Red Pulse
Health Bulletin of the Workers Power Group
MARCH 14/15

INDEFINITE STRIKE TO WIN!

One day actions—protests or even strikes—will not win this dispute. The Tories can sit back and watch the disruption knowing that tomorrow we will be back, working twice as hard to catch up on work missed today.

Of course the one day strike by nurses in Manchester did achieve something. The government withdrew their special duty payments plan—but only to refer it to the Pay Review Body where it will re-emerge in a slightly different package. That achievement must now be followed up by decisive action to win our full demands.

Because in most cases protest strikes can't bring about any change in the government's plans many workers begin to ask 'Why bother?'. After 3 February we all felt more confident, but six weeks later what has happened? The government has shown no sign that it is about to budge on cash for the NHS. They even had the confidence to spit in our faces by slapping another 20p on prescription charges. That insult, plus the budget plans are a challenge to health workers. The Tories think they can ignore our action.

Our response must be effective, hitting at the government. An indefinite strike during which all routine work is cancelled means increased pressure on them to do something. It also means hitting at the profits of drug and supplies companies who would soon run to Thatcher asking her to reconsider.

Such action would be bound to damage patient care, and our wage packets, but if we don't take decisive action now there will be any patient care or wage packets left! How much more charges go up? How many more services will be sold off to sharks? How many more nurses will be forced to leave the

Today or tomorrow there should be mass meetings of str every hospital to discuss the way forward. We should vote to OUT! Where that vote is carried strikers should go out to ar other hospitals to follow suit. These meetings need to elect union strike committees to run the strike and to determine the of emergency cover, if any, we provide.

These meetings at hospitals, are and national level should draw up our demands:

- A massive increase in funds to reverse the cuts and res services
- Abolish waiting lists, meet pay claims of all health workers in full
- Introduce a minimum wage equal to the average industrial wage (£185 per week)
- Reverse privatisation
- Nationalise the profiteering drugs and supplies companies under workers control without compensation.

Thorn-EMI and the laws

Many workers have taken strike action today in support of the NHS. Many are not themselves employed by the health service, this makes their action ILLEGAL!

These men and women have taken action because they know it is essential to defend the NHS. They know from their parents and grandparents what fear there was of ill-health before the NHS was created. They avoided calling out the doctor because of the bill they would receive.

Workers fear a return to this with Tory plans for private insurance hospitals for the rich and a 'poor relief' sickness service for the rest. This explains why we have such solid support when we take strike action. Other workers know what's at stake.

But with this basic show of solidarity they are breaking the law! Workers at Thorn-EMI in the north-west know this all too well. They struck in support of health workers on 19 February and as a result their convenor and three stewards have been threatened with fines of £45,000. The bosses are sueing for damages—claiming lost production due to the one-day stoppage.

If Thorn-EMI bosses win it will give the green light to many more to use the law. Already, British Rail is threatening Kings Cross ASLEF workers with court action. Unions could have their accounts frozen, their money (i.e. our money) stolen by the courts; trade union leaders including stewards could be imprisoned. And if successful, this case will send our union leaders into a panic and they will try and prevent any solidarity action being taken.

In fact many health workers are also breaking the anti-union 'employment' laws. Our democratic mass meetings where we voted for strikes do not satisfy the unelected judges. They say we should have secret ballots or face fines.

These laws have been deliberately created by the Tories to make effective working class action illegal. They form a massive obstacle to the working class—everything we try and do collectively is met with injunctions, fines and, if we refuse to pay, workers will by imprisoned. The TUC have gone along with these laws, despite earlier promises to go to jail rather than comply.

The Thorn-EMI workers must get the full support of the labour movement. If they are fined, or if union funds are seized we must all be prepared to show them the solidarity they have shown us by launching a general strike—not for one day or two hours to 'protest', but a general strike *until* we win!

Then we'll see if the bosses want to take every worker through the courts! They couldn't and wouldn't. When a general strike was threatened around the imprisonment of the Pentonville dockers in 1972 the court action was quietly dropped. We must meet this attack in the same way!

Red Pulse is a bulletin produced by the healthworkers of the Workers Power Group, a revolutionary communist organisation.

For A National Strike Committee!

