

## PUBLIC SECTOR PAY FREEZE: UNITED ACTION TO DEFEAT THIS ATTACK

**T**he Government is leading a charge to impose pay cuts on millions of public sector workers by setting a limit of 2%.

**Glenn Kelly,**  
NEC member (personal capacity)  
**and Adrian O'Malley**  
Wakefield Health (personal capacity)

This insulting offer is despite the fact that the inflation rate is at its highest in ten years at 4.3%. So while our rents, mortgages and council tax bills increase, we're expected to find the money with less pay.

In the health service the government wants to stage the deal making it worth just 1.9% and in Scotland the new SNP government has now imposed a 2.5% deal on all Scottish health workers.

Taking New Labour's lead, the Tory Local Authority employers (for England, Wales and Northern Ireland) have told council workers they were getting no more than the 2% increase, as apparently "there is not a problem with low pay in Local Government"! They then hinted at an extra 0.5% "informally" being offered but the local government minister Ruth Kelly is pressurising them to drop even this miserly improvement.

As if the pay freeze wasn't enough, the local authority employers are also gearing up for

a wholesale attack on our national conditions starting in 2008 with the removal of existing national agreements and introduction of PRP and local pay bargaining. This is all the more reason not to show any weakness this year.

The critical question for us is what is the union going to do about it and when?

Off the back of the teachers and RCN votes, in April the UNISON health conference voted for a strike ballot against both the staging and the amount on offer. Two months on and nothing has happened. A senior officer told the NEC last week that there was a proposed ballot timetable set to start in September!! So much for conference being the sovereign body of the union! What are the Scottish health workers supposed to do: sit and wait for members to have received the pay increase for five months and then act?

In April, the Local Government unions rightly rejected the 2% offer without even needing to consult the members, so why are we now wasting time consulting over an extra 0.5% which would amount to an extra 40p a week for the average member before tax?!

The union should be going to conference and be seen to be leading the charge to fight for a decent pay rise. However some are talking



of waiting for a "final offer" and then consult the members on that offer and only then deciding if we should ballot or not! Once again we'd be left to wait for months if some have their way.

We cannot allow the tops of the union to mislead this dispute like they have the pension dispute. We must ensure that the Local Government conference instructs the

SGE to start a strike ballot by backing the Bromley and Knowsley strike amendment to comp A.

The timing of the ballot should seek to achieve maximum unity with other workers but not at the cost of doing nothing for months on end. The leadership must not be allowed to use waiting for other unions as a do-nothing excuse. If we lead then others will follow.

If Local Government votes for a ballot at conference this week surely that should be the trigger for a joint ballot of health and Local Government involving 1.1 million UNISON members alone.

This could mean we could give the government and employers a summer of discontent linking up with the postal workers and the teachers to follow.



### Socialist Party fringe meeting

Tuesday 19 June - 7.00pm

**Speakers: Dave Nellist** - Coventry Socialist Party  
Councillor and a Labour MP from 1983 to 1992

**'Unions break with Labour and build a new party for working people'**

at the Brighton Hotel 143/145 Kings Road

(on the front turn right out of the conference centre)

After the elections: Labour's has lost over 5 million votes since 1997. After the "coronation" of Gordon Brown: will there be any difference from Blair's catastrophic reign as Labour leader? Unison members are asking the question after years of pouring money into the party. "What have we got for our money?" Come to the meeting and debate the way forward now.



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■ **Blair Gone, Brown Crowned** so whats changed? - Editorial

■ **Remodelling Deal** say no to mark two

■ **BNP** UNISON members concern on how they are to be defeated in the wake of recent elections

■ **Pensions** the Government lies but UNISON leadership proposes acceptance of the resulting 'deal'

## EDITORIAL

### Blair has gone, Brown is crowned but it's time to build a new workers' party

**Ten years of 'unremitting' attacks on the working class and poor for the benefit of the rich, blatant corruption – symbolized by the Ecclestone affair at the beginning of his reign and 'cash for honours' at the end – the systematic undermining of the NHS, the continuation of the dirty work of the Tories through privatisation. Above all, the obscenity of the Iraq war with its 650,000 civilian victims and the country plunged back almost to medieval barbarism. This, and not the sycophantic blandishments by Blair and his media allies in the last week, is the real 'legacy' of his disastrous reign.**

**B**ut, protest the Blairistas like Peter Mandelson, thousands of children have been lifted out of poverty. Yet the UN recently declared in a special report that the position of children in Britain was the worst in the advanced industrial countries.

