

# Socialist Appeal

## Sorry Darling; No Pay Restraint here

PUBLIC SECTOR pay is big news this summer. In fact contrary to what the weather forecasters might tell you, it could be a decidedly warm one. It doesn't take a lot to work out why either. We are being made to pay for the New Labour meltdown. Pay restraint is intimately tied into the government's finances and that means dinner ladies and civil servants footing the bill not only for the ongoing occupation of Iraq and Afghanistan but also the black hole in public spending courtesy of the ex board members of Northern Rock. Alistair Darling's plea that the need to keep inflation under control "applies to each and every one of us" will ring hollow in the ears of the civil servants and other workers on the minimum wage or a marginally better pittance.

### **UNISON Council Workers vote to fight pay cuts**

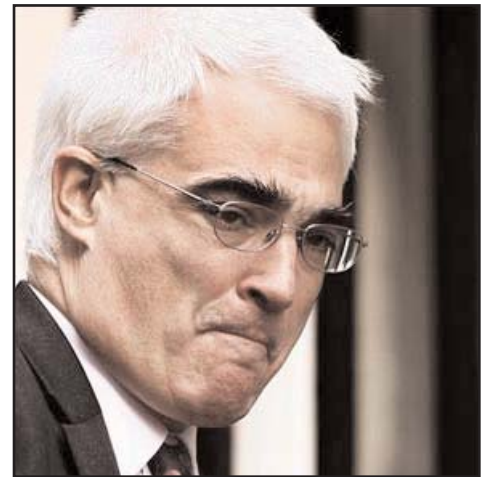
The 55% vote in favour of strike action is a clear rejection of Gordon Brown's pay restraint and reflects the impact that the economic crisis is having on thousands of UNISON members. Yet the outcome of this ballot wasn't a racing certainty by any means. It took place in the teeth of lukewarm support from the national union, outright opposition from the likes of the North West Region "loyalists" and despite the fact that the GMB decided to announce the day the ballot commenced that their local government members had indicated that they would accept. So in fact the 55% rejection of the 2.45% offer represents UNISON members sticking their heels in.

### **Backed into a corner**

We have explained over the past few months that UNISON members were increasingly being backed into a corner as a result of rising fuel and food costs: "The effects of this debacle are being felt throughout the country in hospitals, schools and offices delivering essential services to the sick, the young and the old. The camel's back is bending under the weight, sooner or later it'll snap. Maybe over pay, maybe over cuts, it depends on events". Socialist Appeal UNISON Special June 2008

### **Cuts, privatisations and redundancies**

However, many members don't see pay as the biggest issue. In large sections of the health service and in local government the issue of cuts, privatisation and the crisis in NHS funding means that people are frightened for their jobs. In that situation pay isn't very high up the agenda. But it's two sides of the same coin. Pay restraint, cuts and redundancies are all part of the same package. When the health ballot in UNISON went down it was on the basis of a 17% turn out. A lot of workers had bigger fish to fry. Given that, in many workplaces the mood has begun to harden. The noises coming out of Mabledon Place also reflect the pressure they are under. It's no surprise that UNISON delegate conference voted to consider taking action over mileage allowances and likewise the



possibility of re-opening the negotiations over the Health pay deal reflects the pressure building up. This also importantly, reflects the pressure that has grown within health recently following the decision of UNITE members in the health service to reject the offer. In similar vein Paul Kenny of the GMB has talked of a mutinous mood and the GMB have even voted to stop supporting anti union MPs. Now the PCS have decided to go ahead with a ballot.

### **We've all had enough of pay restraint**

In the public sector all sections are affected by Gordon's pay restraint policy. Even OFSTED are taking action! It has to be an unfavourable situation for a co-ordinated public sector pay campaign. But, there is a great deal of combined and unequal development going on across the Public Sector unions. Unfortunately however, the emphasis is on the

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"uneven" rather than the "combined". Some union leaders have been verbally very supportive of the campaign against pay restraint, but on the other hand other groups have been willing to "hold the line". This is particularly the case in respect of the UNISON health leadership whose dominant faction was in favour of accepting the pay deal without even holding a ballot.

Coordinated action needs clear leadership and maximum unity. The bosses

want to divide the movement and play off one group against another - hence the sweeteners in the health deal. The unions need an intransigent class position, fight for the full claim in every case. Table thumping and radical noises from the leadership are one thing, but getting the various (often competing) bureaucracies to turn words into action is a completely different kettle of fish. Branches and activists across the public sector should be putting pressure on

their respective leaderships to maximise the effect of the campaigns and coordinate the action wherever possible. This is perhaps the best opportunity that we've had to combat the New Labour pay restraint policy. The mood among the members is hardening and given the political and economic backdrop to all this there is no reason why we can't win. We need maximum unity and to paraphrase Paul Kenny a Public Sector Pay Mutiny.

## Socialist Appeal Stands for:

**For a socialist programme to solve the problems of working people.** Labour must break with big business and Tory economic policies.

**A national minimum wage of at least two-thirds of the average wage.** £8.00 an hour as a step toward this goal, with no exemptions.

**Full employment!** No redundancies. The right to a job or decent benefits. For a 32 hour week without loss of pay. No compulsory overtime. For voluntary retirement at 55 with a decent full pension for all.

**No more sell offs.** Reverse the Tories privatisation scandal. Renationalise all the privatised industries and utilities under democratic workers control and management. No compensation for the fat cats, only those in genuine need.

**The repeal of all Tory anti-union laws.** Full employment rights for all from day one. For the right to strike, the right to union representation and collective bargaining.

Election of all trade union officials with the right of recall. No official to receive more than the wage of a skilled worker.

**Action to protect our environment.** Only public ownership of the land, and major industries, petro-chemical enterprises, food companies, energy and transport, can form the basis of a genuine socialist approach to the environment.

**A fully funded and fully comprehensive education system under local democratic control.** Keep big business out of our schools and colleges. Free access for all to further and higher education. Scrap tuition fees. No to student loans. For a living grant for all over 16 in education or training.

**The outlawing of all forms of discrimination.** Equal pay for equal work. Invest in quality childcare facilities available to all. Scrap all racist immigration and asylum controls. Abolish the Criminal Justice Act.

**The reversal of the Tories' cuts in the health service.** Abolish private health care. For a National Health Service, free to all at the point of need, based on the nationalisation of the big drug companies that squeeze their profits out of the health of working people.

**Trade unions must reclaim the Labour Party!** Fight for Party democracy and socialist policies. For workers' MPs on workers' wages.

**The abolition of the monarchy and the House of Lords.** Full economic powers for the Scottish Parliament and the Welsh Assembly, enabling them to introduce socialist measures in the interests of working people.

**No to sectarianism.** For a Socialist United Ireland linked by a voluntary federation to a Socialist Britain.

**Break with the anarchy of the capitalist free market.** Labour to immediately take over the "commanding heights of the economy." Nationalise the big monopolies, banks and financial institutions that dominate our lives. Compensation to be paid only on the basis of need. All nationalised enterprises to be run under workers control and management and integrated through a democratic socialist plan of production.

**Socialist internationalism.** No to the bosses European Union. Yes to a socialist united states of Europe, as part of a world socialist federation.

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