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Rage at inequality fires workers' action

“WE HAVE to let management know we won't accept this pay freeze anymore,” were the angry words of one striking journalist at the Southampton Echo picket last week. Elsewhere local government workers in Southampton and across Hampshire are preparing for a fight against massive cuts to terms and conditions, cuts to services and the threat to jobs.

Nick Chaffey,
Secretary Southampton Shop Stewards
Network (SSSN)

Newly elected Hampshire Unison branch secretary and Socialist Party member Tim Cutter, speaking in a personal capacity at the SSSN public meeting in December said: “Our branch has taken a clear stand to oppose all cuts in jobs, services, pay and conditions. Our stewards support this stand and at meetings across Hampshire, members have shown their anger at the attacks and want to fight back. Members are taking a leaf out of the books of the students, no doubt inspired by their thousand plus demo through Winchester.”

Just before Christmas, mass pickets of angry NHS cleaners in Southampton showed how a new tradition is being laid down. In just a year these cleaners have organised themselves. Over 90% are now in the union, led by determined stewards. They represent seven different nationalities and are united in their determination to fight for justice over unpaid wages and sick pay.

When they marched around the hospital during their strike they discovered the chief executive in a downstairs, glass fronted room. Such was their anger, they rushed forward banging on the windows demanding: “We want our money!” NHS managers beat a hasty retreat.

At a public consultation meeting over the



Southampton hospital workers on strike.

photo Southampton SP

threat to the Bitterne NHS walk-in service, a unanimous vote against cuts sent a defiant message to NHS bureaucrats that cuts will be fought.

Underlying all these disputes is a deep sense of injustice at the gross inequality between workers and the bosses. Hospital cleaners highlight the lavish bonuses NHS managers pay themselves. Striking journalists point to the 21% pay rise awarded to the Newsquest

chief executive.

Council workers can see money spent on overpaid executives, councillors and consultants with privatisation profits lining the pockets of their friends in big business. Eight Southampton NHS Primary Care Trust executives each earn six figure salaries, in total over £1 million.

Everywhere there is a growing mood of anger. Unfortunately this anger is lacking a gal-

vanising national leadership prepared to take on the government. The TUC nationally is setting a tone of passivity, reflected by many officials locally.

As the cuts bite, thousands of campaigns will spring up across the country. If they are to be effective and defeat this government they must be tied together by a thousand threads into a united fight of the trade unions, communities, students, youth and pensioners. If the TUC fail to do this, we must be prepared to take up the challenge.

The National Shop Stewards Network (NSSN) has played a central role in 2010, building pressure on the TUC to act and supporting and organising a fightback from below. In 2009 it bought together some of the leading trade union fighters from the disputes and struggles at Lindsey, Linamar, Visteon and Vestas.

As 2011 opens with an outline of huge attacks to come, the NSSN proposals to launch an all-Britain anti-cuts campaign will give great confidence to all those groups of workers and youth fighting back and looking for support and solidarity in their struggles.

NSSN National Anti-Cuts Conference

22 January, 11.30am – 3.30pm

Registration from 10.30am

South Camden Community School,
Charrington Street, London NW1
1RG, (near Euston station)

See: www.shopstewards.net

Jobs cut while the rich carry on partying

ON 6 January nearly 8,000 council workers employed by Greenwich received notices of dismissal. The council wants to sack its entire workforce, with no entitlement to redundancy pay, and offer new contracts with inferior terms and conditions.

A Greenwich council worker

Workers are entitled to four annual increments to take them to the top of their scale. These are not

yearly, negotiated pay rises, they are a contractual entitlement, a condition under which workers have taken jobs on. Now the council has decided which contractual entitlements it will honour.

This is a clear example illustrating the uneven power relationship in the workplace. The only chance that workers have of evening up this relationship is by collective action through their trade unions.

In Greenwich, Unite members are preparing to fight this attack. This is because workers recognise that this

is merely the first round. If the council gets away with it this time, it will become the method of choice in attacking pay and conditions.

There must be no mistaken tactic from the unions that by allowing this attack now, further attacks will be avoided - that the council will somehow be reasonable in light of a sacrifice made by workers. The opposite is true. It will be seen as a sign of weakness and will give the green light to further attacks.

