

PUBLIC SERVICE WORKERS' NETWORK

From "On the Road" to "On the buses"

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 tack on pay and conditions and are ultimately a concern for ALL workers. This irrational sectionalism has led to some farcical Branch meetings in which officers have publicly debated what could be voted on by all union members, and what had to be restricted to car users.

Communication has been appalling. In the worst traditions of a Top-Down controlled strike, workers on the ground have been irresponsibly left to the mercy of intimidation tactics by management, with no advice or support, and with no real expectation of solidarity from non-car users, because of the sectionalist running of the Dispute by the National leadership.

The frustrating thing is that a Boycott-which is what this action effectively is potentially an extremely strong weapon for workers; It enables workers to take direct action while staying at work, without the inconvenience of organising a strike. But this can only be effective if it is creative, worker-controlled action directly aimed at the grievance.

Trade Unionism in Crisis

Building an anarcho-syndicalist alternative

A Dayschool for Trade Unionists to discuss workplace organisation and plan a way forward

SATURDAY 30th OCTOBER

12 noon

Jacksons Lane Community Centre
 269a Archway Road (Highgate tube)
 London N6

Registration £2

Stabbed in the Back

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solicitor's letter (at the Council's expense) before even speaking to the workers about the £2,000, and the secrecy with which this was done, to prevent its affiliates and their members knowing how their money is being wasted on a political vendetta. Principled trades unionists should be supported, and everyone should know that there are plenty around who are far

more interested in victimising those who rock the boat than in fighting the Tories and their local agents, and should oppose them.

Letters of protest at the Trades' Council's action should be sent to: Mickey Dunn, Secretary, Hackney Trades Union Council, 219 Mare Street, LONDON E8.

Send copies (and check the facts and latest developments) and letters of support to: Hackney TUSU, Colin Roach Centre, 10A Bradbury Street, LONDON N16.

Who we Are

Network is published by a group of militant public service workers to promote the idea of workers self management, and of revolutionary change in society. It is also an open forum for all public service workers to share, discuss and analyse our experiences, and to develop solutions to the problems we face. We welcome your letters, comments, articles, photos and graphics, although we cannot guarantee to publish them.

We are also seeking to network as widely as possible with like minded workers.

We see no point in wasting our time and energy in trying to reform the existing unions, or in trying to elect more left wing leaders. We want to see workers' organisation which is not divided by union affiliations, bureaucracy or political parties, and which embrace all public service workers, whether they are employed by local Government, Health Institutions, Voluntary organisations, or private Contractors, on the basis of practical solidarity.

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PUBLIC SERVICE WORKERS'

NETWORK

No.3 Autumn 1993

Free

Inside

Unison - Is it really what we've all been waiting for

Resisting the community care cuts

Breaking the Pay Freeze

As we go to press, Kenneth Clarke is threatening workers in the public sector with a pay freeze next year. We wouldn't mind the average 12% pay rise that private sector managers are getting. "Greater productivity" means forcing more drive towards profits and not service provision in the public sector. For workers in the private and voluntary sectors it will mean impossible workloads increased yet again.

At this point it is customary for the writer to call upon the TUC to organise a general strike, and for the reader to switch off. We are not going to reel off the same old tired slogans, but look at how public sector pay claims have been conducted in recent years, starting with the watershed of the 1989 local government white collar pay strike. Former NALGO members in local government are currently in the middle of a second ballot on whether or not to break the government-imposed 1.5% pay limit. The timing of Clarke's announcement - after the TUC, and in the third week of the ballot - is significant in that it is timed to miss opportunities for serious, united opposition before next spring. The present 1.5% offer has been rejected as a government-imposed diktat, but a separate ballot was held on the question of industrial action, one which may be lost, but which the prospect of a pay freeze next year might have turned into a big majority for action.

The sole national strike by local government white collar workers in 1989 came as a big surprise to the NALGO leadership. Few of us on the shop floor (except the pessimists) were surprised, however. For a start there had been a steady stream of leaflets and meetings (see any before July this year?) for months, and the ballot took place before the July 1st date of the



Firefighters - Against 1.5%, earlier this year

pay settlement, showing that the union meant business. More importantly, there was much more at stake than just the flat-rate £1,200 or 12% pay claim, about which there was rare enthusiasm. There were strings attached to the employers' offer which threatened the national negotiating machinery - which is why the union meant business, and why the membership did as well.

