

Campaigning works: CARDIFF SCHOOL SAVED!

2011 BEGAN WITH A VICTORY for the parents and children of two primary schools in Cardiff.

Cardiff Council has finally capitulated and cancelled its plans to close English-medium Lansdowne Primary School and relocate Welsh-medium Ysgol Treganna to Lansdowne's premises in Canton, Cardiff. Cardiff Council has agreed to build a new school for Welsh-speakers on a brownfield site in the city.

The victory marks the end of a determined three-year campaign for Lansdowne supporters and a campaign to ease overcrowding for Welsh-speakers which has been ongoing for a decade.

Cardiff Council cynically attempted to use the desperation of Welsh-speaking parents who face difficulty finding places for their children as means of justifying the closure of English-medium schools. Such divisions could enormously weaken campaigns against cuts and closures.

The challenge for parents today is to consciously replicate the movement that arose spontaneously in 2006, and link up the groups in united campaigns against school closures.

It is no accident that Lansdowne, whose activists had begun to help develop Cardiff Save Our Schools with parents from other schools, was the school which managed to force concessions from the politicians. Forums like these are crucial if the best examples of how to campaign are to be shared.

The Lansdowne experience shows the importance of immediately setting up an action committee and calling a meeting, thrown open to parents, staff and community

members, to discuss how to fight the plans. The combined scrutiny of many eyes and brains quickly demolished the Council's arguments justifying closure and came up with the best ways of explaining to the wider community what would be lost if the school were closed.

The Council's claim that it was wasting millions on so-called "surplus places" was exposed as a bureaucratic attempt to present a plan to close schools and cut spending on education as the inevitable consequence of market forces.



The Welsh Assembly funds schools on a per-pupil basis, which means that a school which has a low intake one year is starved of resources. This model works against attempts by schools to solve any problems which develop and means that a temporary issue can be quickly lead to a downward spiral of under-funding and debt as some parents remove their children.

Councils often then use problems or fewer pupils as justification for closing schools. The result is that temporary fluctuations in the birth rate can lead to permanently higher class sizes across the whole area as children are pushed into fewer schools. The Welsh Assembly should change the way education is funded, instead of cutting a swathe through our schools.

Campaigners used every opportunity to

expose the Council's claims as bogus, but they knew, too, that it is not enough to win the debate. So Lansdowne immediately took to the road of public protest to force the issue into the public eye, marching several times on the Council and making closures an election issue too.

Lansdowne campaigners also never faltered in their determination to save the whole school - every place and every job in it. They rejected an earlier offer from the Council to build a new, smaller, English-medium school to replace Lansdowne that would have seen the loss of half of the jobs and places in the school.

During this very public campaign, rather than numbers falling as parents hesitated about sending their children to a school facing closure, the obvious commitment of staff and parents actually led to an increase in applications.

For schools facing closure in remote parts of Wales linking up with other campaigners is complicated by the large distances which can exist between school communities. Campaigners must use the anti-cuts committees which have sprung up in many parts of Wales to make these links.

With a determined and united campaign, we can defeat the plans pushed by politicians more concerned with placating big business than defending our access to education.

*Ross Saunders, Secretary, Cardiff
Against the Cuts*

Rawmarsh: Action brings results

Rob Owen, Carmarthenshire NUT (personal capacity)

At our 2011 AGM, Carmarthenshire NUT passed a resolution to send full support to staff taking strike action to defend their jobs at Rawmarsh Community School (RCS) in Rotherham, South Yorkshire. Teachers will be heartened to hear that their determined campaign has again forced their employers to retreat.

February 8th marked the ninth day of strike action by NUT members at RCS in a campaign to oppose the axing of up to a third of staff posts at the school.

The solid strikes had already had an effect, persuading management to defer some of their proposals. But the RCS NUT group knew that the 9 remaining compulsory redundancies and 25 teacher job losses were still unacceptable. Class sizes will rise and pupils will lose out. As their parents' leaflet states "the responsibility for current debts at RCS does not lie with the pupils, teachers or community therefore they should not suffer"

NUT rep, Ralph Dyson, explains: "Every teacher has gone through all the guilt pangs of: 'are we doing the right thing?' But when you sit down and think about it there is no other alternative. It is up to others who have created this mess to search their conscience. Rawmarsh is a community which has gone through steel and mining closures and now sees their education attacked by bureaucrats who can only see the dollar sign. Is this a cause worth fighting for? I think so. I have had first hand experience of pit closures and the effect this has on education and community. From bitter experience I have learnt that to lie down and accept it will only lead to even more devastation".

On strike days, teachers have held solid pickets and then gone leafleting in town to explain the dispute. Support from parents & pupils has been fantastic.

The strike is also becoming a beacon to inspire others to stand up to the cuts that are threatening local services and communities. The 500 strong Sheffield Anti-Cuts Alliance demonstration on 29 January was proudly led by the Rawmarsh NUT "Kids not Cuts" banner.

A further three-day strike was due to begin on 15 February. However, talks then succeeded in making sure that the last remaining teacher redundancy which was to have been implemented this April was withdrawn. As a result NUT members at the school voted to temporarily suspend any further strike action for the remainder of this school term. However, the NUT members are clear that their action will continue after Easter if the school fails to reverse its plans for redundancies that are still proposed for August.

Send messages of support to: ralphdyson@yahoo.co.uk and donations to the: NUT Regional Office, 7 Chequer Road, Doncaster DN1 2AA.

Pensions

Talks are taking place between public sector unions - including the NUT, ATL, NASUWT and UCAC - about how best to respond to the Government's threats to make us **PAY MORE** to get **LESS PENSION** and then have to **RETIRE OLDER**.

George Osborne has now said that final decisions about increased contributions (which could be as much as £100 extra from our pay) will be postponed until June, rather than being fixed in the Budget in March. However, the proposed £2.8 billion savings from that extra 'stealth tax' on public sector workers is apparently still to be announced in that Budget.

Unless that is withdrawn, the offer of talks will be worthless - unions would just be left to agree exactly how that pay cut will be applied to their union members!

We should not accept that any contribution increase is needed - the cost of teacher pensions is already set to fall and no valuation has been carried out to justify any increased contributions. This is just a tax on teachers to pay for the bankers' bailout and bonuses.

The NUT Executive voted last term that it would launch a ballot for strike action before Easter. NUT reps should be making sure that membership lists are up-to-date and home addresses correct. But all unions should be preparing for action to defend our pensions.

Unions have to quickly ascertain whether the Government are serious about any offer of negotiations. That would have to mean the Government withdrawing any savings proposals from the March Budget - and withdrawing its threat to introduce the indexation of pensions from the RPI to the lower CPI on April 1st.

If they're not serious, then we mustn't hesitate. Unions must respond swiftly with ballots for co-ordinated strike action.

Demonstrate at the Tory and Lib-Dem Conferences in Cardiff on Saturday 5 March

Don't let the Tories and Lib Dems waltz into Cardiff without making them see the colossal opposition which exists to their cuts.

Assemble 11am at City Hall, Cathays Park, Cardiff



Classroom Teacher in Wales

If you want ... help organising a strong Union group in your school

... to share your views about the pressures teachers face

... to take action to defend teachers and education in Wales ...

Get in touch : www.classroomteacher.org.uk
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