan protests.

Likewise in Greece, assemblies were formed to support town hall occupations. Last year in a suburb in the south of Athens, people from the neighbourhood participated in a huge evening assembly. Council workers supported the occupation and issued a statement of support! The town hall was then used as a gathering place and a centre to exchange information for the campaigning. In several universities assemblies have taken place and university occupations have spread. Hundreds of schools were also occupied by students and teachers.

In Bulgaria on 28th October, students carried a coffin and banners saying 'save Bulgarian education' to the front of parliament to protest against rising student fees, cuts in staff pay and proposed closure of departments over the winter.

In Spain, so many people are out of work that the government has been forced to extend the guarantee of unemployment benefits past the usual two years. At least they accept there are not enough jobs!

AT THE SHARP END - THE REAL EFFECT OF THE CUTS

Behind the million or billion pound figures in the media lies real hardship. Notts SOS Campaign asked ordinary workers and residents what the cuts mean for them. This issue our cuts stories are mainly from the County but of course they are also happening in the City which we will cover in future Newsletters.

School Closure threats

Any illusion that schools will be exempt from the cuts was quickly dispelled by Notts County Council's announcement that they intend to close the Gedling School. If they get away with it Gedling parents will be denied a local community school for their children - so much for parental choice. The council probably wasn't expecting a campaign to save the Gedling School to begin so soon but a big protest outside the school was held on Wednesday, November 3rd. The following day 500 people attended a meeting at the school to give the Local Authority and extremely rough ride. Notts SOS will be giving full backing to the campaign to keep the Gedling School open.

Elderly care homes to be sold off

Ken Burton's 96 year old mother-in-law Dorothy Hinds lives in one of the elderly care homes Notts County Council wants to sell. *"I've never been involved in campaigning like this before, but I've seen the difference between care in the public sector and the private sector,"* says Ken, who chairs the Friends of Bramwell Campaign Group fighting the sale. The campaign group is asking people to send them their experiences of elderly care homes across the county, good and bad, public and private, for a planned campaign in conjunction with the Nottingham Evening Post newspaper. For more information contact Ken Burton on 0115 922 7257 or email Kenneth.burton83@ntlworld.com

Middle Street Resource Centre closure

Resource centre user Karen Medd told Notts SOS Campaign. *"Having suffered bouts of problematic mental health since my teens, I found myself falling again into my old repeat cycle of having no job, a terrible financial position, a rapidly depleting social network and alienation from society. But this time, and at long last, something different happened. I was referred to a mental health day centre in my locality. There I found a disparate group of people who probably would never have had the chance to meet if it wasn't for the centralised facilities of Middle St. Here we can brush up on the education and skills we have missed out on due to ill-health, and how to support each other through the many challenges that confront us, challenges that few people would choose to have. Over the last few months, we've been campaigning to save our Centre, which Notts County Council wants to close. They want to deprive us of our choice to attend Middle St., a choice that is made on the basis of our experience, evaluation of the alternatives and consideration for our fellow service users. This mad slashing of everything that makes us a decent society has to stop."* You can support the campaign by signing a petition on website www.mistag.co.uk

Future for libraries looks bleak

A Unison shop steward told Notts SOS Campaign that cuts affecting libraries across the county include the following. All county libraries will close for 10 days over the Christmas period from December 24 to January 4. Next year opening hours in some libraries will be cut by up to 50% while others, often in areas with few other community facilities, will be open for only up to 10 hours a week. Staff will be cut. A massive 75% will be cut from the book-fund from £1.7m to £400,000, meaning many fewer new books, CDs and DVDs. Library charges will increase. There may be reductions in free mother and baby singing sessions; free mother and toddler story times; free activities for older children/school groups; homework clubs; free computer taster sessions for the elderly; free support for reading groups; free or low cost activities for adults; and in free access to public computers. *"Libraries offer currently offer many free and low cost activities. They are somewhere safe and accessible for children and somewhere warm and friendly for the lonely, jobless, elderly and homeless,"* the steward said. *"Surely when everyone will have less money to spend the service a library offers becomes more important to the local community not less. Cuts such as those now proposed make the future of libraries look very bleak indeed."*

