WITH rank and file health workers throughout the country barracking them for their inaction, and with Norman Fowler meering at their every request for arbitration, the union leaders in the TUC Health Service Committee have been forced to step up their action.

They have recommended all-out indefinite strike action. After seven months of using every trick in the book to avoid this call, they have now decided that the time has come. But the whole credit for this decision being taken lies with the thousands who have come out in the Days of Action. Their determination has forced the leaders to act.

However, even with Thatcher denouncing health workers as “ill-motivated trade unionists”, and declaring that she will stand firm, the TUC leaders are realising that the strategy of rank and file workers is proving in-effective. It offers an excellent opportunity for strike leaders to take stock of the present situation and organise to take the struggle forward. It must provide stewards and strikers with a really demo­ lishing lesson in the health workers’ struggle. It is a recipe for further demoralising delay. There is no doubt that Spanwick, who spoke of an all-out strike with “two months notice...to let the government think about it” will drag his feet on taking a decision. Those who vote against the rec­ ommendation will probably do the same.

This danger of delay also poses the danger of division as the union leaders fall out with each other over the timing of the action. Decisive measures are needed to speed up acceptance of the TUC’s recommendation, and action upon it. The campaign against health workers by the Tories’ spiteful propaganda machine - the press, radio and TV - will intensify. The Tories will aim to split the masses of health workers from the militants fighting for all out action. The union leaders have not exactly deluged the members with propa­ ganda arguing for all out action. They are unlikely to start a serious campaign now.

It is down to the militants to ensure that a decision for all-out, indefinite strike action is taken quickly. This can be done by a campaign of mass meetings of all health unions in which all the arguments can be put. Such meet­ ings must be informed democratic meetings. Stewards and Strike Committees must produce their own barrage of propaganda to counter the bosses’ lie machine.

The TUC Committee’s refusal to issue a clear call for action should serve as a warning. When a strike takes place they are likely to use it to negotiate a deal as quickly as possible, even if it falls well below the full claim.

An all-out indefinite strike needs to be organised so that it can win. It must be controlled by local democratic strike committees, which should elect delegates to a national strike committee. This body could serve as the authentic voice of the rank and file. It must be cross-union. It must have the power of veto over all deals negotiated by the TUC committee. It must fight for a majority of by delegates from all the unions to sit on the TUC committee.

Action by health workers must be linked to action by other workers. The other week water workers, health workers and British Telecom workers - all in the public sector - staged separate Days of Action. The Tories must be del­ igated in the face of such diversity.

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Confence must organise rank and file

The October 30th stewards con­ ference was the turning point in the health workers’ struggle. It is being held at a time when in­ creasing numbers of health wor­ kers are realising that the strategy of the TUC leaders is proving in­ effective. It offers an excellent opportunity for strike leaders to take stock of the present situation and organise to take the struggle forward. It must provide stewards and strikers with a really demo­ cratic forum, open to resolutions and speakers from all delegating bodies, within which to discuss the issues.

The conference should decide to launch a campaign to fight for all­ out indefinite strike action, with em­ ergency cover being decided upon by the local unions. This call for action can win the full claim.

The conference should come out to rank and file hospital workers throughout the country. This must

mean that strike committees produce regular bulletins putting the case for all­ out indefinite action. Regular mass and section meetings must be held to keep all health workers in touch with developments and give them all a voice in decisions. The strike committees must be opened to the activists from the picket lines. Only in this way can we build a base to launch all-out action. In order to co-ordinate such a campaign, conference should form a steering committee of delegates from strike committees and stewards com­ mittees. That steering committee should campaign to secure further affiliations from all strike and stew­ ards committees. It should initiate a campaign of pickets and resolutions meetings and bulletins to demand of our leaders that they organise all-out indefinite strike action.

The demonstrations in Glasgow and Birmingham showed that this call can win widespread support.

Unless we try to organise that sup­ port now the Trade Union leaders will drag the dispute on until large numbers of workers will have become demoralised and unable to resist a sell-out.

The steering committee should press for an immediate meeting with the TUC Health Services Committee. We should coordinate action in ev­ ery union to force the leaders to call us all out. We must make every effort to pressure the leaders to fight until we win. But should the leaders refuse to issue the call, and should they continue to dither then we must not give up and accept defeat. Out of this conference we must build a network of strike committees that can force the bureau­ ecrats to act, if possible, but which can organise decisive action itself if necessary.

by Ron Giles

The role of our union leaders

Lessons of the strike so far

Tory attacks on Public Sector

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Militants must learn lessons of strike

If the Tories are to be beaten in this struggle we need to learn the lessons of the dispute so far. There can be no doubt that health workers have shown their willingness to fight and to extend the action. But so far, we have not been strong enough to force the union to change course and call for decisive action to win the full claim.

It's not just local officials who have been dragging their feet. In many areas militant leaders have faced obstruction from their local officials as well. Take Sheffield for example. Ken Curran, NUPE full-time officer, has swung 180 degrees in this dispute. Knowing that he was remembered as a sell-out merchant after 1979, he promised last April that he would do everything the membership demanded this time.

