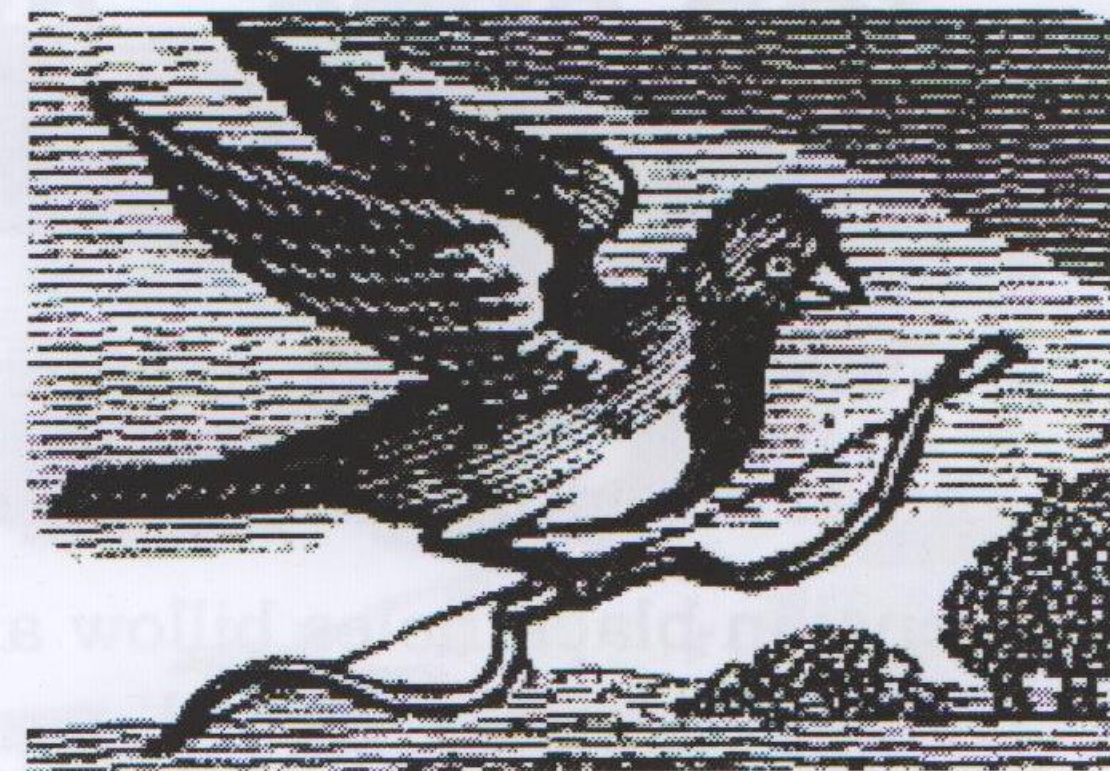


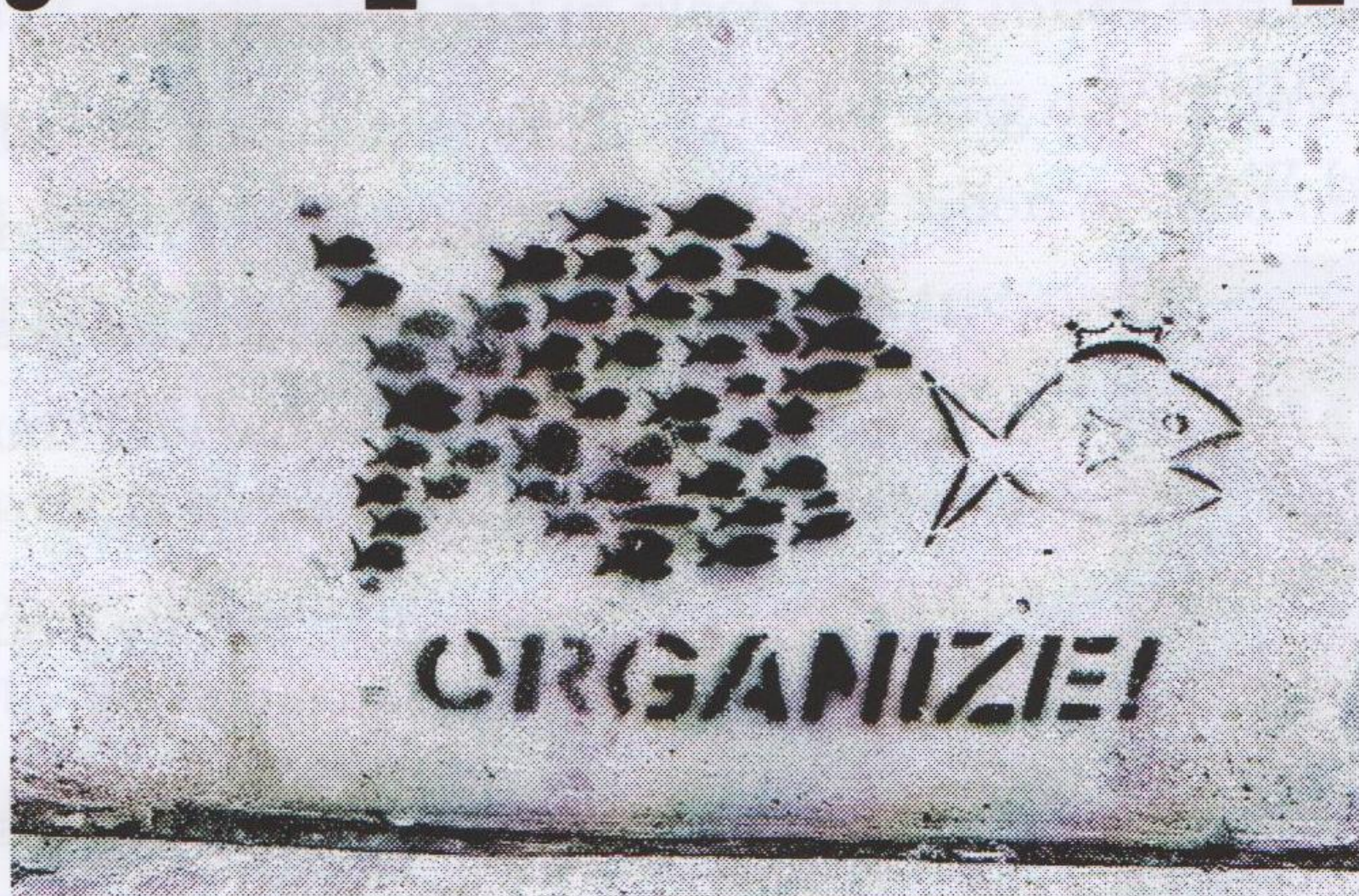
THE NOTTINGHAM SPARROW



Rebel Nottingham ~ Our Nottingham

May 2010 N°4

They expect us to pay



We won't let them!

Labour's Alistair Darling says that cuts will be "tougher and deeper" than those of Margaret Thatcher. The think-tank Institute for Fiscal Studies has said that hefty tax rises and Whitehall spending cuts of 25% over six years are on the cards. Already we are looking at an extraordinary level of attacks on us, the worst off in society. Public sector workers, already underpaid as a trade-off for greater security and better working conditions, are looking at unprecedented attacks on them.

The Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development estimated in April that a reduction of 580,000 in the core public sector workforce was probable, "dwarfing anything explicit in the election manifestos". An across-the-board pay freeze this year is looking extremely likely. The PCS union have arranged strikes against the reduction in redundancy payments for public sector workers. These redundancy arrangements were actually arranged during the stewardship of that notorious friend of the workers, Margaret Thatcher. Apparently it's fine to have redundancy payments in place as long as no one is actually planning to make redundancies.

Continues inside

LETTERS TO THE SPARROWS' NEST

Collins' darkest hour

Dear Sparrows, During the widespread opposition to the English Defence League in Nottingham on St. James Street, I spied council leader Jon Collins barking or possibly bleating into his mobile phone.

It seems he was starting to get a bit worried about 'patriotic' thugs bottling citizens of the City from the doorstep of Wetherspoons.

Hopefully he was wondering how a pub that had indicated that no way would the EDL be allowed to drink in town was suddenly full of drunken nationalist extremists.

The same thugs were then allowed by Notts police and officers from other forces to go marauding about the city until well after dark.

Keep up the good work,
- Margaret, NG3

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JOB CUTS – SERVICE CUTS – BENEFITS SLASHED - HIGHER TAXES - LOWER WAGES – LONGER HOURS

In the private sector, businesses use the recession and threat of redundancy as an excuse to reduce employee pay. Pension black holes billow and gape as they are dipped into at will to fund financial speculation. Meanwhile corporate profits continue to soar with shareholders and board executives the only ones reaping the benefits. Indeed there may have been a recession but the combined fortunes of the richest people in Britain managed to rise by nearly 30% last year. We live in the time of the greatest inequality between rich and poor since the Second World War.



