

The Sheffield city council budget has been slashed by 8.35% for next year, and this has amounted to a huge cut to front line care. What this has amounted to on the ground is a huge reduction in staffing levels, pushing local unemployment even higher.

I work as a support worker for a private company that provides social care for people in Sheffield for people with learning disabilities and mental health issues. The company I work operates across the city. According to government officials, cuts to public spending will not harm front line services, workers, or service users. The reality of the situation is that working conditions are getting worse, day services are closing down, and those paying for the support services are being excluded from any of the decisions relating to care they supposedly direct and influence.

anarchist support worker

Though not fully clear what the implications of this development are at this stage, what we are likely to see is deterioration in the quality of services, as companies seeking to cut corners in order to make profit become more and more a reality in the healthcare sector. This is also part of the race to the bottom in wages as we are all forced to compete with each other to be the cheapest and work the hardest in order to keep our jobs.

People I speak to at work are extremely worried about the future; the constant reforming of the organisation over the past decade has left morale, even in management's words "extremely low". Many people have felt that there is absolutely no security in the health sector even before the current crisis that is certainly well founded with the government having put aside a pot of £2 billion for upcoming redundancies this year. To add to this the 3,000 staff employed by the trust are also currently in the process of a labour introduced initiative called 'Transforming Community Services'. This initiative aims to finally separate commissioning from provision in the trust. What this boils down to is the organisation being a tiny core of public sector workers who purchase services from whichever private, social enterprise or charity choose to tender for the service. Very often this is the cheapest bidder. The NHS is in the process of becoming little more than a brand, one that hides the fact that rate commissioning from provision in the trust. What this boils down to is the organisation being a tiny core of public sector workers who purchase services from whichever private, social enterprise or charity choose to tender for the service. Very

across many services, indeed Suffolk County Council are looking to do this to every last one of their services to slash costs. sometimes you are being treated by a private company. This is a model you can expect the government to try and replicate

Aside from the past success of these kinds of tactics what we are fighting for is essentially access to education for everybody regardless of income. We also recognise that there is a much wider struggle beyond simply what is happening to education right now. We need to extend these tactics into all of these areas where we are currently under attack. This is a fight that all of us should be taking on and working in solidarity with each other.

In our workplace, Ingeus, a private sector employment services company (who are also currently expressing an interest in the work for your benefits' workers are pilot in Manchester), have been brought in to try and arbitrarily reduce sickness and absence rates that are already well below the NHS average. All those earning over £21,000 a year will have a pay freeze, while all those earning less than this will get a mere £250 a year increase. For me this works out at a 1.5% rise in earnings this year, with the RPI inflation index running at 5.1% currently, this is a real terms pay cut for every single person who works here for the next two years. Workers lucky enough to have a final salary pension scheme will also be affected as payouts are calculated at a percentage of the average of the last 3 years wages.

Due to an ever increasing number of service users the very modest budget increases in the upcoming years do not allow us to maintain the current level of service provision. Frontline services have been cut despite political promises to the contrary. Recruitment including agency staff is frozen and retiring health care staff are not being replaced. Departments who can't meet the required budget cuts through natural wastage are being forced to cut staff. Specialist commissioning staff are being replaced by a GPs buying up services. This has been tried before with disastrous results and was quickly abandoned. GPs are up in arms over having to provide a service they have no experience in and no time to administer. It's almost certain that commissioning will be subcontracted en masse to eagerly waiting private consultancy firms. Also quality control and auditing of services are in the process of being replaced by, what at this stage, appears to be a code of voluntary self policing.

anarchist health worker

It is no wonder that the majority of new workers – with the worst pay and conditions - are too afraid to unionise, and that traditional unions are unable to bridge the divide between 'worker' and 'unemployed'. These unions mostly exist to support one section of the working class at the expense of another. Even in this, they are at present so weak that they can't do much more than negotiate 'fairer' redundancy packages for their members, and settle for below-the-cost-of-living pay increases.

In desperation, several major unions are trying to 'win the argument' with the state about why it doesn't need to make the cuts. In this, too much emphasis is being placed on the demand that the super-rich pay their taxes. This all assumes that the ruling class feels accountable to us. How much more evidence do we need that this is not true?