Moreover, today, a million children live in overcrowded, run-down, damp or dangerous housing. The number of homeless people in Britain has risen to 391,000; across the UK 93,000 families are living in temporary accommodation, twice the number when Labour came to power.

The average price paid by first-time buyers has doubled in five years. House prices are now beyond the reach of first-time buyers in 93% of towns, up from 37% in 2001.

#### Miserly

**B**ut there is a minimum wage, isn't there? Yes, of a miserly £5-35 an hour!

This is at a time when the Sunday Times rich list showed that the combined wealth of the UK's 1,000 richest people had risen by 20%, to a staggering £59 billion in the last twelve months.

When Blair leaves office, he will no longer have to 'struggle by' on an annual salary of £180,000 a year. His wife, Cherie, earns an estimated £100,000 a year plus £30,000 every time she gives a 'lecture'.

He is entitled to a backbench salary of £60,000, redundancy pay of £31,000 and a retirement pension of £63,000 for life. When he reaches 60 he will be eligible for another pension for his long service as an MP. This will be worth another £40,000 a year. The dosh will pile up as he lectures to the like-minded rich throughout the world.

#### The Labour Party

**B**lairism/Thatcherism will still dominate New Labour under Gordon Brown. Mandelson shows the real character of New Labour when he declared: "No Labour Party manifesto would now propose to repeal Mrs Thatcher's trade union law, reverse privatisations or remove the right to buy a council house." (Evening Standard, 8 May)

Paradoxically, it was in the trade unions and among some workers and young people outside of the Labour Party that McDonnell's campaign did find an echo. This could have been reflected in the ballot if it had taken place. Pressure would have undoubtedly mounted for these union leaders to support McDonnell, whose policies are more in line with the official policies of the trade unions and particularly with the rank and file.

Notwithstanding our opposition to the proposition of John McDonnell and others that the left could breathe new life into the moribund and empty shell of the Labour Party, we supported, particularly in the trade unions, the idea that, if it came to a vote, McDonnell should have been supported. We did this, despite some hesitation and even doubts within the ranks of the Socialist Party, in order to go

through this experience with leftward-moving workers and test out the viability or otherwise of the idea that Labour could be transformed.

The best outcome would have been for McDonnell to have accumulated enough votes for a real leadership contest to take place. It would have led to debate and possible ideological turmoil – not so much in the Labour Party but in the wider labour movement. McDonnell would not have won but out of such a battle the beginning of a coherent left could have emerged.

But 'hope springs eternal'. McDonnell and his supporters, despite the non-contest, now argue that with just one more 'heave' New Labour can be transformed. This is quite false. Mao Zedong's long march of the 1930s was a stroll in the park compared to the task of transforming New Labour.

A Brown Government could be overwhelmed by an avalanche of the stoked-up discontent of the working class, manifested through trade union struggle. Civil servants, through the PCS union, are already engaged in a battle over job losses, as well as the attempt to limit pay increases, including the magnificent strike on 1 May.

On the other hand, the basis for a new mass workers' party has been prepared by the events of the last decade and a half. The discontent of the working class will not be manifested within the existing New Labour structures, contrary to the hopes of John McDonnell and the left still clinging to the wreckage of New Labour. There was a flicker of hope perhaps that Labour could be 'reclaimed', kindled by McDonnell's campaign. But those hopes have now been dashed for most people, as was indicated by a letter which appeared in The Guardian when it was clear that New Labour was a one-candidate party.

The correspondents, in just two lines, introduced a 'reality check', concluding after Brown's coronation, "Ah well, saves us having to rejoin what used to be the Labour Party"!

