

Hereford Heckler



The bulletin of Hereford Solidarity League

FREEDOM, EQUALITY, COMMUNITY • #17 • DECEMBER/JANUARY 2010/11

THINK OF A NUMBER...

0.5—the amount, in billions of pounds, thought to be lost to benefit fraud. **10.5**—billion pounds of benefits that people are entitled to but do not claim. **120**—billion pounds of tax that corporations and super-rich individuals have avoided paying. **1,000,000,000,000**—the number of pounds used to bail out the banks.

GET OUT ONTO THE STREETS!

The last few weeks have seen an explosion of popular anger against government cuts, the dismantling of education and the injustice of bailing out rich bankers.

The protests against this unnecessary assault on working class people have been met by a ferocious response by the super-rich elite who run this country—corrupt media outlets have been falling over themselves to portray the protesters as ‘extremists’ and over-emphasise the damage to property that has occasionally occurred.

Meanwhile very real violence has been inflicted on demonstrators by the state’s ‘boys in blue’—*individual protestors savagely beaten, hundreds arrested without just cause, thousands subject to reckless horse charges and the use of ‘kettling’*. *Police have even been prepared to punish schoolchildren by denying them food, water and toilet facilities for almost 12 hours.*

As we go to press the vote on student fees has just been approved and the state has changed tactics, with numerous articles in the press arguing that the protests have achieved nothing in the end. Nothing could be further from the truth.

The reality is that the state and its servants are now running scared. The campaign to shame the Liberal Democrats who misled the electorate with false election promises has been highly successful. Leading Liberals are becoming too scared to show themselves in public—they were recently forced to cancel their conference in London due to protests—and they are frantically attempting to distance themselves from the government’s policies to which they signed up.

The violent thugs in the police are being forced onto the back foot too. A desperate-sounding media campaign to justify their oppressive tactics and the ridiculous appeal to parents to prevent their children attending demonstrations due to the ‘potential dangers’ fooled no-one. It is clear that

the supposedly impartial ‘thin blue line’ is firmly on the side of the ruling elite. It is an arm of the state, there to defend the rich when they push the people too far.

People are now beginning to question the rules by which this very unequal society operates and are finding the courage to demand something more. One A-level student demonstrating against the cuts said she felt “alive, really alive,” and had never been politically active before.

“I think it slapped me across my face, saying you should have paid attention to the government because they’re liars,” she said.

KEEP UP THE PRESSURE!

Despite what you might be reading in the capitalist press, protest does work! The misinformation campaign, the cowardice of self-interested politicians and the violent suppression of demonstrators is proof of this. Protests have succeeded in overturning great wrongs before: votes for women, the eight-hour day and civil rights in America were all notable struggles won by campaigns of direct action and civil disobedience.

We can and must maintain the pressure on the super-rich elite. They must not be allowed to get away with their crimes against the poor.

In our opinion it is vital not just that the protests continue but that they are expanded in scope to include all those of us affected by the state’s policies of ‘slash and burn’. We must not allow the media to divide us into separate groups—students, trade unionists, benefit claimants etc. We must drive home the message that the cuts affect every one of us and that they are being pursued for the benefit of the rich not in the interests of all...

... We call on all readers to get out onto the streets! Defend your communities! Stand together with your neighbours to resist these attacks on working class people! We can and will succeed!

STUDENTS MARCH ON TOWN HALL

Over 500 students joined a walkout and demonstration in Hereford against the proposed rise in tuition fees and the scrapping of Educational Maintenance Allowance.

Hundreds walked out of lessons at the Folly Lane colleges and marched down Aylestone Hill into High Town to chants of 'no ifs, no buts, no education cuts'.

Many onlookers honked horns or clapped in support of the demonstrating students, which was part of a national day of action on 24th November.

Upon arrival in High Town students gave speeches to the crowd before moving off again, this time to the Town Hall to present a petition to council staff.

Students from schools, sixth form colleges and universities up and down the country took part in similar protests in their areas.

What was needed was for the Hereford march was to go beyond the uncreative, and often ineffective, walk from point A to point B. After the march came to a standstill many students were left asking 'what are we doing next' and 'why don't we march somewhere else'. Elsewhere around the



country students had occupied university buildings and blocked roads. Unfortunately, no such action occurred in Hereford.

The truth is that a petition that is supposedly going to be handed to central government will achieve very little—it will be thrown straight in the bin and not seen again.

A sit-down protest, or an occupation of a building such as the Town Hall, instead of just a speech from the bench outside, may have offered a more effective and lasting method of protest.

At this stage we cannot rule out any tactic, and we need to be prepared to use whatever works to stop the ConDem's attacks on working class people.

