

Claimants resist 'forced labour'

By Harry McGill

Hackney residents have been organising with groups across London and beyond to resist government plans to turn benefits claimants into a "reserve army of cheap labour".

Under the Single Work Programme (SWP) that is being rolled out nationally, claimants will have to do compulsory work for companies such as Primark. They will not receive a wage, or the benefits and working conditions given to regular workers. They will be used to replace existing workers and push down wage levels.

If people refuse to work for free, or employers judge that they're not working hard enough, their benefits can be cut. The breadline £65 a week unemployment allowance can be removed for up to three years.

Welfare Action Hackney, together with the London Coalition Against Poverty and other groups,

are calling for employers to boycott the "slave labour" scheme. We have already won support from several employers and union branches.

They are also demanding a grievance procedure for claimants to challenge unfair penalties imposed on their benefits. And they are working to get SWP workers unionised to protect their rights.

Free welfare advice is available at a weekly drop-in session, every Thursday at Bohemia Café, opposite Hackney Central station.

The SWP is part of government efforts to strip away the minimal safety net and create conditions where people have no choice but to take any job, regardless of pay and conditions.

The major flaw of this welfare reform is long term unemployment has doubled in the last two years. There are no jobs out there!

For more information, go to welfareactionhackney.org

Prepare to campaign over council tenancies

The government has set out proposals as part of its Localism Bill which will see fixed-term tenancies for new council tenants.

It will also see some new housing association tenants paying a rent as high as 80% of the market rent – a huge increase.

These measures, taken together with the introduction of radical changes, and major cuts, to housing benefit, mean the government is making a real attack on our housing.

Local campaigners want to join together with all those who oppose the government's proposals in an effective broad and united campaign in order to fight for the housing we need.

Eileen Short, chair of Defend Council Housing, and part of the new umbrella Housing Emergency campaign, will be speaking at our next Alliance meeting on 3 May.

News from the Hackney Alliance to Defend Public Services



Hackney alliance supporters on the great TUC demonstration in central London last month

Join the fight to stop the cuts

Hundreds of thousands of people joined the giant TUC demonstration in central London on 26 March to protest against the ConDem government's attacks.

They marched against Tory plans to privatise our NHS, our schools and our universities. They protested about the cuts to local services, attacks on pensions and a host of other crimes.

In Hackney, youth workers, health workers and teachers are already protesting over cuts to local services.

Everyone needs to get behind them, and encourage others to do the same.

That is what the Hackney Alliance to Defend Public Services was set up to do.

Since July last year, the alliance has held public meetings, organised lobbies of the local council and backed protests by local campaigns and trade unions.

Those protests and campaigns are set to become more widespread and tougher.

Despite appeals that it lead a

borough-wide fight to stop the ConDem attacks, Hackney council earlier this month shamefully, and unanimously, voted through a massive £44 million of cuts.

It claims this will not affect local services significantly, but already youth workers face redundancy, and some 200 council staff have taken voluntary redundancy.

We now need to build a much bigger alliance to make sure every attack – be it from the council or the government – is seen off!

Join the alliance now.

www.hackneyalliance.wordpress.com

HACKNEY ALLIANCE
TO DEFEND
PUBLIC SERVICES



GOT A STORY?

WANT TO GET INVOLVED?

● Call Glyn, 07810 545838

● E-mail hackneyalliance@hotmail.com

● Come to our meetings at The Moth Club, Valette Street, E8

● Need a creche or childcare so you can come? Get in touch

● For Turkish translations go the website above

Hackney Alliance is supported by Amicus London, Day-Mer, Hackney Unison (Local Government), Hackney Unison (Homerton Hospital), Hackney Teachers Alliance (NUT), Hackney PCS, Hackney Labour Representation Committee, Hackney North and SN CWP, Hackney Green Party, Hackney Right to Work, Hackney Keep Our NHS Public, Friends of Hackney Nurseries, Hackney Anti-Academies Alliance, Hackney Trades Union Council, Hackney Housing Group, Hackney Stop the War, Hackney Cultural Association, Lea Bridge CLP, NUJ Press & PR, Refugee Workers' Cultural Association (Gik Der), TGWU (Unite), UCU Community College

Health workers defend our NHS

By Hackney health workers

Health workers and supporters are beginning to mobilise against the Coalition government's Health & Social Care Bill, which proposes the most radical and destructive changes to the NHS since its foundation in 1948.

The Bill comes on top of the myriad of cuts facing health services around the country.

Around 300 health workers demonstrated at Homerton Hospital last month over plans to make cuts of £15 million.

And three weeks ago, nurses, doctors and other health workers joined a 1,000-strong march from the Royal London Hospital in Whitechapel to St Bartholomews in the City to protest over threats to cuts up to 600 jobs over the two facilities.

Alongside the cuts, the marchers protested against the government's

Health and Social Care Bill

If enacted, the Bill will see the end of a comprehensive, equitable health service based on individual patient and population need.

The NHS will become a franchise, with private corporations deciding health policy, and cherrypicking services which are profitable. The NHS will be more and more geared towards treating people with straightforward illnesses.

