

For a Workers' Europe

The government intends to hold an in-out referendum on the UK's European Union membership. David Cameron is currently attempting to negotiate with other EU leaders to allow the UK government more power at the expense of the EU.

Dressed up in nationalist rhetoric — opposition to foreign migrants and the demand for “our” right to control “our affairs” — Cameron is fighting for the right of the Tory government, acting on behalf of the capitalist class, to ignore European law and regulations that interfere with profits of British capitalists.

Columnist Iain Martin, writing in the Telegraph on 30 May, complains that Cameron's shopping list for change in Europe is too vague. Martin advocates Cameron “should at least be looking to scrap anti-competitive social and employment laws that come from Brussels and [try] to win new flexibility for the UK to do its own trade deals.” The Telegraph has the virtue of being plain and clear. Much of the EU legislation the political right in Britain would like to see abolished, it is in the direct interest of workers in Britain to maintain.

No doubt Cameron — unlike many in his own party — would like to see the UK remain in the EU. Cameron wants to avoid the political disruption and economic overheads of withdrawal.

However the Westminster politicians may find it difficult to manage and control the referendum result from above. And it may be that the UK will stumble out of the EU, against their wishes.

The main result of Britain leaving the EU will be a big confidence boost for the political right and the growth of anti-immigrant racism.

The drive against EU membership is being led by poisonous and divisive anti-migrant howling from some of the press. Xenophobia has an appeal; UKIP won 3.8 million votes at the general election largely by playing to fears of foreigners.

Although the precise timing and the wording of the question to be voted on are not yet clear, the political dangers should be obvious. There is already a large constituency — well-funded, with a long tradition in UK politics, that has its own political voices and access to the media — which is loudly and crudely attacking migrants' rights and using nationalism to try to pull the UK out of Europe.

In the run-up to this referendum there will be a further poisoning of British politics.

In an in-out referendum Workers' Liberty will vote to keep the UK in the EU. We will do so for reasons similar to those that motivated our call to Scottish workers to vote against independence. In general, we are in favour of fewer and weaker borders and barriers between peoples.

If the issue in the referendum had been, for example, a vote on an EU economic treaty, we would probably have advocated abstention. It is not our job to choose between different methods of exploiting workers.

But the issue now is about strengthening borders and hostile attitudes towards other peoples; pulling the UK out of the EU will do both. It runs in the opposite direction to the creation of a federal Europe, which we favour.

The European ruling classes have pulled Europe together, substantially integrating Europe economically and politically. By doing so — in their own way, in their own interests — they have also expanded the possibilities for Europe-wide workers' unity. We could add many qualifications — the expansion of bureaucracy, the capitalist nature of the process of integration — nevertheless European integration is historically progressive.

To try to break up the process of integration is as regressive as trying to turn the internet off because it is run by capitalist companies, or attempting to abolish parliament without bothering to see that bourgeois democracy is replaced with something better.

Unfortunately, some of socialist left, influenced by nationalism and Stalinism, will advocate withdrawal. They will say a blow to the EU is a blow against capitalist exploitation and imperialism. But not all damage to capitalism is in the interests of the working class. Socialists are not simply anti-capitalist — we have a positive programme which we fight for, and which includes European unity.

The people who will gain from UK withdrawal are the racists who hate migrants. It makes no sense for the left to vote with UKIP and the Tory right for withdrawal, pretending we are doing so to fight racism and nationalism. That would be ridiculous.

And some of the left will flounder about in confusion wishing the question was different and trying to avoid the issue of EU membership by stressing their opposition to racism and UKIP (reasonable of course, but limited and without political traction).

We advocate the left forms a united campaign with the following aims:

- To defend migrants' rights and oppose racism
- To vote against British withdrawal from the EU
- To fight for a workers' Europe, based on working class solidarity

We advocate that the left unite to fight for these aims and campaign for these ideas inside the workers' movement. And, in addition, we suggest that the labour movement learn one more lesson from the Scottish referendum debacle: that the unions and Labour Party must not join a cross-class alliance with pro-EU Tories and others. Such a bloc discredited the labour movement during the Scottish campaign. We are for debate on this issue and welcome discussion with others on the left and in the labour movement on the way forward.

