

## OPINIONS ON National Shop Stewards' Network (NSSN) meeting on Saturday 4th December to form an All-Britain Anti-Cuts Campaign

### 1. Letter from Dave Chapple, CWU, Chair, NSSN Steering Committee

"We are drawing attention to the disastrous outcome of the Steering Committee of the National Shop Stewards' Network (NSSN) meeting on Saturday 4th December.

The majority in the meeting, who were Socialist Party (SP) members, voted through a series of decisions despite the opposition of absolutely everyone else, of various political affiliations and none.

The meeting decided to propose that the anti-cuts conference being organised by the NSSN on January 22nd should set up an "NSSN All-Britain Anti-Cuts campaign" and the election of a committee at the conference, which would be separate from the existing NSSN structures. As supporters of the NSSN, we are aware that the NSSN and its supporters are already working, locally, regionally and nationally in opposition to the government's attacks on our public services and jobs. The NSSN has an immense task in helping to build for effective action which can begin to beat back these attacks, although it is noteworthy that the original proposal put forward by the Socialist Party omitted any mention of the NSSN working to organise industrial action against the public sector attacks.

However, to agree that the NSSN has an important contribution to make to the anti-cuts movement is a long way from agreeing to the need for it to launch yet another national anti-cuts campaign. At a time when there is pressure for anti-cuts campaigns to work together – witness the protocol agreed between the Coalition Of Resistance and the Right To Work campaign; the forum on December 5th organised by Right To Work on working together; and the pending meeting called by the Trade Union Coordinating Group on December 14th – the creation of yet another group can only be seen as counterproductive. That the NSSN participated in the forum on December 5th and intend to take part in the meeting on December 14th stands in stark contrast to this move.

Attempts by non-SP officers of the Network to remove the most contentious aspects in advance of the Steering Committee meeting were unsuccessful. The proposals were the subject of a lengthy heated debate. Attempts to delete contentious parts of these proposals were defeated by the SP majority, with no wider support. Attempts to make positive proposals to work constructively with other anti-cuts organisations were defeated in the same way. The only real progress was the removal of a proposal that the NSSN should support anti-cuts candidates in local elections in May, a proposal which would have immediately wrecked the non-party and cross-party nature of the NSSN.

Launching a further national anti-cuts campaign, while obstructing cooperation with other organisations, would be a retrograde step, as well as changing the nature and direction of the NSSN. If the NSSN becomes controlled by one political party which is unwilling to work constructively with any other shop stewards in the network, we would see no point in further participation.

Confirmation that this is the way the the SP intends to proceed seems to be borne out by events since the meeting of the Steering Committee – the secretary has unilaterally announced that only SP

members will represent the NSSN at 2 forthcoming meetings discussing left/anti-cuts cooperation, with not even a pretence at consultation with non-SP officers .

We therefore urge the Socialist Party to pull back."

NB: A personal request from Dave Chapple, NSSN Chair: "We are circulating this statement throughout the trade union movement, especially activists in NSSN affiliated or supportive unions, to which, ultimately, the NSSN should be responsible. Please discuss it at your trade union branch or other union meetings. We need messages of support for this statement, but would also welcome questions and comments, sent to the address below. NSSN Officers and steering committee members listed are willing to attend trade union meetings to put our case, so please consider inviting us.

Finally, friends, our London conference on 22nd January gives us a chance to return the NSSN to a sensible consensus-based policy: please do your best to attend: a substantial turnout of mainstream trades union activists can ensure that the NSSN has a future: the Socialist Party alternative, as the 'trade union wing' of a small left group, has no future at all."

Dave Chapple, CWU, Chair, NSSN Steering Committee;

1 Blake Place, Bridgwater, Somerset, TA6 5AU; 01278 450562; [davechapple@btinternet.com](mailto:davechapple@btinternet.com)

Jane Bassett, NUT, vice-Chair, NSSN Steering Committee;

Bob Archer, NUT, NSSN Website/Press Officer;

George Binette, Unison, NSSN treasurer;

Ray Morell, Unite, NSSN National Organiser;

Becca Kirkpatrick, Unison, NSSN Affiliations/Fund-raising Officer

plus the following members of the NSSN Steering Committee:

Brian Bamford, Unite;

Andy Reid, PCS;

Stuart Melvin, USDAW;

Glyn Harries, Unison

Ian Allinson, Unite,

Gerry Downing, Unite,

Jeremy Drinkall, Unison;

Helen Steel, Unison

Pete Firmin, CWU,

Steve Ballard, NUT

Paul Turnbull, CWU

Note: For clarification, we attach the 2 resolutions put forward at the Steering Committee meeting, one by Linda Taaffe, on behalf of the Socialist Party, and one by George Binette, with the support of all non-SP members of the Steering Committee. There were 3 accepted amendments to the proposal from Linda Taaffe – to delete "Organise support for anti-cuts candidates in the local elections in May"; to add "do everything in our power to lobby for as generalised industrial action as possible..."

as an addition to the "First tasks"; and to replace "produce an email organiser..." at the end by "develop a communications team to speed internal/external communications, using the website, website, textstream, etc. and make use of affiliated unions resources".