Hence the strike, and the withdrawal of the strings; but also the recommendation of the negotiators that the lowest acceptable offer - 8.8% - be accepted. Once their negotiating rights were no longer under threat, the union leadership dumped the flat-rate claim, which they had always disliked. Getting 500,000 workers out on strike was also a bit of a shock to them, particularly the way many took to militancy and picketing, and the more-easily controlled take-home-pay selective action which made its debut in the strike quickly became a substitute, rather than a cutting edge, for mass action. The attitude towards the claim also taught workers new to strike action a harsh lesson - union negotiators will compro-

mise, not hold out for the objective which brought you out on strike. People weigh up the costs against the potential gains, and a sell-out isn't worth losing pay over.

In 1990 this lesson had been absorbed, and people were more worried about their jobs than the size of their pay rise anyway. Union leaders also insisted that how the bosses paid for pay rises was THEIR problem, and refused to link the Poll Tax to pay and the question of funding public services. Why fight for a pay rise if it means cuts that will cost you your job? The inevitable ballot defeat poured icy water on the embers of 1989, much to the relief of the bureaucrats. The bosses have since taken advantage of this to bring in codes of conduct, sickness harassment, limits on trades union facility time, back door pay cuts, and innumerable piecemeal attacks on workers' rights and workplace organisation.

The spectre of some of the "strings" - performance-related pay and individual contracts - have returned too. While the former are being proposed

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Workers have the power to...

STOP THE HOSPITAL CLOSURES

Last year's Tomlinson Report earmarked eleven London hospitals for rapid closure. The Government says the Closures are necessary because "there are too many beds" and "they are too expensive".

This is absolute rubbish. London has less than 20,000 beds for a population of almost 7 million. Paris has 33% more, and New York almost 50%. The Capital has lost over a quarter of its beds since 1982.

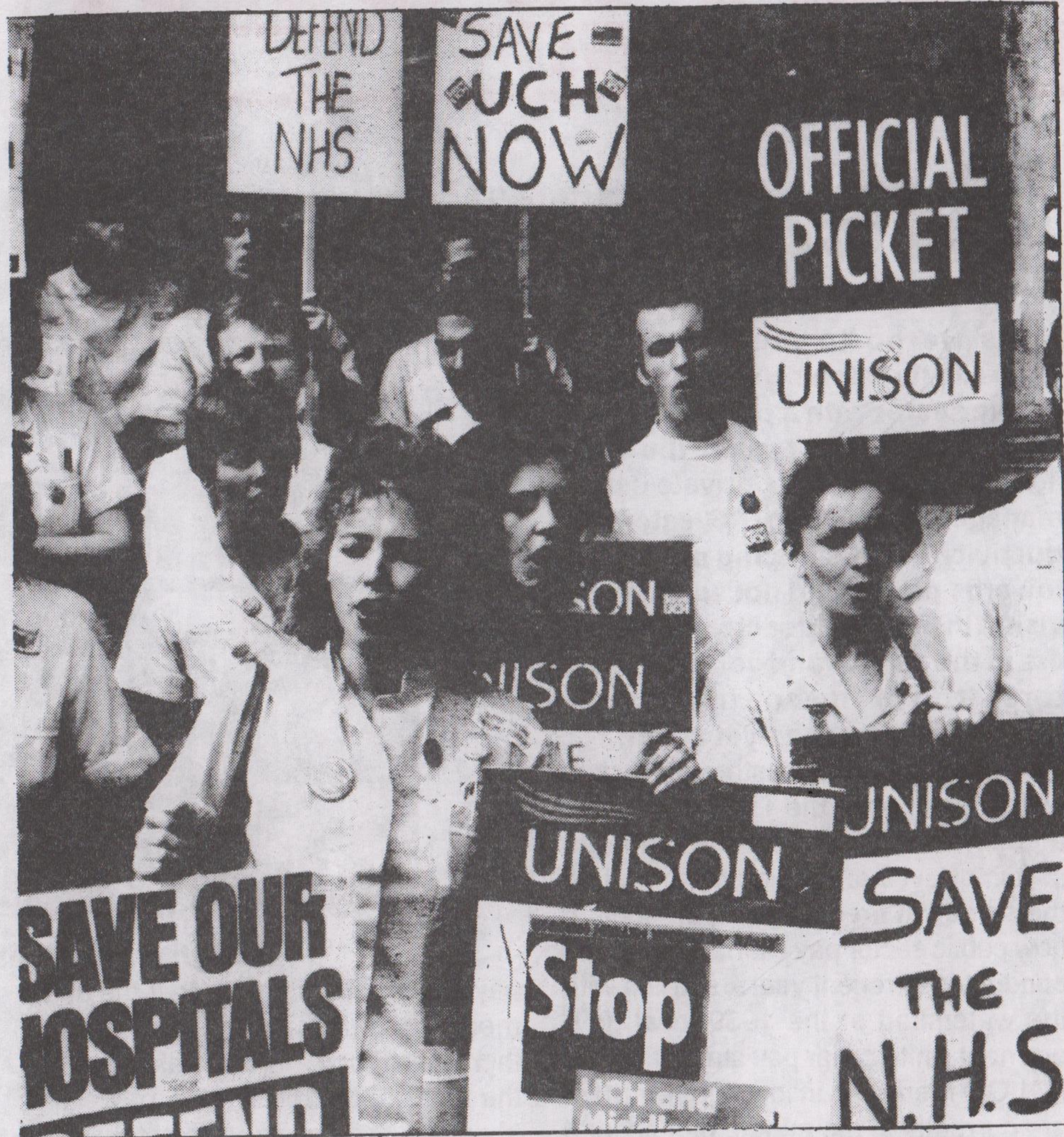
The situation in the rest of the country is no different. Cuts in Sheffield will leave the city with just one accident and emergency department. In Glasgow, 1 000 beds will be axed. Cuts in Manchester will close the City's general hospital. The list is endless.

