



# North East Workers & Politics

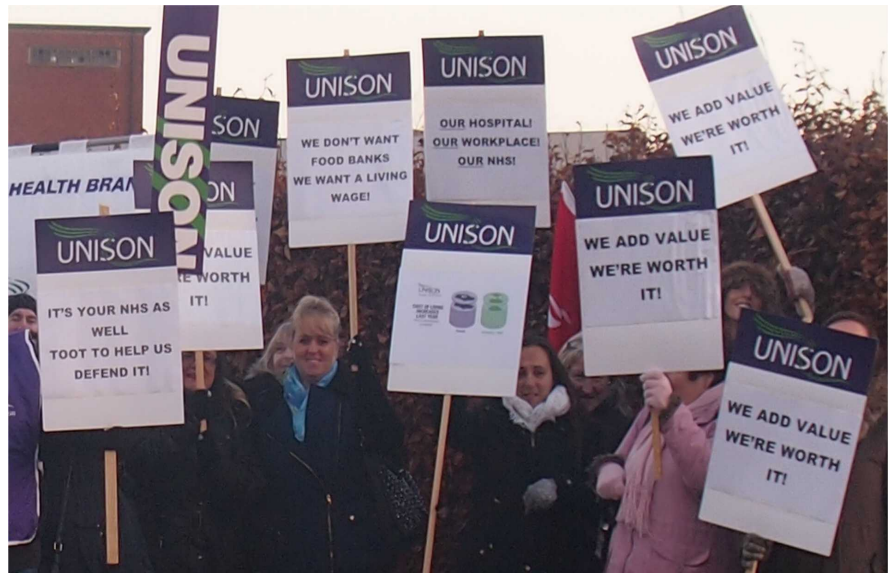
Build the Workers Opposition, Set Our Own Agenda,  
No to Handing the Initiative to Any Other Force!

Volume 15 - January 29th, 2015

By Donation

## Building the Organised Resistance

On Thursday, January 29, an estimated 400,000 health workers in England and the north of Ireland will continue their rolling strikes against the Westminster government over payment of only a 1% inflationary rise in April. Health workers will walkout for 12 hours between 9am – 9pm. Ignoring the recommendation of the Pay Review body, Jeremy Hunt announced that this would be paid only to some staff on the top of their banding but even this was to be non-consolidated into pay and pensions. The strike has created the same enthusiasm as the previous actions on November 24 and October 10 to fight against pay cuts, the sell-off of resources to the private sector. With a further 24 strike planned for February 25th the Coalition government has now been forced into talks with the health trade unions. Health workers add value to society and healthcare is a right!



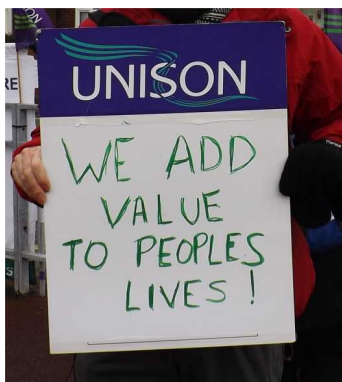
*Health workers on the picket line QE Gateshead*



### Barbour Workers Fight to Defend Family Values

The recent successful strike of Barbour workers, their unions and supporters including the MPs was a victory for every one in fighting to defend family values. They were opposing the imposition of shift changes and the removal of unsocial hours payments. Management were not taking into account any of the concerns of the workers before the strike. Fazia Hussain-Brown Unite regional officer said that the improved offer includes a day shift option for those with family and car-

Workers Forum Interviews  
with those on strike Page 2



**Continued on Page 4**

## Northern Public Services Alliance Summit Calls for the Defeat of the Coalition Government

**On Saturday January 17<sup>th</sup> the Northern Public Services Alliance (PSA) organised important all day summit conference in Newcastle attended by around 100 trade union activists from across the public service unions in the region.** Opening the conference Clare Williams Chair of the PSA said that the summit was to focus on work between now and the General Election in the northern region and beyond. She said “we have to recognise that it is important that we get rid of the coalition government” and that the message she gave is that “we understand the false divisions between people, public or private, colour of peoples skin, religion, gender, or sexuality.” She said “ultimately we’re in a battle for what type of society we want to live in.” Following the Chair’s introduction the summit shared thoughts on the the austerity agenda and how it was affecting the country and the north east, on the experience of building alliances and coalitions to defend public services and also on sharing views on developing a “Manifesto for Public Services” to use in workplaces and communities.

