

Unison rejects NHS pay freeze

UNISON'S HEALTH service group executive has decided to completely reject the employers' proposal of a two year pay freeze in return for no compulsory redundancies.

Socialist Party members on the Unison health SGE, personal capacities

This deal also included a freeze on increment rises, which would effectively further cut members' pay. In return for this sacrifice the employers have offered to guarantee no compulsory redundancies and respect national pay and conditions.

In reality this deal was no more than a determination by the employers to make NHS workers pay for the financial crisis in the NHS, a position that some of the union leadership seemed to have accepted. Even worse, it was clear that with the break-up of the NHS this would have been impossible to enforce,

indeed a clause in the proposal left room for individual employers to ignore any national agreement. In other words this paltry guarantee was not even worth the paper it was written on.

However, when news of the proposals emerged rank and file health workers expressed their anger and that pressure had an impact on the executive meeting. The leadership did not dare to put forward acceptance of the deal, but instead argued to continue negotiations with the employers. This position was overwhelmingly rejected by the executive. The decision was taken to throw the employers' proposals out completely.

It is clear that the employers and government are about to launch, not just an unprecedented attack on health workers' living standards but also upon the very existence of the NHS. That's why we need to build on today's positive decision and develop a national strategy to defeat the coalition government.



Rank and file health workers wanted to reject the deal.

photo Alison Hill

Kirklees council First round victory in cuts battle

ON 7 January, at one of the biggest stewards' meetings in Kirklees Unison branch's history, the branch voted to call off the planned five-day strike which had been endorsed by a mass ballot of the 7,500 strong membership only two weeks earlier. Instead a last minute deal was reached which was in line with the union demands to halt the council's plans.

Mike Forster

The council has backed down over its plans to impose compulsory redundancies, reduce redundancy pay and try to select people for redundancy with a poor sickness record.

Before Christmas, the council was making threats to the workforce that hundreds of jobs could be on the line. They were trying to break morale and trade union organisation. However, they were banking on a 'No' vote in the ballot that had been running through most of December.

The council was pushing dark propaganda that there was no choice but to make the cuts and that they were looking after the best interests of their workforce. But Unison members delivered a 'Yes' vote for action which was announced on 21 December.

The following day a mass meeting of stewards called on the union to

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act on the ballot result and a strike was planned. This concentrated the minds of the council who made a new offer to the union on 30 December.

They have backed away for the time being but the agreement is only in place until 1 April. Although this is a Labour council, they have made it clear that they intend to push through yet more cuts.

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A rally called in Huddersfield on 8 January celebrated this victory. As the chair of the rally said, we have won the first round in a much longer battle which we must win if we are to save public services.

Darlington Newsquest strikes continue to spread

JOINING FELLOW Newsquest staff around the country, members of the National Union of Journalists at the Northern Echo and its sister papers in Darlington held a solid strike on 6 and 7 January. This is part of coordinated action throughout the Newsquest group over job losses, failure to raise pay for the last four years at Darlington, and the ending of the current pension scheme.

Newsquest has responded to the planned strikes with a paltry pay offer of 2%; while the chief executive, Paul Davison, got a whopping 21% pay rise to £609,235 a year.

The parent group Gannett UK made an operating profit of £71.71 million in 2009.

Management is now commencing negotiations with the union on the proposed job cuts. This is seen by the branch as a welcome development.

Picket line

THE ATMOSPHERE on the picket line was electric; over 70% of the news room staff lined both sides of Crown Street chanting and receiving support from passers by, motorists, and bus drivers.

The strikers were joined by representatives of the trades council, Unison and journalism students from the local college.

The strikers held an impres-



On strike in Southampton in December.

photo Nick Chaffey

sive impromptu 50-strong march around Darlington town centre with banners and placards.

This will be the first of many protests the town is likely to see this year.

NUJ branch officers attended the Darlington Trades Council meeting.

They have pledged to support the campaign against the cuts in Darlington where the Labour council is planning to implement 25% cuts to jobs and services.

Messages of support to

nujdarlington@hotmail.co.uk

• After similar action in Blackburn the employers presented an improved offer.

A Newsquest employee told The Socialist: "I believe we can chalk up a partial victory."

"Newsquest were adamant there'd be no pay increases but with the strike action in Brighton and Southampton, and votes to strike at loads of centres across the country, they've suddenly found 2%."

Alan Docherty

Rotherham teachers strike

"KIDS NOT Cuts" was the message on the placards and badges of striking teachers on the picket line outside a Rotherham secondary school last week. The strike is against plans by the headteacher to make a quarter of teaching staff redundant. This is a bid to reduce a £1.3 million debt and an overspend of £400,000 this year, which has nothing to do with the teachers or students.

Rotherham Socialist Party members

The head claims that such a reduction in staff would not affect children's education yet was forced to send year 10 and 11 students home on the day of the strike.

Ralph Dyson, the National Union of Teachers (NUT) rep at the school

explained:

"28 members of the National Union of Teachers (NUT) at Rawmarsh Community School (RCS) took the first of three days strike action on 5 January.

"Two more strike days are set for 12/13 January.

"Initially over 30 redundancies were proposed, including 20 teachers, with staff losing jobs in the middle of the school year, causing massive disruption to children taking exams.

"Following the threat of action by the NUT, management deferred many of the redundancies to the end of the school year but still plan to go forward with the redundancy process and have the same number of job losses.

"A parents and community group has formed that is supporting the

action by teachers."

In an on-line poll of the Rotherham Advertiser, 85% backed the teachers' action.

NASUWT, the majority teachers' union at the school, and Unison representing support staff, should join the NUT strike action now rather than waiting for the first redundancy notice to be issued. The NUT strike threat has already forced the Labour-controlled education authority to fund an extra £300,000 to delay redundancies until after exams.

The threat of a total shutdown could force them to write off the deficit altogether and save all the jobs.

• Please send messages of support to ralphdyson@yahoo.co.uk and donations to NUT Doncaster office, 7, Chequer Road, Doncaster DN1 2AA.

inbrief

London Underground

Rail union RMT has demanded an end to the cuts programme being forced through by London Underground. The union has exposed plans by tube management to allow more than 30% of tube stations to be unstaffed during operational hours. This is in contradiction to London Mayor Boris Johnson's promise that no station would be unstaffed during passenger hours. At the same time, tube fares have gone up by nearly 7%.

Birmingham bins

Bin workers in Birmingham are due to strike on 13-14 January in a dispute over an attempt to cut their pay by up to £4,000 a year.

Their strike on 20 December was successful as is their current work-to-rule.

But the council has retaliated by removing facility time for trade union reps and attempting to deduct more wages on the pretext of the work to rule. They are also trying to use poorly trained and equipped scabs.

Heinz

Workers at the Heinz factory in Wigan were striking on 11 January, after voting to reject the company's latest pay offer.

Over 65% of the 1,200 workers voted to reject the 3.5% offer and so went on strike for the fourth day. Talks are proceeding at ACAS.