

Hampshire

Battling to defend jobs

ON 19 January, Hampshire County Council (HCC) announced that they were going to sack 1,200 workers. This announcement was released to the media before the Unison trade union was informed of the full scale of the job cuts.

Tim Cutter,
deputy branch secretary,
Hampshire Unison
(personal capacity)

These attacks come on top of plans by the council to cut enhancement payments for care workers and mobile library workers who work weekends. This is an attack that Hampshire Unison is already planning to ballot for industrial action over and we now need to link this to the nationwide struggle to defend jobs.

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HCC say they need to make £55 million in cuts over the next four years but they intend to push them

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through over the next two years. These upfront cuts are no doubt being made with the next general election in mind.

Members are already determined to fight against the pay cuts and now will be just as angry and determined to fight against the job losses.

Hampshire Unison has already produced a petition and started a campaign to link up with members of the public and service users in order to organise a campaign of resistance. We have also got plans for linking up with other trade unions in the area in order to form a united fightback against the cuts.



The joint trade union march through Southampton on 20 January.

photo David Smith

Second show of strength by Medirest workers

FOR THE second time, hundreds of Medirest cleaners at Southampton general hospital came out on strike on 19-21 January to fight for unpaid wages and sick pay. Some workers are owed £3,500.

The strike has created a very strong and determined mood to stand firm. Of 272 workers, 254 are now in the trade union Unison. Workers from seven different nationalities work in the team.

Unison steward Jo Spear said: "It is bringing everyone together. We've put our cards on the table and the Trust are having to take note. We are still angry at what's happening. Not just the money, it's about respect and how we are treated. Recently we were told they had run out of money to vaccinate staff against swine flu and if we wanted it we had to pay for it ourselves!"

On 20 January, 200 Medirest strikers joined hundreds of council

workers in a mass demonstration and rally. Over 800 council workers from Unison and Unite held a joint meeting which unanimously rejected council proposals to cut jobs, pay, and terms and conditions. It was the biggest meeting for years and the biggest trade union demonstration in Southampton for decades.

The mood of anger was summed up in the roar of approval for a teaching assistant who raised the

need for the unions to follow Greece and France and organise a one-day general strike.

The turnout for the TUC demo on 26 March will be huge. The urgent task will be to ensure this anger is translated into effective strike action capable of halting these cuts.

The fight to stop the closure of the NHS Bitterne Walk-In continues to gain support. Students are continuing to fight the education cuts. In a

sign of growing unemployment locally, 5,000 people turned up to a jobs fair at Southampton Airport offering 100 jobs.

Southampton Shop Stewards Network is holding a Fight the Cuts demonstration on Saturday 5 February with support from Southampton trades council, the PCS and other union activists.

**Nick Chaffey, Southern region
Socialist Party**

BA workers vote to fight on

FOR THE fourth time in 13 months British Airways cabin crew have voted overwhelmingly to take strike action. The ballot returned a 78.5% vote in favour of strike action in a turnout of 7,335 members.

Neil Cafferky

Readers of The Socialist will recall the original dispute with British Airways was over the issue of imposition of changes to employment. This strike ballot is around the following issues:

- An immediate restoration of staff travel concessions, in full, to the crew from whom they were taken by BA.
- Binding arbitration, through ACAS, of all cabin crew disciplinary cases related to the dispute.
- Restoration of the wages docked from crew who were genuinely off sick during strike dates.
- Full and proper discussion of the trade union facilities agreement at the company with the immediate removal of all threats and sanctions made by BA in relation to this.

At the time of writing Unite, the union which organises BA cabin crew, has not announced dates for strike action.

Commenting on the ballot result Unite general secretary elect Len McCluskey called for BA management to come to the negotiating table: "Surely BA management must now wake up



On the picket line in 2010.

photo Paul Mattsson

and listen to the voice of their skilled and dedicated employees.

"This dispute will be resolved by negotiation, not litigation or confrontation, and it is to negotiation that BA management should now apply itself. We are ready."

This call was echoed by BASSA branch secretary Duncan Holley. Banking on management opening negotiations in the face of an overwhelming ballot may explain the delay in calling strike action. Given BA management's past failure to enter into serious negotiations, this may well prove to be a vain hope.

Much of management propaganda in the course of the dispute has centred on the supposed financial difficulties of the company. BA has now returned to profitability and yet it continues to obstruct a resolution of this dispute and persecute trade union activists. It is a transparent case of union-busting on the part of BA management.

Should BA cabin crew decide to take strike action they will have the support of the labour movement behind them once again to defeat this intransigent management vendetta against trade unionism.

DWP contact centre strike

AS UNEMPLOYMENT figures jumped again, Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) civil servants in the PCS union were taking strike action to provide a decent service to claimants. The overwhelming majority of the 3,500 workers in Newport, Bristol, Chorlton, Glasgow, Makerfield, Norwich and Sheffield who have been transferred from benefit processing to call centres came out on strike on 20-21 January against worsening working conditions and a poor service to the public.

Alistair Tice, Dave Reid, Hugh Caffrey and Tom Baldwin report.

On the picket line in Sheffield, Linda called the two office floors of Sheffield DWP contact centre "the chicken run" - 500 staff but only 400 seats. Another picket said it's "like a prison cell".

Lauren explained that most of the Sheffield contact centre staff were transferred from benefit processing. Many have years, some decades, of experience in benefit delivery. Now they are glorified call centre workers, forced to read from a script, timed on every call, unable to give claimants the benefit of their knowledge and experience.

A new manager has been brought in to enforce these in-



Sheffield. photo Yorkshire SP

dustrial conditions. He is attacking the union to force them through. Five PCS reps have been de-recognised and facility time withdrawn. They face disciplinary action for attending a branch executive committee.

Adam said: "This is the biggest picket we've had for years, it just shows how angry everyone is."

At the Makerfield site near Wigan in Lancashire, almost all the 800-strong workforce were on strike and mounted two pickets.

Despite the freezing weather in Bristol, the pickets were in an upbeat mood and reported that the strike was even more solid than previous ones, with more people out on the picket lines.

For more workplace reports and regular updates on disputes, see www.socialistparty.org.uk