As we go to press, parliament has approved a rise in tuition fees. These protests are now a litmus test for other anti-cuts campaigns. Where will the students go from here? What better tactics could be used? How much have the protests rocked the government? This is not the end, there's still all to play for.

No to cuts in benefits— HEREFORD CLAIMANTS MARCH

On the same day as the student protest, Hereford's claimants also marched against cuts to their benefits.

They joined a march from the Job Centre, through High Town before meeting up with students at the Town Hall.

Numerous studies since the coalition government were elected have shown that it is poorer people that will be hit the hardest, particularly benefit claimants who face cuts in housing benefit.

Among other government initiatives are plans to make all recipients of Job Seekers Allowance do a compulsory four weeks full-time work for no pay. If they refuse they lose their benefits.

Our fight against government cuts needs to be continued and extended. Workers, students, the disabled, the elderly as well as benefit claimants need to fight together and step up the resistance—mass demonstrations, pickets, occupations and strikes—whatever it takes to get our message across that the cuts must be stopped!

MAKE THE RICH PAY

We live in a vastly unequal society. The richest 20% of the UK population own more than 60% of the wealth – around 5 trillion pounds.

The cuts in spending are being made because the country is in debt – the last government used £1 trillion of public money to bail out corrupt bankers who had gambled away Britain's future.

This government is making the rest of us pay for the recklessness of the rich. The cuts to education, benefits and other essential services and the massive job losses will affect the poorest parts of our society most.

Meanwhile prices in the shops are rising—not helped by next year's massive VAT increase.

Yet the rich are being rewarded! Whilst the government tries to shift the blame on to benefit fraud it has allowed the super-rich to dodge taxes of up to £40 billion using their Swiss bank accounts. And corporations like Vodafone and Boots are swindling the British public of another £83 billion through tax-avoidance schemes.

And, of course, those rich bankers keep on awarding themselves HUGE bonuses—£4 billion this year!

That's not fair. Make the rich pay for the damage they caused, not ordinary people like me and you.

(TEXT OF A FLYER GIVEN OUT AT RECENT DEMONSTRATIONS IN HEREFORD)

HUNDREDS MARCH AGAINST CUTS IN GLOUCESTER



Hundreds of protesters—including members of Hereford Solidarity League—marched through the centre of Gloucester in November in opposition to the governments programme of cuts.

Despite the rain and the biting cold, three to four hundred people congregated at Gloucester Park on the morning of 20th November. After some short speeches the march set off through the city, coming to a stop at the Shire Hall. Here, some more speeches were heard from the trade unions.

We were told police had been up to their usual tricks prior to the march, attending a planning meeting by the Gloucester Trades Council, who'd organised the event, **to warn them of that anarchists from Hereford (presumably us) were planning to attend.** The trades council were nonetheless pleased to have our support on the day and seemed to care little for the police's **blatent scaremongering.**

Shortly after the speeches ended, a group of marchers decided to picket the city's Vodafone store. This protest was similar to dozens recently held across the country and was to highlight **the company's unpaid tax bill of £6 billion,** showing the relationship between unpaid tax of the rich and the poor paying the price through the cuts.

Police had formed a line in front of the store before we had even arrived and shutters were pulled down behind the door and windows, leaving some customers ***TRAPPED INSIDE!*** Leaflets were handed out and demonstrators explained to passers-by the reasons for the protest, many of whom were supportive.

Boots was also picketed to highlight the fact that they have recently moved their HQ to a Swiss PO Box in another tax avoidance scheme.

facebook 'Hereford Heckler'

Pickets and public meetings say...

MP MUST GO

Disgraced North Herefordshire MP, Bill Wiggin, has been ordered to repay more than £4,000 after over-claiming on his expenses.

Bill Wiggin was also told in October to say sorry for wrongly designating his second home in London as his main home.

Wiggin had previously been exposed for claiming interest payments for his 'second home' near Ledbury for almost two years, despite the fact that the £480,000 house had had no mortgage at all.

Locally, Hereford Solidarity League members have been amongst those keeping up the pressure on him to stand down as MP.

On two occasions our members have attended his surgeries: in Leominster in October where, with full support from all passers-by, Wiggin got an hour-long earful from the street whilst trying to go about his business; in Ledbury in November Wiggin was presented with a ready drafted letter of resignation for him to sign*. He met with us briefly only to say all we had heard about him was apparently lies.

A public meeting was also held by Leominster residents to discuss the town's reaction to orders for Wiggin to pay back over £4,000 in



stolen expenses. The meeting passed motions stating:

• That Leominster's mayor write to the prime minister reminding him that he made a promise to put Bill Wiggin "out of the door" should he be found to have claimed money he was not entitled to; and asking, now parliament has decided Mr Wiggin falsely claimed money, that the prime minister honour his promise.

