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**PUBLIC SERVICE WORKERS'**

# **NETWORK**

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**FREE**

*Read: Direct Action  
PO BOX 29 SWPDO  
MANCHESTER  
M15 5HW*

## **ASSUME NOTHING!**

**If you work in Local Government, or in part of the voluntary/private sector where your pay and conditions are determined by Local Government negotiations, then you need to know the truth about Single Status.**

There are no more "manual" and "white collar" workers with different pay and conditions. UNISON, which dominates union representation in this sector, claimed a victory for the lowest-paid (manual) workers. Job Evaluation Schemes will determine whether pay and conditions will be harmonised to the benefit of workers or will leave us worse off than before. These have to be negotiated locally.

The national scheme is the best of the available models, allowing for union involvement at each stage of the process, like the old Manual scheme. The bosses are keen on exploiting the implementation of Single Status to attack pay, conditions and representation. They are likely to go for something more like their old Whitley Council's scheme, applied to white collar workers, which allows unions less of a say.

Manual workers on overtime and bonus schemes run the risk of losing out from the move to salaried pay. Weekend working and unsocial hours without enhanced pay rates is another likely move. This will be justified on grounds of "best value".

We have to put pressure on bosses to adopt the National Scheme, and then work hard to end low pay and ensure no-one loses out in Job Evaluation. In the context of a frozen overall wage-bill we have to stop the bosses making the comparatively better-paid pay for any improvement for the lowest-paid.

### **In harmony with the bosses**

The bosses have already used Single Status to cut down on union representation. This has continued the process started by the merger of NALGO and NUPE, which was designed to make recognising UNISON attractive to bosses in the private sector. Planned single union deals meant fewer committees, less facility time, fewer stewards to oppose management - and a better chance of "bloodless" recognition.

Single Status means more local bargaining, at the same time as attacking organisation and representation. Cynics among us reckon this is what UNISON wants - passive, check-off membership with less pesky stewards. To get anything out of Single Status, and to prevent anyone losing out, we must organise, and be prepared to fight.

### **UNISON WITCHHUNT**

Time and again officials have attacked activists who oppose cuts, or support the Socialist Workers' Party or the Campaign for a Fighting, Democratic UNISON.

The abandonment of the Hillingdon Hospital strikers on legal advice that they could win no more compensation at Industrial Tribunal shows what UNISON is - a business.

The witchhunt aims to stop resistance to Blair's Tory agenda. The CFDU is attacked because it understands that Labour won't become a government for the workers with pressure from below.

PSWN goes further than CFDU's demands for the election of full-time officials (on a worker's wage), and control by the membership to limited tenure and recallability in office.

UNISON will inevitably kick out any real rank and file movement. If that leads to a union based on solidarity and direct democracy we'd welcome it, but for now we don't advocate a split - other unions would strangle it.

Networks of solidarity between and across workplaces, industries and areas must be prepared for any new union to survive. To do this we must focus on workplace organisation and solidarity, not elections and committees.



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## **PAY CUTS FOR CARE WORKERS**

**Pay levels for care workers are low, and getting lower every year. Pay levels won't improve in the near future unless care workers take strike action.**

We help the most vulnerable and disadvantaged people in society with their basic needs. For this most valuable of all jobs we are paid a pittance. Care assistants are typically paid between £3.70 and £3.80 an hour, and get as little as £1.35 in some homes, according to a survey carried out by Pay and Workforce Research.

Most care workers are women, and this has a lot to do with these lousy rates of pay. We may have a government that pays lipservice to sex equality, but don't expect anything more than the same old sex discrimination in pay.

Not only is pay for care workers low, but every year its getting lower. While prices go up by 3.5% or 4% a year, our pay only goes up by 2.5% or 3%. This means that pay is being cut in real terms - the wages of care workers are losing their value compared to prices.

UNISON, the union that is meant to represent us, is doing nothing about the situation. In 1997 they told us that if we all accepted increases below the rate of inflation this would pay for a better rise for the lowest-paid. What did the lowest-

paid get? - 4.7%. This hardly even kept pace with inflation. And what did they get this April? - 3% - another cut in real terms.

The government tells us that we all have to accept pay cuts for the good of the economy. Are Tony Blair's cronies in big business taking pay cuts for the good of the economy? Are they hell! The typical pay rise of one of the top 225 "earners" in British industry was 14.6%. Why should carers be getting poorer and poorer year after year while rich parasites see their incomes soar?

### **Action or poverty?**

Care workers often do not want to strike because of the suffering this may cause to those they care for. Well, striking isn't something any of us are likely to take pleasure in, but what's the alternative? Care workers in Tameside have been out on strike since the Summer after management cut their pay from £4.50 to £3.75 an hour. Care workers in Leicester are striking over new contracts which cut their pay and conditions. Meanwhile, care workers in Essex and Bedfordshire are considering action against privatization.

PSWN is a network of workers in private, voluntary sector, health authority and local government service jobs. Our aim is to link like-minded people who believe in effective workplace organisation independent of the corporate unions and direct action to improve our lot. Contact PSWN National Secretary for info. We are part of the Solidarity Federation, whose Aims and Principles are available on request.

PSWN National Secretary  
&  
Manchester SF-IWA  
PO BOX 29, SW PDO  
MANCHESTER M15 5HW  
(0161) 232 7889

North & East London SF-IWA  
PO BOX 1681 LONDON N8 7LE  
(0181) 374 5027

Norfolk & Norwich SF-IWA  
Room 13, Muspole Workshops  
Muspole Street  
NORWICH NR3 1 DJ  
(01603) 611072

Red & Black Club/SF-IWA  
PO BOX 17773 LONDON SE8 4WX  
(0171) 358 1854

Sheffield SF-IWA  
PO BOX 1095  
SHEFFIELD S2 4YR

South Herts SF-IWA  
PO BOX 493  
ST ALBANS AL1 5TW

West Midlands SF-IWA  
PO BOX 6705  
REDDITCH B97 6SQ

There is no point calling on UNISON's national leadership to organise a national pay strike because they will not do it! UNISON General Secretary Rodney Bickerstaffe is just sitting on his backside waiting for Tony Blair to give him a seat in the House of Lords.

But this does not mean that national action cannot start locally. Care workers in Essex are already making links with the striking workers in Tameside. National links must be made by workers ourselves - union officials will do nothing. The only alternative is poverty.

**PUBLIC SERVICE WORKERS' NETWORK/SOLIDARITY FEDERATION-IWA**