Motion 82 'A Europe Fit for Workers' from Newcastle City Branch includes a clear call for Unison to campaign to stay in the EU during a referendum on UK membership, fight for cross border worker solidarity and to build links with Eastern European and Greek Union.

The motion has not been prioritised and pressure needs to come on conference floor to ensure this is discussed. If you agree with the motion and want to help support it or find out more call **07740099479**



Workers' Liberty Unison National Delegate Conference bulletin 2015

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Fight to save the NHS



Less than a month since the election and the assault on the NHS has begun. Quietly, with policy announcements that barely reached the newspapers, the Tories have set about destroying the NHS. Their first target is safe staffing.

On 3rd June NHS Chief Executive (pro-privatisation, ex-UnitedHealth boss) Simon Stevens admitted to Health Service Journal that his “collective action” on “rip off” agencies will “undoubtedly” create staffing shortfalls. On the same day NICE announced it was suspending all work on safer staffing.

The dependency of the NHS on agency staff is a result of year's of underfunding and real terms pay cuts. In March 2014 the NHS employed 371,191 qualified nursing staff. At the same time, the Nursing and Midwifery Council had 680,858 active registrants. Hundreds of thousands of nurses have left secure NHS employment in favour of joining an agency. There is no shortage of nurses. There is a shortage of nurses willing to work for a pittance!

These nurses have dealt with the problem of low pay as isolated individuals. As a movement we have failed to convince them of the necessity of fighting for and possibility of winning a collective struggle against the government. After 5 years of pay freezes, finally our leadership calls action on pay but only to raise the “oh-so-reasonable” demand of a 1% pay rise coupled with the miserable tactic of 4 hour walk-outs. Far from demonstrating the effectiveness of collective action, the leadership seem more committed to further demoralising an already brow-beaten workforce.

But while healthworkers struggle to organise more than a flimsy protest strike, the bosses are pushing ahead with their own hard-hitting collective action. The government (which is pro-market in every other area of public life) is talking about setting a cap on the amount NHS employers can spend on agency workers. By their own admission this will probably lead to dangerously understaffed wards.

It is no coincidence therefore that in the same breath, Stevens called on Chief Nurse (and government yes-woman) Jane Cummings to develop a “

less mechanistic approach to setting nurse-staffing levels”. “Less mechanistic” than the evidence-based approach that was being developed by NICE. NICE's work on safe staffing was one of the key outcomes of the Francis Report. Julie Bailey of Cure The NHS, whose mother died in Mid-Staffordshire hospital, called the government's abandonment of this work, “a betrayal of all we fought for”.

The week concluded with Staffordshire Commissioners considering a £1.2 billion contract cancer services from a private-public consortium led by multi-national corporation Interserve. Whenever private companies have been allowed to run NHS hospitals they have chased profit at the expense of patient safety. When Circle ran Hinchingbrooke, they were running one ward on 21 patients to 1 nurse.

Taken together, these announcements are the clearest indication yet of what many NHS campaigners have been warning of for decades — the secret plan to reduce the NHS to a rump service for the poor and thus create profit-making opportunities for private health firms.

Stevens has said that converting agency staff into NHS employers is the NHS's “single biggest operational financial risk”. Translated from management speak, this means that in the short term the NHS will refuse to pay agency rates even if this means it compromises patient safety. After a few weeks or months of understaffed wards he hopes some of these agency workers will return to low paid NHS work. If they don't then maybe we will just have to get used to it. We cannot allow this to continue. Activists should leave conference determined to put our union on a war footing with the government and NHS bosses. Collective action by NHS staff and agency workers to break the government's pay restraint, could be the start of restoring the NHS to a properly funded, comprehensive health service. Failure to do this will only result in further attacks.

This bulletin is produced by members of Workers' Liberty who are active in Unison. Workers' Liberty is a revolutionary socialist organisation that fights for a working-class alternative to capitalism and Stalinism based on common ownership and workers' democracy.
For more information, see www.workersliberty.org

How do we build a rank file?

