

We Want Information

A small group of us have started this bulletin to spread information about the council's plans and resistance to them. At present, there is often very little communication between members of different unions working in the same building let alone between people in different parts of the council or between council workers and other people affected by the council's schemes such as tenants, squatters, nursery users etc. We want to try and break down these divisions as a first step towards uniting in action against the council's attacks.

We don't think that the Unions can be relied upon any more than management to tell us what's really going on. Take the engineers' strike- the Unions got them to call off their pickets of the Town Hall promising that they would get support from their members, yet over a week later most union members still hadn't been informed what was going on. In that time we produced two leaflets about the strike, not to mention some tasteful green anti-cuts stickers!

We would like you to send us any information you have about what the council's up to and how people are fighting back (scandal and gossip will also be welcome!). Everybody should take responsibility for communicating what's going on, whether by just phoning up friends around the council or by producing their own leaflets. For instance, some people in social services gave out their own leaflet about the effects of the cuts on child abuse, during the recent one day NALGO strike.

We don't want to set up an "alternative union" or a pressure group to get the unions to do things for us, nor do we want to start a group to provide fodder to be recruited by political parties. We are interested in hearing from people who like us want to organize effective action against the cuts such as strikes and occupations.

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SUPPORT THE ENGINEERS

70 motor mechanics have been on strike since they were locked out of their workplaces- Lambeth Council's vehicle depots- on the 20th January. The strikers, who are members of the Amalgamated Engineering Union, have several main grievances:

CONSOLIDATED WAGE

The engineers' basic pay is poor- only their bonus makes it fairly O.K., and if they're off sick they don't get their bonus. For some time they have been fighting for a consolidated wage, where the bonus is included in the basic pay. Last year, when the council agreed to reduce the working week from 39 hours to 35, they said that if productivity improved during a 6 month trial period they would introduce the consolidated wage. But when this period was up, on November 1st, the council went back on this promise, even though they themselves had to admit that productivity had gone up by at least 28%. The strikers are worried that as the cuts take effect their bonus will be hit, and are demanding a consolidated wage now.

FLEXIBILITY

Although their contracts state that they are employed as motor mechanics, in the past the workers have agreed to do some extra duties in return for a £6 a week 'flexibility payment'. This amount was supposed to be increased annually to keep up with inflation, but has in fact stayed the same. In negotiations since the strike started the council has agreed to pay out the flexibility money owed.

STAFFING LEVELS

Staffing at the Shakespeare Road depot, where the strike started, is 15% below complement. The dispute began when the engineers withdrew from the flexibility agreement and refused to cover a vacant post by doing cleaning work. The bosses responded by sending them home without pay, and faced with this lock out an indefinite strike was called. The strikers are demanding that the vacancy for a cleaner at Shakespeare Road is filled.

ALL OUT AGAINST THE CUTS

At first glance this might seem to be a sectional dispute of little relevance to everybody else, but in fact this strike is all about the cuts. The engineers have been locked out for refusing to cover for a vacant post (i.e. do somebody else's job), something that plenty of other council workers frequently do. And Cllr. Davies, chair of public services, has said that the council will only grant a consolidated wage if the strikers agree to accept planned cuts at the depots.

Management have been planning this dispute for some time- weeks ago a leading councillor was heard to say that they were heading for a showdown with the engineers. They have threatened to bring in private contractors, showing that Labour bosses are just as bad as the Tories when it comes to strikebreaking. What they are doing is testing the water- if they can get away with forcing a small group of workers to accept the cuts they will move on to use similar tactics against the rest of us. That is why it is in every council worker's interest to support the engineers. A victory in this strike will be a victory for everybody facing the cuts.

The engineers are every bit as determined as the council; some of them have said that they would rather be sacked than go back to work on the bosses' terms. They have had some support from other workers- on Thursday 21st many people refused to cross their picket lines outside the Town Hall and Housing, and social services workers have respected picket lines at the depots. Vehicles such as Post Office vans and BP tankers have also been turned away. To bring this strike to a speedy and successful conclusion though a lot more active support is needed.

