

Southampton council workers vote for more action

Nick Chaffey

"The bin workers have led the way, it's time we did some of it!" was the conclusion of the 100 care workers who turned out to discuss the dispute over pay cuts and job losses at Southampton city council.

The meeting provided debate and discussion on where next for the dispute, especially on the threat made by Tory councillors that council workers could face the sack for taking industrial action as the dispute passed the twelve week period of statutory protection.

Branch officers explained that the council would be unlikely to risk losing hundreds of careworkers. Mass sackings would also escalate the dispute further. When it was put to the vote, care workers voted nine to one in favour of a further strike on 6 October.

Mass meeting

Two days later, a mass meeting of the bin workers voted overwhelmingly by a show of hands to support the care workers' strike. This will now be put to a ballot.

Southampton council workers are showing tremendous resolve to sustain a work-to-rule and further strike action.

Tory councillors have fuelled the fire when they voted to increase councillors' pay against the recommendation of the remuneration committee that chastised councillors for taking pay for a 35-hour



Southampton council workers are showing tremendous resolve photo Paul Mattsson

week but in many cases only doing 25 hours!

Unite Steward John Earley said: "If the council had been prepared to negotiate from the start they wouldn't be in this mess. They say we're all in this together but while councillors get a pay rise for doing less we get a pay cut."

Labour councillors, while opposing the rise, failed in their duty to contribute their increase to the strike fund but have offered to donate their money to charity! New Labour have circulated a new leaflet stating their opposition to

the strikes.

The Socialist Party continues to give full support to the fight against pay cuts and job losses and has supported calls from council workers for a council-wide strike to escalate the pressure on the council and force a retreat.

The council has £17 million in reserves, so the pay cuts are unnecessary and it was recently exposed that the Tories have borrowed a massive £78 million since 2008 - the same money they are now attempting to cut from the budget.

The biggest cut that needs to happen in Southampton is the removal of the Tory council. But if Labour maintain their attack on the unions and pledge cuts of their own it is essential that council unions stand anti-cuts candidates to put real fighters on the council.

As the movement to stop the cuts grows and the preparation is made for 30 November national strikes, the potential exists to inflict a major defeat on Southampton Tories and show workers nationally what is possible.

Bus workers force management climb-down

Unite members

During August, National Express West Midlands (NXWM) bosses informed drivers at its nine garages that practically all local agreements would be torn up from 25 September.

This would involve, among other things, getting rid of paid breaks, travelling time and scrapping shorter shifts on Sundays.

This follows the last pay deal, which centred on a way-below-inflation 2% a year for two years pay increase, which was accepted on the understanding that local agreements would be left alone.

NXWM is one of the biggest bus operators in the country with op-

erations stretching from Coventry to Wolverhampton and employs around 3,750 drivers.

For certain drivers these planned changes would mean three to four hours extra work during some weeks, for no extra pay.

However to their credit the Unite union Traffic Negotiating Committee immediately organised garage meetings which attracted very sizeable turnouts of drivers who reacted with horror and anger at the management's plans and voted overwhelmingly for strike action.

The company immediately backed down and informed the union at a meeting on 25 August that following the reaction of the drivers the changes were now off the table, although they still intend

to somehow make over £20 million of savings.

An additional 'bonus' is the recent shock resignation of NXWM unpopular managing director, Dave Kaye, for 'personal reasons'.

During his time at the company fares have risen by 9.5% with services cut by 3%, while according to the Birmingham Mail profits have soared to over £80,000 a day! After less than a year in the job surely these 'personal reasons' don't have anything to do with promising to take on the drivers and ending up walking away with his tail between his legs?

This episode has proved decisively to drivers the power that we hold in our hands and the importance of being organised.



Bus workers have seen the benefit of good union organisation photo Paul Mattsson

Recognition won back - at a price

Rob Rooney

Plymouth Unison shop steward, personal capacity, and Socialist Party member.

Unison has won back recognition by Plymouth city council but only after agreeing to a cuts package which inflicts devastating losses on some workers.

