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PUBLIC SERVICE WORKERS'

NETWORK

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-Fighting the pay freeze.
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COMMUNITY CARE: *FIGHT THE CUTS*



Bosses and politicians tell us community care is going well, and that services are improving. If you weren't born yesterday, you'll know that this is a sick joke.
People are being thrown on to the streets, or left alone in their homes to fend for themselves, while services crumble around them. Workers face pay cuts, longer hours and atrocious working conditions.

The Government's Community Care Act introduced wholesale competition . Private companies - many profit-oriented - are rapidly buying up day centres, residential homes and other services. Care organisations now undercut each other, the aim being to pay the lowest wages, and to get away with providing as few staff as possible, working under the worst conditions. Alongside this, they echo the politicians' lie that everything is going well and that services are actually improving.

Charges for old people have shot up and now, for the first time, people with learning difficulties and mental health problems are being told that they have to pay for day or home care. The most needy and the people with the least money are increasingly being asked to pay for services that they can't afford.
Most community care workers are not organised in unions, and work in small demoralised workplaces, with no opportunity to get together like other workers. So far the bosses have been able to use this to walk all over us. The few remaining pockets of workplace organisation are being attacked, and shop stewards- or anyone else who speaks out- are being "de-recognised" and/or victimised by management. The existing unions provide us with no real protection and often disarm ordinary workers. Their strategy is to rely on European law and wait for a Labour government. Meanwhile they send us a glossy magazine once a month, offering us cheap insurance and holidays. This is an insult to workers who are on poverty level wages and daily fighting to keep our jobs and basic employment rights.

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EDITORIAL

Fighting the pay freeze?



After the predictable loss of UNISON's ballot on actually taking any industrial action to break last year's 1.5% public sector pay limit, workers in local government now face a pay freeze. The announcement of the freeze, during the last week of the UNISON ballot, spurred the union's leadership to action - they intended to "mobilise public opinion". In the April edition of UNISON magazine Local Government supplement they're going to "consult over pay bill freeze" (We're sure the Tories will be quaking over that!). Having waited months for the TUC to act, they're now going to "consult on a rolling programme of industrial action in response to the government's pay freeze".

Waiting for the next Labour Government

Being cynical, we see this for the membership-blaming exercise it is. What UNISON is really interested in is minimum wage legislation, something which also interests the Labour Party. Rodney Bickerstaffe was talking about it on TV in March, and although he suggested such legislation would be welcome from any government, this means *Wait For The Next Labour Government.* For those of us who've heard this kind of thing from NUPE Officers in the past as an excuse for not doing anything it all sounds horribly familiar.

Going nowhere

The real issue, of course, is the freeze in the overall wage bill imposed by the government, which (in case you didn't know) is Tory, and thinks there are far too many public service workers earning too much money, and that minimum wage legislation is a Communist Euroconspiracy. The freeze has been accompanied by ministerial waffle about "productivity", which simply means higher wages = less workers. They clearly aren't going to change their tune without a virtual insurrection on our part, and consulting over pay strikes (leading to job losses) without addressing this pay-off is going to get nowhere.

Threat of redundancy

Since 1990 redundancies have been a more pressing issue than pay, and workers have been forced to consider both. It is highly unlikely that there'll be any support for action on a pay rise without a clear strategy to tackle this issue. It should also be noted that in some areas workers have been forced to accept pay *cuts* to "save jobs", and the reality is that workers' actual priorities are very clear - *the same wage is better than no wage at all.* Even if redundancies are avoided at the cost of higher vacancy levels, or other "hidden" job cuts, workloads are going to increase, and services and working conditions deteriorate accordingly.

Posturing about pay

Meanwhile, as long as the unions are unable to do more than posture about low pay and blame workers for doing nothing about it, the bosses will take advantage of union demoralisation and demobilisation to walk all over us. The majority of those bosses also belong to the same Labour Party whose political ambitions the union leaders are helping by advocating minimum wage legislation and avoiding doing anything which will tackle the real pay vs. jobs crisis in Local Government.

