

Welcome to the first issue of *Nottingham Trade Union Solidarity*. The aim of this bulletin is to spread information about current disputes, how they're being fought and to build practical solidarity between unions. For some time now, the labour movement has been reeling from an employers' offensive. Throughout industry and the public services, workers are coming under renewed attack. Those of us who produce and support this bulletin think it's about time the trade union movement got together to resist these moves and offer alternative solutions.

From the attacks on public service pensions, privatisation in health and education and the appalling treatment of workers at Gate Gourmet and beyond, there is plenty of evidence that solidarity is desperately needed. Here we aim to build this solidarity and demonstrate just what is possible when we work together.

If you want to support us, make a comment or get more copies of this bulletin contact :
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Firefighters won't shift!

Members of the FBU in Nottingham currently face attacks on two fronts. On a national level there's the attempt to force firefighters everywhere to perform duties normally carried out by paramedics and locally the Fire Authority wants to transfer to a more intensive shift pattern. *Dave Green (FBU EC member, personal capacity)* outlines what's at stake.

Following on from the outcome of national arbitration, there have been negotiations locally over several proposals on shift patterns. These vary from the Brigades Management insisting on a three-shift system, to a proposal from the FBU based around a two-shift system. The FBU proposal meets all the requirements of the Fire Authorities local Fire Cover plan and at no extra cost. The Brigades proposal will cost the Fire Authority around £1.5m to implement (with the various 'incentives' being offered). The position of the Brigade Committee was that Officials should continue to negotiate with the Brigade Management

but that the current management proposal was totally unacceptable.

The response from the Brigade Management has been to send out a letter to all FBU members in Notts that if no collective agreement is reached by January 13th then the Fire Authority will issue 90-day notices of termination of contract, effectively sacking the entire workforce. The Authorities intention being that all employees sign their new contract of employment by 13th April or they will be dismissed from the service.

New Low

This ultimatum, on the back of a policy that the Fire Authority will now deduct 10% of our members pay for refusing to undertake 'co-responding' duties, takes us to a new low in the field of industrial relations within the British Fire Service. The 'co-responding duties' are those normally carried out by trained paramedics. In September, Nottinghamshire fire crews voted 4 to 1 to refuse to allow the imposition of ambulance duties on to their colleagues at Retford fire station, in the north of the county. These ambulance duties would require fire crews to be dispatched to medical emergencies. The FBU has a longstanding policy of refusing to attend medical incidents. This would provide a third-class service to the public who require trained paramedics for such medical emergencies – not firefighters.

Dangerous Games

Matt Wrack, General Secretary of the Fire Brigades Union (FBU) said, "This is a dangerous and badly thought out proposal. Firefighters do not have the necessary training to be sent to ambulance calls. This is playing dangerous games with people's lives. If there is a problem with ambulance provision in Nottinghamshire then that should be addressed but this proposal is just an attempt to solve a problem on the cheap."

Ian Young, FBU Official in Notts said, "As firefighters we have enormous respect for the skills and training of paramedics. People making calls to the ambulance service expect to see an ambulance with paramedics.

This scheme means that the first people they see are likely to be firefighters – with just basic first aid training."

This bullying style of management has no place in this so-called 'modern Fire Service', and we've urged Fire Authority members to fully engage with the FBU in order to secure an agreed outcome. Imposition without agreement can only result in long term industrial strife from which neither the public nor the service will benefit, particularly when there are already identified viable solutions.

Industrial Conflict

Unfortunately the only conclusion that can be drawn from this concerted attack on Firefighters is that senior management and the Fire Authority want all out industrial conflict. Whilst FBU members will be asking their Officials to do all they can to negotiate a satisfactory outcome to these matters, patience is wearing thin. Lives are being put at stake by local and national politicians who have not forgiven the FBU for the 2002/03 strikes. They are prepared to put the Fire Service to the sword for total industrial supremacy over the workforce.

FBU Members in Nottinghamshire (Firefighters and Control Staff) are under attack; please raise the issue at your branch and workplace. If you require any further information or a speaker than please contact 06ec@fbu.org.uk

Gate Gourmet Workers Still Locked Out

Despite talk of a settlement, workers at Gate Gourmet remain locked out. BA may not renew it's catering contract with the company and the fate of those who fought to save their jobs remains unclear. The picket lines are still in place and well attended — the need for solidarity is as great as ever. Send messages of support and donations to **Gate Gourmet Hardship Fund, c/o Mr E McDermott, Regional Secretary TGWU, 218 Green Lanes, London N4 2HB** and visit sackedbygategourmet.org.uk for the latest news on the dispute.