There is no time to lose in a fruitless attempt to resuscitate the living dead. It is now urgent that the efforts of workers, young people, trade unionists, women and the oppressed ethnic communities move from below, if the trade union leaders will not, to build a powerful force for a new political voice of the working class, a new mass workers' party.

## Say NO to the remodelling deal mk2

**T**he Local Government Service Group Executive's proposal in resolution 12 is one of the most far-reaching and potentially divisive recommendations regarding school staff to come from the national leadership in over a decade.

**Mike Forster**  
Kirklees LG (personal capacity)

#### What are the proposals?

They want conference to approve a plan to remove staff away from the National Joint Council (NJC) negotiating body and in effect create a separate and new body solely for school staff. This is being offered by the government, whose rationale for doing so is to create a more 'flexible and adaptable' body which can more quickly respond to the 'fast-changing reform agenda' in schools, including the creation of foundation schools, trusts and academies.

Whilst some of these arguments may be true, if Unison goes along with this trap, they will be responsible for breaking up the union's collective bargaining strength which will be massively weakened if school and council staff have a separate employer. When this government is hell bent on privatising services and attacking union rights, why should we now believe that they are suddenly willing to offer an improvement for school staff?

#### So what do these proposals mean?

Whilst we would welcome a body which could have teeth to impose improved and consistent pay and conditions of service, this is not what the government is saying. It is proposing a 'non-statutory body' which could issue advice and guidance to schools which they could have 'regard to'. They hope that

will encourage compliance. There is no statutory underpinning which the leadership naively believes that they can secure through further talks. This was not our experience in the pensions negotiations!

This would create a structure which cannot deliver any more consistency than we have at the moment – at the expense of splitting up local council staff from their school counterparts. The government report actually says that the attraction of such a system is that it would remove the liability of schools from the equal pay agenda since they could no longer be compared to council staff.

This is a union busting agenda and must be opposed. It does not and will not address the pressing problems for school support of low pay, inferior conditions of service and the ongoing scandal of term-time pay. Flexibility is a by-word which school support staffs understand only too well for exploitation and low pay.

#### Splitting Union Structures

In reality this is an agenda to force the creation of two separate union structures, one for council staff and one for school staff. Whatever the current weaknesses of local councils, at least they have some control over the worst excesses of schools, which will be lost forever if the SGE resolution is passed.

We already have an unfortunate precedent in the national body for Further Education Colleges. This has proved to be a toothless tiger. Local employers have completely ignored its recommendations leaving workers to fight alone against ruthless principals. It is estimated that over a half of colleges ignore national agreements.

#### What to do instead

The question is how we force schools to recognise national agreements. We should instead be arguing for the creation of a sub-

committee of the NJC. This should have teeth to impose its decisions. Private employers should be required to follow its guidance. This would preserve the unity of the local government workforce, whilst bringing the private employers on board. It would preserve and enhance pay and conditions of service for Unison members in schools, whilst maintaining the links with their other council counterparts. Anything less than this will split the union, sell a bum deal to our school members and give further encouragement to the dismantling of public services.

If the government will not agree, they must be met with a determined fight to win the argument. There is still a huge well of discontent around remodelling and unfair pay levels in schools which could easily be harnessed by the union around a national campaign. This has been repeatedly called for by union conferences but national campaigns by this current leadership appear to be cosy talks

with the government!

We cannot allow the leadership to steamroller through another remodelling deal mark two! Remember that the remodelling agreement was presented to us a fait accompli, already signed, sealed and delivered without any guarantees. We must demand:

- The SGE proposal is rejected.
- A national schools conference to discuss these far-reaching proposals.
- A national agreement binding on all employers and with the necessary ring-fenced resources to lift school support staff out of poverty pay.
- An end to the fragmentation of our union and its collective strength.
- The return of education to the democratic control of the public sector.

Support the amendments from Kirklees and Bromley branches



# The BNP

The fact that there is only one motion on UNISON national conference about the racist, far-right British National Party (BNP) does not reflect the very real concern of UNISON members about the rise of the BNP



**T**he BNP fielded a record number of candidates in the May elections. In the event, the BNP failed to make the electoral breakthrough they and others had predicted, with a net growth of only two councillors.