IN THE fight for a national strike on 14 March we have met open sabotage from the trade union leaders. We need to take control of the dispute out of their hands by building local and national strike committees.

The NUPE and COHSE leaders have made it clear that they do not want another national day of strike action. COHSE leaders, under pressure from their members, called a 'day of protest' on 14 March. NUPE and the TUC leaders have refused to support even this limited call. That refusal by NUPE has been followed by an instruction to regional full-timers not to make strike action official on 14 March.

Their determination to stop strike action flies in the face of rank and file willingness to strike on 14 March. They have even sabotaged solidarity action. Rank and file health workers from COHSE spoke to NUM branches in South Yorkshire and won support for strike action. Then NUPE full-time officials turned up to tell the miners not to strike. On the 5 March demonstration the TUC bureaucrats were even prepared to kick and hit nurses to make sure their voices weren't heard and the call for strike action wasn't made from the platform in Hyde Park.

What makes the leaders act like this? Their actions are rooted in the policy of 'new realism'. This policy says that at the moment 'workers won't fight' and 'even if they do they can't win' and we will 'risk being fined and losing members so there is no point in striking'. Instead they say we must wait for Labour to be elected in 1992! In the meantime we must abandon pickets, strikes and solidarity action in favour of passive protest and developing good relations with our bosses. NUPE leader Tom Sawyer summed up the 'new realism':

'All the solutions and the levers I have pulled since I have become an official in the union don't work any more. You pull and nothing happens. You can't pull a lever and get a strike any more.'

LEVERS

But now Bickerstaffe and Sawyer are having to pull all sorts of levers to stop strike action on 14 March. Because they and the TUC are determined to derail the fight in the NHS and build an all class campaign which involves everyone from wet Tories, consultants, vicars and agony aunts through to the scab-outfit, the RCN, in protest action—vigils, petition signing and giving out red roses. Strikes, picket lines and solidarity, the real way to victory, don't feature in their strategy, because consultants, wet Tories and the RCN don't like them.

We know Thatcher isn't open to persuasion or reasoned argument. It is only strike action by health workers and others that can force her hand.

How can leaders like Willis, Bickerstaffe and McKenzie stay in control of the unions when they openly sabotage and betray their members?

In the first place the ideas of new realism have filtered through to many workers. The trade union leaders have led so many disputes to defeat—miners, printers etc—that it has convinced many experienced union members that perhaps new realism is right. But the North Manchester nurses and Ford workers proved this is wrong. We can fight and win with strike action. But the moment the masses of the working class move into action the leaders put the bureaucratic machinery into gear to stop us.

This is no accident. The trade union bureaucrats are the bosses' agents in the trade union movement. Their sabotage is not just out of ignorance or spite. They have a material interest in smoothing over disputes, reaching compromises and getting us back to work as quickly as possible. They are well paid, with big cars and high living standards. There is no pressure on them to fight for better pay and conditions.

ROUGHSHOD

They will always ride roughshod over the members wishes in order to keep the peace. In May '82 when NUPE conference voted overwhelmingly for all out strike action in the health service rather than one days the executive met the same day and voted to ignore that decision. That dispute dragged on as a series of one day strikes and ended in defeat.

But no bureaucrat will have suffered the six years of poverty pay, cut, job losses and privatisation which that defeat was meant for health workers today.

Rank and file health workers have to fight *now* to break the control of these sell-out merchants.

In the present struggle that means building active, democratic strike committees in every hospital and every town, to control the action. These strike committees must be linked up to form a national strike committee. Already strike committees are being formed and a national conference of strike and stewards committees has been organised for Saturday March 26th in Sheffield. This can become the organising centre for the rank and file to control the dispute.

In the fight to build strike committees and gain control of the strike we cannot ignore the need to transform the unions into democratic fighting bodies. To think that the control of the leaders will go away if we ignore them will lead us to defeat. The rank and file movement should fight to change the unions from top to bottom. That means from the strike committees rank and file union members should take up the fight to democratise the union from their local branches to the national conference.

We should demand that those union leaders who won't fight should be replaced. All union officials should be elected, accountable and instantly recallable. They should receive a workers' wage. All branches should be run democratically, taking all decisions at mass meetings by show of hands, producing branch bulletins and building joint shop stewards committees.■

P&P Workers Power BCM 7750, London WC1N 3XX