

Portsmouth: protesters present alternative budget

AS PORTSMOUTH'S Lib Dem-led city council voted for over £20 million in cuts, Portsmouth Against Cuts Together (PACT), the community group supported by the city's trade union movement, presented an alternative budget to the council meeting.

Portsmouth Socialist Party

The meeting was lobbied by over 100 people opposed to cuts, including council workers, museum and library staff, pensioners groups, students and local trade unionists.

Over three years, the proposed budget seeks to make £22 million of cuts. This translates into 183 initial job losses, while the GMB union reported that over 400 workers are under threat, either from redundancy or attacks on terms and conditions.

PACT's alternative budget was emailed to every councillor. PACT called for the council to reject the proposed cuts in favour of using

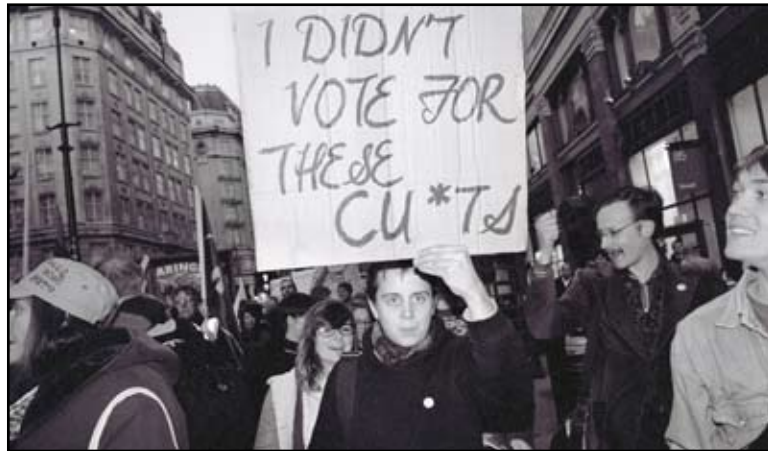


photo Paul Mattsson

reserve funds, some of the largest held by any council in the country, as well as substantial profits made from assets such as the city's port, to stop cuts in the short term.

The council was then invited to draft a new budget for job creation and investment, before launching a mass campaign to demand the necessary

finance from central government.

However, Lib Dem leader of the council Gerald Vernon Jackson claimed: "We're using £4 million of our reserves but can't keep spending them. Confrontation with the government would leave the city with enormous debts. It would be irresponsible."

Birmingham: 'unprofitable' services face axe

BIRMINGHAM CITY council has announced budget cuts of £300 million over the next three years, with £212 million to be cut this April. The vicious programme of cutbacks and privatisations will damage adult, youth and children's services, with plans for privatisation of adult social care.

The 'front-loading' of the cuts means that 7,000 jobs will go in April, with many more under threat. Council workers have been forced to sign new contracts with reduced terms and conditions - otherwise they face immediate dismissal.

A total of 4,300 council jobs will be cut altogether in April, with another 3,000 being transferred to 'schools cooperatives' independent of the council.

Birmingham city council, a Con-Dem coalition, clearly sees itself as the flagship for the 'big society' in which the public sector no longer has a role.

Council leader Mike Whitby has stated that his goal is to balance the 'deficit' between the cost of council activity and the cash



those activities bring in. In other words, any 'unprofitable' service - which means any free service based on need - must go.

The Socialist Party is working to help build the fightback against the destruction of public services in Birmingham. We are proposing a needs-based budget that will maintain essential services and public sector jobs.

The first of our open anti-cuts meetings in local communities will be at the Methodist Church, Shirley Road, Acocks Green, 7pm on 10 March.

Joel Lane

Birmingham Socialist Party

Action across the country - fighting all council cuts

Leeds

AROUND 80 protesters gathered outside the Leeds council executive meeting on Friday 11 February to protest against the planned loss of around 3,000 jobs and cuts to mental health and leisure services in the city.

Members of Leeds Unison, alongside other trade unionists and anti-cuts campaigners, joined with mental health service user groups demanding that the council refuses to make the cuts. Placards demanded that the council saves the adult social services day centres and Leeds Crisis Centre. Some placards stated "Leeds Labour: Pickles' Poodles", referring to local government minister Eric Pickles.

Campaigners over cuts in the mental health service demanded to speak to councillors, but most councillors rushed past. The Labour-Green controlled council executive is pushing through the Con-Dems' cuts agenda.

Although there are various legal challenges against the cuts to adult social services being pursued, the cuts as a whole remain set to be passed through the full council meeting on 23 February.

Campaigners are building for a big lobby of the council. Students at Leeds University are organising a feeder march.

