

# No return to hire and fire

## Tories consider abolishing more workers' rights

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It's not the endless pursuit of profit or the speculation of bankers that has caused economic crisis; it is 'unproductive' and 'underperforming' workers. So says a leaked report by venture capitalist Adrian Beecroft. His solution? To scrap the 'concept' of unfair dismissal, allowing employers to sack workers more easily.

Employment legislation apparently encourages workers to 'coast along' and then win an unfair dismissal claim when sacked.

Beecroft proposes Compensated No Fault Dismissal which would allow employers to sack workers with basic redundancy pay and no legal appeal rights.

He admits this may lead employers to get rid of workers they "did not like"; but "while this is sad I believe it is a price worth paying".

There is no evidence that scrapping unfair dismissal would make businesses more "competitive and hence more likely to grow". What it would do is instil a climate of fear inside workplaces and give unscrupulous employers a mandate to hire and fire at will.

The British Chambers of Commerce's Abigail Morris incredibly claimed that most of the time employers "only know that the law's changed when they get a claim



Workers lobby parliament to demand trade union rights photo S.Beishon

coming through from an employee that said they didn't do something that they should have been doing".

If this is true, it highlights a level of incompetence that would put the human resources managers of such companies at risk of the new proposals themselves!

Beecroft's report didn't come out of the blue. Chancellor George Osborne was reported by the Daily Telegraph as supporting the find-

ings. The government has already announced it will extend again the qualifying period for a worker to take their employer to an employment tribunal to two years after their employment starts.

For workers to have even a pretence of fair employment rights would require protection from day one of employment.

The report's leak is probably to test the water; it allows draconian

proposals to become part of 'open' debate.

In times of mass unemployment, such reactionary views can even gain a foothold amongst the workforce, particularly if insufficiently challenged by trade unions.

The Trades Union Congress should state now that any attempts to weaken the rights of individual workers will be met with collective action by all.

## Ireland: Spectacular election result for socialists

Along with the Irish presidential election, a parliamentary by-election took place in Dublin West on 27 October which Ruth Coppinger of the Socialist Party Ireland contested.

Ruth secured 21.1% first preference votes and after transfers under the proportional representation system was only eliminated by the narrowest of margins. In fact her 9,873 votes were exactly tied, after a recount, with the Fianna Fáil candidate's vote but Ruth lost out under electoral law because her first preference votes were fractionally less.

Nevertheless, Ruth's vote surpassed Fine Gael's (the senior government coalition partner with Labour and a traditional capitalist party in Ireland) and Sinn Féin, which enjoyed media attention because of Martin McGuinness contesting the presidential election. Her vote also easily outweighed the Green Party's.

Labour's Patrick Nulty, held off the challenges from Ruth and Fianna Fáil. However, even though Fine Gael and Labour have been in power less than eight months, their combined vote slumped nearly 17%.

The Socialist Party's campaign provoked a major debate on the government's austerity measures and the alternative to them

The Socialist Party ran a very vibrant political campaign. It succeeded in making the issue of hospital cuts and cuts to education the main local issues and provoked a major debate on the government's austerity measures and the alternative to them.

Ruth and Socialist Party TD [MP], Joe Higgins, along with staff at the hospital, had already established the Defend Blanchardstown Hospital Campaign which organised protests and debates before and during the campaign.

Ruth was also instrumental in setting up the Special Needs Assistants Parents Teachers campaign to fight against brutal and disgraceful cuts that hit children and young people with special needs.

While Ruth's campaign was able to undermine Labour and begin to catch them, this time, the by-election came a bit early, before sufficient numbers of the working and middle classes had moved decisively against Labour. Many people are still hoping against hope that there will be an economic recovery and that Labour will form some protection from the worst ravages of austerity.

Ruth was the United Left Alliance

candidate, as well as representing the Socialist Party, and a significant layer of ULA activists put in a lot of work and added to the campaign.

● In the presidential election (a largely ceremonial post that the Socialist Party believes should be abolished), Labour's Michael D Higgins was gifted the presidency by the implosion of 'independent' Sean Gallagher's campaign.

The entrepreneur, who had recently resigned from Fianna Fáil, fumbled and stumbled and wasn't able to satisfactorily answer accusations that he solicited donations from businessmen for Fianna Fáil's coffers.

In the absence of a candidate/campaign that called for resistance to austerity or advocated a consistent left or socialist position, the Socialist Party did not call for a vote for any of the presidential candidates.

