

Workers turn up the heat in Southampton



The brilliant demo through Southampton photo Paul Mattsson

Nick Chaffey

Over 1,000 council workers, striking Medirest cleaners and their supporters marched through Southampton on 13 June, in a powerful show of solidarity against vicious council cuts and the scandalous consequence of the private sector in the NHS. Strikers were out picketing from early in the morning. For Medirest cleaners this is their sixth strike and, with action over seven days, their

longest to date. Reports are circulating of Medirest using unemployed workers on benefits from the government's new slave labour initiative. If true, this is a major warning to the trade unions of the need to link up with the unemployed to fight this new legislation. Council workers have made it clear they will fight measures to impose pay cuts. Ian Woodland, Unite regional organiser, made it clear to the rally: "We will not walk into talks until the council removes the threat

to sack workers." Local polls in the press give the current public support to the strikers at 66%. The heat is on the council as the rubbish piles up across the city. Southampton Socialist Party received positive support for our leaflet calling for council-wide strike action on 30 June alongside other public sector workers if the council has not backed down by then. Text messages of support to Medirest Unison steward Jo Spear 07899 087957.

Tube drivers prepare to strike

RMT tube drivers on London Underground (LU) will be striking on 19-20, 27-28 June and 30 June – 1 July. This is in defence of victimised tube driver Arwyn Thomas. Arwyn and fellow driver Eamonn Lynch spoke at the National Shop Stewards Network conference on 11 June. The RMT have won reinstatement for Eamonn but LU management has refused so far to reinstate Arwyn.

Arwyn told the NSSN conference: "I was one of four RMT members who were summarily dismissed during the last RMT/TSSA strike in defence of 800 jobs and the subsequent downgrading of safety. We've had local strikes in defence of myself and Eamonn Lynch. We had two days of strike action at my depot Morden on the Northern line and two days of strike action on the Bakerloo where Eamonn worked. My depot was solid and the Bakerloo line was shut down completely for those two days.

On the Bakerloo line we have a minority of drivers, 60% are in Aslef. But the vast majority of Aslef drivers did not cross picket lines. That shows that you can take solidarity action if you are determined enough. The two strikes were very successful but they weren't going to move management. So the RMT took the brave decision to ballot every train driver on the underground for two people. The vote was 2:1 in favour of striking. The management signed a deal which meant the re-engagement of

Eamonn, which is a terrific victory for the RMT. Management reneged on the second part of the deal which was my reinstatement. Instead they tried to offer me money but I told them to stuff it." Eamonn added: "For nine months LU have tried to claim my dismissal was nothing to do with trade union activities. Spending £250,000 of taxpayers' money to victimise two union reps... We'll go on strike as long as necessary to get Arwyn's job back."

Unison NEC elections - left retakes lost ground

The results of Unison's national executive council (NEC) elections give the left 17 seats. Socialist Party members in Unison fought these elections in an electoral alliance with the United Left. Unison's largest region, the North West, showed the most dramatic swing. All the contested seats went to left wingers, and Socialist Party member Roger Bannister topped the poll with 7,561 votes. One shock result in this region was the defeat of key right winger Bob Oram, whose initial election to the NEC was swiftly followed by his election to the influential position of chair of the staffing committee. But the shadowy world of Unison's ruling clique means little to ordinary members facing attacks

on jobs, and pay. They voted Oram out by a thumping majority of 950 votes! The leadership of the North West region acts as organiser for the national leadership, rallying support for their policies at conferences etc. But these elections make it clear that there is no support for these activities at the base of the union in the region. Socialist Party members Jean Thorpe and Vicky Perrin topped the polls in their respective regions, (East Midlands and Yorkshire and Humberside), and April Ashley's 37,827 votes in the Female Black Members seat was the top vote in that section. Even where socialists were not elected, it was often by slim ma-

ajorities, such as Angela Waller who missed election in Yorkshire and Humberside by only 161 votes. Unfortunately Hannah Walter was unsuccessful in retaining her Northern region seat, after the bureaucracy responded to her victory two years ago by transferring members out of the region in order to reduce the number of NEC seats available! The four Socialist Party members on the NEC will work with other left NEC members wherever possible to promote fighting policies to defend members from the Con-Dem attacks, and will argue for an end to wasting members' money on Labour MPs and councillors who are not prepared to oppose cuts. A Unison member

HMRC staff strike - and look forward to action on 30 June

PCS members

On 7 June, PCS union members in Revenue and Customs (HMRC) offices across the UK walked out from 4pm to 5pm in protest at the 'attendance management' policy that was recently imposed. The following day, we started work at 10am and then walked out from 11.30am to 1.30pm for a mass extended lunch break. This attendance management policy can be seen as a cynical attempt by HMRC management to make it easier to sack people. It reduces the number of absences a member of staff can have before their line manager has to consider 'discussing concerns' with them. This can, technically, lead to staff having formal action taken against them after just four days off sick. Over the last few years, because of massive cuts in staff, incompetent management, oppressive working conditions and other indignities, the department has been in meltdown. The sheer amount of upset to the public these events, among others, have caused has naturally led staff to be stressed. In Leeds and Bradford, union members walked out on Tuesday and on Wednesday, there was a suc-

cessful meeting at the Leeds office, with over 20 workers attending. In Coventry PCS members mounted picket lines until 10am, when over 100 workers gathered to walk in and log in together to cause maximum disruption to the system. One picket at the Llanishen tax office in Cardiff said: "They're getting ready to sack workers on the cheap". "They say you're entitled to have time off work if you're ill, but if you do they sack you!" said John, a PCS member who has just begun work at the site. "The worst thing is, they're cutting jobs here while there's huge amounts of tax going uncollected. Of the £120 billion uncollected and evaded they're not even looking for £30 billion of it - it's parked indefinitely and will probably never come in". Members were angry at yet another cynical attack by management but they were also upbeat now that collective action was being taken. Members marched back into the office behind the PCS branch banner but the action doesn't end there. Many expressed their willingness to come out for longer than the couple of hours taken over two days in the current action and there was a real sense of anticipation in looking forward to the national strike action on 30 June.

Gloves are off at Sheffield uni



Telling it like it is photo Alistair Tice

Alistair Tice

More pickets, more flags, more placards, more determined! That sums up the attitude of Unite and Unison members of support staff at Sheffield university on strike again on 10 June. This was their second day's strike to stop university management slashing the pension entitlements of hundreds of low-paid, predominantly women workers. So-called negotiations had got nowhere. At a meeting on 8 June, the university had brought what they called 'meaningful proposals'. A Unite steward told me: "They handed us a one-sided A4 sheet, I said where's the rest of it? It took two minutes to read, two minutes to understand and two seconds to tear it up!" Management seem more interested in trying to intimidate workers who have gone on strike. Terry showed me emails that had been sent by human resources (HR) to all portering and security staff follow-

ing a 'complaint' by one worker who scabbed. It says "Another name that appears to be circulating is Terry Ancliffe." Terry said he'd not even spoken to this individual. HR also says that strikers' refusal to talk to non-strikers breaches health and safety legislation. "Well management haven't spoken to us about pensions for a year!" retorted Terry. Because the student year has now ended, strike action over summer may not be as effective so the unions are proposing protest rallies to expose the university's hypocrisy in espousing 'equality and fairness' while attacking the lowest paid. So the next action will be on 18 June when hundreds of prospective students and their parents attend an open day at the university. This is an important dispute because no other university yet operates a 'cash-balance' pensions scheme but if Sheffield University get away with it, no doubt others will try to follow. As Unite rep Martin's t-shirt said "The gloves are off".