The swingeing cuts are the Government's latest measures in their plan to deny free access to good quality Health provisions. Their real agenda is to dismantle the Health Service.

The Government's Strategy for implementing the closures is to pick groups of Health workers off one by one. In London, last year's announcements provoked protests and demonstrations from Health workers at Bart's, as an atmosphere of uncertainty and confusion hit the capital. Yet the fate of Bart's now appears to be sealed - along with the Queen Elizabeth Hospital for Children. The Bart's campaign had relied on the strength of "public opinion", and the argument that Bart's was more necessary than other Hospitals, to change the Government's mind. The Government chose to ignore the widespread support for Bart's.

The Strike by nurses and porters at University College Hospital was provoked out of the decision by management to shut down in-patient services at the Hospital. Last year, nurses at UCH successfully occupied wards threatened with Closure, and forced management to back off.

Now they are at it again, following Camden and Islington Health Authority's decision to put a ban on all "non-emergency operations" so that



UCH Strikers-calling for unofficial action

the hospitals do not treat too many people on the waiting list. The strike, by health workers from the threatened wards, has received massive support from other workers; Ambulance workers refusing to move patients out of the wards threatened with Closure; Carpenters and removal workers refusing to cross the Picket Line to dismantle the wards; Workers from around the area pledging to walk out if management try to close the wards.

Our strength is in the massive potential we have-as workers- to generate a strong, solid action against the attacks on our Health services. We have the power -along with other workers- to take direct control of this fight,

without relying on union bureaucrats. Far from giving us strength, union bureaucrats will seek to undermine us, and ultimately sell us out.

Other workers have shown that they will take action, if Health workers themselves make a clear call.

To do this we need to ignore the anti-union laws that make it impossible to actively support each other. We need to form joint union groups which are completely independent of the union bureaucracy. Building strong links ACROSS different hospitals and Health and Community Health services, we need to make it clear that we are united, and will not be DIVIDED and isolated to fight individual struggles.

Breaking the Pay Freeze

Continued from front page
for Chief Officers, along with fixed term contracts. The latter are being introduced in the private sector to break union organisation. The government is even changing the law to allow discrimination against trades unionists who refuse individual contracts and want to retain collective bargaining. At the moment the unions are rushing to the European Court to head this off,

but if workplace organisation was stronger it wouldn't even occur.

The attacks which have succeeded the "strings" of 1989, and the pay cuts being imposed piecemeal locally, and nationally through abolition of the car allowance, are a nationwide strategy by the bosses. The nationwide strategy needed to defeat them - and the proposed PAY FREEZE - is not one the bureaucracy could initiate, even if it

wanted to. It means different shop stewards' committees (and representatives of workplaces without one) getting together directly within and across employers, to plan and coordinate action based on the real needs and perceptions of workers on the shop floor. What also needs to happen is for organisation to develop a voice to do its own negotiating, rather than leaving bureaucrats with a different, failed agenda to take over and stitch us up. A tall order, true, but a necessary one.

A Pain in the Neck ?

REPETITIVE STRAIN INJURY

Increasingly office workers are able to say that work really does make them sick. They are joining the ranks of workers from many manual trades that have known this for decades. The sickness?...RSI.