Asserting our power to resist

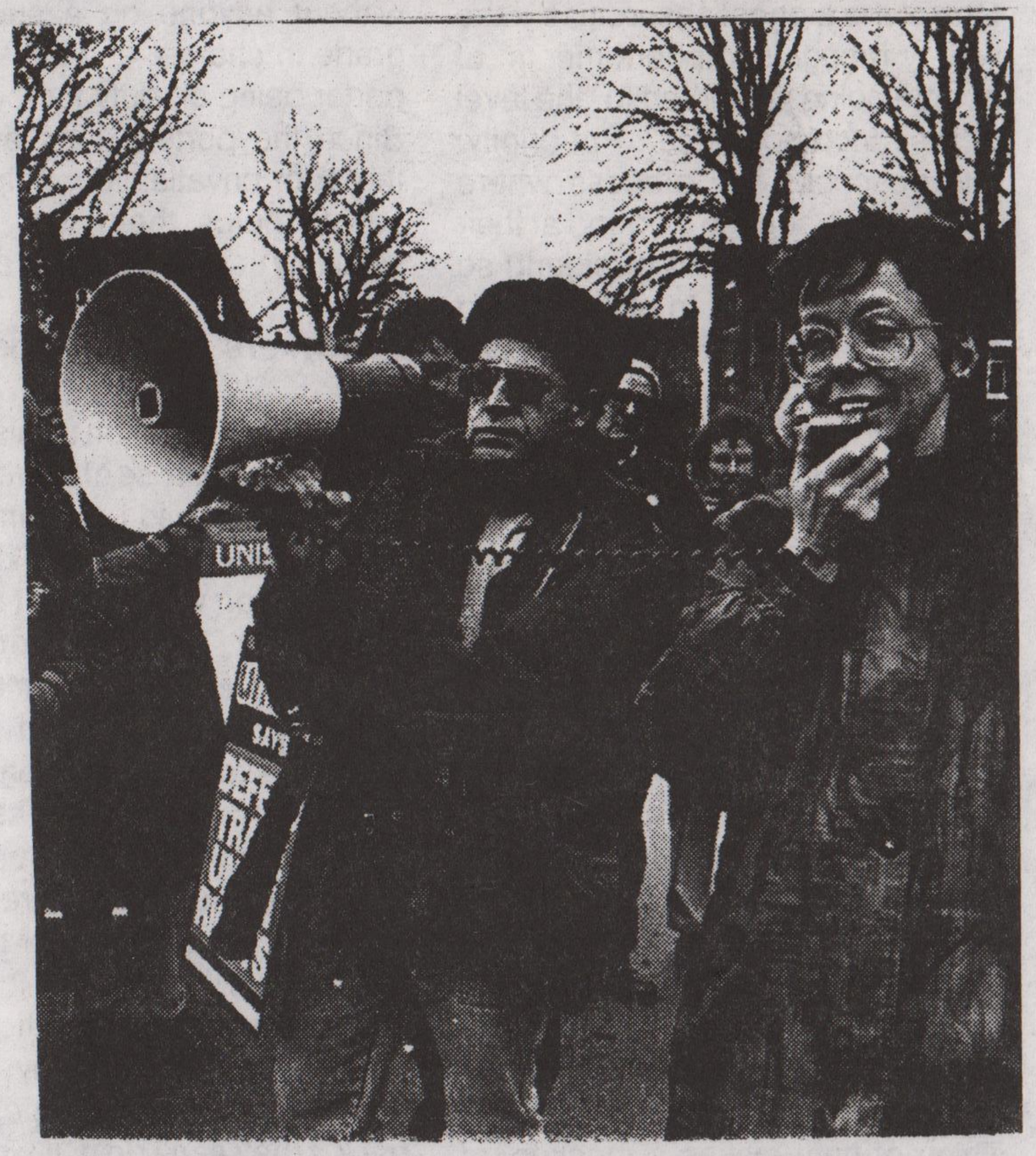
The stark reality is that many of us are desperately fighting to keep *in* a job, let alone hang on to any semblance of decent pay and conditions. Annual ballots against the pay freeze are not enough. To be successful resistance must accept that pay, conditions and job security are intrinsically linked. Fighting for one at a time will only serve to demoralise. We need to re-establish the workplace culture of militancy that means that *whatever* the bosses throw at us, we actively resist. Despite UNISON's current obsession with European laws as a magic wand for defending jobs, pay and conditions, we know we'll still get hammered by bosses who either ignore legislation or exploit its loopholes. Our only defence is strong workplace organisation, directly linked with service users. We argue elsewhere that there are many opportunities to build such organisation in care, and this is true of most sectors.



in laws, which exist to limit our rights, not to uphold them, there is a useful concept in the 1974 Health and Safety at Work Act (which the government is starting to erode, having ensured it is unenforceable for years). That is a worker has a right ("where practicable" - i.e. when it suits the boss) to a healthy and safe workplace, and can seek an alternative one, if available.
It is time to make those generic job descriptions backfire on managers, by working only in those workplaces which are healthy and safe, which is technically not refusing to do your job, but which will require solidarity to work. Such action forces management to address health and safety problems, whereas now they are happy to let workers "cope", or explain to their bosses why homes and offices are closed.
Public service jobs may not at first sight seem the most unhealthy and dangerous, but decades of neglect, cuts and macho management are taking their toll. Workers have already been killed by irate clients. Fear of losing our jobs dominates the thinking of most workers. Many of us can be intimidated into keeping quiet about our experience of violence. It's time we stopped management from exposing us to violence as "part of the job" and used what few health and safety rights we have left to build a culture of saying that we won't take any more- And backing it up with support between workers, and above all, *action.*

NHS VICTIMISATION THWARTED

A small victory was gained by the workers at Manchester's Christie Hospital in February when Frances Kelly, a steward and chair of the Joint Union Committee, had the threat of dismissal lifted after a disciplinary hearing. She had been constantly harassed by the hospital management for her union activities since it became a Trust. Management instigated an investigation into her duties, which dragged on through several postponements, as part of their continuing attempts to undermine union rights at the hospital.
At her disciplinary hearing a mass rally was held, with support from inside the hospital, and from activists from all over Manchester. After many hours, during which supporters sang and chanted, the case against Frances was thrown out.
This proves we can defend our rights by active solidarity and physically supporting each other, but we also need to be prepared to use industrial action when union activists are under threat from the management. If we are not then union activists will be left vulnerable to more determined and better prepared managements, with sackings the inevitable result.