Among the speakers were Peter Wilcox, regional secretary of the Fire Brigades Union, said “We have to build alliances if we are to have an impact at the election. We all need to work together,” Kevin Courtney, National Union of Teachers Deputy General Secretary said that his union had a “Stand up for Education Manifesto.” He said we must build our cause one with the children and parents on education and that building trade union alliances was key. Recalling the important march for the National Health Service (NHS) of the “Darlington Mums” in the summer from Jarrow to London Rehana Azam, GMB National Officer for Health and one of its organisers, said that this was part of making NHS the number one political issue in the election. This was ahead of the attempt of the media, big parties and UKIP to make immigration the main issue in the election.

Giving the keynote address to the summit, Dave Prentis, General Secretary of Unison said: “We are now moving to an election which is probably the most critical election that I have ever been involved in. Unless we get the Tories out everything we have heard (in the summit) is nothing to what they intend doing if they get a majority.” He said; “Already 59,000 jobs have gone from public

services in the North east, double it because the intention is to take public spending back to the 1930s by 2019 that is their vision for our society.” He pointed out to the summit that the trade unions are the trusted ones compared to the big party politicians. He said for the organisations of the trade unions to deliver is probably the most important thing of all. Dave Prentis said that “the focus was to go all out to defend the NHS and make that the main issue.”

After workshops in which the summit discussed content of a Public Services Manifesto, the summit finished with a short question and answer session with Dave Anderson MP Blaydon, Chi Onwurah MP for Newcastle Central and Councillor Laura Pidcock, Northumberland County Council.

Overall the summit was timely and vital in terms of the context and bringing together the public service workers to develop their resistance over the coming weeks to the Coalition government and its “austerity” agenda. The Workers’ Opposition must unite all those forces and candidates that stand against the austerity agenda and for the rights of all. This must be the stand in releasing the initiative of the working class movement to turn the election into a battleground where genuine anti-austerity candidates, that can win, are elected and that the Coalition government is defeated on the basis of the political and tactical considerations worked out in the workplaces and communities in every constituency as to what best serves the interests of the working class and people.

The issue is to develop the independent politics of the working class, politics which is independent of any party, or force that is tied to the interests of the big business monopolies and call for a new direction for society and for the economy. Such a Workers’ Opposition has the aim of not only of defeating the Coalition government but also holding the future government to account and placing the alternative agenda of the working class and people at the centre of the politics of the country as the main opposition.

□

**Workers' Forum****Interviews - 24-11-2014**

**Marion Langley, Branch Secretary South Tyneside Health Branch of Unison**

**WF:** How is the strike going?

**ML:** I think the strike has been really good. We have got fantastic support. It is all the unions together today and it is really nice to see us all on the picket lines together and fighting for fair pay for all. The fact is that 1% isn't enough, especially when it is not consolidated into pensionable pay and therefore not a pay rise at all.

**WF:** Cameron keeps saying that you cannot have "a strong NHS without a strong economy" and seems to be putting the cart before the horse?

**ML:** My opinion with that is that if we got a decent pay rise I am sure that the majority of health service workers and public sector workers would spend their money in the locality and their local economy would rise and more businesses would boom in their own communities. Also, as you say, it is putting the cart before the horse. Having a strong NHS is part of having a strong economy, and the NHS is something people will always want to fight for, free at the point of need and making sure that we have got everything that would take people from cradle to grave with health care. It definitely should not be privatised or run for profit.

**WF:** The government keeps suggesting that the NHS and public services are a "cost" to the economy. How do you see that?

**ML:** I don't agree. It is not a "cost" to the economy. It is a service that adds value to the economy and a service that every single person needs at some point in their life. From that perspective I think the government has got it totally wrong. To be fair, the Labour Party did not do much to help us when they were in power, and there were a lot of the things they should have not introduced or should have overturned, especially the PFI, but didn't.