Repetitive Strain Injury (RSI), is a collective term to describe a range of conditions characterized by discomfort or persistent pain in muscles, tendons or other soft tissue, commonly in the upper body. A more medically correct classification of such injuries is Upper

limb Disorders (ULDs) which covers injury to the tissues of the hand, wrist, arm and shoulder. These tissues, that connect to bone and tendons, can become damaged by continuous and repeated movements, or by less continuous but more forceful movements caused by activities involved in the work we do. The pain usually involves improper use of the body during work. Such pains may or may not produce symptoms that are visible to doctors on examination or x-rays. This means that workers who complain of injury or pains are often accused of shirking. This may sound like the blame lies solely with the person doing the job, but people are expected to adapt their bodies, work habits and other needs to fit in with the equipment they operate. The fault lies with the design of the equipment we're to use and the regime we are expected to work under. There are now many more cases of RSI, particularly amongst office workers because new technology has been widely introduced without careful planning or consideration. VDU operators have been identified as a high risk group because of the frequency with which they have to strike the keys in order to achieve the speed necessary to conform to their job. In December 1991 two former BT keyboard operators were awarded £6000 damages for pain and suffering caused by RSI contracted at work. Pay for these operators was based on how many key strokes they could achieve in an hour! How could these workers take the necessary breaks and changes to their work pattern to stave off strain?

Employers often conveniently blame the slowness of the health and

safety at work act (1974) to keep up with changing technology. "It takes employees and the employer time to recognize possible health hazards in new equipment, (especially as some only become apparent after long-term exposure) and then takes longer for legislation to catch up." This is no excuse. During this time our long and short-term health is at risk.

Information and medical recognition is changing all the time. (I myself went from one doctor telling me imagining it to being given physiotherapy on the National Health by another!). New EC directives are being published detailing the need for better adjustable equipment and furniture. If you are concerned or want to know more the first step is information. All Unions have some sort of brief on RSI, ask them for info. Secondly get together with people you work with, make sure you all take adequate and frequent breaks. Collectively you can represent a strong force to stand up to the bosses and negotiate better conditions.

Other names for RSI

- Work related regional pain syndrome
- Overuse syndrome
- Cumulative trauma disorders
- Musculo-skeletal disorders
- Occupational cervicobrachial disorders
- Shoulder-arm syndrome
- Upper limb syndrome

Limb Disorders (ULDs) which covers injury to the tissues of the hand, wrist, arm and shoulder. These tissues, that connect to bone and tendons, can become damaged by continuous and repeated movements, or by less continuous but more forceful movements caused by activities involved in the work we do. The pain usually involves improper use of the body during work.

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RESISTING THE ATTACKS ON COMMUNITY CARE

In the last issue of Network, we outlined the current chaos ensuing in Community Care, as uncontrolled competition for profits threatens the very existence of person-centred services based on need. In this issue, we will look at the current possibilities for worker's resistance to the attacks, and begin to outline a strategy for fighting back.

THE NEW MANAGEMENT APPROACH

The new (and for some, not so new) type of management in community care brings with it a ruthlessness towards users, providing a minimum of care and support, in order to maximise cost-cutting and/or profits. This approach can only be carried out with a similarly ruthless approach towards workers. If management can succeed in intimidating workers into submission, it makes shutting the users up a lot easier.

In the current climate in Care work, many of us are experiencing a large rise in disciplinaries, sackings, and general harassment as part of this process.

In the face of such an attack, the many different unions- and branches of unions- that people are members of have remained completely mesmerised and powerless. The formation of U.N.I.S.O.N., (covered elsewhere in this Issue), rather than bringing unity, has appeared to most of us as even more remote and meaningless than ever. What's increasingly becoming apparent is that for all of its offices, cheap insurance and holiday offers, and glossy publicity, the U.N.I.S.O.N. leader's approach cannot be ANY substitute for worker's organisation at a workplace level.

When it comes down to it, management have the law completely on their side if they want to victimise an individual or a group of workers. The only thing that makes them think again is a strong, militant workplace union group, prepared and motivated to take effective

action.

The setting up workplace controlled networks, uniting all Community Care workers is particularly relevant at the present time, in community care. At a time when the public sector unions are obsessed with their new, glossy super-union, UNISON members are finding themselves coming to the conclusion that they must ORGANISE themselves. Faith in hierarchical, bureaucratic, branch-level union structures is dramatically dropping. Who still goes to Branch meetings anyway? Most genuine, militant workers have been reduced to supporting each other at a workplace level.

But the Community Care act -which threatens to set worker against worker to compete for meagre contracts from social services departments makes it absolutely essential that we make rank and file links right ACROSS the industry,

at workplace level.