The Education Offensive

Over the last few months the Government has unleashed a series of attacks on both the pay and conditions of teachers and upon the very future of comprehensive education. By early next year, each school head will have to carry out an assessment of the current 'Management Allowance' (MA) allocation given to teachers and decide whether or not the responsibilities they carry can be transferred to a new, slimmed-down 'Teaching and Learning Responsibilities' (TLR) scale. So people who have taught for decades and gradually accrued MAs now face the prospect of not just a forensic audit of their skills but a substantial pay-cut if no transfer to TLRs is possible. Many teachers remain unaware of what faces them, and those with some idea of what's at stake don't like it one bit. We've yet to see in what way and how many teachers will be detrimentally affected by the transfer but teachers have recently shown willingness to take industrial action over pensions and will no doubt respond in a similar way if the outcomes are unsatisfactory.

Education Vultures

The Government has recently announced the icing on the cake of its plan to 'reform' education. Not happy with selling just small numbers of schools to private companies in the form of 'City Academies', Blair wants to give these vultures the chance to pick the flesh off any school. In Nottingham we face the prospect of three more 'Academy' schools in the short-term and with the new policy announcement it's likely more of our schools will be handed over.

These moves don't just represent an all-out attack on the idea of secular, inclusive education but have very real implications for the pay and conditions of teachers. Academies don't recognise trade unions and employ each member of staff on an individual basis. They can ask teachers to carry out non-teaching duties and require them to work evenings and weekends. This represents a complete deregulation of the workforce and attacks the professional status of teachers. Already unqualified and underpaid staff are expected to carry out teaching duties in many schools—this is a trend that looks set to continue.

The NUT is campaigning with other unions and parents to stop the three new academies and sees these moves as part of a wider agenda of privatisation in the public services. **For more information or to get involved in the campaign phone 07779328418.**

Tom Unterrainer, Nottm City NUT (pc)

Reject this divisive deal!

Sir Digby Jones, the director general of the CBI, described the deal on public sector pensions as "a bad deal for the taxpayer". He continued, "the government has capitulated to the threat of public sector strikes". Coming from the head of British Industry, trade unionists might be fooled into thinking the pensions deal was a big victory for public sector workers. Nothing could be further from the truth. Jones is crying crocodile tears over a sum of public money somewhat short of the thirty pieces of silver accepted by Judas Iscariot.

This will prove to be a deal business can live with. Alan Johnson has revealed just how pyrrhic this 'victory' is. "It means all new public sector workers will now have a pension age of 65, not 60, matching the norm in the private sector. Turnover of staff guarantees that this change quickly works its way through the system and ensures that we deliver the £13bn savings to the taxpayer."

New Labour are playing the long game. The threat of industrial action forced them to make limited concessions to the existing workforce. But by dividing workers into different sectors, and within each sector creating two tiers of workers, they hope to avoid making the concessions of principle that actual industrial action could force on them.

Union leaders appear to be making New Labour's task easier. Without consulting members or even their Executives, they have sold out the principle they said they were fighting for—the right of workers to retire on a decent pension at an age young enough to enjoy it—with the safeguard that those they are selling out are not yet in the workforce, and so are ill-placed to object. To describe this as a 'victory' is to play fast and loose with the English language. We have an agreement that leaves no existing worker with an improvement in their pension and all new workers with a significant reduction.

In 30 to 40 years time when current workers in the public sector have retired the crux of what the unions have agreed will remain in place. All public sector workers will have to retire at 65 or pay significantly more contributions and/or accept lower pensions to retire at 60.

Is this the victory we gained through calling off the action immediately prior to a General Election? This is not a victory but a cheapskate manoeuvre by both the government and trade union leadership. This deal divides new workers from those already in the pension scheme; and local

government and fire service workers from the rest of the public services.

We should not let the pensions of new workers (including some in the workforce already, though not in the pension scheme, such as student nurses), and of local government and fire service workers, be cut without a fight.

Given the state of morale in the trade union movement and given the eagerness of the trade union leaders to roll over and die in return for the government's meagre concessions, it will not be easy to generate such a fight. However, we can start at grass roots level with the public sector unions urging the membership to reject this divisive deal. We need to build pressure on union executives so that they go back to the government demanding the right to retirement at 60 with no loss of pension for all public sector workers.

Liam Conway, Central Notts NUT (pc)

What Next?

We hope you've found this modest first edition of *Nottingham Trade Union Solidarity* useful and that you'll make copies and distribute them as widely as possible. We want as many union branches as possible to receive copies, discuss the issues at stake and build practical solidarity. To make this easier we ask you to pass a motion at your branch supporting the bulletin and calling for greater cooperation between unions locally. The NUT in Nottingham recently passed a motion on 'Trade Union Solidarity and Privatisation' that resolved to build solidarity with the sacked Gate Gourmet workers, work with other unions to halt privatisation in the public services and to support efforts to coordinate this work. We ask you to propose a similar motion to your branch.

As well as material support and solidarity, we want your articles, views and comments on any issue relating to trade unionists in Nottingham. Try to keep all contributions as short as possible and always include either contact information or suggestions for action and organising.

For more information, help and advice or to contribute to Nottingham Trade Union Solidarity contact us at

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To join the Nottingham Trade Union Solidarity e-list, contact

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