

Lambeth Activists Newsletter

Summer 2010

DEFEND EVERY JOB AND SERVICE!

- COUNCIL THREATENS TO CUT OVER 450 JOBS AND DECIMATE HOUSING AND SOCIAL SERVICES
- CON-DEM GOVERNMENT WARNS OF WORST CUTS SINCE WORLD WAR II
- LAMBETH UNISON BRANCH COMMITTEE PLEDGE TO DEFEND EVERY SINGLE JOB AND SERVICE,

By Jeremy Drinkall, Lilian Baylis School Shop
Steward (personal capacity)

Tens of thousands of working class turned out to re-elect Labour to Lambeth council in May in order to keep the Tory wolves at bay. But our councillors immediately repaid their working class voters by imposing over 450 job cuts – not “just” the 334 announced two weeks ago, but also up to 70 in Lambeth Living and 60 or more in Adult and Community Services.

The biggest cuts are to Children’s and Young Persons’ Services (215 jobs), Adult and Community Services (60-70 jobs) and Housing (about 125 jobs, including Lambeth Living). The cuts will destroy some services and inevitably it will be the poorest and most disadvantaged sections of our community that will suffer most.

In addition, the local authority is pressing ahead with plans to invite residents to “run their own services” in return for a council tax rebate in Britain’s first “cooperative council”. This can only mean:

- a) **privatisation**, since firms would be brought in to “advise” residents and implement their proposals
- b) **job cuts**, as volunteers would replace well-trained and experienced staff.

c.) **profit before people**, as private sector organisations increasingly look to make even more money out of delivering public services in accordance with market principles.

What a recipe for disaster!

Nor are these the last of our problems. The Con-Dem coalition has been quick off the mark to announce big reductions in council services: £537 million from grants to councils, £311 million from funding for schools, £309 million from transport budgets.

Add to that, we’ve been offered zero per cent on our pay (while inflation is back up to 5.3%) and now the Whitehall politicians are whipping up a storm over the “cost” of public sector pensions, i.e. the wages we’ve put aside for our retirement.

We can resist these attacks

But those who want to put hundreds of working class people on the dole and slash public services have counted on us being shocked into silence. They hope we will become resigned to our fate and accept that there is no alternative and that local people will not stand with us in defence of our jobs.

But we will not be silenced. We know there is an alternative. And we have the capacity to lead the working people of Lambeth behind us in defending jobs and services.

Lambeth Activists is a small but growing group of Unison members who want to see the branch bring in new activists and develop fighting policies. We have been at the forefront of the resistance to the council cuts, (cont p2.)

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persuading colleagues in our own and other workplaces to stop the cuts; as shop steward and branch officers, writing bulletins and motions for action; linking up with other unions, like the lecturers at Lambeth College, to launch a united campaign of resistance.

At the last branch committee, we won unanimous support for our policy of defending every job. Of course, some colleagues might be tempted to take voluntary redundancy rather than provide a deteriorating service with fewer rewards but with 2.5 million on the dole, any pay-off will soon be spent and it will be hard to find as good a job. Those left at work will still have to do the same amount of work with fewer colleagues.

We also won the argument to recruit and defend agency workers, some of whom have worked at the council for over a year. They too have families, rent or mortgages, bills. We demand they are made permanent, not redundant.

It's not just Lambeth council, either. Civil servants face a recruitment freeze, tube workers are going on strike on 23-25 June over pay, jobs and conditions, and Lambeth college lecturers are striking (again) against pay cuts on 21 June. Our motion to the branch committee agreed to set up an anti-cuts committee with all the public sector unions, the trades council and community and campaigning organisations, like the Tenants Council.

Prepare for strike action

Most importantly, we must prepare to take strike action to stop the cuts. At the end of the day, it is unlikely that we will be able to persuade the council to back down by argument alone. But strike action may force them to back off.

At Lambeth College, serious concessions have been wrenched from management after a one-day strike, but the union is striking again to save more jobs. Last year Leeds refuse collectors and Tower Hamlets college staff went further and took all-out strike action until they won. And they did win.