Fine words? But, in practice Ken Curran has acted to demobilise effective action. He stopped the Rotteram strikers from spreading their indefinite strike to other areas and withdrew their strike pay. He isolated them and starved them back to work. Curran has not fought seriously to implement NUPE conference's call for an all-out indefinite strike. He and his South Yorkshire branchman, Sean Hilland, did not even mention it at a Yorkshire and Humberside meeting three days after the committee lost its argument on the picket and lobby of the health conference. He warned a hospital management meeting that if they took all-out strike action they could expect no support from him. So as for doing anything the members demanded!

In addition, Curran and Hilland, like many local officials have campaigned against the Sheffield strike. Like many local officials have campaigned against the Sheffield strike.

The barriers to their full involvement in the unions. The issues militancy or the call for a conference. militancy or the call for a conference. The success of that, and other days of action, was entirely due to the work of the local strike organisations. In Leices-

ter the Health Coordinating Committees must have maintained a tight grip on the dispute throughout. They have had no consultations with the strike committees who actually organised the action. They have ignored letters and resolutions expressing disquiet at the TUC strategy. If it had been left to them the dispute would have petered out long ago.

It is the rank and file organisations that have carried out the work of mobilising and extending the action. The call for a day of action on the 22nd of September was undoubtedly a result of rank and file pressure. The success of that, and other days of action, was entirely due to the work of the local strike organisations. In Lebanon.

OPEN THE UNIONS TO WORKERS

At the forefront of every march, picket and lobby of the health dispute have been thousands of women workers. All the major unions involved have massive numbers of women organised behind their banner. In the dispute they have done an effective and decisive role, well beyond the "normal" level of involvement of women in the unions.

The fact that in "normal" times women workers have been involved in nothing to do with the usual excuses that male union leaders spout. It is not because women are naturally passive or not interested in the union. It has everything to do with the fact that the union leaders have created a whole series of barriers in the union to women's involvement. Meetings outside of worktime, for example, cause enormous problems for women with kids to look after.

These barriers are reflected in the number of women stewards and officials within the key health unions. NUPE, which prides itself on its policy towards women has a terrible record. While in 1980 66% of its membership were women, only 27% of its stewards were women. Again, 1980 figures show that of the 125 Area Officers only 6 were female. COHSE has an even worse record. Three-quarters of its members are women, but there is only one woman National Officer.

In this strike women need to organise to redress the balance. The barriers to their full involvement in the unions must be broken down by a fight now to impose the norm of union meetings at the workplace and in works time.

Strong, democratic women's sections should be built in the unions. Women workers would have the right to caucus. This way women can organise their participation in the unions and not become ghettoised, away from the main action. The more affecting working class women's low pay determination, childcare problems etc. can be played firmly on the agendas of the unions.

The mobilisation of women in the dispute offers the chance to win these policies. Militants must ensure that they are taken up in every branch, district and stewards committee.

The tactics of the leadership threaten to disrupt the energy and organisation that have been built. In general the area by area rolling days of action had less support than the September 22nd day. Some militant have reacted to the TUC's feeble tactics by arguing against support for one day actions — saying that it must be all-out or nothing.

The most recent example of this has been the London ambulance workers who refused to support the regional day of action. This stand, taken by some stewards, in good faith, plays straight into the hands of the leadership, because it can present it as a decline in support for any action. At the present time the more support we can drum up for the one day actions and in the fight for commitment to all our strike action, the greater is the pressure on the TUC not to sell us out and to adopt a strategy that can win.

The fact that the one day actions have been a success, despite the problems that militants have faced in acquiring support for them, has increased the pressure on the TUC and is also a testimony to our argument that health workers are still prepared to fight.

That will to fight must be built on now to force the union leaders to the floor of the NEC and an all-out, indefinite strike. To make that strike possible our members have to put the lessons of the last months and organise to place the running of the dispute, not just to the stewards and rank and file health workers.

by Jane Bruton
WHY THE BUREAUCRATS BETRAY

MANY militants in the course of this long drawn out dispute have asked themselves why the officials are so set on avoiding effective or decisive action. Why, despite having Thatcher and Fowler repeatedly split in their faces, they were readier to fawn than to fight. Like the noble Duke of York they are very good at marches and parades, but not so hot when it comes to a real battle.

Revolutionary socialist criticism of union officials goes beyond criticism of individual officials and their failings. We see that the full time officials of the unions are a bureaucracy of what do we mean? Most people know about the effects of bureaucracy - the slow and cumbersome procedures, the red tape, the rudeness and contempt of branch officials who are engaged full time office enabled them to become something like officials to remain unchecked and unaccountable at the time when they were something like officials. In 1974, the Transport and General had 485 officials. These officials, supposedly the servants of the membership are, in fact, the masters of the unions. How has this come about? How has possession of full time office enabled them to restrict and narrow the democracy of the union to a largely ornamental extra?