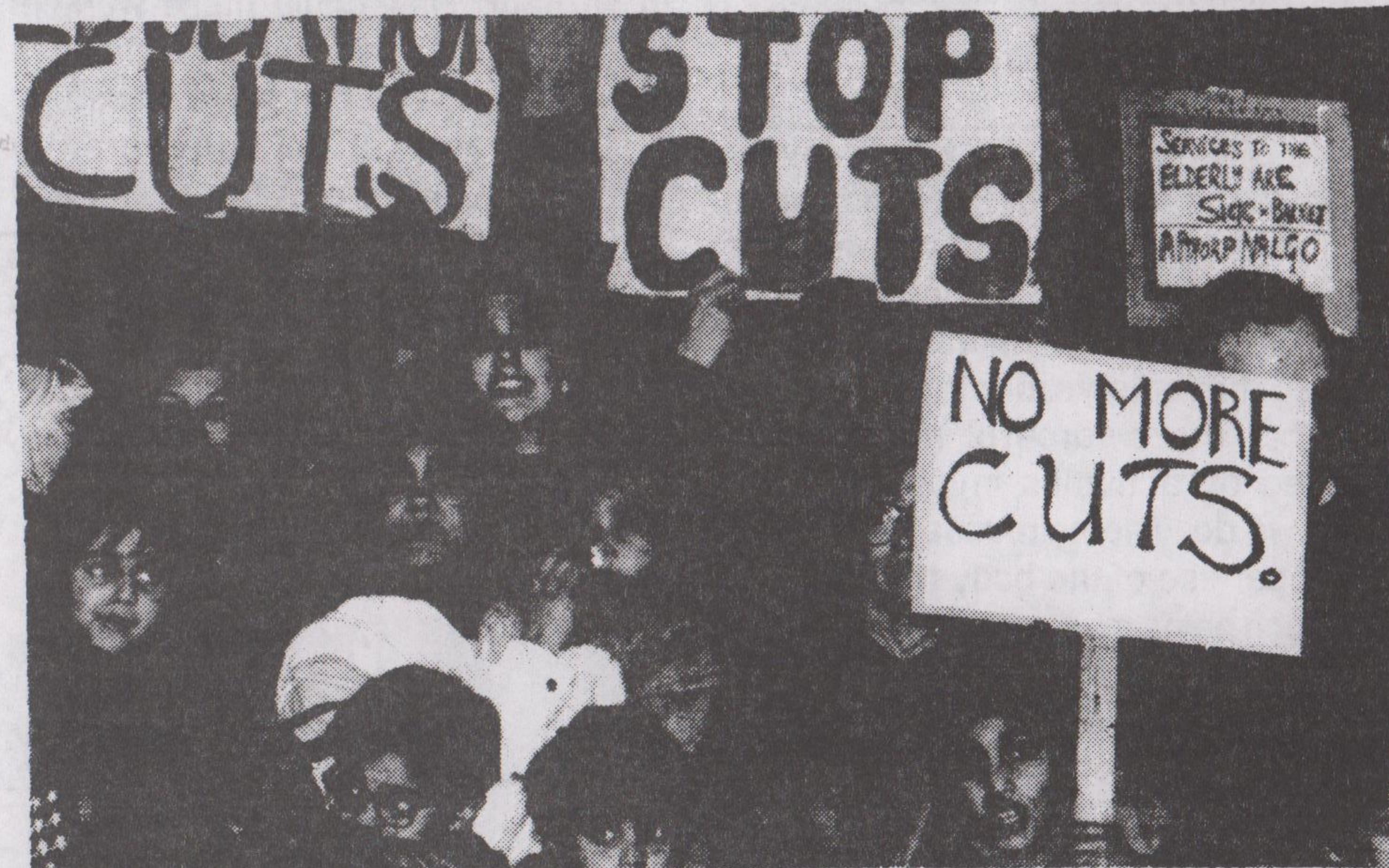
As well as aiming to break from the reformist unions in terms of structure and organisation, we must also break from them ideologically. Unions are commercial organisations. Union leaders cannot and will not break the law, even when they admit that a host of anti-union legislation stacks the odds completely against workers and unions.

Effective action has been completely curtailed. Workers have to wait weeks until their union tells them they can go on strike. Secondary action - supporting workers who have a different employer- is illegal.

UNITING ACROSS WORKPLACES

If we accept these limits, we may as well give up now. The only way we can fight the attacks on us from the hundreds of ruthless Community Care employers that are springing up, is to be strong enough ACROSS OUR INDUSTRY and potentially, to be able to take joint (and therefore illegal) action

Employers are using competition to attack workers. If one organisation



drops its wages, this not only gives a precedent, and confidence to bosses of other organisations, it also completely undermines every other worker in the industry, whose pay and conditions may be undercut. Decisions to take solidarity action must rest not on whether or not we are acting legally, but on our assessment of how strong we are, and our chances of winning

The present unions clearly have NOTHING to offer, in terms of a strategy, and in fact are legitimising the privatisation and decimation of Community Care.