- don't cross picket lines.
- join the pickets at the depots in Shakespeare Road and Kennington Lane.
- collect money for the strikers (AEU strike fund, c/o Joint Trade Union Office, 17 Porden Road, SW2)

MOBILISE FOR ALL OUT STRIKE ACTION IN SUPPORT OF THE ENGINEERS AND AGAINST THE CUTS:

Squatters Confront Bellos

On Friday 29th Jan. a group of squatters occupied the plush office of our beloved leader, Linda Bellos to protest against the council's policy of evicting squatters. Bellos wasn't very pleased and she was even more pissed off when the police turned up to chuck out her uninvited guests- when they kicked the door open she was standing behind it and took the full force of it. Shame!

The council make out that squatters take away homes from homeless people, but squatters are homeless people who have taken things into their hands by moving into empty places. The reason that housing waiting lists are so long is not squatting but the fact that

thousands of buildings are left empty by councils and private landlords, and that the rich have multiple homes while others live in cardboard boxes.

Linda Bellos has threatened to clamp down even more on squatting- we can help make sure that this doesn't happen. Council workers must demand that instead of wasting money carrying out evictions cash should be spent on making empty flats and houses fit to live in. In the mean time evictions can be sabotaged by losing the relevant paperwork and by tipping off squatters in advance (a note to Brixton Squatters Aid, 121 Railton Road, should do the trick).

Councillors have had their chips

The last council "Policy and Resources Committee" meeting, on Jan. 18th, was a riot! As the councillors rubber-stamped the latest cuts package council workers and others affected by the cuts threw eggs and chips at them and set off a fire alarm. Unfortunately some NALGO hacks tried to spoil the party by ordering people blocking a door and refusing to let a councillor into the Town Hall to get out of the way. We told them where to go. There is another important P&R meeting on Feb 29th. Let's make this another night to remember!

NALGO backs down

The last NALGO branch meeting voted to negotiate a redeployment scheme in return for council guarantees that there will be no compulsory redundancies, no victimisation etc. Believing in council guarantees is about as sensible as believing in Santa Claus- at the moment the council is tearing up agreements left, right and centre. Negotiations won't get us anywhere, our only guarantee is ourselves and our determination to fight every attack the council bosses launch against us.

REDEPLOYMENT=UNEMPLOYMENT

The redeployment scheme is a smokescreen for job losses, with people facing the sack for refusing to do any old job the council wants them to do. Besides redeployment might soon be forgotten as an even more serious threat comes into view: compulsory redundancies. The council's "Plan 5" admits that these are on the cards (as well as discussing the possibility of future wage cuts!). At least 100 90-day redundancy notices are ready to be sent out. Anyone who thinks that they are going to be redeployed to a better job, or even that the council is going to grant decent schemes for early retirement or voluntary redundancy is living in cloud cuckoo land. This time our backs are to the wall- the choice facing many of us is to fight or face the dole queue.

WE CAN WIN

Some people say that there's no point in fighting because the council hasn't got any money, but they're wrong. Nurses are in a similar situation, employed by almost bankrupt health authorities, yet they realize that by taking national action they can force the government to cough up more money. If we link up our struggle with other people facing cuts such as councilworkers in other boroughs and hospital workers, we can all benefit from forcing the state into retreat.

NEVER MIND THE BALLOTS

The best time to fight is now alongside the striking engineers. Whatever happens there should be no compromise with redeployment or redundancy schemes. If we are asked to sign any agreements we should just tear them up; Camden council sent out 5500 letters asking people to agree to redeployment, only 74 came back! As soon as management tries to introduce redeployment or redundancies in any part of the council people should walk out. Instead of waiting for a ballot they should then spread the strike themselves by picketing other council buildings. Union divisions must be ignored- members of all unions and of none should be persuaded to join the strike. Picketing needn't be confined to standing outside buildings either- groups of strikers could go inside to get people out. On Jan. 18th. a group of pickets managed to close down a library by doing this during the NALGO strike.

To show that we mean business we should disrupt council meetings and occupy strategic offices. We will also need to organize mass meetings of all strikers to discuss tactics. The fight ahead certainly isn't going to be easy but the alternative is the complete decimation of council jobs and services.

If you want more copies of this bulletin please get in touch. Alternatively make your own copies and pass them on.