**Jean Thorpe**  
NEC member (personal capacity)

Although the election results will cause some difficulties for the leadership of the BNP as they rely heavily on election results to motivate party activists, this does not mean the BNP is on the decline. The fact they were able to find 744 people prepared to stand as BNP candidates in the local elections in England, and a full slate in the regional constituencies of the Welsh assembly and Scottish Parliament, shows they are still building wider support.

### How can the BNP be stopped?

The major trade unions, including UNISON, placed campaigning against the BNP as a high priority in the run-up to the May elections. The unions joined forces with a number of anti-BNP groups and coalitions including Unite Against Fascism (UAF) and Searchlight.

The tactic of most of these cam-

paigns was to concentrate on turning out votes for the main parties, mainly New Labour, to stop BNP candidates from getting elected. The aim of UAF is to "aim to unite the broadest possible spectrum of society to counter the threat of the BNP" and it urges people to "use your vote to stop the BNP". Labour MPs regularly appear on its platform and UAF's criticisms of New Labour policies are muted. Searchlight's "Hope not Hate" campaign sadly adopts a similar approach by sowing illusions that the best way to defeat the BNP at the ballot box is through the mainstream parties.

Given the racist and extremely reactionary nature of the BNP it is understandable that the superficially attractive position of 'vote anyone but BNP' could gain an echo.

However it is precisely the Government and local council policies of attacks on public services like the NHS, housing and education that have paved the way for the rise of the BNP in the first place, who falsely claim to defend these services and the white working class. Depending on the same parties, with the same pro-big business policies, to stop the BNP will only succeed in pushing more voters towards the far right in the future.

While sometimes a campaign to mobilise the anti-BNP vote can stop the BNP getting elected, it doesn't deal with the root cause of the problem. In fact it leaves the BNP free to pose as the only alternative

to the unpopular policies of the main parties. For example, in Stoke-on-Trent the campaign run by Searchlight & others helped unseat one BNP councillor. But the disgust and anger locally at the policies of the main parties allowed the BNP to win three other seats, including the seat held by the Labour leader of the council who was trying to close half of Stoke's older peoples' residential homes.

To cut across the growth of the BNP in the long term we need to point out that it is the very policies of New Labour and the other mainstream parties that actually pushes some voters towards the BNP and that a genuine electoral alternative for working people is required.

A small example of how a real alternative can halt the growth of the BNP is Huddersfield where last year the Save Huddersfield NHS campaign won a council seat, pushing the BNP into fifth place with a much lower vote than they attracted in other seats in the council.

To stop the BNP's growth nationally requires the building of a new workers' party that unites all workers and fights privatisation, defends public services including facilities for young people, fights low pay, puts forward real solutions to the chronic public housing shortage and does not whip up racism or division by attacks on migrants and asylum seekers.

## Merger with GMB?

Unison has agreed a "policy of close and joint working with the GMB" said Dave Prentis at the NEC. For our analysis of what this means go to [www.socialistparty.org.uk/unison/index.html](http://www.socialistparty.org.uk/unison/index.html)

## Health Pay fringe meeting

sponsored by **Waltham Forest Health** and **Wakefield Health**  
**Unison branches**

**Wednesday 20 June**  
**- Lunchtime**

at the the Quality Hotel, West Street  
(turn left out of conference centre  
and left again up West Street)

## campaign for a new workers party

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## National Shop Stewards Network founding conference

Saturday 7 July, 11am-5pm

South Camden Community School, Charrington Street, London NW1

(near Kings Cross/Euston stations)

for more information:

[www.shopstewards.net](http://www.shopstewards.net)

# PENSIONS THE GOVERNMENT LIED TO US

## WHAT ARE WE GOING TO DO ABOUT IT? REJECT THE LEADERSHIP PROPOSAL TO ACCEPT WHAT'S ON OFFER

**T**he March Local Government special conference was persuaded by the majority of the leadership to vote to "continue negotiations" rather than fight, on the basis that an improved protection deal was in the bag (after all we'd got a letter from the Labour minister promising it).

