

**Morning Star National Conference
Congress House
Saturday 19 June**

Report of NDTUC Delegate

Morning Star

The day-long conference opened with a potted history of Britain's only socialist daily newspaper. This is a history characterised by the promotion and defence of the British working class and its representatives over decades and through two world wars. It emerged from newspapers like the Chartist Northern Star, which outsold even the Times, though most of its "readers" could neither read nor write, and had to have the paper read to them.

In its history, the paper's journalists defied bans, prescriptions and boycotts by Governments and wholesalers who refused to handle it. But they and it survived to vindicate the pledge of Harry Pollitt, General Secretary of the Communist Party of Great Britain who said it should never be allowed to die. Staff suffered blacklisting and imprisonment, internment camps and penal servitude. It even suffered complete wipe out in a fire with presses and equipment destroyed – and still came out the next day.

The conference was treated to a remarkable film profile of the newspaper featuring the editor Bill Benfield and his staff, at work producing the only newspaper in Britain consistently reporting the struggles of ordinary working people, against all the odds, but today, with growing trade union and reader support.

All agreed the Morning Star was set to come into its own again, as Britain enters a new era of appalling cuts in public services, welfare benefits, pay and pensions hitting the working class and the poor hardest of all. Trade unions and members were urged to order it and circulate it in workplaces, with trades councils like our own urged to consider taking out a subscription, ensuring that indeed - it never dies.

SERTUC

Megan Dobney of SERTUC called on trades councils to lead the fightback against the cuts, to be announced in the Tories austerity budget. She said they, and the trade unions, faced a war on three fronts – the wholesale privatisation of education, a fundamental review of health and safety legislation, which would cost the lives of working people, and a radical review of employment law shifting the balance of power further in the direction of big business and the bosses.

She said trade unions and their members could not lead this fightback alone. They had to start now, campaigning in their communities, to build up broad alliances with the capacity to defend public services. She said there would be a battle at national level, but that in the end the real struggle would be at local level. And she called on trade unions to build their memberships, cut out the competitive nonsense between them and strengthen their solidarity. She urged them to affiliate to their trades councils, saying organisations (like the NDTUC) were ideally placed to build fighting links to other activists.

Economy Debate

Matt Wrack leader of the Fire Brigades Union opened the debate with a warning that the Con Dem Government was deliberately creating a mood of cuts in the country, to make those cuts seem inevitable. He said the Government and its many allies in the media were constantly spinning the line about a bloated and wasteful public sector diverting attention from those who had plunged the country into the worst recession in living memory.

He said they were claiming now that the cause of the crisis was the person cleaning your hospital and serving you children school dinners, and not Goldman Sachs, or Lehman Brothers or RBS.

He asked delegates to remember what public services actually were, and said they were the services we – the ordinary working people – relied upon. Real services used by real people. He rubbished the spin about gold plated public sector pensions saying they were insignificant compared to bankers pensions. This crisis began in a deregulated banking and finance sector and it had sparked a worldwide economic catastrophe. £900bn was handed to the banks without consultation as a result.

And he denied that the cuts were forced on the Con Dem government by the crisis, saying that David Cameron was promoting his ideas of slashing the public sector long before the recession arrived.

Meanwhile, he said, the rich were growing richer as a result of the crisis. They had come through with flying colours. We are not in this together, he said, to loud applause.

He said the fire service had already been through a decade of cuts which meant it now took longer to get to emergencies, while elsewhere in the economy, £120bn a year was lost in tax loopholes and billions more were wasted on war. Do we want to build bombs or hospitals and schools?

He concluded with a call to create a movement prepared to fight together and not be picked off one by one. He called for a clear line from the TUC and a major event to challenge the cuts agenda. With 6 million trade unionists, we had the

largest society of volunteers in the country which could lead a movement to stop the cuts.

Trade Unions and the Labour Party

Professor Keith Ewing raised a series of practical problems for the trade union movement in reclaiming Labour for working people - including the Prime Minister's own deliberate plans to reduce constituency boundaries from 650 to 500. It was meant to ensure Labour were never elected to office again.

It was a cynical move which will wipe out seats in Labour strongholds. He said the fight had to be on several fronts, not just in the Labour Party. He was skeptical of the ability of working people to fight back, without the Labour Party.

But RMT general secretary Bob Crow was robust in his attack on Labour and its betrayals of working people and the trade unions. He dismissed the chances of affiliated trade unions being able to influence the Labour Party, describing the Party as like Monty Python's parrot: Dead.

He said working people had to come together to form a new party of labour, one that would fight for all trade unionists. He was enthusiastically applauded when he called for a mass walkout of this year's TUC conference if David Cameron addressed delegates – as he had been invited to do!

George Galloway said that however let down people felt, the working class had returned to Labour in the last few weeks of the General Election. He called it too little and too late, but it clearly showed that the majority of working people saw Labour as their party, in spite of the appalling betrayals. Delegates heard that the trade unions had given hundreds of millions of pounds to Labour, and got nothing back – not even seats in the House of Lords, he said, to laughter. At least Dick Turpin wore a mask, he concluded.

Unite assistant general secretary Tony Burke said his union, as the biggest donor to the Labour Party, would use its democratic structures to win back Labour for ordinary working people. He admitted Labour had failed to remove the anti-union laws but was insistent that Unite would only support future candidates who would repeal those laws. He said we needed people in Parliament who know what it is like to be an agency worker and not just career politician.

Much of the conference debate centered on Labour leadership contender Diane Abbott, with the audience disagreeing over her left-wing credentials.

But Communist Party of Britain executive member Mary Davis emphasised the need for extra parliamentary activity struggle to change society saying when people move, parliaments move.

Stand up and fight

Bill Benfield closed the Morning Star annual conference urging the working class movement to "stand up and say clearly that capitalism has to be ended."

He highlighted the Con-Dem government's plans to "turn us back to the stone age" with the cuts agenda being rolled out this year.

"The Tories represent the clear determination of capitalism to reverse every gain made since 1945, and turn the clock back," he said.

He warned that people should not be fooled by "PR man" Cameron, who he described as "new breed of Tory" but with the same vicious anti-working class policies a little more dressed up.

Comparing the role of Cuba and Venezuela in "standing up to big capital," he said the Morning Star remained "the enemy within."

"We are tiny, but we have picked on the biggest bully in the playground - transnational capitalism," he said.

The veteran campaigner dismissed the notion that capitalism could somehow be given a human face again if Britain managed to grow out of recession.

He insisted: "There has always been a conflict between democracy and capital. It is irresolvable. So it is time for us to target capitalism itself."