How we should fight the cuts: In short, we need to fight the cuts with immediacy! This is not a practice run or a time to make threats that we can't back up with action. The state will only make concessions if we threaten its power, to the extent that when capitalists and their tame politicians looks at events in the Arab world, they start to think about what can happen when a people sees its state as illegitimate. We have to make them sweat!

We are already seeing an increase in civil unrest and a shift from reformism to radicalisation in Britain. This will only increase as people's material circumstances decline. We have to turn despair and isolation into power and collective action, to create a mass movement of resistance together.

We should be:

- o Forming **General Assemblies** on the basis of neighbourhoods, communities, universities, industries and so on. The point is that they cut across divisions like worker/non-worker, student/administrative staff/lecturer. They need to elect instantly recallable delegates to co-ordinate with other assemblies, so that vested interests can't take hold and power can't corrupt, and no one can get lazy or sell out. This is the best way to co-ordinate between university and factory occupations, town hall invasions, community-run support groups and so on.

- o Using such assemblies to organise for a **General Social Strike**. The TUC isn't even able to organise a symbolic one-day general workers' strike, and with weak ineffectual unions and poor job security, workers can't risk going it alone. So let's have massive civil disorder on the part of people who can take action: walk-outs of schools and colleges and massive occupations of our city centres; creative use of facilities like libraries, parks, leisure centres to show workers there that we are behind them; economic blockades e.g. of fuel depots where the workers can't get away with picketing, and so on.

- o **Building alternatives** to reliance on the state for everything. Again, general assemblies can provide a structure for this. But we can't replace the state as though it will simply collapse through under-use. We can't bypass it by creating islands of autonomy: it will fight back. We can't pretend that we can manage just fine without it economically either. This is not Cameron's 'Big Society': it is the working class fighting for its life. These alternatives must have revolutionary ideas at their heart and must organise against the state as well as outside it.

What do you think? Talk to us and talk to your anti-cuts comrades and let's start piling the pressure on. Read more from the list of organisations/papers and websites below. If it isn't time for radical change now, when will it be time?

Visit: www.afed.org.uk & www.afed.org.uk/blog.html and read our papers **Organise!** and **Resistance**. See also **Catalyst**, **Freedom** and **Black Flag** – the best papers by other class-struggle anarchists.



What do you make of Aaron Porter's recent comments that the students are 'aligning themselves with the anarchists'?

Because the tactic of occupation, as opposed to lobbying or simply asking political representatives to make changes for us, is a tactic that has been historically successful. Clegg and his broken promise to scrap tuition fees is just one example, among many, that politicians cannot be trusted to make decisions for us. Direct action puts a lot more pressure on university management and by extension government ministers to act. Aside from the past success of these kinds of tactics what we are fighting for is essentially access to education for everybody regardless of income. We also recognise that there is a much wider struggle beyond simply what is happening to education right now. We need to extend these tactics into all of these areas where we are currently under attack. This is a fight that all of us should be taking on and working in solidarity with each other.

Why should the occupation be supported? Because the tactic of occupation, as opposed to lobbying or simply asking political representatives to make changes for us, is a tactic that has been historically successful. Clegg and his broken promise to scrap tuition fees is just one example, among many, that politicians cannot be trusted to make decisions for us. Direct action puts a lot more pressure on university management and by extension government ministers to act. Aside from the past success of these kinds of tactics what we are fighting for is essentially access to education for everybody regardless of income. We also recognise that there is a much wider struggle beyond simply what is happening to education right now. We need to extend these tactics into all of these areas where we are currently under attack. This is a fight that all of us should be taking on and working in solidarity with each other.

Why are you occupying the Hicks building today? We are occupying for a variety of reasons but generally around the common purpose of being against the cuts in this university, to other universities and to education in general. Particularly we want to demonstrate against the proposed rise in tuition fees and the ongoing privatisation of higher education. However, we are also trying our actions to a wider struggle against austerity measures and cuts. So our occupation is about more than just education cuts but this is currently our primary focus.

Mark is a third year Biology student studying at Sheffield University and a member of the Anarchist Federation. He is one among many students currently occupying the Hicks Building on Sheffield University campus. The views expressed in the interview should be considered his alone and not that of the occupation's general assembly.

