Two of the Sheffield Post Offices axed by Royal Mail in their widespread closure programmes of last year are to re-open in Sheffield. Good news, right? Not really. Considering Sheffield City Council leader Paul Scriven's earlier vocal opposition to these post office closures and his pledge to save them all, this is all a case of too little too late. They too branch, Oakbrook Road in Nether Green and Park Grange at Norfolk Park are to stay open till 2011, when their "viability" will be reassessed. It is clear to us at the Fargate Speaker, and we'd hope to you too, that this is just a temporary situation and will do nothing to stop the relentless privatization of what used to be staple community services. And even if these two offices remain open, what of the many other communities that are still left in the lurch? Residents of Crookes, Walkley, Ecclesall, Sharrow and elsewhere are still left short-changed by this whole episode. The inability of our Council to properly represent the views and priorities of regular working class people and their surrender to privatization shows how much trust we can really put in them.

The same goes for our national politicians. Liberal Democrat leader and Sheffield Hallam MP Nick Clegg described the situation as "a shame". It's nice to know we have such committed politicians working on our behalf. There is a silver lining to this however. The campaign of Sheffield Communities Against Post Office Closures is a great example of how communities can work together, without any need for bureaucrats or politicians, to come up with real solutions. Their ideas of decentralised, community-run post office networks are the sort of thinking that is needed in this era of privatization and public service closure.

East Midlands Trains have launched an attack on free space and freedom of movement in Sheffield, closing off public access to our railway station. Their plans to install ticket gates at the bridge through Sheffield station, cutting off access to a vital route, have faced determined opposition from the grassroots group Residents Against Station Closure, and a poll on the subject found 95% of Sheffield residents opposed it, but EMT have refused to listen to objections. They claimed they were going into negotiations, and then suddenly closed the route off without issuing any warning. Residents of Oxford, Keelby Road and Park Hill and anyone using the tram stop at the back of the station, will be forced to use a longer and more inconvenient route, making life much harder for disabled people and those with young children. But this issue doesn't just affect them - it's a sign of a much larger and more worrying trend. A spokesman for East Midlands trains said that "a line had to be drawn", and we agree - by making this decision, EMT have put their profit margins ahead of the views of the 2076 Sheffielders who signed a petition opposing the barrier, and we can't let them get away with it. It raises serious questions about democracy when a scheme so universally unpopular with pretty much everyone can be pushed through. As for our elected representatives, MP Richard Caborn boasts that he's "told them not to do a daft thing like this again", but what are the chances of them actually listening to him? If we're going to defend the principle that public needs come before private profit, it'll take more than fine words from politicians - we need to build a large and militant movement, capable of scaring the arrogance out of bosses who'll never listen to our views unless they're forced to.

For more information about Residents Against Station Closure their website address is: www.rasc-sheffield.com

Fargate Review

Fargate review provides an entertaining overview of some of the city's lesser known attractions. This issue we share our pick of Sheffield's abandoned buildings:

1. Probably the creepiest abandoned building in Sheffield, this empty church is ripe for midnight exploring complete with ripped up hymn books and decapitated doll heads strewn around various rooms to really cultivate that slasher movie feel. It has also been host to some epic rave parties in spite of a decidedly dodgy roof.

2. Shops. With the economic crisis beginning to bite many of the less competitive retailers have shut down. But don't fret we are positive that that empty Woolworths (what was it they sold again?) will be replaced by yet another Starbucks any day now...

3. Introducing the most secured derelict building in the city. Matilda used to be a thriving, squatted social centre boasting a cafe, gig space, art gallery and many more community projects. Realising the obvious threat that this posed, the powers that be invested their time and money in erecting the social centre collective, installing CCTV and bricking up windows and doorways. Let that be a warning to anyone who might dare think of using empty space for something useful again!

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The Economic Crisis

**Guess who foots the bill...**

The recession is here. We’re told to tighten our belts and brace ourselves for redundancies, wage and service cuts. A recession is simply when the economy shrinks for 6 months in a row. What this means for individuals and businesses is a squeeze on profits, and we can be certain that unless we do something about it, that’s going to mean a squeeze on us, as our employers try to protect those profits. Politicians and business leaders are united in saying we should pay for a crisis not of our making. So how is the recession going to affect us?