## 2. Reply to Dave Chapple from NSSF officers

We send this reply to NSSF supporters and those outside of the NSSF who have had Dave's email (IMPORTANT: The future of the NSSF: a statement from NSSF Officers and Steering Committee members). It wasn't our choice to have a public debate in this way and we regret his damaging actions but we have a duty to respond and give our side of the story. If you've read his email, you will understand the unavoidable sharpness of our response.

Dave Chapple has circulated a critical email about the decision of the NSSF Steering Committee to launch an Anti-Cuts Campaign at its Conference on January 22nd.

The real facts of what happened are the following. After a debate in the Steering Committee lasting around three hours and 39 attending, where all those wanting to speak did speak, a vote was taken. On a show of hands Dave's view did not prevail. Behind the disparate opposition to the NSSF majority is a clear difference on programme, strategy, and tactics and this will now go to the Conference for debate. This isn't a crime but normal democratic trade union procedure.

The decision of the NSSF Steering Committee was taken 10 days ago. Only now, on the eve of a meeting of the Trade Union Coordinating Group (TUCG) of the left unions in the TUC, did he choose to attack this decision. In an unholy alliance with the SWP and their front organisation the Right to Work (RTW) he hoped to put the NSSF in the dock before fellow trade unionists as unprincipled splitters and sectarians. This completely failed, not least because the accusers are, themselves, guilty of the "crimes" they impute to the NSSF majority, and particularly to the Socialist Party.

It is enough to remind ourselves that it was the SWP who launched the sectarian attack on the fire-fighters at the end of their recent dispute. As RTW, they also invaded the ACAS talks in the BA dispute, and were widely criticised by rank and file Unite members. In a similar sectarian fashion they attacked the Lindsey strikers, as well as the left-led PCS leadership - particularly its general secretary Mark Serwotka over the alleged pension "sell-out" (in 2005). It is they who set up RTW 18 months ago as a rival to the NSSF. In the London Student Assembly this week, they actually voted against supporting the January NSSF Conference but now say they want to build for it to 'save' the NSSF!

Those who voted in favour of an Anti-Cuts Campaign recognise that trade unions are already located in fighting cuts in the workplace, but that there are other aspects to the struggle. Community campaigns to save services are springing up everywhere. Witness the marvellous student rebellion of recent weeks. Those against these proposals believe that NSSF should step back, and leave leadership matters to other organisations, particularly like RTW.

The NSSF Conference statement in June declared that NSSF should take our work into the wider

community. Dave Chapple did not disagree. The October Steering Committee, which Dave Chapple chaired, built on this by agreeing, with only one vote against, to call an Anti-Cuts Conference.

Dave Chapple also accuses us of not wanting unity. This is a lie. It was RTW that split away from the NSSN last year, and then not clearly as an anti-cuts campaign. Actually, the NSSN was formed four years ago - originally as an initiative of the RMT transport workers union, well before either COR or RTW. Yet now he implies we are the splitters. We want unity in action, and will do our utmost to get that action. It was us who suggested at an Officers meeting recently that we send invitations to RTW and Coalition of Resistance to convene a meeting to iron out practical problems, initially. Both have agreed, though with all the activity no date has yet been fixed. We did send people to the RTW Forum. Dave Chapple attended this, denounced the NSSN decision and promptly left without hearing further discussion. Rob Williams attended the Trade Union Coordinating Group on behalf of NSSN on Tuesday. His explanation of the NSSN majority position was not criticised. In fact he received support when he criticised the SWP in particular for their continued support of Labour councillors intent on carrying through cuts. As this criticism of the SWP grows, they will undoubtedly try to do another somersault. To even attempt to forge a genuine unity in action with such people requires, above all, an open recognition of their history and record.

What workers are interested in is a fighting programme to defend ALL jobs and services. No other campaign other than NSSN has such a programme. That is why we are getting such a good response to the Conference. Moreover, Matt Wrack General Secretary FBU pointed out that campaigns like NSSN, freed from any bureaucratic obstacles, are well placed to react quickly and effectively in conjunction with fighting trade unions to fight the cuts. An Anti-Cuts Committee, democratically elected at the Conference but linked to our NSSN Steering Committee, will make us even more able to intervene effectively in this movement at this volatile time.

We hope all supporters are building for the Conference, where Dave Chapple and others, will be able to put their case. We believe that the active fighting campaign of NSSN – shown in action on the TUC lobby, and on the October 23rd demos - will be supported.

For a principled active intervention in the coming battles!

Linda Taaffe

Rob Williams

Bill Mullins

NSSN Officers, representing the majority of the Steering Committee