

# Demand that Unison defends hospital worker Len Hockey

Paula Mitchell

Health workers across Whipps Cross hospital in east London have rallied to the defence of Len Hockey, joint Unison branch secretary.

Porters, domestics, switchboard staff, social workers, nurses, ambulance workers, volunteers and staff at the on-site nursery have all signed the petition against the investigation being carried out by Len's employer, Initial Facilities.

Members of Len's Unison branch rightly expect their union to vigorously defend their branch secretary.

So members were astounded to receive a three-page letter at their home addresses on the weekend of 21 January, from their Unison regional officer, attacking Len.

The letter was addressed to Len but the first he knew of it was the phone calls he received from shocked members.

A very difficult time has been faced in recent months with workers having to battle the employers over regrading and redundancies. An increasingly bullying regime has led to big numbers of staff on final warnings.

The letter from the region, a response to a branch survey of members carried out at the start of November 2011, is a scandalous attempt to drive a wedge between Len and the members, and blames Len



Campaigning for Len outside the hospital photo S. Sachs-Eldridge

for the problems the members face. It came at the same time as Len received notice of the investigation from the employer.

Members of staff, who wish to remain nameless for fear of reprisals, showed the letter to the Socialist.

One porter said: "Len has been a brilliant branch secretary. He has always stood by us, now we need to stand by him. We're with him all the way. We expect the union to do everything in its power to defend Len."

Please send protests at the threat

of disciplinary action to the employer Initial: susan.matthews@rentokil-initial.com, trish.sharpe@rentokil-initial.com and to Whipps Cross hospital trust: cathy.geddes@whippsx.nhs.uk

Please send copies of protests to London Unison region, with a note to the region to say that you expect Unison to vigorously defend Len from the attack by his employer: v.lucioni@unison.co.uk and c.remington@unison.co.uk

Also send copies to Len Hockey at leonardhockey789@hotmail.co.uk

## Excerpts from the letter:

Dear Len  
"Unfortunately your behaviour throughout this period has been to undermine this instruction [from the Industrial Action Committee, which had refused a request for strike action] and undermine the Region in trying to get the job evaluation exercise in place... The withdrawal of the employer from this process was a direct result of your refusing to abide by the IAC instruction...  
"The failure to progress AfC (Agenda for Change) redundancy terms is because you had undermined the negotiations over implementation of AfC and therefore your actions prevented members benefitting from the banding exercise and AfC redundancy terms..."

"NHS Job Evaluation cannot be completed as, because of your actions, the process has been undermined and the employer has withdrawn. The false information that was subsequently circulated by you to the porters has been countered to some degree by my meetings with our porter members and by my copying of this correspondence to them."

Yours sincerely  
Vicky Lucioni  
Regional Organiser

## In brief

### Stop press: Victory!

Today, Tuesday 7 February, Len Hockey received a letter from his employer Initial stating that there is no case to answer in their attempt to discipline him.

This is a fantastic victory against an anti-union employer who wanted to clear out a fighting union leadership.

Initial had trumped up a charge of Len meeting with union members without prior approval from management. Without a shred of evidence and with the fury of union members on their necks, management backed down!

As soon as the threat to Len was raised, with a unanimous show of hands, an emergency meeting of Unison members agreed to prepare for strike action and to demand the London region of Unison do everything in their power to defend Len.

Emails of protest flooded in to the employer from all over the country, and to Unison to demand they vigorously defend Len.

A campaign of protests at the gate and of petitioning around the hospital galvanised support across the board – from porters and domestics, nurses, doctors, social workers, ambulance workers, onsite nursery and canteen staff, hospital volunteers and visitors. On the morning of Len's investigation, staff and visitors were met by a sea of "Defend Union Reps" posters and placards and a gathering of supporters.

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### Construction workers

On 1 February, around 60 construction workers and their supporters protested against the imposition of the new Besna contracts outside the Trinity Walk construction site in Leeds City Centre. Around 40 sparks also protested outside Ratcliffe-on-Soar power station.

