

Hackney Unison condemns witch-hunt - and votes for fighting anti-cuts strategy

ARAPTUROUS cheer rang round the crowded meeting hall of over 250 rank and file trade unionists at the Hackney (London) Unison AGM on 2 February. The branch secretary announced the employment tribunal victory of the four Socialist Party members wrongfully barred from holding office in Unison. These included our former branch chair Brian Debus.

A Hackney Unison member

The damning conclusions of the tribunal chair, which called into question the honesty and motives of the unelected bureaucrats who led this disgraceful witch-hunt, were read out.

Audible gasps and murmurs of anger were directed towards the Unison regional officer who was present at the AGM. He has covered Hackney for several years and is also responsible for the Newham branch which has been suspended from functioning for two years now. It seems his role is to 'control' Hackney branch on behalf of the witchfinders and to douse the flames of democracy, free speech and socialism!

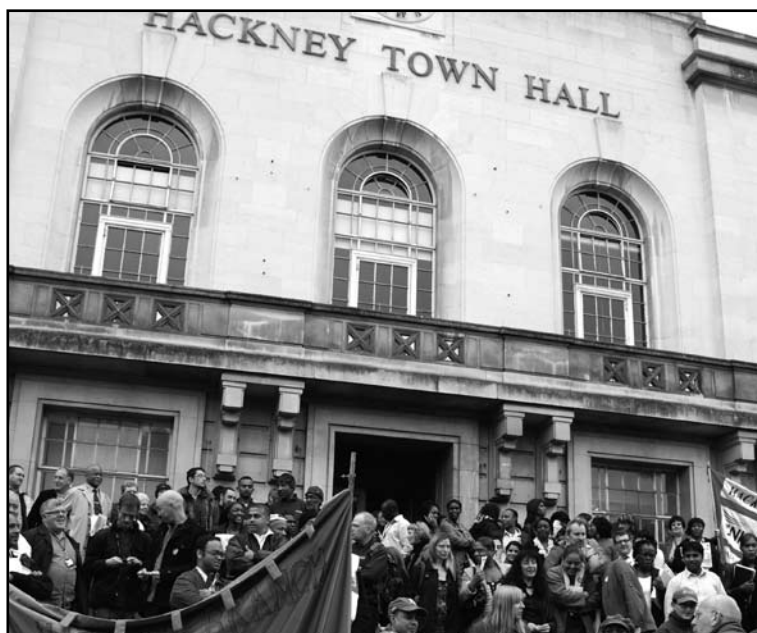
He was asked to account for the actions of the region. His misleading response was that he could not comment due to the proceedings being confidential.

This assertion was immediately challenged by members who pointed out that employment tribunals are a matter of public record. In defiance of the union leadership the meeting overwhelmingly elected Brian to the post of education officer.

The meeting debated several important motions including one that called for a 24-hour national public sector strike to oppose cuts in jobs and services. The membership voted overwhelmingly to pass the motion.

One of the most interesting discussions at the meeting was on a motion put forward calling on all Labour councils (including Hackney) to pass needs-based budgets instead of voting through cuts.

A number of members spoke for or against the motion leading to a lively and very healthy debate. The arguments against, now becoming well rehearsed in Labour councils across the country, were that these are Tory cuts, 'there is no choice', we must be realistic and make it easy



Protesting at council cuts.

photo the Socialist

for Labour to come on board in the anti-government struggles etc.

One of the four speakers who asked us to oppose the motion is himself a Labour councillor in Enfield, although he didn't declare

this fact. He may have been concerned that the only votes against the motion in our AGM were the four speakers, plus four others, with seven abstentions and 230+ for the motion.

We call on all Unison members and branches to demand that the injustice of the witch-hunt be undone. A model motion and the background to this case can be found on the Defend the Four Website: www.stoptthewitchhunt.org.uk

Defend the Four meeting

Tuesday 22 February
7.30pm. Exmouth Arms, 1 Starcross Street London NW1 2HR. (Round the corner from Euston station). John McDonnell MP will be speaking.

Lobby the Unison national executive

Wednesday 23 February
8.30am. Unison HQ, Mabledon Place, off Euston road.

Jobs massacre at Pfizer

ON 1 February it was announced that 2,400 workers at Pfizer's research and development facility in Sandwich, Kent, will be made redundant after the company's decision to close the site completely.

The government claims that the private sector can provide enough employment to compensate for savage cuts in public sector spending. David Cameron commented only a month ago that companies like Pfizer will spearhead job creation.