In the aftermath of the Unison Local Government Special Conference, unison activists are rightly discussing where next, how can we build on this policy victory and make it a victory for low paid workers in our re-opened pay battle. In this contribution Ed Whitby discusses how we continue to reclaim not just this pay battle, but also the structures of our union from the workplaces and branches upwards.

The momentum for last month's Special Conference came from the anger of many members across the country, but significantly in the North West, about the failure of local government unions to lead a serious fight to defend our pay, terms, and conditions. In Unison's largest region, where density is highest and strikes most solid, this anger, and the desire to hold the Unison leadership to account, was strongest. This region is also one of the worst-hit by government cuts.

This mood is in many ways a culmination of successive failures: the 2011 pension battle, the false starts and eventual capitulation in the 2013, 2014, and 2015 pay campaigns, and the failure to lead a serious fight against five years of severe cuts in local government.

Those campaigns failed, in part, because of the huge democratic deficit inside Unison. Campaigns are "led" (although, in fact, not led) from above, with the membership treated as a passive stage army to be marched up the hill of one-day strikes, and then demobilised when the union leadership decides the membership has exhausted its will to fight. That conservatism and defeatism is projected back onto the membership itself, who then feel too demoralised to do anything other than vote for shoddy deals, and the employers win.

The decision of the Special Conference to resume the 2015/2016 pay fight is a huge victory, but it does not, by itself, redress that fundamental power imbalance within the union. It does not create rank-and-file control. It does not erase the very real demoralisation (more-or-less engineered by the leadership) that still exists amongst much of the membership.

Some left-led branches, with the powerful North West Region acting as a lever, have been able to coordinate and achieve something significant within the union structures. But what happens next? What happens in Northern Region, in Wales, in the South East Region, where those wanting to carry out the policy of the Special Conference are in smaller numbers and have less influence in branches or regions?

How do we win the fight to open up and democratise branches and regions? How do we transform our union structures – not winning mere changes of personnel on national committees, but fundamental transformation of the way our union is run? At present, the far left in Unison seems unable to think beyond ensuring a few left-wing individuals get elected / re-elected to national committees. But having left-wingers on national committees is of limited use if there are no rank-and-file structures to discuss what they do, and to hold them to account.

The frequent incompetence of the existing bureaucracy shouldn't fool us into thinking that all we need to do is win a few more seats on the NEC, or the SGEs, or win a few more policy debates at NDC, to turn things round. The experiences of "left-led" unions like PCS and NUT, who have suffered heavy defeats with similar failures to fight in a sustained and coordinated way, should give us pause. There's more to winning reform in unions than electing better people to committees.



A promising start - but we have to build strength in our branches

Genuine rank-and-fileism means, fundamentally, union members being self-organised in strong branches, with as little distance between the structures of the union and the workplace as possible. It means transforming union structures to get rid of the corps of highly-paid, unelected, unaccountable officials and ensure that all union officials who have any direct role in the day-to-day running of the union are elected and paid no more than an average workers' wage. In the immediate term, before winning such reforms, it means strong, militant branches organising horizontally, not "outside of union structures", but in grassroots networks within the union that can discuss and plan strategies for action. Building rank and file organisation is key but is not counter to using official structures. A decent rank and file organisation would fight for good policy at every level, stand accountable reps and would fundamentally transform the union because it would have the ability to argue for and in practice to carry out those policies.

The Local Association National Action Campaign (LANAC) in the National Union of Teachers is a useful model. LANAC is based on union structures, and is made up of delegates from affiliated NUT branches (with observers from NUT workplace groups). As such, it aims to transform both the culture and structures of the union by fighting for democratic reform and more radical industrial strategies. It is a quite different model from the moribund "Broad Left"-type approach, which merely seeks to cohere left-wing individuals to intervene in union elections or conference policy debates.

The victory at the Special Conference shows that battles of policy can be won within union structures. But while those structures remain under the control of the same bureaucracy that sabotaged the pay fight in the first place, independent rank-and-file organisation (beginning at branch level) will still be necessary.

Getting our priorities right

Workers Liberty delegates will support efforts for these motions to be reprioritised and discussed by conference.