Meanwhile, GP services will be transformed into competing businesses obliged to contract services from a host of private, profiteering companies providing health services alongside a diminishing NHS.

● **Join the campaign to Kill the Bill. See more information and how to fight the Health and Social Care Bill at www.KeepOurNHSpublic.com.**

Homerton bosses back off

Management at Homerton Hospital has backed off badly damaging the hospital's advocacy service, which helps patients who cannot speak English describe their condition, and provides support during their confinement.

It follows a campaign by UNISON union members at the hospital, who joined forces with advocates and community groups to voice opposition to the cuts.

Management had proposed cutting all advocacy posts except those for Turkish speakers. All agency and "bank" bookings for face-to-face advocacy were to be

discontinued. Patients would have been forced to use the telephone interpreting service instead.

Management has now agreed to retain three part-time posts covering six languages. In addition, it has recognised that patients facing complex consultations need face-to-face advocacy, and should retain the right to request it. The proposal to move to an interpretation only service has been put on hold.

This is only the beginning, and many more cuts are to come. The lesson we need to draw from the advocates' campaign is that fighting back pays off.

"The price of this financial crisis is being born by people who did absolutely nothing to cause it. Now is the period when the cost in being paid, I'm surprised that the degree of public anger has not been greater"

Mervyn King, governor of the Bank of England

BANKERS' BONUSES

Ending tax relief on bankers' bonuses at banker Goldman Sachs alone could pay half the cost of the Education Maintenance Allowance

DEFICIT LIES

In 1945, the level of debt in the British economy stood at an astonishing 200% of GDP— far greater than the "deficit" that the ConDems say must be paid off in four year. Yet that debt did not stop successive governments creating the NHS, the welfare state, and building hundreds of thousands of council homes

MAKE THE RICH PAY

The wealth of the 1,000 richest people in Britain rose by £77 billion last year. A 10% tax on that would raise £7.7 billion

ESOL campaign garners support

Around three hundred Hackney ESOL students, teachers and supporters came together on Sunday 13 March in protest against the proposed cuts to ESOL funding.

Under government plans, from August only those on "active benefits" will be eligible for full fee remission, a change which will bar the majority of ESOL learners in the borough from free ESOL classes.

The Save ESOL Day event, organised by Hackney Action for ESOL, saw students gather with their families in London Fields, where they made banners, signed petitions and recorded testimonies about what ESOL means to them.

A noisy march then proceeded to Hackney Town Hall, where students delivered powerful speeches on the critical importance of ESOL in their lives.

Amina Omar, who studies ESOL for Childcare at Tyssen Children's Centre, described the cuts to ESOL provision as "completely



ESOL campaigners joined the rally outside Hackney Town Hall

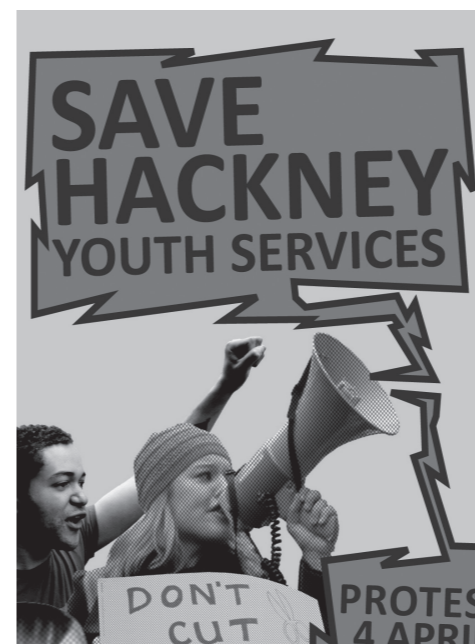
wrong". Amina, who came to the UK from Somalia, spoke about the contradiction in government policies which emphasise the importance of integration, yet are taking away people's opportunities to learn English.

Amina wants to volunteer and to work, but needs ESOL to do this: "Without ESOL, how can we

communicate and find jobs? It is shameful."

SOL teacher Dipa Vaghela added "The changes are going to have a huge impact, especially on those who are on a low income and women with young children. People's lives are improved through education and the power to communicate."

Youth workers protest over cuts



Hackney youth workers and supporters protested at the council's Children's & Young People Scrutiny Committee meeting at Hackney Town Hall on Monday 4 April to protest over major cuts to youth services across the borough.

The council that last month said it was not cutting frontline services

STOP THE TAX DODGERS

Tax dodging by corporations and the rich costs the government £95 billion each year – more than what the government will save from cuts

is shutting down its youth service merging it with the Youth Offending Team to create Young Hackney Service.

It is shutting most of the borough's youth clubs. Only the 5 hubs (Parkside, Stoke Newington Milton Gardens and Forest Road, Concorde and Hoxton Hall) are included in the strategy.

So, at a time when youth unemployment is rocketing, the council is making 91 workers redundant between the Youth Service, Youth Support Team and Youth Offending Team, leaving just 90 full-time posts in the new service.