In many unions the officials are not elected at all but are appointed. Even when they are elected, they are often elected for life. In NUPE, their term of office is often for life. In some unions, like the AUEW the officials are subject to re-election but the period (five or seven years) are long and allow the officials to remain unchecked and unaccountable. In the battles when they are actually making decisions against the interests of the rank and file. Certainly many national officials are subject to control by a lay executive or by a conference but, again, the insecurity or the infrequency of elections to these bodies and the fact that the "lay" delegates to these bodies have no system of control and winnings on the rank's stewards, convenors and branch officials who are engaged merely in the representation of the membership. All officials are subject to lay control but the periods the officials are appointed for are too long.

Beyond the very base of the union democracy is weak. Some unions, like the AUEW, do not base their branches in the workplace. Those who elect officials took place on a branch basis only between five and ten per cent of the membership voted. The "reform of postal ballot results in more members voting but it subjects them to the full pressure of the bosses' media in the home. There they are isolated from their fellow workers, from the discussion, argument and solidarity that is vital to real workers' democracy.

A crucial factor in the distance between full time officials and the membership is the wide difference in income and life style between them and their members. Generally, national officials are paid double or treble the average wage of their members. Obviously they are not directly spurred to struggle in the same way as the rank and file. They are subject to the same material pressures and as a result often do not understand the urgency of fighting the bosses in full. They will be more open to pressure from the bosses to negotiate a compromise.

The full democratisation of the union, the TUC demands justice for all health workers. * For joint shop stewards' committees in every major workplace, that regularly report to mass meetings held on workplace time and which publish a regular bulletin or newsletter. * For trade unions branches on a workplace basis, meeting in workplace time with no loss of pay. Only thus can full involvement of the members be achieved.

* All officials to be subject to regular (one or two year) election and recall by the election. They should receive the average wage of their members. * Union policy must be decided by the annual lay delegate conference, and these should elect an all-lay executive committee to whom the officials should be accountable.

In a dispute the achievement of maximum rank and file control is essential but the job does not end there. The situation today and the prospect for the coming years is one of vicious attacks by governments and employers. * In the battles that will take place the bureaucracy will work overtime to isolate militants from their base. They will attempt to turn the majority of members, generally left passive, against the militants.

In the first place those committed to fight the bureaucracy must organise themselves. The present minority of militants in each union should be linked into an organised minority within and between unions. This organisation can be the starting point for a mass rank and file movement. Such a movement must mobilise the majority against the bureaucracy by winning it to policies that can place the unions on a war footing.

This means transforming the unions. It means democratising them, dismissing the privileged and unaccountable officials. The movement must organise its membership through the struggle for militant socialist policies. We can do this around the following demands:

- Unisonise the whole workforce. For industrial unions - one union for
What is ‘Workers Power’?

Behind Fowler and Thatcher lies a system in crisis - Capitalism. It is a system that puts millions on the dole, seeks to drive down the wages of the desperately poorly paid ever lower, strived to drive back the gains made by workers - the health service, housing and public services. It is a system that seeks to divert attention from its crimes and to bolster its profits by bloody wars like that in the South Atlantic. Last, but by no means least, that under Thatcher and Reagan is arising for a war that would obliterate the greater part of human life. We want to destroy capitalism before it destroys us. We want a health service that, under Thatcher and Reagan is arising for a war that would obliterate the greater part of human life. We want to destroy capitalism before it destroys us.

The health strike has highlighted another aspect of the Tories' general attack on the working class - their attack on our organisations. While we are campaigning for support on our marches and pickets from other trade unionists, the Tories are starting to denounce our action as illegal. When the Fleet Street electricians took action in support of their leader, Sean Geraghty was whipped before a court of law and fined.

Sure enough the Tories have managed to establish a law, Prior's Employment Act, that makes basic trade union action illegal. What is more Tebbit plans to add to these attacks on our organisations. Their General Election programme indicated that priorities and standards of the NHS will be determined by the full cost of it. We are not asking for charity or sympathy, we are common action against the common enemy. The miners' pay claim, resistance to the steel closures, the water workers' claim, resistance to the privatisation of British Telecom, together with the health workers' claim itself all confront the Tories. To face the enemy separated from each other, we need a united approach, a united front approach, echoed by Spanswick and Lord Carrington "Or perhaps the miners' old enemy Heath? This approach, echoed by Spanwick and others who appeal to the Tories' "reason" is not the sort of leadership that the working class needs.

The strike committee, the delegations to fellow workers, solidarity actions, the increase in particular the gigantic organisation of the miners' strike, which is the working class' start to co-ordinate their action. The miners' strike becomes the starting point for a united front. By building support for an all-out indefinite strike by the health workers through local solidarity action committees, workers can begin to coordinate their action.

We need to match the Tories’ own determination. They are conscious fighters for the CBI, the City of London, the bankers and financiers, who milk the public services and nationalised industries through interest charges. We need a leadership that will fight for our rights. To appeal for a more, 'compassionate' replacement for Norman Fowler from the ranks of the Tories, as the Parliamentary Labour Party recently did, is a sick joke. Who does Michael Foot propose - Tebbit ? Biffen ? Foot propose - Tebbit ? Biffen ?