**WF:** How do you see things going in the future; do you see further strikes?

**ML:** I would really hope not, health workers don't want to strike. It is not why they join the health service, but they have had enough. However, I don't see the government sitting around the table with the trade unions at the moment. So the trade unions need to take some action for the government to change its stance towards health workers.

**Hazel Kjebekk – Phlebotomist and Branch Chair South Tyneside Health Branch of Unison**

**WF:** Can you speak about the strike today and its successes?

**HK:** It was great to see so many people supporting the strike today: nurses, occupational therapists, health visitors, healthcare assistants, midwives, porters and catering staff. The show of support from the general public was fantastic; they understand our fight and the government has left us with no other choice but to take action.

**WF:** The government and media are always trying to suggest that the health service – and in particular paying health staff – is a cost and burden. They don't seem to understand how health workers add values to society, do they?

**HK:** This government and the media are trying to portray health care workers as a burden, overpaid and underworked. But the real truth of the matter is that healthcare workers add value to society and are highly valued by the people who use these services no matter what their job is. From domestic cleaners to surgeons, we all have the same aim in mind and are all dependant on each other and demand respect and value from this government and media.

**WF:** How do you see the way forward now?

**HK:** The way forward is for this government to recognise that we are valued members of society doing good jobs and we have bills to pay, keeping a roof over our heads and putting food on the table to feed our

**Continued on Page 4**

## **Workers Forum interviews continued from page 3**

families. A 1% pay rise is not acceptable in a current climate of rising costs. We need a decent standard of living. Increasingly people in work are having to use food banks and can't afford to heat their homes. It doesn't have to be this way. We can and must afford a properly funded NHS with enough staff to look after the people we serve and a fair wage for the job we do.

**Beverly Todd, Society of Radiographers**

**WF:** Can you say why the Radiographers are on strike?

**BT:** People are so fed up and this latest insult has been a step too far. We have had all these years of pay freeze and then not even been offered the 1% that had been recommended by the Pay Review Body.

**WF:** So what do you think when the government says health worker are not worth this pay rise?

**BT:** What annoys me the most is when they say that the bankers have to have their bonus because we need the right people in the job. Are they the right people? Look at the mess they have got us into. I would much rather have the right person as the radiographer, or the right person as a carer, or the right person as my porter or whoever it is. If these people were so good in their jobs how did we end up in this financial crisis? I know it is the US financiers who started it, but our financial sector did not help it. Then the MPs are taking their 11% pay rise and say they have to have it because it is decided by an independent pay review body. But then they ignore our independent pay review body, or anybody else's! But it is not just about the pay. They are attacking the whole NHS, they are privatising its services and so on.

## **Barbour Workers Fight to Defend Family Values continued from Page 1**

ing responsibilities. She added that "This hard won outcome would not have been possible without the resolve of the workers who faced being sacked if they didn't sign up to inferior contracts." Nobody wants to strike but the Barbour workers see the vital need to build the opposition to this austerity being passed onto the backs of those who produce the goods and services whilst the rich get even richer at their expense.

Margaret Thatcher infamously said that there was no such thing as society only "individuals and family values" and attacked any social organisations such as trade unions defending collective rights. Now even their claim to defend

individuals and family values has been exposed. All the big employers and their government are attacking individuals and family values so as to make more profit at the expense of the people. Only

the workers opposition defending collective rights with its social values and upholding the rights of all stands to protect peoples working conditions and family values

□

## **The Line of March**

Monthly Publication of the Revolutionary  
Communist Party of Britain (Marxist-Leninist)

*Subscription rates within Britain  
(including p&p) are £35.95 per year.*

## **Workers' Weekly**

*Workers' Weekly Internet Edition posted on website*

*Visit the Website: [www.rcpbml.org.uk](http://www.rcpbml.org.uk)*

National Office of RCPB(ML): Write to 170 Wandsworth Road, London SW8 2LA,  
Phone 020 7627 0599, or e-mail : [office@rcpbml.org.uk](mailto:office@rcpbml.org.uk)