The closure is being explained largely by Pfizer's decisions to cut

costs due to the pressure of drugs coming 'off patent'. This will affect profits as Pfizer's monopoly on producing those drugs comes to an end and generic production can begin. The patents system allows prices to be maintained at exorbitant levels. When the patents run out it becomes an excuse to reduce the workforce.

Pfizer is the main employer in the town and surrounding area. It is predicted the loss of Pfizer will result in an estimated total of 4,000 jobs lost from contractors and other employers.

This profit driven decision does

not reflect a lack of demand for the development of new drugs or research. Generic production will reduce the cost of many drugs and make them more accessible to ordinary people, but that should not take place at the cost of workers' jobs.

The Socialist Party calls for nationalisation of the Sandwich facility. This call must be linked to the demand for the nationalisation of the pharmaceutical industry as a whole, to be run under democratic workers' and patients' representatives' control.

Jon Redford

RMT cleaners strike over pay and pensions

CLEANERS IN the Rail, Maritime and Transport workers' union (RMT) who service First Great Western trains in Cardiff and Swansea went on 24-hour strike on 4 February. This was over a catalogue of failures regarding pay and pension contributions by their employer Mitie.

Alec Thraves from Swansea Socialist Party spoke to Owen Herbert, South and West Wales RMT executive member, on the picket line at Swansea station:

"Since Mitie took over the carriage cleaning contract it has failed abysmally to resolve a whole series of issues of pay and pension problems that are causing real hardship for our members.

"Our members, who are already on low pay doing a dirty and hard job, have, over the past several

"Their measly pay offer is effectively a pay cut and it's of little surprise that with such contempt and arrogance from the company our members returned a 100% yes vote for this industrial action on a 70%-plus turnout."

months, been short paid by hundreds of pounds as well as not being paid on time. The company has failed to protect members' pensions or to take the necessary steps to set up a section of the railway pension scheme.

"Their measly pay offer is effectively a pay cut and it's of little surprise that with such contempt and arrogance from the company our members returned a 100% yes vote for this industrial action on a 70%-plus turnout. Our members will be taking further action in the future if these issues are not immediately resolved."

This strike took place on the same day as the Wales/England rugby international in Cardiff, a massively busy and arduous day for rail staff, particularly these low-paid cleaners.

One rep on the picket line related how he had cleaned up the first class carriages before one match and collected over 300 empty champagne bottles! Wouldn't mind betting there were a few Mitie directors amongst that lot of 'supporters'!

Striking against health job cuts

ON 3 February, speech and language therapists, members of Unite from Southwark PCT came out on strike following the announcement from management that 11 of the 35 staff will be sacked. This strike was solid and it was clear from passing motorists that there is a lot of support for these workers.

The strike followed a rally the previous evening, organised by Unite, which attracted over 150 - including

parents and children who will be affected by these cuts.

Speaking at the meeting Unite general secretary Len McCluskey made it clear that the full strength of the union is behind this group of workers. This underlines the importance of him being elected as a general secretary, as he is seen to be on the left and supporting workers in struggle.

These attacks will be a devastat-

ing blow to vulnerable children and families who desperately rely on these services.

All the speech therapists in Southwark are fully behind this action and they have done some good work in building support for the action in the local community with leafleting and petitioning. It is very important that this struggle develops the links with other workers under attack.

Chris Newby

Unite anti-cuts conference



A national anti-cuts struggle is essential.

photo SPS

OVER 400 Unite members attended a conference against the cuts organised by the union's London and Eastern and South-east regions. While the members were angry, and went away convinced that Unite would fight the cuts, what was lacking was an overall strategy to really take on the bosses and their representatives, whatever their political colour.

Kevin Parslow

New general secretary Len McCluskey opened the conference and laid the blame for the crisis at the doors of the bankers and their system, accusing Cameron and Co of making workers pay for the collapse of the banking system. He also gave support to the students and their struggles, and called on the police to stop criminalising young people.

However, no speakers from the floor were allowed in the plenary sessions. Only in the workshops was the anger of the members allowed to be expressed, with some activists calling for industrial ac-

tion, up to a general strike, to fight back!

But it was in the workshop on political campaigning that much of the frustration came out. The platform speakers concentrated on the cuts of Tory councils like Southampton, as well as the ConDem government, and their political response was to give out Labour Party application forms!

This was challenged in an all-too brief session by a number of members. It was left to Suzanne Muna from LE1111 branch to point out that she lived in a Labour-run authority and they were attacking youth and other services just like the Tory councils! Her call for the union to withhold the political levy to Labour for making cuts received warm applause.

Unite now must take the lead, as the biggest union, to support and coordinate campaigns and strikes against the vicious attacks of the government, councils and the bosses. But it must link up with those communities organising to fight back, against whoever is carrying them out, and develop a na-