• That Leominster's mayor write to the chairman of North Herefordshire Conservative Association asking them to instruct Bill Wiggin to hand over his bank statements and utility bills for inspection.

• That Leominster's mayor write to the chairman of North Herefordshire Conservative Association asking that they consider asking him to stand down as MP.

The pressure is still firmly on Bill Wiggin to stand down. Hereford Solidarity League will be picketing the MP's future surgeries and invite all constituents to join us. See our Facebook page for further details when they are announced.

*This letter can be read in full on our website: www.herefordheckler.wordpress.com

BOYCOTT CALLED ON TESCO

Over a hundred residents from the Hinton and Putson neighbourhoods of Hereford turned out to a protest meeting against Tesco's plans to build a store in the area.

The meeting, held in mid-October, heard how the new owners of the now closed Gamecock pub had been sold the premises on the condition they would lease it to Tesco for a minimum of 20 years.

Neighbouring greengrocers, Flynn's, have said that they will go out of business more or less as soon as the new Tesco store opens. Many local farmers, who supply the grocers with produce, will feel a knock-on effect and other stores in the area are also threatened.

The meeting voted almost unanimously to boycott Tesco around the city from now on. Plans are also being made to mount a strict boycott campaign of the new store when it opens.

An organising committee was also formed and has now called for a picket of Tesco's Bewell Street store on 18th December. We encourage all Hinton and Putson residents to attend.

PICKET TESCO SATURDAY 18TH DECEMBER, 12 – 1PM AT TESCO IN TOWN. BRING PLACARDS

Religious Fundamentalists Target Hereford Youth

There is growing concern amongst parents and youth workers in Hereford about the increasing influence of Christian fundamentalists on young people. In particular the growing influence of Freedom Church who, through the work carried out by their youth group 2XL, are being openly promoted and funded by Herefordshire Council, as seen with the free two-page advert in this month's 'Herefordshire Matters'.

Christian fanatics like Freedom Church hide behind the veneer of forward thinking, welcoming, new-age acceptability. But look beyond this shiny PR and you'll find a group that disregards science in favour of 'creationism', thinks of contraception and homosexuality as unholy and believe that women should be subservient to dominant males. In all a narrow minded and unethical, fundamentalist cult.

Of course like all religious groups Freedom Church promote the work they do here and abroad as the positive

work of god, and any youth work that 2XL is involved in is heavily regulated. But what many people are asking is how a church with such extreme views can get paid to deliver sexual health work in schools. How do they approach subjects like abortion, homosexuality and gender issues?

Freedom Church is not the only organisation causing concern. Questions are being asked about the work done by Close House in Hereford. What is the real agenda motivating these people? Are they simply trying to recruit more members? We have religious freedom in this country but we also have a duty to protect young people from the damaging influence of religious groups. We can only imagine the uproar if these groups were part of the Muslim faith.

We at Hereford Solidarity League believe there is no place for religion in education, but it should be up to every student, parent and teacher to decide who is involved in schools and youth groups. Choices can only be made if groups like Freedom Church and Close House are forced to make it clear who they are and what they stand for.

DON'T MOAN, ORGANISE! GETTING A CAMPAIGN STARTED

So you've been getting angry about plans to turn your local park into a VIP nightclub for weeks now. You've written to your councillor and he's ignored you. Now it's time to start a campaign.

Once you've checked there's not already a similar campaign going, you should begin by calling a meeting. This can be public or private; you can invite the whole town or just concerned friends and neighbours. The purpose of this meeting is to get people involved.

Make sure everyone's fully aware of the issue and why it will be bad for the community (or good, if you're campaigning FOR something). Find out what people are willing to do to help and, if possible, divide up the tasks there and then to give people a chance to get instantly involved i.e. someone doing research, someone organising fundraising events, another person putting a leaflet together. And don't forget to set a date for the next meeting.

Choose tactics that you think will work and pick them accordingly. If you're campaigning for more bins in your area try a letter writing campaign and maybe publicity stunts like inviting the press to a community litter-pick. If you're trying to shut down a shop that's selling knives to young children try pickets and boycotts.

Most importantly, keep at it. You're unlikely to be successful over night and some campaigns can go on for years. But with a bit of perseverance and enthusiasm you can achieve any goal you want to.

WE RECOMMEND 'THE PROTESTER'S HANDBOOK' BY BIBI VAN DER ZEE AS AN EXCELLENT INTRODUCTION TO CAMPAIGNING.



