Red Pulse
Health bulletin of the Workers Power Group
BLOC CONFERENCE
Saturday 12th Feb '88.

HEALTH WORKERS
ALL OUT STAY OUT

FEBRUARY 3rd SHOWED what is possible. Thousands of nurses, angry and frustrated at what they see happening to the NHS, voted to take strike action. They were joined on the picket lines by striking ancillaries. And by other workers such as the Frickley miners.

The strikes were spontaneous and under the control of the rank and file. Hardly a bureaucrat was in sight. Except for a few who doled out placards announcing that our picket lines were only 'protest lines'.

The union leaders were shocked by the nurses response to the strike call. Ever since they have been desperately trying to channel our anger into passive protest. Hence the demonstration on Saturday March 5th and the call from COHSE for a national 'day of protest'.

They want to grab control of the action. They want to put it back on the road as a moral pressure campaign. They want us to ally with 'wet' tories, consultants and the scab RCN leaders. That is the alliance that February 3rd busted apart.

The ability of the bureaucrats to control the campaign depends on 2 things. Firstly, on our success in fighting for a national, all out indefinite strike of health workers. Secondly, it depends on building strike committees to coordinate the strike in every hospital, every locality and at a national level.

Inorder to unify the strike movement we must be clear about our goals. We should demand a massive increase in NHS funding to:

* abolish waiting lists
* reverse all cuts and privatisation
* abolish low pay in the NHS

The Pay Review Body should be scrapped and the nurses claim met in full. There should be a national minimum wage for all workers in the NHS, set at the average industrial wage.

The depth of the cuts means that only NHS workers themselves know their full extent and how to repair the damage. We should fight for workers control with committees of health workers determining staffing and funding allocation at local and regional levels.

With this clear focus health workers should demand that the union leaders call an all out indefinite strike in the NHS with emergency cover only under workers control. Against this the union leaders will propose one day protest actions. There are serious problems with one day strikes. The Manchester Nurses 24 hour strike was courageous. It forced a retreat. But the tories plans were only shelved. February 3rd and 10th showed we can't secure **total** victory through protest strikes or by moral pressure. The position of the employers has to be made impossible before they will give in.

In the 1982 NHS dispute there were a whole series of one day strikes. Because this action never brought the situation to a head the dispute dragged on for eight months with no sign of the government budging. Despite winning treamendous support from other workers it became more and more difficult to get NHS workers out for one day strikes, knowing that the day after nothing would have changed except their own backlog of work.

Indefinite all out strike action is the key to forcing the tories on the defensive. It is quicker in the long run, and it can be the focus of solidarity actuion from every section of workers who want to defend their NHS. We should be in no doubt that such solidarity action is there to be won. Ellesmere Port Vauxhall workers showed that was so.

We must make sure that every day of protest called by the union officials, be it a local demo or a national one day general strike, is used to launch a national strike with the aim of an all out stay out.

The union leaders must be bombarded with resolutions demanding that they call an all out strike.

The conference today provides an ideal opportunity to name a day for a national conference of NHS strike committees and to issue a clear call for all out action in the health service. Lets make sure we don't lose that opportunity'

LINK THE STRUGGLES

GENERALISE THE ACTION

THERE COULD BE no better time for a conference of rank and file militants. All over the country workers are showing just what they think of 'New Realism'. From the ferries to the hospitals, from Fords to the coalfields thousands of workers are saying 'enough is enough'.

The trade union leaders have been caught on the hop. It was the nurses themselves who organised the action in Manchester and on February 3rd. Rank and file ferry workers refused to heed McCluskie's call to throw in the towel. Mick Murphy and Jimmy Airlie failed to ballot their members into accepting Fords' terms.

The possibility of forging these battles into a mighty offensive against the Tories is there. The trade union leaders will try to keep each struggle seperate. They will try to divert our anger into futile rounds of Days of Protest. **We must organise to stop them.**

The tories class wide attack must be met head on with class wide resistance. Our goal must be to link together all **the present** struggles into a springboard for a generalised drive to defeat Thatcher. We must unleash the anger that milions of workers feel as the Health Service crumbles, as the schools are hived off for the rich and as the hated Poll Tax looms. Now is the time to fight.

The trade union rank and file must be org -anised independently if it is to destroy the Tory's plans and stop the bureaucrats sabotage and diversion. We need our own plan of action to beat the Tories. That's what we should hammer out today.

We must fight to draw the struggles together. In every area action councils must be formed of delegates of workers in struggle. Car workers, hospital workers, teachers and threatened local government workers must all be represented. They must go out with the clear message:

* There is no better time to fight the employers than now when thousands of workers are already locked into struggle.

* The defence of the NHS, the defeat of Baker and the Poll Tax is the concern of every worker. Now is the time for active solidarity, for strike action alongside the health workers.

At every stage of the fight to escalate the action the union chiefs will attempt to derail us. That's why we need national conferences of strike comittees in every industry to take the action forward and guard against betrayal. BLOC should immediately call a conference of strike committee and steward committee delegates to seal that coordination at a national level.

We must demand of the leaders that they fight for us not against us. They must issue the call for national strike action in defense of the interests of their threatened members They must say now that should the bosses courts sequstre the funds, or jail the officials, of any union they will be met with an indefinite general strike. And we must organise to hold them to those words and turn them into action whatever they do.

The call will go out today for a One Day General Strike. The danger with this call as it stands is that it can play into the bureaucrat's hands. They want an endless round of Days of Action that they can turn on and off. We have to argue that this is a recipe for a stop-go road to demoralisation and retreat. Not days of action but all out to defeat the Tories must be the rank and file battle cry. Yes, make every day of action a day of solidarity strikes. But the wave of militancy we must unleash against the Tories cannot be limited in advance to One Day General Strikes. What do workers do when its over? Even a one day General Strike can be pencilled into the timetable of the union officials to let off the steam of rank and file anger.

A new layer of workers are being blooded in struggle with Thatcher. Many have no time for Kinnock and the TUC realists. They are prepared to act for themselves. It is vital that in the struggles ahead those militants are won to the fight, not just to defeat Thatcher now, but also to the building of a new revolutionary party that can lead the fight to smash capitalism once and for all.

workers power