Iain Dalton
Leeds Socialist Party

Surrey

SURREY UNISON members were joined by NUT, PCS, CYWU union members and library campaigners from Bagshot to lobby Surrey county council's budget meeting.

Unison branch secretary Paul Couchman outlined their opposition to all cuts in jobs and services. Mark, a member of the CYWU youth workers' union, explained what the council is doing to youth services: "The council wants to chop it up and commission from the third sector... turning staff into agency workers, split everyone up and undermine terms and conditions."

Nick, a youth worker, said: "Keeping young people in custody costs £100,000 a year, giving a young person quality youth services costs £100 a year. The government's outlook and attitude for young people



Councils face growing anger.

photo Paul Mattsson

is to smash up youth services."

The threat to schools was highlighted by several speakers.

PCS rep Thelma showed how cuts in Revenues and Customs posts are letting big businesses continue to evade tax: "The cuts since 2007 mean in Woking we have gone from 500 staff to 13!"

Councillors prepared to stop and speak were told to abandon the cuts and fight the government. All they offered was a choice of job cuts or pay cuts. The united voice of the lobby was "no thanks!"

Nick Chaffey

Mansfield

OVER 150 people took part in the first Mansfield Save Our Services (SOS) protest march, including firefighters threatened with redundancy.

SOS and Socialist Party member Karen Seymour opened the speeches with a passionate plea for the community to come together to fight back, setting out how socialist ideas could achieve this.

Two speakers from mental health charity Mind told of the life-saving impact their organisation has. "I

would be imprisoned for assisting someone in suicide," said one volunteer. "The cuts facing Mind could lead to suicide for some service users, yet the government are pushing through regardless."

Another woman was in tears as she described how she had been using Redoaks Day Centre from the age of 16 and she was now 61. She too faces having a key support in her life taken away, because of a financial crisis she had nothing to do with.

Sean Fleming of the Fire Brigades Union outlined the impact the cuts were going to have on both fire services and the whole community. He got the loudest cheer when attacking councillors who voted for cuts instead of defending public services.

Andy Dobbs

Waltham Forest

FIFTY PEOPLE gathered to lobby outside Waltham Forest town hall in north east London as the borough's council cabinet voted through cuts amounting to 600 job losses and major service closures.

The protest heard from social workers and career advisers whose

jobs are at risk, as well as ten-year-old Lily who explained how much she would miss the music service, which she is using to learn the trombone, if it is closed as planned.

We then went into the public gallery to watch the vote. Cries of "use your reserves!" and "build a campaign!" echoed through the chamber throughout the 'debate' and when every Labour councillor voted for the cuts.

"Shame! Shame!" was shouted from the gallery before we were escorted out by a security worker whose job was amongst those to be cut.

Nobody was fooled by the 'there's nothing-we-can-do' shrugs or by the vicious attack made by the leader of the council on the 1983-87 socialist-led Liverpool city council which set a budget based on the needs of the people of Liverpool and built a mass campaign to ensure not a single redundancy was made.

Sarah Wrack

Halifax

SATURDAY 12 February saw one of the biggest demonstrations in Halifax for over a decade, which was

called by Northern Towns Against Cuts, an alliance of public sector unions.

Trade unionists from Unison, NUT, NASUWT, GMB, Unite, PCS, plus an impressive alliance of voluntary groups, service users and young people took part.

The speakers, however, failed to give a fighting programme to effectively oppose the cuts.

As well as the local Labour MP, several trade union leaders restricted themselves to calling for a vote for Labour in the forthcoming elections. The lobby of the council the following week, when Labour councillors will be voting through a massive programme of cuts, was not mentioned.

The alternative to the cuts was only outlined in leaflets distributed by supporters of Calderdale Save Our Services (SOS), an anti-cuts alliance which emerged out of two well-attended and successful public meetings towards the end of last year.

Because these meetings included calls to stand anti-cuts candidates in the May elections, Labour Party members immediately established the Northern Towns Against Cuts grouping with support from some full-time trade union officials.

However, Labour's manoeuvring will not stop the growing anger and organised opposition against all cuts.

Mike Forster

Wiltshire

TRADER UNIONISTS from all over Wiltshire held a protest in Salisbury on Saturday 12 February. Several hundred people marched through the centre of the city, protesting about cuts in jobs and services in Wiltshire. Salisbury is not a city noted for its radical outlook on politics, but the march was well received by most of the public.

Most demonstrators on the march were trade unionists working for local government and the NHS. There was a great deal of interest shown in the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition leaflet, and many people bought the Socialist.

After the demonstration, the marchers heard from local trade union leaders and RMT transport union president Alex Gordon. Everyone was urged to attend the national TUC demonstration on 26 March.

Jane Ward