That does not feel secure, and able to resist the exploitation that is happening. whereas an employee cannot. The changes that management want to bring in over the next few months require a work force in a precarious position, and if they complain about being over worked, and under paid then they can be fired with no notice, workers, while paying double the cost for the privilege. The reasons behind this plan seem fairly obvious. Agency workers are generally this means that the company is firing experienced and dedicated workers to employ untrained and short term agency an agency they are paying for two (agencies charge service rates' which are roughly the same as the employees wages). Es-

The company has also engaged in the bizarre tactic of employing agency staff to work as short term "bank workers" in order to plug the gaps created by the redundancies they have introduced. This means that for every worker the company gets from an agency they are paying for two (agencies charge service rates' which are roughly the same as the employees wages). Es-

being more easily achieved than the practice of good care). managers and the reception area of the company (in order to make it 'look more professional' – the appearance of good care (such as computers that are less than a decade old) instead money has been spent on redecorating the offices of the executive some kind of ethical policy. The reality is that instead of money being invested in desperately needed equipment for staff The company I work for claims to be not-for-profit, this tends to give people the impression that the company operates with

ing behaviour, violence etc) have serious health issues, and to workers, who are not given help to do the job safely (some clients have histories of challenging behaviour, violence etc) have serious health issues, and to workers, who are not given help to do the job safely (some clients have histories of challenging behaviour, violence etc)

er. Those left in the job are left with the unenviable task of filling in the gaps, which means being over worked, and stressed. Many care workers, some with over 20 years experience, are finding it too stressful to carry on, and are walking away from the job, meaning that the most qualified staff in the company are leaving, while new employees, who often aren't given a decent (and legally required) level of training before they are left to work with clients. This is dangerous to both clients, who often have serious health issues, and to workers, who are not given help to do the job safely (some clients have histories of challenging behaviour, violence etc)

everything we've won: they want it back

everything we've won: they want it back



The accompanying three statements by Anarchist Federation workers and students set out how we are experiencing threats to provision and conditions in education, in the NHS and in support for independent living. These are sectors in which many anarchists are involved and we imagine that these stories will resonate with your experiences.

Why anarchists organise against the cuts: Our immediate aim is exactly the same as everyone's: to stop this attack on our economic well-being. As we see it, what little we have as a class, we have won through struggle in previous generations. Now the state is strong enough to take it back again. So anarchists are part of the working class as it defends what it has.

But anarchists don't argue for a benevolent state, for state-ownership of industry and services. This is where we differ from the trades union leadership and most of the Left. We think we need to go further as a class, to achieve political freedom as well as economic equality. So whilst we are defending what we have, we are also attacking the state, threatening its legitimacy and suggesting to people that we would be better off without it.

Under Thatcherism, as under repressive and uncaring regimes elsewhere and before it, the working class had to look after itself. It established voluntarily what it needed when things got really tough, out of mutual solidarity. So, in the 1980s, strike support groups were set up which made major industrial disputes sustainable. In areas of high unemployment, claimants unions emerged. Where racial minorities were marginalised in inner city ghettos, people gave their time freely to save their youth from self-destruction. In places where women experienced violence, rape crisis centres and refuges were set up. We did these things because no one did it for us.

The re-election of Labour initially brought state funding for some of these projects and their workers got qualifications and wages – not a bad thing in itself. But New Labour started eroding the autonomy of radical projects. Grants were cut but Lottery funding – the great sop – was denied to 'political' projects. And what remains of the professionalised voluntary sector is now being demolished by the ConDems.

So this is about us, starting again from scratch, yet again, and with nothing. That's why anarchists don't trust state provision: what it gives with one hand, it can take back with the other. That is why we don't see a contradiction between defending state provision and opposing the state. We all have short-term needs and have to fight to get them met however we can. The process of fighting gives us strength and confidence but also reminds us that all we have is one another. Let's make the most we can of that fact.

Why we don't think the TUC can help us in this fight: The unions are not prepared to stand up to the state but only to tip-toe round the law. They won't risk huge fines by calling for effective action, such as mass or secondary picketing or a general strike.

ALL IN THIS TOGETHER! FOR A GENERAL SOCIAL STRIKE



- * WALK OUTS
- * OCCUPATIONS
- * DIRECT DEMOCRACY
- * WORKPLACE AND NEIGHBOURHOOD ASSEMBLIES



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