We can do the same here. But we need everyone to recruit their workmates to the

union. We need to build up a network of solidarity from service users and other unions, so we can sustain ourselves over the period of action.

And we need as many union members as possible to become activists, so that our campaign is run from the grassroots: every decision, every tactic, every action has to be the collective decision of the majority. No more sell-outs from Unison head office – this time we want to fight and win!

Join the union if you're not already a member. Recruit others to the union. Put yourself forward to be a shop steward. And join Lambeth Activists today.

Lambeth UNISON is holding a meeting at 12:30 , 5th July 2010 in Lambeth Town Hall.

Together we can resist these attacks!

<http://lambethactivists.blogspot.com/>

GAZA – BREAK THE SIEGE!

By Gurmeet Khurana, Lambeth UNISON
International Officer (personal capacity)



On May 31, Israeli commandos boarded the Mavi Marmara, the largest boat of the freedom flotilla that was carrying aid to the 1.5 million people of Gaza, and murdered 9 unarmed activists and injured many more. The boats were carrying much needed humanitarian aid such as food, medicine, building materials and books for the children of Gaza. The boat was in international waters at the time of the killings. This was not just mission to deliver aid to Gaza but also an attempt to break the illegal siege that Israel

has imposed on the people of Gaza since the election of Hamas in 2006.

Israel claims that the murder of unarmed civilians in international waters was an act of self defence and that the murdered activists were armed and were members of Hamas and Al-Qaeda. These outright lies have been exposed by the testimonials of hundreds of activists who were eyewitnesses to the attacks. The autopsies of those killed has also revealed that they were actively targeted. Furkan Dogan, a 19 year old, was shot five times, from close range in the side of his nose, in the back of the head, in the back and twice in the left leg. Others were also shot from behind.

The IDF also admitted to doctoring audio recordings of communication between itself and the flotilla which had the activists saying things like "Shut up and go back to Auschwitz" and "We're helping the Arabs against the US, don't forget 9/11. And now the very people that committed the crime will be conducting an 'impartial' investigation into what happened!

Israel says that there is no humanitarian crisis in Gaza and so there is no need for aid convoys. But Gaza's people are suffering terribly under the siege. Around 70 percent of people live on less than \$1 a day, 75 percent rely on food aid and 60 percent have no daily access to water and unemployment is high. The International Committee of the Red Cross says that the crisis is so deep it cannot be solved by humanitarian aid, only by lifting the siege.

The Gaza Strip has been under siege since 1991, preventing the Palestinians from living meaningful and civilized lives. This was intensified in 2007 after Hamas won the 2006 elections thus collectively punishing the people of Gaza for daring to choose their own government!

In response to the murders of the courageous activists on board the Mavi Marmara, thousands of people have staged angry demonstrations across the world including London, Istanbul, Madrid, Sweden and in Israel itself. The workers movement has also responded with many unions issuing statements condemning the attacks and

calling for the immediate lifting of the blockage. The most inspiring action has come from the Swedish Dock Workers Union who will be blockading all Israeli ships and goods, both to and from Israel, from 15-24 June! These actions now need to spread to trade union branches around the world in an effort to intensify the Palestinian call for a global boycott, divestment and sanctions campaign!



There are also plans for two simultaneous convoys, one by land and the other by sea, which will leave for Gaza in September. The target is to enter Gaza by land with 500 vehicles and by sea with sixty ships. The convoy's aim will be to arrive on Gaza's frontiers at the same

time and to enter with the world's largest ever aid convoys thereby render the siege null and void. The workers movement needs to be behind this convoy and should look at sponsoring vehicles and ships as well as organising locally to fundraise and raise awareness of the siege and the Palestinian struggle in local communities.

Lambeth UNISON, alongside the local Palestine Solidarity Campaign, hold monthly boycott, divestment and sanctions stalls in Brixton. To get involved, contact Gurmeet on 07828 668496.

<http://www.palestinecampaign.org>

THE TRUTH ABOUT TEMPS

**By Mary Kotey and Rob Gowland, Lambeth
UNISON Membership Officers (personal
capacity)**

**EXPLOITATION
SPREADS!**
*Today Agency Workers
Tomorrow All Workers*

A lot of things are being said about Agency Workers at the moment and emotions are running high. We should not forget that Agency Workers are often the most vulnerable members of our workforce.