**Public service cuts**
A further £35bn of the government’s savings are scheduled to come from public sector spending cuts. This will mean cuts to public services and workers’ pay and conditions. Of course if you can afford private healthcare this probably won’t bother you. For the rest of us it’s bad news.

**Wage cuts**
Those of us who keep our jobs can’t expect to escape the punishment. Wages can be cut in less visible ways too. For instance a new boss might encourage a remorseless cut in Leak entertaining staff, or hire a new manager on £50,000 who has the thankless task of cutting staff wages or conditions. This is what they have in mind. Of course we pay the price in stress and burnout, but at least we’ve got a job, right?

**Redundancies**
One way in which the cost of the crisis is passed onto us is through redundancies. Unemployment is predicted to increase to as much as 3m in the next couple of years. This means over a million people will lose their jobs. Already the news is full of layoffs, and it’s set to get worse.

**Is it all doom and gloom?**
It doesn’t have to be if we’re honest. We’re not in a very strong position and we’re likely to take the brunt of this crisis unless we set about changing that. There are various things we can do, ranging from simple things you’re probably doing already to daring acts of collective action to win the things we need. So...

**Collective action**
Collective action covers a whole range of things, but the principle is that while on our own we are weak, when we act together we can achieve more than the sum of our parts. Examples include going in a group to the manager’s office to demand that support colleagues being made redundant or pressured into working longer or harder. The Lib Dems – what are they good for? ABSOLUTELY NOTHING!

The Lib Dems - What are they good for?
Seriously, what is the point of the Lib Dems? As far as anyone can tell, their main selling point seems to be that they’re not Labour or the Tories – so basically, like the BNP for people who aren’t racists. And if you think that sounds useless, you’re right. It’s hard to understand the case that, unlike their two main rivals, they’ve never been trusted with much power, so they’ve never had the opportunity to make any really disastrously bad decisions, but then again, I’ve never started a war or buggied up the economy, and you don’t come to see me and say that I should be trusted to run the country as a result.

But what do they actually have to say for themselves? One of their biggest boasts is that they’ve spent nearly half a million pounds on PCSOs. You can debate whether or not more police is good investment, but it’s hard to deny that PCSOs are utterly useless – they’re not even real cops, they can’t join the Police Federation, and can only arrest the citizen’s arrests the same as anyone else, they’re not allowed enough to carry batons or CS spray, and South Yorkshire’s don’t even have hand cuffs (they’re allowed to carry rubber gloves! Bascally, they’re no different from anyone else having a stroll around the place, except the Lib Dems are paying half a million quid for them. They’re not there to tackle proper crimes like rape or murder, most of their duties consist of things like hassling beggars or stopping people littering – we can all agree litter is a bad thing, but is it really that far up the list of the problems the world faces today?

Their councilor Sylvia Ingleson actually boasts that they’re “pressing” the government to provide more help to “the business community” - i.e. bosses. They claim that they’ve helped persuade the government to lower business rates – so in other words, money that could be used to pay for schools, hospitals, or even more of the useless fake cops they seem so keen on but instead be staying in the pockets of rich business owners. And they seem to think this is something to be proud of.

Even more inexplicably, they’ve refused to even discuss a government offer of £370,000 to help fund free swimming for pensioners and children – although presumably if the children involved were re-branded as Youth Police Swimming Pool Support Of it. They’ve also pushed through pay cuts for low-paid workers like nursery staff while hiring two new managers on £50,000 a year. Doesn’t that make it very clear that they have no real alternative to offer. Lib Dems – what are they good for? ABSOLUTELY NOTHING!

Repossessions and evictions
A further £35bn of the government’s savings are scheduled to come from public sector spending cuts. This will mean cuts to public services and workers’ pay and conditions. Of course if you can afford private healthcare this probably won’t bother you. For the rest of us it’s bad news.

**Fargate poses the question....**
This article originally appeared in Teabreak, a workers’ bulletin produced by the Libcom collective - Libcom.org