

Wildcat

MANCHESTER FREE BULLETIN

NO. 6 PASS IT AROUND

OBJECTIVES

1. To report on, analyse and seek solidarity for important struggles amongst our fellow workers, especially in the Greater Manchester area.
2. To encourage independent working class activity outside of the control of the trade unions and in opposition to all political parties.
3. To aim at the revolutionary overthrow of all governments, bosses and leaders by a revolution in which the majority of people, who at the moment are just expected to follow orders, all play an equal part. And we would like to see the creation of a world without the wages/money/market system, where we can all have a say in how things are run, and where production is for human need not profit.

NHS WORKERS FIGHT BACK

Frustration and anger over the insulting and divisive wage offer to Health Service workers (4% for most and 6.4% for some nurses) effectively a reduction in real wages over the year of at least 6-8%, has eventually forced them to overcome the constraints of 'dedication to the service' and 'professionalism' which the government, employers and press have used to keep them in line. Whilst the majority of nurses in the Royal College of Nursing still refuse to join in any strike action with their colleagues they have at least (for the first time) decisively rejected the wage offer on the table.

The other unions in the Health Service are in theory united in a campaign to defeat the employers and the government over this issue. But theory and practice are not the same and the interests of the Unions and the workers themselves don't necessarily coincide.

For instance pickets we spoke to at the Royal in Manchester during the first two one day stoppages explained how separate union meetings had led to different combinations of union members coming out on each occasion, COHSE staying in the first time and NALGO staying in the second time. One lot of technicians who had a different settlement date hadn't joined in at all. Even the two NUPE branches (there's a separate one for ambulancemen) held separate meetings with different results. Whilst pickets understood the difficulties which nurses faced in deciding to strike, there was some resentment that more of them didn't take some kind of action. The third one day strike was officially supported by all the Unions but received patchy support at the Royal (although solid support elsewhere).

Our suggestion that each hospital needed to have joint meetings of all the workers prepared to take action, with directly elected joint 'campaign' committee was generally accepted by most of the pickets we spoke to as 'only sensible', but they lacked the confidence or perhaps experience to be able to push for this and seemed somewhat resigned to Union divisions. A joint shop stewards committee had eventually been formed and this seemed to be the 'best that could be achieved' as far as most of the people we spoke to were concerned.

Elsewhere in the country these same



union divisions have caused serious problems. In Edinburgh there was an initially united display of militancy by the majority of workers at the Royal and City hospitals in both NUPE and COHSE, who went on 'all-out' strike and became a catalyst for action in the area, which was eventually broken by the withdrawal of COHSE members under pressure from their national union.

However, we don't want to paint too gloomy a picture. In many areas unity has been achieved at 'shop floor' level despite the unions.

Perhaps the most significant development in the dispute so far has been the steady build up of solidarity action from workers outside the Health Service. So far this has included miners, water workers, steelworkers, bus workers, firemen and others. This solidarity action is absolutely vital to the success of the struggle but it is clear that it will only grow, and be sustained if health workers themselves go out and talk directly to other workers rather than leaving it all to union officials. This is how hospital workers got action from South Yorkshire miners as early as May 19th. It may take a lot of courage for the inexperienced to do this but the rewards can really be worth it. At the same time Health workers are likely to get more of a response from others, if they are taking militant and resolute action themselves. Solidarity action cannot be seen as an alternative to action by Health workers, the two must go together, which means pressing for an 'all-out' strike at the earliest opportunity.

Another avenue which hasn't yet been explored is the possibility, not simply of 'solidarity' action, but of joint or combined action with other public service workers in

similar situations. An obvious target here are the local authority white collar workers, who for similar reasons have just been offered and rejected a paltry 5% increase.

Those of us working for Local Authorities have a responsibility to raise this possibility wherever we can. We are of course in the same unions (NALGO and NUPE) but a major rebellion of Public Service workers, with all the political overtones that would have, is not something our Union leaders would cherish and we can expect more opposition than help from them if we try to join forces for our mutual benefit.

One option being pushed by the Union is that would be a complete waste of time is 'arbitration'. This would simply buy the employers and government time to weaken and divide the struggle and almost certainly coming up with nothing of value for the workers (as for the railway men and teachers) even if the government were to accept it.

Clearly this limited dispute can be won, but it won't be easy and it won't be by the Health workers alone.

'DUST UP'

In 'Wildcat' No3 we reported on the dispute in Bury over the Councils attempt to dispose of its' refuse service to a private company and cut down on the number of dustmen. That attempt has been thwarted for the time being, but a similar dispute has arisen in Stockport which emphasises the argument we put forward earlier. Basically, 'privatisation' as it is called, is merely one of a number of strategies aimed at cutting expenditure and reducing the workforce.

In Stockport the Council is threatening to sell off the service unless the workers agree to 51 redundancies and increased workloads. Clearly the Tory Council doesn't mind which way it gets its cut-backs, but is hoping that the Unions opposition to 'private' firms generally will make it back down and persuade its members to make sacrifices.

That hasn't worked so far but in another dispute, with Manchester

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