Management and union bureaucrats often view temps as entirely expendable. A recent union bulletin stated, referring to job cuts, that "deletions are of posts and not of people. Some of these posts may already be vacant whilst others may be filled by agency workers who will be terminated." Sadly, this says it all.

Lambeth Activists are clear on their stance regarding agency workers - all workers should stand together to fight these cuts.

Aside from the financial effects of jobs losses, cuts will result in poorer services being provided; remaining workers will have to carry out the work previously undertaken by double the number of workers. The pressure will be immense!

Much work has been done on increasing the rights of agency workers, such as working towards guaranteeing that pay and working conditions are the same to permanent staff performing the same roles. Despite this there is still a lot of work to be done such as paid leave on bank holiday and sick pay. Agency Workers carry out important roles, often for lengthy periods, and always with the threat of termination with one week's notice and no redundancy pay. They are often given no indication of what is happening with their posts and are not given a chance to find alternative employment. Many have years of experience that will be lost if they are "terminated".

What Agency Workers may not be aware of is that if they have served for a length of time, usually over a year, they may be entitled to assimilation rights into their posts. This is something the Union can and will help with. Lambeth Activists also believe any posts filled by Agency Workers should be advertised as permanent jobs and the Agency Worker covering the post given the chance to apply for the job. Furthermore, Agency Workers should be given the same redeployment rights as permanent members of staff.

Another thing people seem to have overlooked - or conveniently forgotten - is that many Agency Workers are members of our Union, and therefore should be receiving the same support as permanent workers who are facing

the threat of their jobs being cut. Not simply being told that they will be "terminated". Those of them who aren't should join now.

An injury to one is an injury to all. We all need to stand together to fight these job and service cuts.

<http://lambethactivists.blogspot.com/>

NO IFS, NO BUTS, NO EDUCATION CUTS

**By Dave Esterson, Lambeth College UCU Rep
(personal capacity)**



On Monday 21st June staff and students at Lambeth College demonstrated in the heart of Brixton against the planned £3.5 million in cuts this year. University College Union (UCU) members walked out on a one hour strike and were joined on the demonstration by college members of Unison.

The cuts that have been proposed are severe: scores of staff still face compulsory redundancy; courses are to be cut; many courses will see teaching hours reduced and class sizes increased; the cost for parents to put children in the nursery will rise as will the cost of many courses for local residents.

There has been a period of consultation with the Senior Management team but the reality is although some progress has been made by the joint efforts of Unison and UCU the managers here are still determined to push ahead with their plans.

In fact, management have proved themselves unprepared to alleviate the effects of the cuts

and have scandalously defended their astronomical salaries. The Principal of the college receives a salary of around £160,000 and the other senior managers all receive more than £100,000. They have also defended the fact the college pays for them all to have private health insurance. Meanwhile they have decided to create another senior management position, again at a salary of over £100,000.

The truth is without more sustained militant direct action by workers at the college we will not change their minds. No amount of well presented arguments or articulate speeches in consultation meetings will convince them. Only the threat or actual carrying out of action that affects the running of the college will help them 'focus'.

So far this has not happened. UCU members went on strike for one day but have since been reluctant to take further industrial action despite the agreed one hour strike to attend the demonstration. Unison is still waiting for the go ahead to get a ballot for action.

It is important to remember that the proposed cuts originated under the Labour government. We can only expect more of the same in the next few years from the new coalition government. The cuts at Lambeth have been repeated in many colleges and universities. We are now going to see the same story right across the public sector.

The situation cries out for united national action across the public sector – direct action. The demonstration on 21st June is also part of the joint education unions' United for Education day of action but in the information sent out by the unions it made it clear this was not a day of industrial action. But to defeat the onslaught against our public services we will need to build an almighty movement, an alliance of public sector workers with the working class users of the services we provide. And it will need to take action – strike action, occupations, lobbies, demonstrations and blockades. At the heart of this must be national strike action led by the unions.

