

BBC staff fight for pensions

PROGRAMMES AND services across the BBC were affected on 5-6 November by members of the NUJ taking industrial action to stop attacks on their pensions. The strike was solid, flagship programmes were unable to be broadcast.

BBC workers could lose between £10,000 and £100,000 if planned changes to pensions are imposed. Changes will mean staff paying more, working longer or getting significantly lower pensions – or all three!

A lunchtime strike rally outside Wood Lane in London was addressed by NUJ leader Jeremy Dear, John McDonnell MP and Newsnight FoC (NUJ rep) Paul Mason. The strikers were solid and determined – with many explaining how the attacks on their pensions are just the thin end of the wedge, with workers across the public sector facing attacks on their terms, conditions and jobs.

NUJ members who we spoke with agreed that it would be obvious to coordinate their action with other unions in dispute.

London Socialist Party members Manchester

STRIKERS AT the Manchester BBC building on Oxford Road mounted a picket line from 5am through the day. As I arrived, two pickets had just succeeded in asking the breakfast presenter not to cross the picket line, and in turning away the vending machine deliveries too!

BBC bosses have so far shown no interest in talking to the NUJ so the next strikes on 15 and 16 November look set to go ahead.

Hugh Caffrey



The Cardiff picket line.

photo Dave Reid

Cardiff

NUJ MEMBERS turned out in force on the strike picket line at BBC Wales/Cymru in Cardiff. Managers failed to provide an adequate service, in part because they sympathise with the strikers – most of them will also lose out if the changes to the pensions go through.

Even though Bectu has accepted the changes to the BBC pension agreement Bectu members support-

ed the NUJ on the picket line and were very supportive. Trade unionists from PCS, RMT, UCU and other unions turned up in the pouring rain to offer solidarity to the NUJ.

Dave Reid, Cardiff Socialist Party

Leeds

A SMALL but solid and assured group had gathered by 7am at the BBC offices in Leeds. BBC Yorkshire political editor Len Tingle was on the picket line.

Michael Johnson



Striking in Southampton.

photo Nick Chaffey

As well as discussing the importance of the strike action with people approaching the picket line, he expressed interest in becoming involved in the general anti-cuts action happening in Leeds.

Liverpool

WE JOINED the picket line at BBC Radio Merseyside this morning where four pickets were speaking

with people entering the building to raise the issue of the attack on their pensions. These staff haven't had a pay rise for the past five years but instead have been given small one-off payments as compensation which has had the effect of freezing salaries. What worries them now is that licence fees have been frozen, and the World Service, which used to be funded by government, must now be funded by the licence fee.

Dave Walsh, Liverpool Socialist Party

Striking tube workers build support

The third day of joint strike action by RMT and TSSA rail unions on London Underground on 2 and 3 November shut down 107 stations. Socialist Party members again visited over 30 picket lines. Once again central London ground to a halt, with gridlock on the roads and crowds at bus stops.

Victoria station was strangely quiet, as if a lot of people had just decided not to try to travel. One picket explained: "Things are starting to sink in with the passengers. There's been one or two high-profile incidents on the tube in the last couple of weeks, with people being stuck underground for hours and having to be escorted out on foot through the tunnels. This seems to have struck home with quite a lot of people that staffing the tube is about more than drivers."

The pickets think that if there is no resolution to the staffing cuts soon the strikes should be escalated.

Paula Michell

Reg Johnstone, an RMT member at Belsize Park, said: "Many rank and file Aslef members did not cross our picket lines. I think the strike this time was even more solid. There weren't as many volunteers to work."

"Since the dispute began the number of threatened job losses has increased. At the start it was 800 mainly station staff, now its 1,600-2,000 staff in all grades – station staff, office jobs. If they carry out these cuts it will become almost impossible to evacuate a deep level station."

Only two staff crossed the picket line at London Bridge station and one or two stayed on from the night shift, leaving commuters in the care of mostly office staff drafted in to the station for the day. "The station's only open because they've got untrained staff running it", said one picket.

Every picket we spoke to was enthusiastic about the idea of a national trade union march against the cuts before the end of the year, proposed by PCS. One commented that strikes by tube workers and firefighters in London are in response to the first lot of cuts and a lot of people still don't realise how massive the cuts are going to be.

Naomi Byron

There was a strong RMT-TSSA joint picket line outside Loughton tube station. Peter Starber, TSSA local rep, stated: "Management is repeatedly trying to drive us backwards after all the steps we've made to make this a safe operating system." However, workers reported they were ready to take further action if necessary.

James Ivens

The pickets at Tower Hill were in a very optimistic mood. RMT and TSSA members are prepared to continue the action as long as necessary to get the threatened job losses reversed. Election material for Socialist Party member Lewis Peacock, who is standing for election to the RMT's Council of Executives, was very well received.

Even the traffic-filled journey to Arncliffe station showed how effective the strike was in stopping London's tube trains from running. In response to the bosses' claims of a 40% service being run, RMT general secretary Bob Crow renamed them Transport for Lies. Trade union members of both the RMT and TSSA were out and in good spirits as the strike seemed to be even stronger than previous strikes.

A station cleaner came to the picket line in order to sign up to the RMT. He was clear that there was no other choice – workers had to stand together in the face of this brutal management onslaught.

Protest at law centre closure



100 supporters, staff and service users of South Manchester Law Centre protested before their High Court case on 8 November. The law centre faces closure due to a cut in funding from Manchester City council and the Legal Services Commission. For more information see: www.smlc.org.uk

photo Hugh Caffrey

National Shop Stewards Network Anti-cuts conference

Saturday 22 January 2011, 12-4pm
South Camden Community School, Charrington Street, London NW1 1RG.
See www.shopstewards.net

Fight the mail centre cuts

ROYAL MAIL management in London is hell-bent on asset stripping in preparation for the Con-Dem government's plans to privatise the post service.

Greg Maughan

Their decision to sell off Rathbone Place, Nine Elms and to close East London mail centre is clearly motivated by financial gain rather than what is good for the service the public receives. Rathbone Place is just off Oxford Street and could raise a pretty penny!

These callous closures from a shortsighted management will have a serious impact on jobs and service levels in London. Since the early 1990s seven mail centres have closed. Last year, Royal Mail paid over £1 million in compensation to London businesses for a range of quality failures.

Royal Mail has already said there will be 453 voluntary redundancies. That still leaves 848 workers from the sites facing closure who will be given a stark choice – compulsory relocation or being forced out of the job because relocating is impossible.

Attempts to deskill and casualise the workforce should be resisted. We all know this is also an attempt to make Royal Mail more appealing to the private sector.

CWU members in the Socialist Party believe that firm opposition to all cuts and closures is needed and that the union should be making preparations now for a strike ballot to strengthen their hands in negotiations.