The elections are a sideshow. Every party with a chance of winning the election and even those without are promising these swingeing cuts. Capitalism needs unemployment as a stick to beat us with. A threat hanging over us so we're willing to accept ever more outrageous demands upon us. Every year that stick gets bigger and bigger and the benefits won by years and years of workers working together disappear. Bosses try to keep profits up by slashing wages and making redundancies.

The only way we can defeat them is by recognising what we have in common and sticking together across grade, trade, contract type or nationality and by organising common action with the growing army of unemployed workers. We have to work together for our own material interests. Interests that are and always will be diametrically opposed to those of the bosses who must administer our economy to maximize profit, whatever the human or environmental cost. There's plenty more of us than them. We need to organise ourselves democratically in our workplaces and communities and **fight back.**

Nottingham City Council plans

£17.2m worth of cuts this year

- Proposed closure of Riverside Residential Home
- Closure of the Willows Older Persons Day Centre at weekends
- New £2 daily charge for attendance at all Adult Day Centres
- Cuts in day care for adults living in Residential and Nursing Homes
- 3% Increase in charges for Homecare, meals at home and transport to Day Centres
- Disbanding of City Council Deaf Team
- Closure of Victoria Leisure Centre was brought forward
- Closure of libraries at Wilford and Beechdale
- Closure of Radford Unity Complex
- Closure of Council for Equality and Human Rights

Nottingham County Council plans

£28.7m cuts this year

- End of funding for Dial-a-ride
- Care homes to be privatised
- Several recycling centres to close
- County Contact points to close
- 1,400 jobs to be lost over three years
- Increase in community care charges from £8.80 to £12.00 per hour
- Increase in the cost of meals in residential and day care services by over 50%
- Increase in home to day care transport charges for service users by 86%
- Reduce welfare rights provision by 33%

PUBLIC SECTOR

Nottingham NHS Trusts to cut £133 million over four years

The NHS is expecting to have to make £20bn savings by 2014. From a survey by the Royal College of Nurses, 26 of the 168 English healthcare trusts 5,600 jobs were already earmarked for cuts in an attempt to slash costs, rising to 36,000 in a worst-case scenario if the trend was replicated across all hospital trusts. Hospital Trusts were also planning a reduction of 1,500 hospital beds.

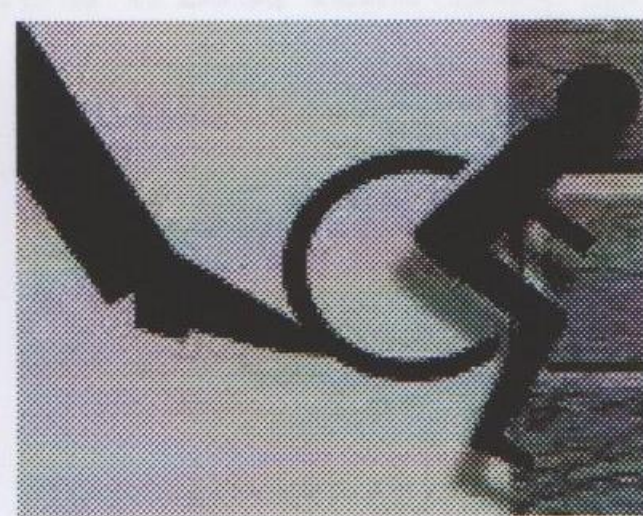
Added to this, a recruitment freeze is in place in a number of trusts and workers leaving the NHS are not being replaced. As an example of what this means over 3000 nurses a year retire from the service. We can expect a step up in the policies of privatisation put in place by the Tories and continued by Labour. This will involve an increase in the farming out of services to privately run treatment services and a continuing expectation of community services such as the blood service and interpreting and translation to compete against multinational companies in the marketplace.

The framework is already in place for services such as Health Visitors and Midwives to follow the same route. The NHS with its free healthcare for all when it's needed is by far our most popular of our public institution. Sickness and suffering should never be something run in the name of profit.