They have been out each week for the past couple of months. There was a determined mood that they will continue with the weekly protests until they win.

Manchester electricians continued their protest at the central library Baileys site, and upped the pressure on the city council, which is the client.

### Bus workers' demo

On 4 February around 150 striking Stagecoach bus drivers and their supporters turned out in Barnsley. The drivers are continuing and escalating their action in a bitter pay dispute. After a short march from the picket lines through the town centre, speakers addressed the defiant rally.

The demonstration itself was organised through Barnsley trades council and support came from many unions including Unison, GMB, UCU and NUT, who notably sent members from Rawmarsh in Rotherham, where Stagecoach have a depot. Only a year ago those teachers were on strike themselves, fighting for their jobs at the local community school.

The demonstration fell on the first day of four days of strike action on alternate days. This is aimed at maximising costs for management who are shipping in scabs from other parts of the country. Strikers remain determined and report that scabs from some regions have refused to assist management.

Chris Bingham  
Rotherham Socialist Party

## Tanker drivers strike again



Picketing last month photo Alistair Tice

Alistair Tice

123 oil tanker drivers began their second week of strike action on 3 February. They are employed by haulage firm Wincanton on the ConocoPhillips contract to deliver fuel to Jet forecourts.

They are taking action to try to force their employers to give them assurances about their future employment. Wincanton's current five-year contract ends in June so now they are on a rolling six-month contract, which means they could be given notice at any time.

Having just seen ConocoPhillips give their office staff at the Immingham refinery depot 90 day's notice, the drivers are understandably worried about their future.

The drivers, all Unite members, are rightly proud of the profes-

sional standards they achieve in a potentially dangerous industry. They are worried that the race to the bottom that the bosses are wanting to implement will not only throw them out of work or cut their hard won terms and conditions, but lead to a reduction in health and safety, cover-ups and ultimately a disaster!

One driver told me that he thought Conoco wanted to get out of delivery altogether and say to dealers: "Here's a field with oil in it, come and get your own supplies."

In a tactical move, the drivers suspended their strike on Saturday morning calling on Wincanton and ConocoPhillips to enter meaningful talks. However, if these are not forthcoming, then notice has already been served of another seven-day strike action starting on 9 February.



## UCU special conference

Edmund Schluessel

Two years ago, University and College Union (UCU) honorary treasurer Alan Carr promised conference that UCU would deliver "the fight of our lives" if the government, whether Labour or Tory, attacked lecturers' pensions.

After a special conference on 31 January to review the Universities Superannuation Scheme dispute in the pre-1992 university sector, we now know UCU's leadership feels the "the fight of our lives" to consist of three days of strike action and four months of action short of a strike. The conference narrowly endorsed the leadership's recommendation to suspend industrial action for the old universities pensions dispute.

Fortunately, the union has taken a more determined position regarding its dispute over pensions in the new universities and FE colleges.

Delegates were astonished to learn that a hotly-debated proposal from UCU's leadership to suspend the union's dispute with the pre-1992 university employers was "a typo".

Many UCU branches openly challenged the way proposals had

been ordered and debated, with one delegate being shouted down as "infantile" by the conference's chair. Delegates were never given a chance for a simple yes-or-no vote on whether to continue action, nor on whether to continue coordinating action with members of the TPS pension scheme in FE colleges and new universities.

In those colleges and post-1992 universities, meanwhile, the mood is absolutely clear. Over the objections of UCU general secretary Sally Hunt, branch after branch has passed motions calling for further strike action over the Teachers' Pensions Scheme, coordinated with other public sector unions.

Hunt, who has consistently opposed strike action in the pensions dispute, has faced a stark rebuke in the FE sector from Bridgend College, who passed a motion accusing her of "misleading" members and "undermining" the democratically-elected national executive.

Voting in the UCU election opened on 6 February. Socialist Party members are supporting UCU Left candidates, including Mark Campbell for general secretary and Angie McConnell for vice president. More details on the campaign will follow in the Socialist.