**Glenn Kelly,**  
NEC member (personal capacity)

We were told, not to worry, the government did not want to disadvantage part-time members either and we could sort out the problems for manual workers and the ill-health provisions.

Now we are told: "Oh sorry the Labour minister lied to us."

The Government has reneged on the offer of 2020 protection. It has given a deal for term-time only workers but not all the other part-timers and they will have to pay a higher proportion of their income in contributions. Manual workers will only get protection of their 5% rate till 2011. And we haven't got the deal we wanted on ill health.

Oh, and we forgot to add that they have completely changed the contribution rate system and now instead of paying a lower rate on all income up to £12k, you will pay the new rates on all your income. Meaning that some members could earn an extra pound and have to pay an extra £10 in pension payments!

The informal consultation on improving protection to 2020 ended on 14 June when we may or may not know if the government intends to lay the regulation for 2020 protection. At SGE a week ago, we were told to much laughter that the head of local government was very hopeful as the minister had spoken very positively about getting this improvement (where have we heard that before?!).

### Leadership majority wave a white flag

On 5 June, 16 members of the SGE voted through a proposal to go to ballot now no matter what the position is on protection and the other issues with the usual cop-out recommendation of "this is the best that can be achieved through negotiations". (This was the general secretary's recommendation only a month earlier that did not get a single vote.)

You have to question those who voted for this. None of them openly said we got what we wanted and should positively call for a yes vote. It was as though they just want pensions out of the way

no matter how bad the deal. This position is now due to go to conference in an emergency motion we must seek to defeat.

The hope that Scotland can avoid what's on offer south of the border is looking increasingly problematic. At the SGE, it was reported that the proposed Scottish scheme is unfortunately beginning to look more like the worst elements of the English/Welsh/Northern Irish scheme, in terms of contribution rate bands and ill-health provisions, and the protection being offered is still no better than 2020 (i.e. only for those over 46 years old!)

After a year of inaction, there is naturally genuine concern that we could deliver any action. However if we believe it's a bad deal then we have a duty to say so. A positive campaign to reject the offer, linking it up with the pay dispute, is the best opportunity of ensuring the victory on pensions that our members deserve.

We cannot turn our backs on those members who happen to be under 50, or part-time, or manual workers, nor can our members afford to pay more in pension contributions whilst getting a pay freeze.



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- Work**
- \* For the unions to take immediate action to implement their current minimum wage demands, as a step towards a legal minimum of £8 an hour (the European decency threshold). No exemptions.
  - \* For an annual increase in the minimum wage, linked to average earnings. For a minimum income of £320 a week.
  - \* Reject Welfare to Work; for the right to decent benefits, training or a job without compulsion.
  - \* A range of policies to achieve full employment including: the introduction of a maximum 35-hour week without loss of pay.
  - \* A massive increase of public spending into healthcare, housing, education, childcare, leisure and community facilities.
  - \* Employment protection rights for all from day one of employment.
  - \* Scrapping the anti-union laws.
  - \* Trade unions to be democratically controlled by members.
  - \* Full-time officials should be regularly elected and receive the wage of an average worker.
  - \* No to the fat cats.
  - \* Renationalise the privatised utilities under democratic working-class control.

- Welfare**
- \* For a living pension for all pensioners — with annual increases linked to average earnings.
  - \* Free, good quality education for all from nursery to university; with a living grant. Abolish fees now!
  - \* Rebuild the National Health Service, free at the point of use and under democratic control.
  - \* Decent housing, with affordable rents. End the housing crisis.
  - \* Defend abortion rights. For a woman's right to choose when and whether to have children.
  - \* Major investment into a cheap, accessible, integrated publicly owned transport system which meets the needs of the people and the environment. Rights
  - \* For the right to asylum. The scrapping of the Asylum and Immigration Bill and of all other racist laws.
  - \* An end to police harassment. For the abolition of the Criminal Justice Act. Scrap Labour's Terrorism Act. No curtailment of jury trials.
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