What the Cuts mean to Me - Call centre worker for an energy company

Despite working in the private sector, the cuts will affect us too. If half a million people lose their jobs, that's half a million people that are going to have difficulties with paying their gas and electric bills. That's half a million people ringing me and my colleagues in all energy companies, upset that they cannot afford to pay their bills. Maybe they're also getting letters from debt collectors, or can't afford to put money on their prepayment meters. People with families and children. Those who look after people with disabilities, or who need to use more energy. It's bad enough at the moment when people cry down the telephone at you, the cuts are not going to help. With family services being cut, colleagues with children are going to have a much harder time. All this means a lot more stress for my members and colleagues. Our company has got rid of hundreds of workers, and is now doing 15% more work with 10% less staff for up to 23% less pay. I asked a Liberal Democrat councillor recently what his solution to the problem was. He said I had to get a job in the private sector. It just shows how out of touch they are, not realising that we were privatised in 1990 and not realising that the company is cutting jobs! I don't know how they expect the private sector to take on public staff? The cuts also present an opportunity to me, however. It can be a great recruitment tool for my trade union in the workplace, and can bring people together against a common enemy. It gives us the opportunity to show our strength, and remind us that while the bosses may have the call centres, the workers have the power.

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OPINIONS

Is there really ‘No alternative to the cuts?’

“We are told there is a deficit crisis in the UK. We are told that we are spending beyond our means. We are told that the solution to this deficit crisis is to cut public spending,” says the public and commercial services union PCS.

But it argues that public spending is an investment, not a debt and it sets out that there is an alternative to the massive public service cuts the ConDem government is making:

- Close the £120 billion tax gap: Figures from the Tax Justice Network show that £25 billion is lost annually in tax avoidance; £70 billion is lost in tax evasion by large companies and wealthy individuals; and £26 billion is going uncollected;
- Bring the banks into public ownership and control: Despite causing the crisis, the banking sector has escaped any significant regulation, and bankers are again awarding themselves huge bonuses;
- Introduce a Robin Hood Tax: A tiny 0.05% tax on global financial transactions applied to UK financial institutions would raise between £20–30 billion per year and reduce the annual deficit by between 12.5% and 20%;
- Cut the real waste: Scrap the Trident nuclear weapons system, which already costs around £1.5 billion every year and could cost £100 billion to replace (according to the 2010 Liberal Democrat manifesto); and
- Stop the War in Afghanistan which is costing Afghan and British lives as well as £2.6 billion each year.

Incredible TUC inaction – what good is a national demonstration in March when the cuts are happening now?

Adult social care in Notts is facing a £72 million over the next four years. £5 million is planned to be cut from Learning Disability and Mental Health, £2 million in community care budgets, a slashing of day care services, and the closure of the welfare rights service. At least £10 million is coming off vital projects supporting the homeless and those experiencing domestic violence. The privatisation of elderly care homes is planned.

“These are figures, but they hide the real hardship that vulnerable people will suffer under the cold cruelty of the County regime,” says a Unison member. *“Many cuts are being pushed through now. It is incredible therefore that the TUC have called for a national demonstration on 26th March 2011! I ask all trade unionists to put pressure on in their unions for a national demonstration this year and a public sector one day strike in the New Year. Let’s stand united with the most vulnerable in society to stop this county council and this government.”*

GETTING INVOLVED What can we do?

Demonstrate against the cuts on Saturday 20 November under the slogan “There is an alternative. Make the rich pay for the crisis.” Meet Forest Recreation Ground at 11.30am and at 12.30pm we will march to the Market Square in Nottingham for a rally with speakers. Bring your banners and placards and anything else to make this a noisy demonstration.

Come to our meetings on Monday evenings at 7.30pm at the ICC (International Community Centre), YMCA, 61b Mansfield Road, Nottingham NG1 3FN. Please just turn up. Meetings end by 9.30pm. Currently we are meeting weekly. Meeting dates are advertised on our website www.nottssos.org.uk

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Tell your workmates, friends and neighbours about our campaign and get involved in saving our services.