



# Workers' Liberty

Unison Health Conference Bulletin (April 2012)

www.workersliberty.org • awl@workersliberty.org • 0207 394 8923

## A strategy to win: allow “million voices” to fight against all attacks

This government is wasting no time in driving through attacks on the NHS and health workers, arguing that the budget deficit means decent pay, pensions and services are unaffordable. The welfare state was created after the Second World War when the country faced severe economic hardship. There is nothing inevitable about cuts at a time like this – it depends on the political balance. This vicious government of the rich is determined to use this economic crisis to further shift the balance of power towards their class. If we fail to resist we are looking at full scale privatisation, massive erosion of our pay and conditions, the end of the NHS as a comprehensive service based on need and further restrictions on trade union rights that will make it harder to fight back in the future.

Everyone at this conference is aware that we need to use the full strength of our union against these attacks. That must mean making the often talked about strength of over a million members standing together a real factor rather than just a nice slogan. But our movement is in a poor state and often activists feel that we cannot mobilise members. If we talk to members it is clear that they are not happy about what is going on but often feel helpless. We need to rebuild our union, build our density, get more reps and involve our members in actively defending themselves. But how do we do that?

The increase in membership in the run up to November 30th proves yet again that a union that campaigns and fights with confidence will increase its strength. But in the main our union leaders show no confidence in our ability to win. Instead they have spent years telling us that partnership working is the only way forward and promoting a service model. Locally the model of a few experienced and overworked branch officers, bowed down with case work, negotiating in

isolation from members is failing.

We have to recognise that to build members' confidence to fight we have to work very differently. We must start with the aim of fully defending and improving our rights and conditions. Secondly we need to discuss a strategy that can actually win rather than tokenistic action. And lastly that we properly involve members in decisions and activity of campaigns. A union actually led by members.

We should start with supporting our members in confrontation with management locally on immediate issues. Our conditions are being eroded day on day. Workload is increasing. We need a member and workplace steward led active campaign on these issues, including regular workplace meetings and decisions in the hands of those affected. We need to focus on getting out and talking to members and building our reps structure through these types of campaigns. This approach can reinvigorate the union if we open up our branch democracy. Members should be encouraged to network locally to share experiences and solidarity and to feed into national campaigns against attacks on agenda for change and regional pay.

Successes at a local level and real involvement by members will build confidence so that the potential of our union can be used in reality to resist the onslaught against our class underway from this government.

**Monday 23rd April, 5.15-7.15pm**

Health Worker

Friends Meeting House, Ship Street, Brighton  
'Organising the Resistance'

- to defend the NHS from the private sector and from cuts in services and jobs
- to continue the fight for our pensions
- for members' control and democracy

# Oppose the pensions “deal”

It is unclear what the result of the current ballot on pensions will be. There is a worry that the turnout will be small. That has not been helped by the fact that it has taken place over Easter and while many activists are here in Brighton, but the main factor is that members feel the campaign has been left to drift since the day of action on 30 November.

The issue is clear – the current proposals mean we still have to work longer, pay more and get less. We have won no significant concessions on these key issues. No one believes this is a good deal. Most of us here know that healthworkers doing hard and stressful work towards our 70s can only bring tragedies for many lives.

We should follow the example of our brothers and sisters in Unite, who rejected the offer by an overwhelming 94% and may now take further strike action. The deal must be rejected!

Unison leaders claim the members are not interested in further strike days. But what’s the evidence for this? We have had one day of strike action which was reasonably well supported. There were problems with the strike mobilisation, but most of these problems were a result of a timid, hesitant leadership.

In Scotland, the union has taken further action on pensions. Unison has employed a strategy of rolling and selective action across different hospitals; it’s limited, but it shows that Unison members are prepared to strike when mobilised! Do our leaders believe there’s “something in the water” that makes Scottish workers uniquely more prepared to take strike action than their counterparts in other parts of Britain? More likely it is a result of members being given confidence by better leadership and organisation over the years.

If we vote to reject the deal, we should not then wait for our marching orders from the union leaderships. Their cowardly industrial strategy has been a failure. As public sector workers we should use our skills and creativity to develop our own industrial strategies and take democratic control over this dispute and our

unions. Our union branches have to be revitalized and turned into spaces where members can come and discuss how to fight for, and win, change at work. Inaccessible structures run by the same tired individuals who’ve been in the job for years are not good enough; if a union is not a weapon its members can use to fight their bosses it’s not serving its purpose.]

