Brighton Solidarity

freesheet of Brighton Solidarity Federation

December 2007

Public Sector Carve Up

2007 has seen the government push through cuts across public services - hospitals and post offices are being closed, postal services are being cut back and thousands of local government workers across the public services face redundancy.



NHS FOR SALE

In the NHS, accident and emergency departments are being closed across the country and hospitals 'downgraded' to meet government financial targets. These targets work by the government imposing tight budgets on individual health authorities - despite an overall NHS budget surplus - which forces them to make cuts to services. These cuts are then used to demonstrate the 'inefficiency' of the NHS and to justify outsourcing to for-profit private companies. These companies then take on the most profitable treatments - such as routine operations - while the treatment of the long-term or complicated conditions remains with the under-funded NHS. This creates a two-tier health service as the quality of universal healthcare suffers. In Sussex, 2 out of 3 hospitals are slated for 'downgrading.'

ROBBING THE POST OFFICE

Post offices around the country are being closed, particularly in rural areas with some urban branches being outsourced to WHSmiths stores. Meanwhile, postal workers have voted to accept cuts to their pay and services after their union called off strike action. Thousands of jobs are threatened as the Royal Mail seeks to further 'modernise' to compete with private carriers. However, as in the NHS only the profitable parts of the business have been opened up to competition while the Royal Mail must still deliver for their 'rivals' over the 'final mile' to the customers door.

JOBS UNDER FIRE

Local and central government services are also facing massive cuts with 100,000 jobs at risk. Locally, the council must reduce its budget by millions - as we are going to press the council have announced up to 350 redundancies and the

Continued Inside...

Inside

How privatisation will affect you

France in Turmoil

Local Round-up

continued from front page...

closure of three learning disability centres and a residential care home.

The government is hoping that the image of 'civil servants' as faceless bureaucrats will disguise the fact the cuts are mostly aimed at front-line services for society's most vulnerable groups; services for pensioners, the unemployed and child protection. Already, we see the effect of this wearing down of the civil service, with the recent loss of the personal details of 25 million housing benefit recipients.

Alongside the cuts to services in the name of 'modernisation,' Gordon Brown has imposed a sub-inflation pay cap for the next 3 years across the public sector. This amounts to a continuous pay cut for all public service workers. Civil servants in the PCS union have voted in favour of strike action, whilst postal workers accepted the offer after the CWU union called off their strike despite no concessions. Meanwhile UNISON carried out a witch-hunt of its own activists opposed to the offer in the NHS, and then ignored a ballot in favour of a strike by other public sector workers. The concern is that cuts in the public sector set the benchmark for private employers, and so impact on everybody who works. Earlier this year when the government moved to close final salary pensions across the public sector, the private employers Siemens and Unisys were quick to follow suit, pleasing the stock market and putting pressure on other firms to do the same.

How this will affect you

- Closures and downgrading of health services, including further reduced access to dental care
- Restrictions on life-saving drugs and treatments for NHS patients
- Hundreds of thousands of job losses
- Pay cuts across the entire public sector
- Spiralling housing costs due to lack of social housing
- Closure of local post offices
- Reduction in emergency service
- Further sell-off of school facilities
- Privatisation of student loans



Who we are

Do you enjoy being bossed around by incompetent muppets? We don't and we want to do something about it! Anarchists stand for a world organised to the needs and desires of the many rather than the profit of a few. We believe in the direct democratic control of our lives - in our workplaces, our communities and society as a whole.

Solidarity Federation is an organisation of working class anarchists who work together to spread revolutionary ideas and practice. We cooperate to produce papers and magazines, organise in militant networks of workers and make a coordinated involvement in campaigns that affect us as a class.

We follow the tradition of 'anarcho-syndicalism', which despite its obscure-sounding name, is the very sensible idea that the working class should organise in mass revolutionary unions to take over the running of society for themselves, without politicians, union bosses or party hacks to tell us how.

We aim to produce this newsletter on a bimonthly basis to spread anarcho-syndicalist ideas in our area. If you're interested in finding out more about anarchism or to get involved, you can see our website at www.brightonsolfed.org.uk or email us at contact@brightonsolfed.org.uk.

contacts

NHS Not for Sale
Campaigning to fight NHS Cuts
www.brightonkeepournhspublic.co.uk

Sussex Action for Peace
Local Anti-war Group
www.safp.info

Black Cat Group
Anarchist student group in Sussex Uni
www.blackcat.blogspot.com

Brighton Resource Centre
Equipment and information for community and activist groups in Brighton and Hove.
01273 606160 - Prior House, 6 Tilbury Place

Where we stand... The Public Sector

All over Britain we can see a coordinated attack across the public sector, as the Government tries to cut back on public spending. The State is trying to claw back the concessions won by sustained workers' struggle in the post-WWII era. This attack translates into lower wages, worse healthcare, spiralling housing costs, worse access to education, and the loss of all the positive aspects of the welfare state we take for granted.

Services like the NHS, free education and social housing weren't granted as a blessing from generous governments past - they were won by mass collective struggle for a better life. We don't defend the public service because we're enamoured with the idea of State control - we know that the State is no more benevolent than a private boss. However, the tendency to privatisation and 'modernisation' is a thinly-veiled attack on essential public services as well as the jobs and conditions of millions of public sector workers.

The effects of this attack are already visible, and will be getting worse. When we're faced with the prospect of local hospitals closing because they're 'unprofitable', we see the madness of a system where human need plays (a very small!) second fiddle to profit.
With 'modernisation' the word of the day, New Labour are going to privatise everything they can get their hands on. Asking nicely won't change anything, we need to organise to hold onto our public services and fight to improve them.