For a full analysis see [www.socialistworld.net](http://www.socialistworld.net)

## Lansley closes another hospital A&E department

Simon Carter

Government health minister, Andrew Lansley, has decided to press ahead with the closure of the A&E department and maternity services at the King George Hospital in Goodmayes, east London. These services will be transferred to Queen's Hospital, several miles away in Romford.

It follows the recent decision by Lansley to approve the closure of the Chase Farm hospital A&E in Enfield, north London.

The King George closures will be a disaster for health care provision across four London boroughs and parts of Essex. Roughly one million

people will only have two hospitals which will provide critical care facilities.

The health authorities have attempted to reassure the public that a 24-hour 'urgent care' facility will be installed on the King George Hospital site. However, everyone knows that a 'polyclinic' cannot serve as a substitute for an emergency department.

Even before the government's closure decision the King George A&E was already being run down, with no admissions of children. However, on a number of occasions, patients taken by ambulance to the A&E at Queen's Hospital have been referred back to King George because critical care facilities at

Queen's are overstretched.

Moreover, a recent report by the Care Quality Commission has criticised the standards of patient care at Queen's Hospital, due to poor management and its over use of temporary staff.

In reality, the closure decision is a cynical cost cutting measure dressed up as a clinical reorganisation.

It's common knowledge that the cost of servicing the Private Finance Initiative (PFI) contract, through which Queen's Hospital was built, has left Barking, Havering and Redbridge health trust deep in debt - one of 22 PFI schemes, nationally, that have become "unaffordable".

The local Tory and Labour MPs in Ilford and the Tory-Lib Dem run

Redbridge council are opposed to closure - not because they oppose the market-oriented health policies of the previous Labour and present Tory-Lib Dem governments - but because of political 'nimbysism', ie don't close the A&E department in our backyard.

The Socialist Party has for the last four years been campaigning against closure (the closure of the A&E has been threatened twice before under the previous Labour government).

As part of the campaign the Socialist Party has demanded an end to privatisation policies such as PFI schemes which have wrecked the NHS, and instead called for a publicly owned, fully funded and democratically run health service.

### Fast news

#### Spare no expense

Former prime ministers Margaret Thatcher, John Major and Tony Blair together have claimed over £1.7 million in 'expenses' in the last five years. Under rules set up by John Major in 1991 the ex-PMs are able to claim a public duties cost allowance. Figures released last year show the maximum allowance claimable doubled from £47,568 in 1997-98 to £100,205 in 2008-9. How the 86-year old Thatcher, given her poor health, has been able to claim £535,000 from the fund since 2006 is not clear. Blair, who has earned millions in speaking engagements, consultation work and publishing his memoirs since leaving office in 2007, has claimed £273,000 from the public purse.

#### Employment credentials

Professor Malcolm Grant has been appointed to chair the NHS commissioning board which oversees the NHS's £100 billion+ budget. Grant, who earns £380,000 a year at the University College of London and will pick up £1,300 a day in his new post at the Department of Health, was nominated by the health minister Andrew Lansley. However, the professor was less well received by the cross-party parliamentary selection panel after he admitted that he found it "difficult to demonstrate [his passion for the NHS] because I am not a patient of the NHS". The panel found that Grant "demonstrated a lack of experience of NHS structures and processes"... "did not demonstrate to the committee a robust understanding of the issues"...and "demonstrated an assumption that his appointment was already confirmed". When it came to a vote the panel split down the middle but the professor received the casting vote of chairman, Tory MP Stephen Dorrell.

#### Academic sums

Headteacher Mark Elms, who earned a reported £200,000 last year, has announced he intends to close Tidemill Academy in Deptford, south London, early for Christmas due to building work problems at the school. But because the Academy is outside local authority control, parents at Tidemill are being asked to fork out £100 a week to enrol their children in a play scheme for the weeks that the school is closed. If it had remained a council-run school then the local authority would have provided free child care.

#### Social unrest

On the eve of the G20 summit of capitalist politicians, the United Nations International Labour Organisation's (ILO) World of Work report 2011 says "the global economy is on the verge of a new and deeper jobs recession that will further delay the global economic recovery and may ignite more social unrest in scores of countries". The report comes at a time when unemployment worldwide is at 200 million, a new record high. The report adds: "On current trends, it will take at least five years to return employment in advanced economies to pre-crisis levels, one year later than projected in last year's report." And that in over 45 of the 118 countries examined, the risk of social unrest is rising.