Education – in short

University and College workers will not be getting a pay deal. More than three-quarters of universities in England are to have their budgets cut for this September – some by nearly 14%, Up to 200,000 prospective university students - around a third of all applicants - are likely to miss out on a place this year because of unprecedented demand. In Nottingham, Castle College is making cuts of £6 million and is to close three of its campus - Eastwood, Carlton Rd and Beeston are being sold off with a total of 115 workers being made redundant.

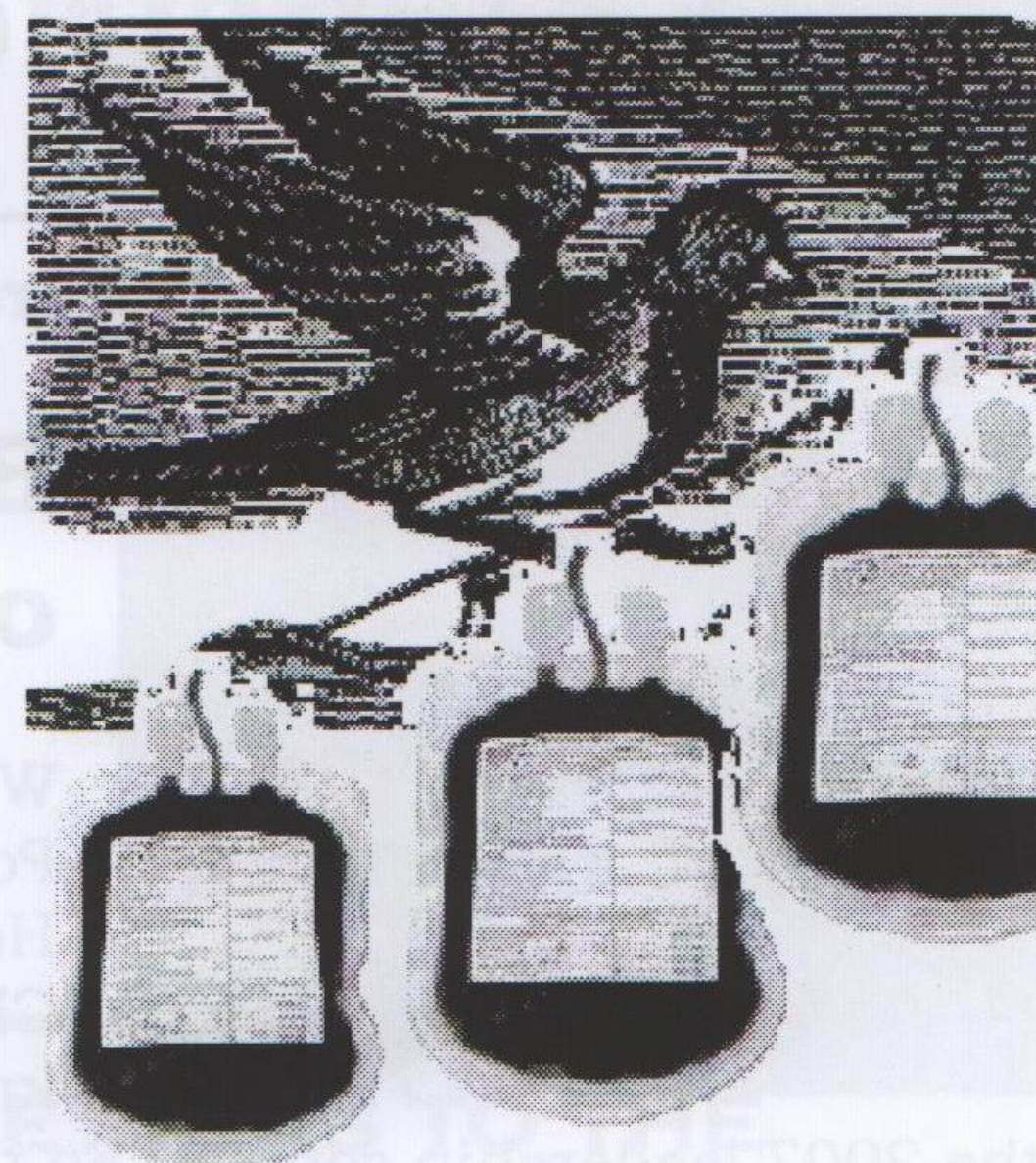
Benefits and 'Welfare Reform'



Whilst more and more people require access to the meagre benefits they need, it continues to become harder and harder to get them. At 2.5 million, the number of people out of work is at its highest since the last three months of 1994. But the claimant count actually fell by 33,000 to 1.5

million in March 2010. This follows a revised fall of 40,000 in February 2010, which was the sharpest drop since June 1997. One economist euphemistically stated that people out of work are "either unable to claim benefits or choosing not to". Everyone else knows the reason for this – the numerous hoops, lengthy delays and constant harassment claimants have to endure for a payment that continues to decrease compared with the costs of living.