The Tory administration summoned Unison, along with GMB and Unite, to talks in January on how to cut £18 million from the city budget over the next three years. When, in August, Unison refused to sign the deal, management took the unprecedented step of de-recognising Unison, by far the biggest union at the council.

With heavy hearts, the branch voted to accept a revised cuts package. I have always argued against ac-

cepting any cuts and consequently voted not to accept.

Management have made minor improvements and made it clear that, with the agreement of GMB and Unite in its pockets, they were set on imposing the cuts even if Unison refused to sign.

There's no getting round the fact that this is a defeat for all Plymouth city council workers.

The challenge for the branch is making sure every Unison member is prepared for the fact that management will try to come back for more.

In the battles ahead it is crucial that all three recognised unions act together, that a democratically elected joint shop stewards committee emerges and that a policy of no cuts of any kind is adopted. Unison is calling for a mass meeting of all three unions.

Construction workers call for national ballot

Kevin Parslow

Another protest against the attacks on national agreements in the electrical and mechanical construction sector took place on 14 September at the Olympic site in East London.

About 100 workers and their supporters gathered to protest against the attempts to deskill the industry by eight major construction companies, including major names such as Balfour Beatty.

Five of these companies have upped the stakes by issuing what the union Unite describes as "legal notice of their intention to dismiss, with notice, thousands of employees before re-engaging them on new inferior contracts". A deadline has

been set for 7 December for all employees to sign these new contracts.

The mood of the workers was angry. They get paid good wages (about £16 an hour) for high-grade skills yet face the prospect of being reclassified as 'semi-skilled' and therefore being lower paid; some cuts in pay could be as much as 35%!

This protest, organised by the rank and file construction workers' campaign, was attended by two Unite officials and addressed by Vince Passfield, regional secretary for the union's construction sector.

Most of the workers are calling for unions, particularly Unite, to organise a national ballot for strike action to hit the bosses in their pockets and stop these attacks on terms and conditions.

In brief

Fujitsu strike

Unite members working at the Fujitsu IT company sites in Manchester, Salford and Crewe struck for 24 hours on 19 September against the company's breaking of agreements on pensions, pay and redeployment. The Crewe workforce is already fighting to defend Unite rep Alan Jennings, victimised by the company.

Management have made concessions to the PCS union which organises former civil service workers privatised to Fujitsu. Unite strikers hailed this as a victory which shows they can win too.

• For more information see www.ourunion.org.uk/news/

Youth workers' action

On 9 September, youth workers in the Unite CWYU (Community and Youth Workers) union went on strike across Oxfordshire, in protest at the council's plans to replace the services they provide with seven "community hubs", which will put 80 jobs at risk.

The strike demonstration was upbeat and noisy with members from several different unions attending, such as PCS. Striking workers from Banbury and elsewhere in Oxfordshire also attended. We marched from Church Green to Witney youth centre, for a short rally outside David Cameron's office.

Rachael Horwitz

• See www.socialistparty.org.uk for the full version of this article, further workplace news and labour movement events.

Privatisation scandal

Greenwich council-owned trading company "GSPlus" have announced cuts that may lead to compulsory redundancies.

GSPlus was set up by the council despite union opposition. They said the move would save jobs and protect pay and conditions. Indeed staff were promised superior conditions to council staff.

The unions pointed out at the time that this was simply not realistic and that in fact jobs and pay would be more vulnerable as a result. It gives us no pleasure to be proved right.

Unite branch secretary Onay Kasab

Pensions action

Members of the UCU lecturers' union have voted for industrial action, including strikes, to defend pensions. Staff at 67 universities in the Universities Superannuation Scheme have voted for a sustained campaign of action because the employers have imposed pension cuts. Action is likely to begin in mid-October.

Lecturers in the other main pension scheme have already taken strike action, with the other unions on 30 June. The ballot for that action is still valid.

Liverpool ballot

200 Unite members working for housing repair service Liverpool Mutual Homes (LMH) are balloting for industrial action against threats to their jobs. The workers provide a repair service to people living in social housing in Liverpool and have been TUPE transferred to a number of different companies. LMH, the latest company has gone into administration.

There is plenty of work to do and LMH appear to be giving work to sub-contractors. Also the Unite convenor is facing the sack.