Against this, rank and file workers must develop a strategy of our own, to fight both the employer's and union leader's ideology.

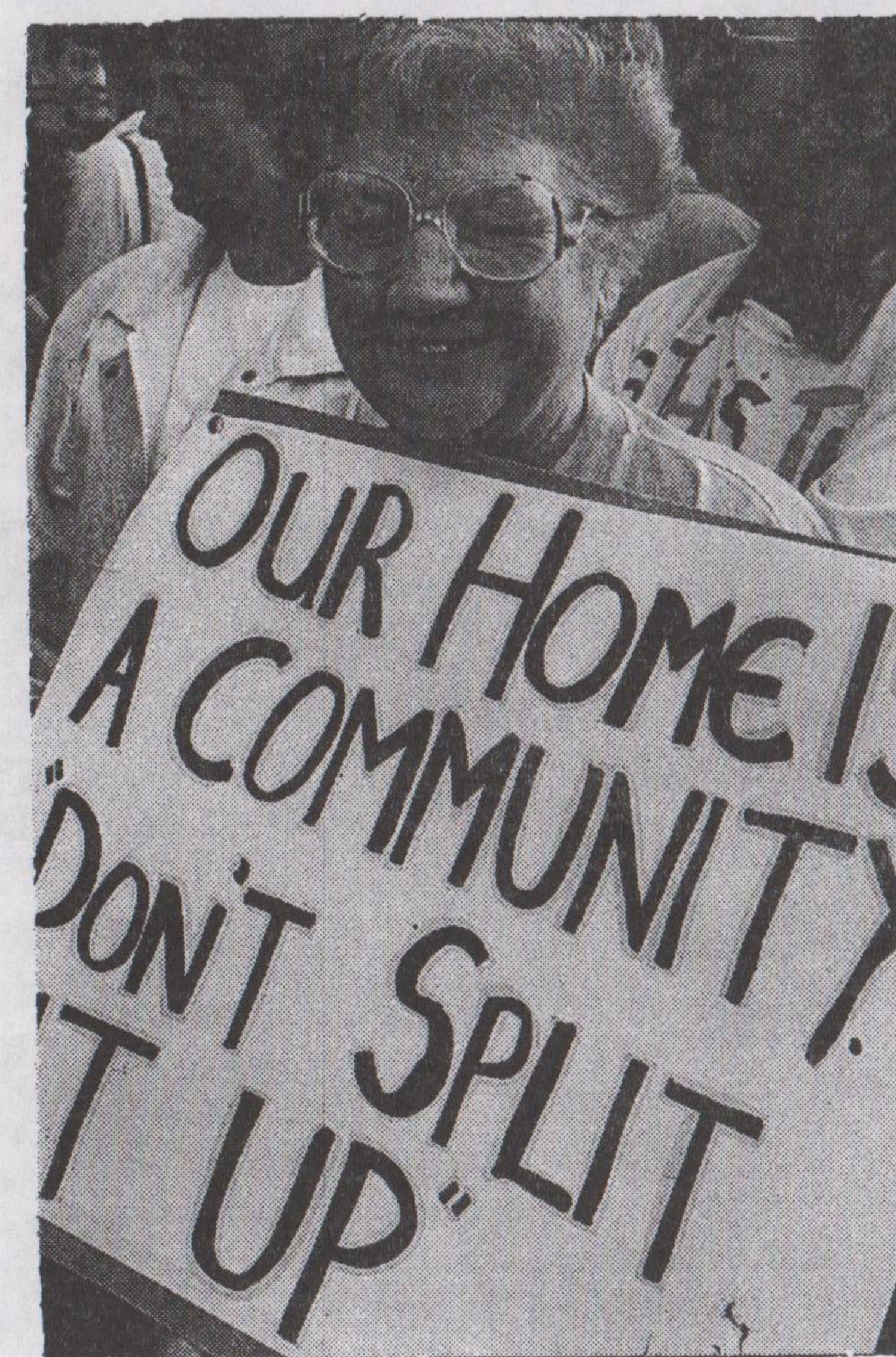
CUTTING THROUGH THE CRAP

Many of us (including shop stewards) now face a scenario of demoralisation and acceptance of current trends. "Liberal" management teams, (the ones who DID begin, a few years ago, with the intention of providing a service and not making a profit) attempt to pressurise workers into managing the cuts -the idea that we are all in the "same boat", workers and management, and we have to make the best of it.

This myth rings true for some workers because not only -as has already been argued- do the reformist union leaders generally go along with this, but the restructuring in the form of selling off services and making them smaller gives some workers, particularly middle management, the illusion that they have some control over finances, namely how things are spent, and that if the organisation is short of money, it is because the finances have been "mismanaged".