If we are going to win this dispute, then we need more than one-day “spectaculars”. Some groups of workers are industrially more important than other groups of workers. An imaginative industrial strategy would combine weeks and months of targeted action with big days of solidarity action to keep the movement together. To strengthen the dispute, strike levies should be raised and industrially significant workers should receive strike pay.

If this deal is accepted it will be the green light to a further series of attacks, including regional pay. Instead of concluding that we can never win, we need to use this type of flexible industrial strategy to build up organisation and confidence.

As workers we keep the world moving, we are the power that turns the wheels of economic life. If we refuse to go to work then we cause mass disruption.

We have immense power to change the world— we certainly don’t need to carry on as normal when a barely-elected government of millionaires is waging ruthless class war.

At the moment, this power is shackled by a cowardly union leadership that is willing to oversee our impoverishment rather than lead a bold confrontation with the government.



# Save the NHS! Block the sell-off law!

Within days of the Health and Social Care Bill being passed in the Commons, it was announced that Serco had won a £140 million deal from NHS Suffolk. 1,000 NHS workers will be transferred to the company. Serco provides second-rate service, lousy workers' rights, but big profits for shareholders. It had an operating revenue of £3 billion in 2009. In 2010 its pre-tax profits rose by 34% to £194.7 million. The company employs 100,000 people worldwide.

It runs large parts of what were public services. It is the largest air traffic control company. It is the largest operator of private prisons in Britain and runs an Immigration Removal Centre. It runs out-of-hours children's services, London's cycle hire scheme, several train networks, Ofsted and Britain's nuclear arsenal.

85-90% of Serco's workforce are former public service employers. How many of Serco's workforce are unionised is hard to establish, but with a workforce of 100,000, there is potential for international solidarity. Serco is run by multi-millionaires, Kevin Beeston and Chris Hyman. Hyman is a born-again Christian - "My whole life, I believe, is driven by God... I'm no genius, what I'm successful for is listening to God"..

"The Health and Social Care Act is a public health catastrophe. It ends the NHS as we know it. It is the end of a NHS that provides healthcare to all across the country on the basis of need and not on the ability to pay" - the verdict of Allyson Pollock, Professor of Public Health at Queen Mary University London.

"Liberating the NHS" was the name of the White Paper that preceded the Health and Social Care Act which was passed despite huge opposition from doctors, other health workers, and the public. The Government will now set about "liberating the NHS" from the principle of free healthcare at the point of need.

David Price, senior research fellow at Queen Mary University London, says: "This law is not about 'cost efficiency'. It's ideological, it's about the welfare state. The government is saying the NHS is no longer sustainable, yet we are richer than ever before... The NHS was conceived of and its architecture designed in the 1940s when Britain was bankrupt, and it was designed to be the most cost efficient health service possible... "Competition will fragment care and erode trust between patients and the medical profession... Patients in the future will not know if a doctor is saying this is the best treatment or that is the best drug for commercial reasons or clinical reasons..."

"The cap on advertising is being lifted and money that would have been used for health care will now be used by the new bodies set up as a result of the new law to advertise their services in competition with other service providers".

Pollock says that "research shows that of all the (healthcare) systems in the world the NHS is the most efficient... The government wants to move away from tax funding, which is very fair, to a mixed system of funding, like in America, where the government pays and we increasingly have to pay out of pocket, either through user charges or through taking out more and more private health insurance. That's the big story behind this law..."

Since the Act passed there has been a rise in campaigning to defend the NHS, including targeting of Virgin stores to highlight the for-profit sector role, occupations, protests outside CCG meetings, a statement produced by doctors opposing the act to hold CCGs to account and lobbying of Labour politicians to pledge to repeal the Act. Unison activists and branches need to put ourselves at the centre of this campaigning. The effects of the Act will be a squeeze on terms and conditions, as sections of the NHS are forced to compete in the open market, and privatisation for our members. We need to link our industrial campaigns against these changes to a political one to repeal the Act.