The problem is that the union leaders are running scared that any such action might fall foul of the anti-union laws. Trade union

activists will have to argue that this means one thing: either we can't take the effective action we need to defend our jobs and services or we will have to defy the anti-union laws.

Organising against the cuts in public services is a matter of urgency. An immediate thing that can be done is to organise networks or co-ordinating bodies made up from trade union reps and activists in local community campaigns. We should organise one in Lambeth and aim to build a campaign of united action.

The demonstration on 21st June was one such opportunity for local anti-cuts activists and trade unions to unite, and it is important that workers stand together in the future to defend public services and jobs.

<http://lambethactivists.blogspot.com/>

LETTERS FROM LAMBETH
PLEASE SEND LETTERS FOR OUR
NEWSLETTER TO: lambethactivist@gmail.com

Questioning the cuts

Dear fellow workers,

Well what can one say in today's climate - and I don't mean the weather. What is going to happen to us, the hard workers in the public sector?

Will there be cuts? Where will the cuts come from? Am I safe? Can't they cut elsewhere? What is the union doing about it? It's not my fault we are in so much debt, why should I suffer? Why should my family suffer?

Well here's news for you, the chancellor, George Osborne states that cutting the national deficit is going to be the great national challenge of our generation: "We've got to get Britain to live within its means...it's time to show the country we are all in it together...after all it is our collective debt" Wow, strong words!

He is even going to ask and make sure that all the best and brightest brains in all parties across Whitehall and the public sector,

voluntary groups, think-tank's, trade unions, members of the public. They want us to tell them what to do. What a great PR exercise. Now if it all goes wrong it's your fault.

Why the public sector? No real pay rises in years, left behind in inflation, rent rises, gas rises, electric rises, water rises, council tax rises, family grocery rises etc..

Well here are few suggestions. Bring back our forces from abroad. Talk to our so called "enemies", not kill them. Get back the money we gave to bail out the banks - billions! Cut big business bonuses. Cut top Civil servants pay and Local Authority top executives pay. Stop the cancer of outsourcing and highly paid consultants in all walks of life doing the jobs that highly paid managers are supposed to do. Re-nationalise the electric, gas, water and railways - they all make a profit let that profit be shared amongst the people, not to a privileged few.

In answer to the questions asked at the beginning, there are no answers at this time, but please stop using the I word, we are in it together at least the working classes are.

Join a union and be heard and fight along side your fellow workers. If you fight alone you will be defeated, if you fight in numbers we can save our jobs.

In solidarity,

**Reg Morrison, Lambeth Living UNISON
Convenor (personal capacity)**

Help!

Dear fellow workers,

Already this mixed bag of politicians is supposedly going to ask us all how we can help to balance the books,

So expect a letter from George Osborne and co. We haven't quite got to the stage of all these charities on the television, please donate a fiver to save your nation but it may come to that.

Here are some ideas:

1. Slash the Civil List; let the monarchy pay for itself. Take some of the profits that Charles reaps from the Duchy of Cornwall. The Queen can open her doors to the "Flog It" team, or perhaps "Cash in the Attic"?
2. Slash the days that Tax exiles can spend in Britain to nil. Stay and pay their dues to the country that made them or stay away for good.
3. End charitable status of private schools. It would not only bring in millions but encourage the privileged few to send their kids to local schools, making Tories to end their token lip-service to state education and build the schools that any civilised country expects.
4. Evict David Cameron and co out of grace and favour homes and turn them into hostels for all the people he is about to make homeless. His cabinet are mainly made up of millionaires why do they need Chequers and Dorneywood, they have their own country homes?
5. Abolish the House of Lords attendance fees. If they are so interested in helping the country, let them do it for free.
6. Let's not pretend we are super power any longer, cut our defence budget to the bone and scrap Trident immediately.
7. Cut every chauffeured limo for all cabinet members, let them use buses.
8. The most important cut should be on alcohol tax, for what we are going to go through we are going to need a drink!

We are looking at a hideous stream of lies about our financial situation. But what we are really facing is ruling elite that despises the public sector and are using the crisis, caused by the bankers ,as an excuse to attack us.