This sort of argument must be exposed as a COMPLETE RED HERRING. If there's not adequate pay and conditions, and decent services for users, its because the bastards have cut the money off, no matter how they couch this in terms like "devolving budgets" and de-centralising services.

We have to cut completely through the crap about where the money is coming (or not coming) from. Our bottom line is to DEFEND CONDITIONS. Whenever conditions are threatened we accept NO responsibility, and push



the responsibility UPWARDS. The new privatised structure blurs the distinction, for some workers, between who is responsible for cuts and who is not. In some cases, this has been used to quell action against attacks on conditions, as workers have become confused about WHERE THE BLAME LIES.

ACTION

Over the next few years, care workers have little choice but to organise in a practical way at a workplace level. This can be done whilst maintaining our membership of present unions, but ignoring and by-passing the bureaucracy of Branch level organisation. The important thing is to build a culture of resistance in our workplaces and recognise that we have to fight TOGETHER to achieve anything.

Our action -when we feel confident enough to take it- must be on a completely different basis than the "action" organised by union leaders. If one organisation is attacking its workers, we must show that it's a common issue for workers. Solidarity action, pickets, joint demonstrations and protests are all important, but they must be directly aimed at DISRUPTING management's attacks on us. We have to break the image of care workers as guilt-tripped, passive workers who don't take action and don't go on strike. We also have to

be creative to be effective. We can sabotage management's financial priorities by a well-timed strike just before April, or when social services are deciding who to give contracts to. Occupations are important, particularly in focussing WHO is actually in control of a service, and in focussing publicity. But they can leave workers vulnerable if they are not linked to a strong and organised campaign that can escalate the action at any time, in the face of victimisation.

LINKS WITH OTHER INDUSTRIES

Ultimately, because we are working in public services, we need to make links with workers in other industries who can take solidarity action in support of services, and vice versa. We also need to make it clear, by our actions, that it is the profit system that we are against. Occupying a residential home against closure, for instance is important, but we need to go on the offensive, directly linking the cutting of services with a system that puts profit before need. Actions that hit hard at economic targets, and disrupt capitalist profits, are ultimately the only actions that will get results.

STAKES ARE HIGH

We need to be clear that no amount of tinkering with the system will get us a completely fair way of running things, where people in need, are provided for. This idea is completely at odds with capitalism. The "free market" relies on the "survival of the fittest".

As the strike at UCH has shown, the stakes in the Health sector are extremely high. The potential for united, genuine action with other workers is there. The employers have made their intentions extremely clear, and have begun systematically dismantling our services. WE must be clear that to take away services that are ours, and to deny us the means to look after each other, is a vicious and unashamed attack on our existence, by those in power.

Our resistance must stem from a belief in Care based on need, and our strategy and tactics need to reflect this.

From "On the Road" to "On the buses"

The local Government workers' car allowances dispute, initiated in July, has raised some important issues and brought various things to light. The Dispute stems from another penny pinching attack on terms and conditions. The employers sought to drastically reduce the reimbursement local authority workers could claim for using cars on council business. For example, someone on "Essential user" allowance driving a 1300cc car 4,500 miles a year stood to lose £1,068.

Many council workers are expected to use their cars as part of their jobs. At the same time, the falling value of all public service wages make it increasingly difficult for many workers to run a car.

In the light of this, in July, UNISON workers withdrew their cars from council business.

This action did show that there is



still a will to fight. By and large, workers are not taken in by the "We all must make sacrifices" bullshit spouted by employers.

Yet serious questions are raised by the dispute.

In many branches, only car users have been kept well briefed on devel-

opments in the Dispute. This is quite irrational when any escalation of the Dispute will call for non-car users to support the Action. In the first, it is a questionable tactic for the dispute to be confined to car users alone, from the start. Employers plans are an at-

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Stabbed in the Back

At the end of March Hackney Trades Union Support Unit (TUSU) ceased to be funded by the local council in East London. Now the two workers who were made redundant, but who are trying to continue TUSU's work through the Colin Roach Centre are being threatened with legal action by the Trades' Council, their nominal employer. These events represent a vendetta against TUSU and its workers by an alliance of "left-wing" Labour Party activists and Communist Party of Britain Stalinists, whose first line of attack against them is to use the bosses' courts.