**Health Alarm mobilising committee** complements other lobbying / campaigning efforts on the NHS by organising and publicising street protests and rank-and-file action to demand the bill is withdrawn and to put forward a positive plan to rebuild the NHS

- the repeal of the cuts to the NHS, the liberation of the NHS from extortionate PFI charges, the reversal of the marketisation already imposed.
- Labour Party to publicly reaffirm Andy Burnham's promise that a future Labour government will reverse marketisation of the NHS by this government.
- add your name or your organisation's name to the statement please contact Rosie Woods on: 07734 088 243 or email: healthalarm@yahoo.co.uk.

**Tuesday 24th April, 12.45-1.45pm**

Keep Our NHS Public / Health Emergency

Speaker:

John Lister, Director of Health Emergency  
Friends Meeting House, Ship Street, Brighton  
'Coordinating Resistance to Implementation of  
the Health and Social Care



# Workers' Liberty

Unison Health Conference Bulletin (April 2012)

www.workersliberty.org • awl@workersliberty.org • 0207 394 8923

## We need a fighting union

**The Unison Service Group elections are our opportunity to choose our industrial leadership for the year to come.**

Do we want the same leadership as we had this year? The same timid "leaders" that allow the biggest attack in the history of public sector pensions to pass with just a single one-day protest strike. The same group of hesitators that allow the government to pass their Health and Social Care Act that spells the end of free, comprehensive healthcare? Or do we want a leadership that is prepared to lead a proper fight against this government of millionaires?

Electing more left-wingers onto the union's leading committees will not be a magic formula for transforming the union. In fact even if all the left wingers get elected then the right-wing will still control the executive.

The most important changes will take place as we organise our workplaces and build rank-and-file organisation and strength.

**But even a half-decent leadership would be better than the current time-servers who exist only to be an obstacle to building the movement we need.**

**Red Pill is supporting the following candidates:**

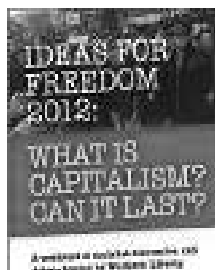
London Female seat – **Janet Maiden**

London General seat – **Len Hockey**

North West Female Seat – **Karen Reissmann**

South West General Seat – **Roger Davey**

Yorks. & Humber. General Seat – **Adrian O'Malley**



**IDEAS FOR FREEDOM '12:**

**What is Capitalism?**

**Can it last?**

A weekend of socialist discussion and debate hosted by Workers' Liberty = Friday 29 June-1 July  
Highgate Newtown Community Centre, Archway, North London

IFF event which combines a serious, thoughtful approach to socialist ideas with a commitment to activism in the workers', student, feminist and other movements. We emphasise accessibility, self- and mutual education and free debate.

As the capitalist crisis deepens and a variety of anti-capitalist ideas take shape, this year's Ideas for Freedom will focus on understanding what capitalism is and what kind of anticapitalist politics are necessary to fight and overthrow it.

Workshops, talks, debates and film-showings -

- How do we make socialism a force again? A panel discussion with Owen Jones (author of Chavs), Rosie Woods (health worker activist and Workers' Liberty member) and more tbc
- Is Greece in a pre-revolutionary situation?
- 33 Revolutions Per Minute: author Dorian Lynskey and hip-hop artist/spoken-word poet The Ruby Kid on protest songs past and present
- Activists from the New Anticapitalist Party's L'Etincelle (Spark) faction on France's far left
- What's wrong with conspiracy theories? with Jack Ferguson of Scottish Socialist Youth
- Roma communities and the rise of the far right across Europe,
- The NHS we had, we have and the one we want
- Understanding the Eurozone crisis
- Iranian socialists on war and class struggle in Iran
- In the Diamond Jubilee year: 1649, when Britain was a republic
- The Minority Movement union rank-&-file movement of the 20s and its lessons for trade unionists today
- Women vs capitalism

Workers' Liberty is a revolutionary socialist organisation active in the British labour movement fighting for an alternative to capitalism and Stalinism based on common ownership, democracy and workers' control. We are active in Unison branches across the country and produce Red Pill bulletin for those who work in the health service. To get involved with producing the bulletin, or to take copies for your workplace, email [awl@workersliberty.org](mailto:awl@workersliberty.org) with the subject line 'Red Pill'.