

'Don't Break Britain' - London 19th January 2010

Andy Richards, Ysgrifennydd Rhanbarddol, Uno'r Undeb Cymru.

– *Andy Richards, Regional Secretary, Unite Wales.*

Comrades, I am proud to be here today to share with you our thoughts from Wales on how we formulate a strategy to oppose these savage cuts which are being imposed upon the people of our country.

Cuts that are being driven by the unelected, discredited and unpopular Tory led coalition in Westminster – the **CONDEM** government.

These cuts seek to make the citizens of Wales and the rest of the UK pay for the 'snouts in the trough' mentality of their mates- the heads of the financial institutions- who brought us to this. And who are again sticking their noses into the bonus troughs whilst at the same time sticking two fingers up to the rest of us as Cameron and Clegg look on.

These cuts are designed to complete the job which Thatcher set out to do – destroy the welfare state and sell off any valuable assets to their pals, whilst subduing workers by the deliberate creation of mass unemployment.

Our Unite anti cuts strategy needs to be sophisticated enough to recognise different regional political realities.

In contrast to previous anti-cuts strategies our new UNITE strategy must be formulated in recognition of the more complex political environment that we now have, post devolution.

In contrast to England and Scotland, Wales is still **Labour led**, albeit in coalition with Plaid Cymru.

In stark contrast to Westminster, Wales' political leaders are looking to the **Trade Union Movement** for help and assistance.

As the Labour – Plaid Cymru coalition looks for difficult solutions following the slashing of its block grant from London, Carwyn Jones the First Minister, speaking at a recent special Wales TUC conference, has asked for, and I quote: ‘**Engagement, negotiation and agreement – not diktat**’. I don’t think we’ll be hearing those words from the mouths of Cameron or Osbourne any time soon!

In any strategy then, I would urge us first to recognise exactly *who* we are campaigning against, and that is the CON/DEM government in Westminster led by the Cameron/Clegg double act.

In Wales the trade union movement is firm in its view that Carwyn Jones’ coalition administration are, along with the people of Wales, equal victims of these cuts. Cuts imposed by a Westminster Government which views Wales *politically* as enemy territory.

To back this up the figures show that Wales came out worse than any other part of the UK following the comprehensive spending review.

The Welsh budget will see a **7.5%** reduction in revenue over the next four years. Compare that with 6.8% and 6.9% for the devolved governments of Scotland and Northern Ireland. In real terms the Welsh Assembly Governments budget will be slashed by **£1.8 Billion** over the next four years.

At the same time, out of the four UK nations Wales has the lowest household income from wages and salaries, the highest dependency on state and retirement pensions, and the highest dependency on most social security benefits. Further to this, our unemployment rate at 8.6% remains above that of the rest of the UK which stands at 7.9%.

So it's the weakest and most vulnerable who will bear the brunt of this social destruction.

Already we have witnessed the cancellation of several flagship projects in Wales. These include the **£30 Billion** Severn Estuary Barrage plan and the **£14 Billion** Defence Training Academy at St. Athan which would have brought us thousands of new jobs in Construction and Defence.

What will the overall impact of the cuts be on Wales in terms of jobs? Well, even conservative estimates predict that job losses in Wales across both the private and public sectors will be around **60,000** jobs.

It's our view in Wales that last October's comprehensive spending review was **politically loaded**. Politically loaded to put increased pressure on the Labour coalition in Wales which faces fresh election in May of this year.

What Cameron and Osborne also know is that massive reductions in public spending will hit Wales much harder than most other areas of the UK due to Wales' above average employment within the public sector.

A **quarter** of Welsh jobs are within the public sector meaning that cuts will be felt harder and faster here.

We should not therefore assist in this Cameron and Clegg plot designed to put us in direct confrontation with the Welsh Assembly Government. **We** know where the authors of this project to break Britain reside, and it's not on our doorstep in Cardiff Bay.

In Wales we intend to work in partnership with Labour to mitigate, to the best of our abilities, the worst effects of these cuts. The easy route would be to reject the Welsh Governments request for assistance and to snipe from the sidelines. **We have a responsibility and a duty to our members to resist this.**

Our constructive proposals advocate working closely with the Welsh Assembly Government to ***Stand Up For Wales*** through our partnership agreements which have seen us overcome many crises in the past.

For example the recent manufacturing crisis which resulted in us developing the **PROACT** and **REACT** specialist industry support programmes which were hailed as best practice around the UK and beyond.

We propose to draw upon those same close partnership working arrangements to overcome the crisis now facing the people of Wales.

Working constructively with Government does **not** however mean that we will not support our members 100% at the sharp end.

Let me be absolutely clear on this – Where we are faced with raw, aggressive imposition by employers or local authorities, **we will** respond accordingly. Our union will always robustly support our members should they decide to take industrial action in defence of their livelihoods.

And that goes for any Labour controlled authority whose councillors, Unite members in some cases, attack our members terms and conditions, which has happened in Wales recently. We have long memories – particularly at election time, so think on.

Whilst in Wales we take the view that we will engage with our devolved government in finding a negotiated way through these dark times, we will do everything we can to oppose the source of this predicament. The unelected Tory/Liberal alliance at Westminster Palace.

The TUC demonstration in London on March 26th cannot be a flash in the pan protest but must herald a relentless and sustained campaign until we force a change in this government's policy.

This will not happen overnight and we must be prepared for a long haul. We don't subscribe to the view that this Con/Dem coalition will be short lived. Both parties have too much vested interest to risk any new general election in the foreseeable future, as the result of the Oldham By-election has recently proved.

The Tories will continue to throw tasty scraps to their partners in slime – who will be content just to have a seat on the chamber pot under Cameron's table.

Publicising and delivering our message will therefore be crucial to the success of the campaign which is why the Wales TUC is directing resource to develop in Wales a network of accredited trained and resourced local campaign coordinators to lead the delivery of the union movement's anti-cuts campaign in the localities.

The Wales **Trade Union Liaison Organisation** or **TULO** as it is known, is also playing its part in publicising the anti cuts campaign, and in particular the TUC Rally on 26th March, with newsletters and electronic mailings being sent out to affiliates and CLP's for distribution. This widens the scope of the campaign and, as we assist with the preparations for the Welsh Assembly Elections in May, it helps to expose the Tory/Lib Dem alliance for what they really are.

As a precursor to the national TUC rally in London, Unite is calling for a Wales TUC - coordinated rally in Cardiff on **Saturday 5th March** – The day that the Tory and Liberal parties hold their Wales conferences.

Both Cameron and Clegg will be addressing their conferences on the same day and have, very conveniently for us, arranged them within a few hundred yards of each other.

This has presented us with just the opportunity we need to direct the anger and outrage of the Welsh people exactly where it should be – at the perpetrators of these savage cuts who were never elected by the people of Wales.

I trust that as many of you who are able, will come to Wales to assist us in giving Cameron and Clegg a very warm reception in the valleys – **a fiery one in fact.**

Comrades I hope you have found my contribution useful and that it has illustrated that our UNITE strategy has to be flexible, multi faceted and deployed across every one of the four nations of the UK as appropriate.

These are very **dark times** for all of our members and their families, in every part of the UK. As the largest and leading trade union in Britain it is up to us to lead the fight back against this government's ideological mission to decimate UK public services.

Unite has a new Leader, **General Secretary Len McCluskey** who has often used a Welsh phrase at our conferences – **Tua’r Goleuni – *Into the Light.***

Let’s all work together then to make Unite the powerful industrial and political tool which will lead our people, our members and our movement out of this darkness and into the light.

Thank you very much – *Diolch yn fawr iawn.*

Pob hwyl !

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