Anonymous

STAFF CONFERENCES: THE QUICKEST WAY FORWARD?

By a UNISON shop steward (personal capacity)

Asked to explain why they are spending thousands of pounds hiring lavish conference facilities in a time of massive job cuts due to a supposed financial crisis, a Lambeth Council spokesperson said:

"this engagement approach and what follows is the cheapest and quickest way forward."

A couple of years ago I carelessly failed to book leave to coincide with one of these idiotic and offensively wasteful events, and so was obliged to sit and watch some DIY MBA throwing toy fish at his audience in an attempted illustration of American business acumen. Obviously when you are struggling to provide public services in collapsing buildings, what you really need to know is how Americans sell fish. Reminded of another American tradition, some members of the audience were looking around for a rope, and the presentation trailed off before they could locate one.

After this Derrick Anderson leapt on to the stage, punched the air, yodelled a greeting and appeared to expect us to rise and issue a roar of applause like a bunch of inebriated Illinois hinge salesmen on a jolly in Las Vegas. Instead he was received with discontented muttering, some of it quite unkind, and berated us for our lack of enthusiasm. He then gave way to the consultant hired to present the event (£1 million worth [sic] of senior executives obviously couldn't be expected to do that without outside assistance) who bounded over to me with his wireless microphone and asked me why I was facing the window and eating a sandwich instead of getting on board and engaging positively in the way forward with the team.

Having swallowed the obscenities which sprang immediately to mind, and the rest of the sandwich (crayfish tails and rocket, as I recall), I said I'd be happy to join in if he or any of the aforementioned executives could show

me a single benefit resulting from the previous conference, or the one before that, or a single loss caused by their absence in the years when they didn't happen. Being an outsider, he considered this a reasonable request, and passed it on to the execs. Having little choice in the circumstances they too opined that it was a reasonable request. But they didn't answer it, and they still haven't.

The manager of the library where I work needs a functioning computer to book maintenance jobs, procurement, email, accounting, all the usual stuff. This engagement approach and what follows really is the cheapest and quickest way forward. It's a few hundred quid, but the council won't pay for it. They prefer to spend a similar amount every month sending out technicians to try to repair the (very) old one and tell her it needs replacing.

ACTIVIST LINKS

LOCAL

Lambeth Activists

<http://lambethactivists.blogspot.com/>

Transition Town Brixton

<http://www.transitiontownbrixton.org/>

NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL

Stop the War Coalition

<http://www.stopwar.org.uk/>

IndyMedia

<http://www.indymedia.org.uk/>

Industrial Workers of the World

<http://www.iww.org/>

Feminist Fightback

<http://www.feministfightback.org.uk/>

Marxists Internet Archive

<http://www.marxists.org>

Palestine Solidarity Campaign

<http://www.palestinecampaign.org/>

Join Lambeth Activists

Help us build fighting, member-led unions

We are a group of activists in Lambeth who believe that the trade union movement at large needs to be rebuilt from the grass-roots, encouraging **maximum participation and control of unions by members** and giving workers the confidence to fight collectively for their own interests in their workplaces. We want **inclusive, active, fighting unions** that effectively take on management and the government by involving all workers in action to defend and extend our rights.

There is an alternative. Email us at lambethactivist@gmail.com or text **07761 707135** to get involved. We have regular meetings in central Brixton.

Visit us at our blog: <http://lambethactivists.blogspot.com/>

Educate.

- Marxism 2010, - Ideas to Change the World, 1-5 July 2010, Central London
- Ideas for Freedom 2010, 9-11 July, Central London

Agitate.

- Lambeth UNISON/Palestine Solidarity Campaign – Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions against Israel stall will be held at 1pm, Wednesday 30th June, 2010 outside of Brixton Tube

Organise.

- Lambeth UNISON Branch Meeting, 12:30pm, 5th July, Lambeth Town Hall.
- Anti-cuts planning meeting. UNISON office, 6a Acre Lane, Wednesday 30 June, 6pm
- Email us at lambethactivist@gmail.com or text **07761 707135** to get involved!

