

# Fight the NHS pay freeze!

LAST MONTH an article appeared on the Unison Health website from national officer Mike Jackson which announced a "tough choice" for Unison members.

## East Midlands and Yorkshire Unison health members

He is referring to an offer from NHS employers to guarantee no compulsory redundancies in England in return for agreeing to freezing pay and incremental progression for two years.

This is a meaningless offer which would benefit the bosses by freezing staff pay but would not save a single NHS worker's job.

'Voluntary' redundancies would continue as would forcing staff onto lower pay bands through departmental restructuring. The end result will still be patient care suffering while thousands of NHS jobs are lost, with the remaining staff having to pick up their workloads.

The Unison Health group executive meets on 10 January. The initial feedback from Unison members is to reject the deal.

But it should not even be consid-



NHS workers should not have to pay for the bosses' crisis.

photo Paul Mattsson

ered for consultation. It is an abdication of responsibility by Unison's leadership who are clearly unwilling

or incapable of organising resistance to the Con-Dems' attacks on the NHS.

They have learnt nothing from the experience of the Irish trade unions, who have cooperated with attacks

on their members' living standards in the name of partnership, only to face further demands for cutbacks from right wing politicians and the bosses.

This proposal should be thrown out and treated with the contempt it deserves. NHS workers should not have to pay the price for the bosses' crisis, either through job losses or cuts in pay.

The leadership of health trade unions should launch a proper campaign to protect terms and conditions, with a decent pay rise.

The National TUC demonstration on 26 March and the trade union conferences starting in April should be focal points to re-galvanising opposition to all public sector cuts.

We should be joining our brothers and sisters in Spain, France, Portugal and throughout Europe in resisting the bosses' attacks rather than feebly giving up the fight before it has even started.

Every NHS trade unionist should demand that their union rejects this lousy deal and raise the demand for national industrial action against NHS job losses, pay cuts and privatisation.

## West Midlands Bus workers fight pay cuts

IN DECEMBER National Express West Midlands (NXWM) bus drivers were offered a pitiful wage increase of just 1.5%, following an announcement that profits have risen by 45%.

### A NXWM bus driver

NXWM profits are rocketing but they're saying our pay should limp along the bottom. A pay 'rise' of 1.5% means in real terms a pay cut of at least 3.5% - which few of us can afford.

Management claim that the union's proposal of a 5% pay increase is unreasonable and that we should be tightening our belts. They expect that, with so many workers in other industries facing pay cuts and redundancies, drivers will want to keep their heads down and will accept a rubbish deal.

This offer is the latest in a raft of measures management has recently tried in an attempt to cut costs: contracting out engineering, making redundancies, closing garages, making inflation-busting fare increases twice in eight months, cutting 5% of services, attempting to bribe drivers to permanently drop down a pay rate and relinquish some of their holiday entitlement, and closing off the top rate of pay to new starter drivers. But do they now seriously expect 3,750 drivers to take a pay cut?

Bus drivers have a tough and unhealthy job and face the threat of physical and verbal assault more frequently than workers in most other jobs. Along with extremely antisocial working hours, NXWM drivers have to drive dirty buses, often with poor heating and mechanical defects that remain unrepaired for months.

Workers like us, who have limited



Bus workers are taking action against greedy bosses. photo Paul Mattsson

access to toilet facilities, suffer from bowel and bladder cancer more than workers in other jobs and shift workers in general tend to suffer from greater levels of heart disease.

NXWM bus drivers provide an absolutely vital public service and deserve to be treated fairly and with respect. The union should therefore reject this derisory pay offer and settle for nothing less than its original proposal of a 5% increase across the board.

If management fails to agree to these very modest demands, the union should immediately respond with a ballot for a 24-hour company-wide strike.

### The Socialist Party calls for:

- No pay cuts - for annual pay rises equal to or greater than RPI inflation.

- Full sick pay - full pay from day one of sickness.
- Equal pay for equal work - for the same pay and conditions at all garages, level with the best.
- No to long hours - for a 35-hour week without loss of pay, all duties to pay from book-on to book-off, unsocial hours payments to be reintroduced.
- Public ownership of public transport - for the renationalisation of the bus, train and tram systems, compensation to be paid on the basis of proven need; for them to be run democratically under workers' control and management, as part of a cheap, clean and reliable public transport system, solely for the benefit of service users, the wider community and the environment.

## Heinz strike again

THE SCROOGE employers at Heinz really hated Christmas 2010. 1,200 employees at Kitt Green, Wigan held their third 24-hour stoppage over Christmas on 29 December, and each strike day means two million cans of beans don't get produced.

### Paul Gerrard

Up to 100 pickets have braved freezing night-time temperatures, encouraged by local well-wishers who have brought mince pies and other Christmas fare to the picket lines.

This time strikers were heartened by a visit from Len McCluskey, newly elected general secretary of Unite, who attacked the 'turbo-charged

profit margins' and 15% bonuses managers make, while workers are expected to take a pay cut. An already unacceptable offer has been withdrawn and last week's 'talks' have been described as a joke.

Unite convenor Ian Wright said: "Len's visit was the icing on the cake, we supported him in his campaign and we have voted for the right man."

A further 24-hour strike is taking place on 5 January but Ian warns: "we will have to take further and more intense action if meaningful talks don't resume soon."

Support and donations are warmly welcomed. Email support to wrightian5@sky.com, and contact Ian on 07716 375 488 for more information and to make a donation to the strike fund.

## Birmingham bin workers fight back

ON 20 December a determined body of 30 bin workers beefed up the picket at the Holford Drive, Perry Barr, depot. All eyes are on the Con-Dem controlled council, where 26,000 workers are threatened with the sack unless they accept new contracts. The immediate issue, amongst other attacks, is that the bin workers stand to lose £4,000 a year. For many this can mean losing their homes.

A Unite rep spoke to Joe Foster, a Socialist Party and PCS member.

"Unison, GMB, Ucatt and Unite are in dispute with the council. There has been an overtime ban and work to rule since 17 December. Unite voted 94% for action short of a strike and 74% for strike action. This stems from a previous deal on single status

- trying to use this to downgrade bin workers' pay instead of upgrading low-paid women workers.

"Additionally the council want to cut the number of drivers by 40 and reduce teams from five to four. They also want to end 'task and finish' whereby you can go home when the job is done. They also want Christmas Day and other bank holidays to be normal working days without enhanced pay.

"The strike is solid and no agency staff are working. But the council have recruited 200 workers directly from Jobcentres. Apart from the threat to our jobs, this is a danger to themselves and the public. We think the council want to hand over the workforce to a private company, after worsening our pay and conditions."

## More pay strikes at Newsquest papers

JOURNALISTS AT the Southern Daily Echo in Southampton, part of Newsquest, are striking from 5-7 January. The NUJ members have already held two 48-hour stoppages over a pay freeze and non-payment of agreed pay minimums since July 2008.

Two days of coordinated action are taking place on 6-7 January at Newsquest papers across the country.

Journalists at the Echo were angered when staff who crossed the picket line were given an extra day's pay per 48-hour strike - meaning many were paid time and a half for working their normal hours.

But a number of those who received the bonus have pledged to pay it into the strike fund, details on their Facebook page: Southern Daily Echo NUJ.

## Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition

LOCAL GROUPS, trade unionists and anti-cuts campaigns who want to stand candidates under the TUSC banner are invited to a conference on 22 January 2011.

The conference is scheduled to follow the NSSN conference against the cuts also being held on 22 January 2011.

- For more information email: electioncoalition@btinternet.com