Funding was officially withdrawn by the council because TUSU refused to be re-located within the new Dalston Enterprise Centre to advise employers on workers' rights (so that they can more easily overcome them). This was rejected on principle - no mention was made of advice on trades union rights or help with organisation for workers in this new role - and because workers in

the area's many sweatshops would be too scared of victimisation to use the same "service" as their bosses. TUSU instead moved to new premises, and started the Colin Roach Centre, so named to reflect its commitment to helping all workers, including those from the area's large black community. (Colin Roach was a local black youth who died of shotgun wounds in suspicious circumstances in Stoke Newington Police Station in 1983.) The aim is to carry on TUSU's work with workers wanting to organise and fight their bosses. Unofficially, TUSU's principled position of supporting all workers in dispute, including those from outside Hackney, or who happened to work for, or were funded by the Labour council, is what the council, and the Trades' Council, want to destroy.

Like many Trades' Councils, Hackney's is moribund. This situation has been fostered by a clique of Stalinists and supporters of the left-wing journal Labour Briefing to turn it into

an instrument of their own private agenda. Top of that agenda is persecuting TUSU. They include Keith Veness, Tony Cordell and Mickey Dunn, all officials of the UNISON No3 Branch, formerly NUPE Officers' Branch; Derek Cox, Peter Shields of the General Print & Media Union, both of the CPB (which includes UNISON No1 Branch Secretary and NALGO NEC member Ivan Beavis among its local membership). Veness is a political associate of Labour MP Jeremy Corbyn, and his "union branch" is a haven for scabs, racists and others who want the benefits of trades union membership without the obligations. It has little organisation, and exists to pay the political levy to the Labour Party and to give its officials a power base.

The court action threatened is over £2,000 left in TUSU's account when it was shut down. This has neither been pocketed by the workers, as will doubtless be insinuated, nor taken as redundancy, but it is intended to use it to carry on TUSU'S work through the Colin Roach Centre. This principled stand is in stark contrast to the Trades' Council's action in sending an expensive

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UNISON

UNISON

The Union we've all been waiting for?

Recent months have seen the creation of a new "super" union for public service workers - UNISON. You will, no doubt, have seen the posters, banners, balloons, badges and assorted stickers proclaiming it as "the union we've all been waiting for". The reality is very different however.

All Unison is, and can ever hope to be, is a bigger, more cumbersome, version of the old public service unions - NALGO, NUPE and COHSE. It will still include many managers within it's ranks, who will sit back and argue for the implementation of cuts - in services, in our wages and in conditions. In fact, as NUPE often organized among the "unskilled" workers, the range will be even wider as cleaners will find themselves in the same union as Principal Officers who get paid salaries beyond their dreams. Some workers who left NALGO to join NUPE will now find themselves back with their bosses, as some NALGO members will be dismayed to be back in the same union as scabs who joined NUPE Officers' branches.

Unison has followed the recent trend in the trades union movement of mergers as a way of off-setting declining union membership. These unions are not becoming Industrial Unions as is sometimes claimed, uniting all workers in each industry, but General Unions including many disparate groups of workers in their ranks. Each one is like a mini-TUC, and they are often in direct competition with each other for members.

The problem is that these new unions offer us nothing that the old ones didn't. They are continuing down the road of compromise and "modernization" that has seen defeat after defeat for workers in this country. They have set up their structures to ensure that workplace militancy is defused and contained so as not to upset the even-

tual return of a Labour government sold on "free market" capitalism. The only thing they have on offer is "members' services" - the cheap holidays in other peoples' misery, insurance and mortgages. Any talk of industrial action or organization comes a very poor second.

Many ordinary union members are sick of this. They are frustrated with the weakness and the unwillingness to fight back but can see no viable alternative. The left in the unions are again talking of Rank and File groups, but these are notorious for springing up during disputes only to fade away again after the enthusiasm has died down. They are a convenient umbrella devoid of political outlook save for opposition to the union leadership and calls for more militant action. Winning a dispute is often secondary to the membership trawls of the various left factions.

Broad left coalitions, built up outside disputes on sinking political differences temporarily in the hope of electing a more militant leadership in the union, have no more coherent political outlook, being based on the absence of divisive political content to maximize

votes. Like the Rank and Files, they are based of fighting for very limited objectives within the existing union structures, which are designed to defeat such efforts. Even if a more left-wing union leadership was elected, it would still be committed to the election of a Labour government, and would subordinate its actions to that goal. All the far left groups behind Broad Lefts and Rank and Files see such an election as a vital step for their own growth.

WE ARE DIFFERENT

The Public Service Workers' Network rejects these approaches entirely. What we are advocating is not new, it is revolutionary. We see the replacement of the present reformist unions with militant fighting organizations with a class outlook as vital. These would be genuine, new Industrial Unions with an overtly political (but not party-affiliated) as well as economic outlook. They would be anti-capitalist and seek to bring about change in society, not through the dead-end of parliamentarism, but through direct action for workers' control of society.



The Three Stooges - united in Compromise