Motion 106 from Lambeth calls on the union to devolve further greater resources to branches. As branches take on increased workloads and are required to do more, this would help to redress the balance.

Motion 77 from Community and Voluntary Organisations calls for support to the Greek fight against austerity. Read more about our view here: <http://bit.ly/1GGJ1Lo>

After the election - Regroup and Fightback

Over the five years of the coalition government, the labour movement failed to mount any consistent fight against it. Had it done so, and had it forced the Labour Party to respond to that fight, we might be looking at a different result

There has been working-class resistance, of course. Some local industrial battles have won gains, such as the 3 Cosas campaign at the University of London, and inspiring social struggles such as those of the Focus E15 mothers have emerged and won victories. But these have been the exceptions, not the rule.

The first step to regrouping and rebuilding, then, is to make our movement fight. No more token one-day strikes, launched too late to make a difference and then unilaterally suspended. No more "mañana militancy", promising the next battle will be fought full tilt, but surrendering on today's.

The Labour Party is in political crisis. That is a tumult into which organised labour and the socialist left must intervene and assert ourselves. Abandoning the terrain to the Blairites, without even attempting to shape the outcome of that crisis, would be disastrous. An anti austerity candidacy like Jeremy Corbyn's is important to having that fight. The labour movement should demand union sponsored MPs ensure he is on the ballot.

Faced with a genuine campaign of combative union self-assertion, within and against the Labour Party, the Blairites may move to sever (or reform out of existence) the link with the unions sooner than the 2019 deadline for the implementations of the recommendations of the Collins Review.

Forcing a break on the momentum of such a fight would be vastly preferable to unions hiving off, one by one, in demoralisation and despair.

The project of the 2010-2015 coalition government to use the economic crisis that began in 2007 to screw down social costs for

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the ruling class, and to remake society along more rigidly neo-liberal, market-driven, and privatised lines. The Tories have had a clear, definitive plan.

To counter these attacks we need clear demands like:

- Expropriate the banks, tax the rich
- Repeal the anti-union laws;
- Public ownership of industry; genuine democratic social control, not bureaucratic nationalisation
- Living wages and living benefits
- A mass programme of social housing construction
- Free education; democratise schools, colleges, and universities
- Reverse cuts and privatisation in the NHS and other public services;
- End the scapegoating of migrants; resist right-wing pressure to leave the EU; open borders
- Democratic reform; abolish the monarchy and the House of Lords; for a democratic federal republic of England, Scotland, and Wales (loosely federated with a united Ireland),

In the bleak aftermath of the election, in a moment when our movement is weak, disorganised, and misled, and at a time when the ideas of revolutionary-democratic socialism seem utterly marginal, that working-class fightback can seem very distant. But a fightback will occur. How successful it is depends on the extent to which socialists in the labour movement manage to affect the regroupment. The attempt to do that begins now, with each of us recommitting to our basic task: to agitate, educate, and organise for socialism.

Support the
the Glasgow Homeless Caseworkers Strike
outside the city chambers (George Square) @
5:45pm Thursday 18th June.

Unison after the election - Where next?

General Secretary Election 2015 Fringe

Wednesday 17th June, 5:30PM, Blythswood Hall, 260 Bath Street, Glasgow, G2 4JP

The rumour mill is in overdrive with reports that Heather Wakefield is allegedly due to be disciplined regarding the actions that lead to the cancellation of further local government strikes over pay. The exact nature of her alleged 'offence' is not known by delegates but could the suggestion that she may challenge Dave Prentis for the leadership of Unison lie behind it?

Delegates may have seen that Roger Bannister of the Socialist Party is already canvassing for votes for General Secretary. Many delegates believed the fringe on 17th would be a hustings to try and select a 'united left' candidate. It appears whatever this meeting decides (and who invests it with the power to decide?) Roger Bannister plans to stand regardless! We agree we need a left challenger to either the incumbent Dave Prentis or another likely challenger from the bureaucracy, however such a candidate should have a mandate to stand and seek support from activists throughout Unison before declaring themselves as a candidate!