



Class(room)Struggle

A bulletin by and for education workers in Tower Hamlets
www.workersliberty.org tel: 0207 394 8923

After a great start – how do we win?

If the Tories have gone to war to impose their vision of society, November 30 was a day when workers fought back, to impose a different, working-class vision of how society should be: a society where the wealth is used to guarantee a good life for everyone, not just obscene riches for a few. We need to carry on the fight to assert that vision and those ideas – the ideas of socialism.

In Tower Hamlets our strike came off brilliantly. Only 4 schools were open out of more than 90 in the borough. A very small number were partially open – all the rest were shut.

The strike showed that education workers (and public sector workers generally) are confident about this dispute. We know that we are in the right. Many workers who will not have taken strike action before in their lives will have gone through the experience of picketing alongside their colleagues, turning workers away, and feeling a new-found confidence through acting collectively. This strike showed our resolve and solidarity, and it has given many of us a new confidence in what we can do. Many people have found out that we are not powerless! Confidence and solidarity are what we need to win. When managers want us to work harder or accept sacrifices, they will often talk about “teamwork”, or the “good of the children”. One picket on the day said

“During our OFSTED last week I was thanked for being a ‘team player’. I didn’t feel like part of a team then, just stressed out – but I do today”. November 30 was about teamwork. It showed what workers can do acting together, across different workplaces. And it really was for the good of the children – it is for the good of children to have schools in which staff are well-treated and secure... And those children and their parents will need to draw a pension themselves one day! But for all that, it was only one day – and we will need to keep the strike going in order to win. And more than that, we will need to organise the strike differently, with more grassroots control of planning, and with different tactics to keep up the pressure, not just one-day spectaculars every few months. This strike came about because of pressure from below. Unison and the

Meeting – what next for the pensions dispute?

**Montefiore Centre, Hanbury Street E1
Thursday 15 December 7:30PM**

Just waiting for the national leaderships to decide when to take further action isn't enough – we need to take control of the dispute ourselves. Join Workers' Liberty activists to discuss strategies to transform our unions and win – and how socialists think our class should fight. Lots of time for debate – all welcome!

GMB only took action because ordinary members put pressure on the leadership. The same is true of many other unions. We need to keep this pressure up. The way to keep the pressure on is through borough and city-wide rank-and-file meetings and meetings of reps and stewards, where ordinary members and workplace activists from the different unions can meet, pass motions, discuss and form their own view. Joint union meetings happened in Tower Hamlets in the run-up to the strike. This is good but we need to have them as a regular part of union life that changes the union permanently – not just one-off events. And we need more members, reps and stewards to go along to them. Grassroots meetings and democratic control has to become the norm for union organising in Tower Hamlets, and these meetings are the way to do that. Democratic control doesn't just mean meetings, it also means regular, timely information, and all union members and activists should receive that – union business is for all members, not just 'the experts'.

Trade unionists in every union and every borough should organise for

- local “where next?” meetings where strikers can talk about the next steps in genuine discussions, not stage-managed affairs with an endless list of top-table speakers
- a programme of action to be announced and built for now, not in the new year
- a strategy that includes rolling and

selective action (bringing out different sections of the public sector workforce at different times) and escalating action (striking for more than one day at a time)

- **strike funds, levied from union dues, to support members through sustained action. Tower Hamlets Unison already has a strike fund – other unions should too. It makes the difference between winning and losing.**
- **open up the negotiations: regularly inform union members fully about ongoing negotiations.**

What is rolling action?

A rolling strike is where different groups and sections of workers take it in turns to strike. That way action (and disruption) is happening continuously, but only some workers are out at any one time.

This allows the non-striking union members to collect money to support members who are taking action – this way it is possible to sustain action for a long time.

In 2004 this tactic was used in a strike of Unison nursery nurses in schools in Tower Hamlets. Different groups of nursery nurses came out for 5 days at a time, while the others raised money for them. This went on for 6 weeks and won a big pay increase for the workers involved.

This bulletin is produced by education workers in Tower Hamlets and published by Workers' Liberty, a socialist group fighting in the labour movement for an alternative to both capitalism and stalinism: for a workers' government and a society based on democratic, common ownership.

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