But while workers face pay freez-

es, the bankers continue to roll in it. Massive bonuses are once again being paid.

The Financial Times continues to print a magazine for the rich called How To Spend It, showing luxury goods that the rich continue to be able to buy.

The rich and their operatives in the Tory government continue to spend, spend, spend on themselves including extravagant new year parties and holidays. Yet they tell us that the cupboard is bare, that there is no money left, that there are record lev-

els of debt. Lie after lie. In fact there is plenty of money, plenty of wealth. It is just that the wrong people have it all and refuse to share it with the majority!

Those who have their noses planted in the trough tell the rest of us that we have to accept a pay freeze for the greater good. But the greater good requires that we oppose pay freezes, the greater good requires that we build a society where the majority are not required to sacrifice our pay for the good of the wealthy, over-privileged few.

The plot thickens at News International

THE NEWS of the World's denials that illegal phone hacking was carried out by the newspaper on a regular and sustained basis are rapidly unravelling.

Philip Stott,
CWI Scotland

Bosses at the News of the World (NoW) have now suspended the assistant editor Ian Edmonson, following new evidence that he sanctioned a private investigator to hack the phone of an actress, Sienna Miller.

This was allegedly done while former NoW editor Andy Coulson, now David Cameron's chief spin doctor, was in post at the newspaper.

For years Coulson and News International executives have claimed that only one 'rogue' reporter, royal correspondent Clive Goodman,

who was jailed in 2006, was involved in hacking.

However, Glenn Mulcaire, the private investigator paid to do the hacking had 4,332 names, 2,987 mobile phone numbers and 91 PIN codes (needed for accessing voicemail messages) in his possession when the police arrested him. These included the details of Tommy Sheridan, who was an elected MSP in the Scottish parliament at the time. Moreover, Mulcaire had an "exclusive contract" worth over £100,000 to work for the NoW.

Despite this clear evidence that Mulcaire was involved in phone hacking on an industrial scale and that he had a signed contract with NoW, no further investigation was made by the Metropolitan Police. This has resulted in allegations of collusion and a cover-up by the Met. Andy Hayman, who led the inquiry for the police in 2006, now writes for the Times newspaper

- owned by Murdoch and News International Ltd.

As Labour MP Paul Farrelly, a member of the culture select committee who looked into the phone hacking scandal, commented: “Had Mr Hayman been in charge of the Watergate inquiry, President Nixon would have safely served a full term.”

This week the select committee met again to discuss the activities and actions of the NoW. Some MPs are demanding a full judicial inquiry into possible collusion between the Metropolitan Police and News International. Even leading New Labour figures including Alan Johnson and Ed Balls have raised the need for an 'independent inquiry' into how the Met investigated this case.

Under mounting pressure, the police will this week also hand over documents that they seized from Mulcaire relating to the hacking of a

sports agent's phone. A string of legal actions by high profile individuals who were on Mulcaire's list is forcing the slow release of information from the Met. Tommy Sheridan is also considering an action against NoW.

All this is taking place while the Con-Dem government is deciding whether to allow Rupert Murdoch's News Corp/International to own 100% of BSkyB - which owns Sky TV. Currently they own around 39%.

Vince Cable, who was due to rule on that after he claimed he had "declared war on Murdoch" has been replaced by a more pliable Tory minister. So that may make the takeover more likely. It will leave News International, who already owns newspapers that control 37% of the market in the UK, by far the dominant media force.

It will also give News International access to huge financial resources

to increase their effective domination of large parts of the press and wider media in the UK and internationally.

There is mounting evidence suggesting that Murdoch's billions have and are being used not just to dominate the media with their anti-working class and pro-rich propaganda, but also to influence the actions of the police and the legal establishment.

The only way to break the dictatorship of the billionaires in the media is through a wide-ranging programme of democratic public ownership of the industry. It would then be possible to ensure democratic access to the press based on an allocation to different ideas, including socialist views, dependent on their levels of public support. This could ensure an end to the scandalous abuse of power currently perpetrated by the billionaire media moguls.