SPORT

WERE ALL IN THIS TOGETHER? *What a load of old balls!*

It's FA Cup 3rd Round time and the papers are full of the usual clichés about the 'romance of the cup' in England where everyone has a chance to win. What a load of old balls!

We in Hereford know a fair bit about Cup shocks—who can forget Ronnie Radford's rocket that did for big-boys Newcastle Utd in 1972? But the truth is that English football—like English society—is dominated by a few wealthy clubs! Yes, there has been the odd 'giant killing' but over the last 20 years the FA Cup has been won by one of the top four Premier League teams on all but two occasions. In fact, only 8 non-elite clubs have won the FA Cup at all during its 140-year history—the last time being three decades ago!

And while the rest of us struggle to find the money to watch our local teams, the overpaid and under-talented Premier League elite continue to rub their obscene wealth in our faces. Recently, it has been revealed that the top clubs spent a staggering £67 million on agents' fees alone last season! Meanwhile the players themselves earned an incredible £1.3 billion in wages. When you include lucrative fees from advertising and numerous add-ons the rewards for our richest footballers are staggering. Michael Owen is currently the wealthiest Premier League player, worth a staggering £40 million—not bad when you consider that in the last 18 months he has done less than 12 hours work! And, like other rich scum, top footballers dodge paying taxes: putting half of their ridiculously-large wages into specially-created 'trust funds' so that even in times of austerity they don't have to pay their way.

As we go to press, Hereford Utd are still in with a chance of FA Cup glory this season. But remember, as we stand shivering on the terraces and our cash-strapped local club desperately attempts to keep the dream alive, the odds are firmly against us. In sport, as with English society in general, it's NOT an even playing field—the odds are stacked on the side of the rich!

AGAINST MODERN FOOTBALL

There are not many football clubs that openly oppose the commercialisation of the sport, but FC United of Manchester (FCUM) have reminded the footballing world that not everyone has sold out. Those uninterested in football may not be aware that FCUM were set up in response to Malcolm Glazer's takeover of Manchester United FC five year ago.

The new club immediately set out to do things in a radically different way from most other football clubs. The club is an Industrial and Provident Society where members elect the board, with membership decisions being made on a one-person, one vote basis. The club pledges to avoid outright commercialism and does not display sponsors logos on the team shirts.

At the beginning of November FCUM played against Rochdale in the first round of the FA Cup. This was the biggest moment in the clubs short history, and so warranted a feature on Football Focus on BBC1.

On the day the live interviews were due to take place the National Union of Journalists were on strike at the BBC in a dispute over pensions. In a show of solidarity reminiscent of the club's working class roots, FCUM representatives would not 'cross the picket lines' and refused to be interviewed. How many other clubs would do the same?

The programme went on air with scab guest, and ex-Man United player, Nicky Butt, and scab presenters Dan Walker and Lee Dixon discussing FCUM while walking around that home of capitalist football, Old Trafford. Oh the irony!

Source: northernvoicesmag.blogspot.com



Helen Heckler

■ David Chameleon was up to his old tricks last weekend, attempting to pass himself off as 'one of us' by backing the bid for the World Cup and discussing the weekend's footie on a popular BBC show. The sycophantic idiot was left with egg on his face when he predicted a big win for 'his' team and they ended up being thrashed! Turns out that he knows as much about working-class sports as he does about working-class life - sod all!

■ Oi Jesse Norman. How do you justify cutting mobility allowance for disabled people? This money is vital for people to be independent and play an active part in their communities. Your rich banker mates caused the recession and you make the most vulnerable in society pay. Compassionate conservative my arse!

■ Wikileaks? Fantastic! When mainstream media fail to do their job properly it comes down to people like this to do it for them. Great to see the lies and double standards of our so-called leaders revealed for all to see. Obama, Bush, Blair, Brown, Cameron, Karzai, Ajmadinejad scumbags one and all.

GET INVOLVED

If you agree with what we've said in the Heckler then why not get involved with us? We hold regular business and discussion meetings where decisions are made and we have no leaders, which means everyone participates on an equal basis. Email us at the address below to find out more.

■ **Hereford Solidarity League** works to build a society based on the ideas of **freedom, equality and community** ■ **Anti-fascism is an important part of our politics**, but we believe that all politicians maintain a system of inequality, privilege and control that divides communities ■ Real change does not happen at the ballot box and can only come about by **independent working class action**; that is, people looking out for each other and organising themselves to deal with the problems that they experience on a day to day basis ■ Our aim is to increase the fighting spirit and self-confidence of working class people to change things for themselves.

Find us on the internet—Join our **Facebook group 'Hereford Heckler'**; visit www.herefordheckler.wordpress.com; or email kay.bulstreet@hotmail.co.uk

