

the Socialist

The paper of the Socialist Party. Issue 665.

The Socialist, PO Box 24697, London E11 1YD Registered as a newspaper at the Post Office. Published by Socialist Publications, printed by Newsfax International. ISSN 1366-9621

Bosses prepare for war on public sector workers

In February it was revealed that the Con-Dem government is preparing a 'war plan' in an attempt to prevent coordinated strike action against the cuts. Tory MP Francis Maude is reported to be overseeing the plans, including the training of scab workforces. After the handover of Birmingham prison to private contractor G4S, the BBC reported that justice minister Ken Clarke said that the "military are involved" in contingency plans should prison officers stage a strike. Here BILL MULLINS looks at further evidence of how NHS employers are preparing to undermine workers' action.

NHS bosses in the west midlands have circulated a twelve page paper, a "working draft subject to publication and restricted in circulation" to local health trusts. It details how employers should make plans to undermine any attempt by health workers to defend their jobs and services.

In the grossly misnamed paper, NHS Contingency Planning: Ensuring Effective Employee Relations, it says, with some understatement, that there is "some uncertainty with respect to the national industrial relations outlook".

You bet there is! Tens of thousands of health workers voted with their feet and joined the massive TUC demo on 26 March to give notice to their bosses that they won't stand back and accept cuts without a massive fightback once they are given a lead.

The paper lists a number of 'flash points' which can cause trouble including "pay review" (zero increases and cancellation of previous agreements to increase pay incrementally); "pensions" (the bosses are planning to rip up the last pensions deal which gave protection to existing staff. At the same time they want to increase employee contributions and increase the retirement age); and other "changes as a conse-

The paper complains that the only "contingency plans" in place across NHS organisations deal with the effect on staff of a flu epidemic, not "employee unrest",

quence of the [health] White Paper", which give "potential for employee unrest".

The paper complains that the only "contingency plans" in place across NHS organisations deal with the effect on staff of a flu epidemic, not "employee unrest", and have never been tested!

Anti union laws

The paper's authors start by advising employers to reach for the legal protection of the anti-union laws in the first instance. This, they say, is the only way that the workers can



photo Suzanne Beishon

have protection from dismissal. Otherwise they are in breach of their contracts of employment and the unions do not have immunity from damages if they don't strictly abide by the legal provisions.

The advice lists potential types of industrial action from "work to rule" to "lock ins". To prepare for this they say that all databases should be updated, particularly listing "volunteer, student and return-to-work staff databases" and later on "St John's ambulance". What is this but a scabs' charter?

The authors recommend that the bosses should work out who is likely to scab from among their employees, "particularly manage-

rial staff or, more specifically, non-unionised staff". On another page it lists where the unions in hospital departments are strong and not so strong.

In its war on the unions, this paper highlights that one of the main reasons the anti-union laws (employment acts) require the unions to give the bosses seven days' notice of any proposed ballot is that this gives time for the bosses to get to the workers first with their anti-strike propaganda.

It lists the requirements of the unions to tell the employer where their members are and what grade they are on. This, of course, has been used by other bosses to get

court injunctions against the unions, claiming that the information the unions gave them was not accurate. Unions such as the RMT have overturned such decisions.

Reading this document from one region of the country and one part of the public sector it makes you wonder what information the trade union leaders are giving to their members on how to prepare to take on the bosses.

The bosses are seriously preparing, from the Con-Dem government down, to push through their cuts programme. It's high time the unions also gave a clear lead to their members by preparing them as well.

Labour Link won't save jobs and services

Like many trade union leaders across the country, the leadership of Unison in the east Midlands have tried to answer the question: "What next after the demo on 26 March?"

In a document recently circulated to branches, they correctly pointed out the need for a good turnout on the demo. Then they add: "The next big thing after 26 March is the council elections on 5 May and we need to give the Lib Dems and Tories a message through the ballot box too".

"Vote Labour", and not a word about further demos, never mind industrial action. It is now over six months since the TUC passed 'composite 10' at the TUC conference that called for a demo to be followed up with "support and coordinated campaigning and joint union industrial action, nationally and locally, in opposition to attacks on jobs, pensions, pay or public services".

Instead, what we have from Unison is an advert for the Labour Party and a promotion of Unison's 'Labour Link'.

But the Labour Link is not going to save jobs and services because the Labour Party opposition to the

coalition government is based on a policy of 'cuts yes but not so fast'. Or as Socialist Party councillor Dave Nellist puts it: "It's a difference of half a parliamentary term". The Con-Dems want these cuts during this parliamentary term, whilst Labour leader Ed Miliband wants to extend into the next parliamentary term.

The campaign to defeat the cuts needs a political answer as well as an industrial one but the unions' leadership have nothing to say about that.

In fact, when the civil service union PCS proposed at the last meeting of the TUC public services liaison committee that the unions should unite in action against the attacks on public sector pensions, Unison officials attacked the PCS for being 'unrealistic'.

They said there was no way they could expect their local government members, who contribute to their pension scheme, to take strike action in defence of civil servants who have a non-contributory scheme.

Unison members in local government face a massive increase in the amount they have to pay into the

scheme and a reduction in their pension entitlements.

Civil servants, teachers and health workers were able to protect themselves against the last attacks on their pensions in 2005 by threatening coordinated strike action. Now the 2005 deal, which protected existing members of the scheme from any detriment, is in danger of being ripped up by the government.

Council workers and civil servants are both under attack. It makes sense, as PCS was proposing, for the unions to coordinate their strike ballots and strike action in defence of the pension schemes, as well as defence of their jobs and wages, which are also under attack.

It is high time that the Unison leadership was held to account for its unpreparedness to defend members facing government attacks. Their strategy is again: "Let's wait for a Labour government", something they mouthed throughout the last Tory government.

A political and an industrial strategy are vital. Socialist Party members in Unison call for the ending of the link with the Labour Party. We



Unison members on the 26 March demo photo Paul Mattsson

argue that the union should put itself foursquare behind the demand for a new mass workers' party based on the trade unions.

See www.socialistparty.org.uk for a list of Socialist Party members standing in the current Unison NEC election.