John Green

£25,000 per 50 kilometre - Peacetime running cost of Challenger II Main Battle Tank, discounting ammunition usage.

£25,000 - average annual salary of fully qualified NHS nurse.

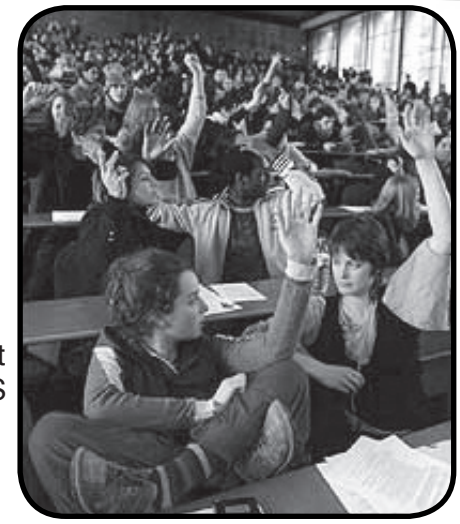
France in Revolt Alex S.

Since September 27th, French Public Sector workers and students have been on strike. Students voted in assemblies to occupy and strike in solidarity with workers due to go out on strike. Over half the universities have been on strike action at time of writing; over 70% of SNCF (France's railway company) and over 50% of energy workers took part in the official strikes of the 18th of November, and by the 30th of November over 150 secondary schools were also out. On the 20th November, these strikes were joined by hundreds of thousands of health workers, civil servants, printers, postal workers and air traffic controllers - staging protests in all major French cities.

Students face the new Pécresse Law, which aims to further the commercialisation and privatisation of universities. Transport and Energy workers are striking against the abolition of their special pensions schemes. Whilst the government argues that these workers are pampered above others, transport and energy workers responded by demanding that the pension schemes be extended to other workers. Two weeks later, Public Service workers joined the strikes due to a 6% drop in purchasing power, printers were fighting job cuts and teaching assistants were striking for better working conditions.

Some unions are now negotiating, but the student strikes continue. The CRS (French riot police) use indiscriminate violence and are widely considered uniformed thugs. One student was told that they wouldn't shout so loud with broken teeth whilst being beaten. Peaceful occupations are attacked by police using batons, tear gas, pepper spray and rubber bullets. The occupation of the Education Authority in Caen was attacked, hospitalising 3 students, with one 16 year old boy likely to lose an eye after being shot in the face. Police also ignore violence by fascist groups, who have been roaming university areas, assaulting students with clubs and in some cases air rifles.

Despite the violence aimed at quelling the strikes, the coordination and execution of the strikes has been extremely successful; workers have been organising through mass



assemblies to take control over their struggles. This forced some unions to continue strike action after workers voted in favour in assemblies. The tradition of French militancy has ensured some of the world's highest standards of social security and workers' rights. This is now under attack, as the government attempts to impose cutbacks across the public sector. The willingness to coordinate strikes across industries and the basis of the strike in rank-and-file control is a lesson for workers and students in Britain who face similar cutbacks.

In the Area...

BRIGHTON'S BURNING

The familiar rhetoric of modernisation is being wheeled out again, and as usual modernising means reducing service and attacking working conditions. New 'modern' shift patterns drawn up by the East Sussex Fire Authority could mean that the number of fire engines operational during the night will be cut, reducing fire coverage, particularly in areas such as Lewes and Barcombe. The Fire Authority have decreed that fires don't happen at night, so we can just do without. The 'variable crewing service' will mean one less fire engine in both Hastings and Brighton, meaning that in case of emergency, more may have to be sent in from surrounding towns and villages, leaving these areas under-equipped. These plans are gambling fire services against coincidence of fires, and that's a gamble with people's lives



Fire Service Cuts: Good News for Arsonists!

POST OFFICE CLOSURE

Brighton joined over 70 other locations - suffering from town centre post office closures. 2,500 post offices are planned for closure - Seventy larger Post Offices, including Brighton Town Centre's post office, will have their business transferred to WH Smith. At the same time, Royal Mail Chief Executive Adam Crozier has awarded himself a £370,000 bonus, taking his "earnings" to £1 million plus. New Labour claims the post offices are losing money, but why should profit matter, when it comes to vital public services like the Post Office?

This will also be bad news for post office staff: facing heavy job cuts, a breakdown of safety at work and a drop in working conditions - Post Office counter staff were on a starting rate of 50p an hour more than a senior assistant or supervisor in WH Smith.



MENTAL HEALTH SERVICE SAVED

After the closure of its National infoline in October, local women's mental health charity Threshold has been saved at the last minute. The service was due to close due to lack of funds after The Primary Care Trust and Council declined to fill a £20,000 gap. However, after a protest of over 100 people through Brighton, extra money will allow the service to remain open for another 12 months. The money has largely come through the service being absorbed by Brighton Housing Trust, and a donation from Brighton and Hove District Nursing Association, so funding problems will likely arise again next year - problems which would not arise if the service directly received an increase in funding.

However, the Infoline - which helped over 1000 distressed women a year - will remain closed. The closure comes amidst a spate of closures of women targeted services - the Women's Resource Centre reporting that 41% of women's organisations had to close a project or a service in the last year due to lack of funds. This is especially important in the area of mental health as even the Department of Health admits that statutory services respond poorly to differences between male and female mental health needs - often resulting in a poor service for women.

Solidarity Cinema film nights - The people's cinema!
The Cowley Club - 12 London Road - free entry
Held the first Tuesday of every month. Food served at 7.30, films for 8.
Next film Tuesday 8 January 2008 - Michael Moore's "Sicko"