The number of people classed as 'economically inactive' is at the highest level since records began in 1971. Long-term unemployment (those out of work for more than a year) increased by 89,000 to 726,000. The recent Welfare Reform Act introduced 'Work for your Benefit' pilot schemes similar to 'workfare' in the USA - 40-hour-weeks for under a third of the minimum wage, a pitiful £1:27 an hour. It also attacked single parents who face sanctions if they fail to prepare for work outside the home as soon as their child turns three and people with impairments, disabilities or severe and enduring illnesses who are being forced off Incapacity Benefit (or ESA) on to Jobseekers.



Documents leaked from a Foundation Trust network urged:

- Abolition of "clinical excellence awards" (merit payments or bonuses for consultants)
- Freezing incremental pay progression for 2/3 years
- Reducing the number of pay bands
- Reform of sick pay
- Extending daytime working hours to 10pm

These are conditions that are liable to be replicated across the NHS as a whole.



Bossy Boots Brown and the Wicked Witches of the East (Nottingham constituency)

Word has it that City Council leader Jon Collins was crying into his pint at the Poacher the other day as he learned that the Labour Party had rejected him as John Hepple's successor in the Nottingham East constituency. They've parachuted in Chris Lesley. Never heard of him? No wonder. He's done little of note, and doesn't know the area. But he's Gordon Brown's mate and was his campaign manager in

the 2007 leadership contest! So that's OK then...

The views of local party activists were ignored as Gordon 'bossy boots' Brown intervened at the last moment to impose a candidate on the constituency. So they whine in blogs such as that of Peter Kenyon, the self-styled 'social and political entrepreneur'(whatever that means). Kenyon's conclusion is that it's 'time to rally round' nonetheless. In other words, pretend that the self-righteous authoritarian control freaks running the country know what's best for us in Nottingham. No doubt Collins and the rest will indeed rally round as good party loyalists.

Either way - and talking about authoritarians - we're glad to see 'whipper-boy' Hepple go. Let's summarise his illustrious career as our M.P. *Likes*: the Iraq war, ID cards, the 'anti-terror' clampdown and foundation hospitals. *Dislikes*: refugees, opponents of climate change, parliamentary transparency and free education.

Chris Lesley, we are watching you too!

So is it all doom and gloom?

It doesn't have to be! If we're honest, we're not in a very strong position and we're likely to take the brunt of this crisis unless we set about changing that. There are various things we can do, ranging from simple things you're probably doing already to daring acts of collective action to win the things we need. So...

Talk to your workmates. Make time on your breaks or in the pub after work. We're all in the same boat, just realising this is a step towards doing something about it. When you realise your problems aren't personal but social, all sorts of possibilities for mutual aid open up. Beware bosses claiming they're in the same boat too; who do you think they'd throw overboard first?

Network with other workers. Do you have friends or friends-of-friends working locally in the same sector as you? Consider going for a coffee or a pint to swap experiences and find out if there's anything you can learn from each other, or ways to help each other out (like handing out leaflets at each others workplaces so the boss can't victimise you).

Consider collective action. The principle is that while on our own we are weak, when we act together we can achieve more than the sum of our parts. Examples include going in a group to the manager's office to support colleagues being made redundant or pressured into working longer or harder. There's safety in numbers. Or deciding with your workmates to 'work-to-contract' - taking your breaks and leaving on time in response to pressure to do more work. It's easier to say no to the boss when you know your workmates are doing the same. More dramatically, things like occupations can win major concessions. When workers were laid off at a factory in Northern Ireland recently they occupied the plant for 48 hours demanding improved redundancy terms. They won. By acting together they turned the tables on the bosses, who expected them to go home alone and 'think things over.' Instead they showed the inevitable wasn't so inevitable. It isn't always easy to take collective action, but it starts from realising what we have in common with other workers, and what we don't have in common with the politicians and bosses trying to shift the costs of the crisis onto us. We can't fight back on our own, but together we have a chance.

[this section adapted from Teabreak bulletin published by libcom.org]