Frances Kelly speaks to her supporters outside Christie Hospital, Manchester, before her disciplinary victory.

The stupidity of hierarchies

The rigidly hierarchical grading structure in Local Government, and other white collar "career structures", has always been a bit of a mystery to me. This is because there seems to be little practical difference in the level of ability or responsibility required by many jobs which have widely differing grades. Some jobs, and some staff, are just more favoured than others. Also, although I'm on a low grade (Sc.3) I could be in charge of manual workers who get paid more than I do! Throw in the fact that my immediate supervisor knows less about my job than I do, and I never get direct supervision (or support) in my work as a result, and you should have got the picture.

One of the biggest absurdities is the widely recognised phenomenon of people being promoted to "the level of their incompetence". Put briefly, this describes the process where someone is seen to be good at their job (and not a known dissident) so they are promoted to another, and another... until they reach a level where they can't do it, and they stay there - in a job they can't do. This happens, of course, because in a hierarchical structure you only move sideways or up, never back down to a job you were good at. What also happens when an individual gets promoted into a key position which is beyond their abilities is that the key responsibility finds it's way downwards, or a struggling management creates a tier immediately below them to do their jobs, so they can concentrate on self-aggrandisement.

Greater expoitation

This not only makes a mockery of often daft hierarchies, it means even greater exploitation for those of us who are too good at our jobs to be promoted, or are out of favour with the management. A favourite tactic in my local authority is to claim that what is on your immediate superior's job description is "implied" in yours, and lots of pressure is exerted on vulnerable individuals to con them into accepting this. Interestingly enough, if you stick to your guns and are prepared to take the odd risk in refusing to do what is not your job, you rarely get troubled with this kind of swindle. My supervisor gets paid more for being responsible for the security of the building, for example. We've fought off attempts to get us to open up to the public without anyone on a supervisory grade in charge, and insisted on a porter being on duty for locking up. Since the porters' jobs are under threat of privatisation, helping ourselves helps them too. A bit of solidarity never did anyone any harm.

> ***"much of what is wrong with the public services cannot be tackled without a complete change in the existing order of things"***

Workers' self-management

The only real solution to this absurdity, and the best use of scarce human resources, would be to end hierarchy altogether. This would have to be based on workers' self management, an elected committee accountable to an assembly of all the workers to carry out planning and take executive decisions on policies determined by the assembly. What it would also do would be to take the economic pressure off workers to go for more senior positions (by taking all roles out of the hierarchy), allow people to stick where they are good, and happy, or move when they need a change, moving back if they can't do it. It would also end the exploitation and resentment it creates, and where supervision is considered necessary by the work-



continued from overleaf

ers, it can be done on the same elected, accountable basis, without the grading/hierarchy problem. And people could get jobs because they can do them, not because they're good at interviews or mates of the management.

Very dangerous

Sound reasonable? Actually the above is very dangerous, and should not be attempted by those at home. This represents a potential threat to the privileges of Senior Management, and would set an example that would be very dangerous to the status quo. In this society the interests of the ruling class and their privileged lackeys take precedence over reason and efficiency, so you won't see any imaginative and radical proposals to get the best use of people's talents in your management's development plan this year. What you'll get is the usual bullshit anyone who is awake more than an hour a day can see through.

Why? Don't people deserve better than the same old wasteful rubbish? They do, but those in power - the government, senior management, local councillors - can't see that they aren't getting what they deserve. The underlying ideas of managers and their masters are so thoroughly absorbed they don't even need to be stated, and they reflect their interests. (One can scarcely exaggerate the effectiveness of doctrinal need in enforcing a kind of institutional stupidity.) Anything that does not serve the greater glory, wealth and privilege of management is beyond their comprehension. Many of our basic problems as public service workers, and much of what is wrong with public services, can not be tackled without a complete change in the existing order of things. That is why we believe that labour unions need to address these questions, and organise to resolve them, as well as the more usual pay and conditions issues.

How to spot a bureaucrat

If you work anywhere in a public service, sooner or later you are going to come into contact with a bureaucrat. They aren't just people who work in an office. They have power in a way that normal office workers or even operational managers rarely have. They make "policy" which in these days is usually a euphemism for cuts.

But you might not recognize them for what they are, because they are doing their best to make sure you don't. "Just call me Ian. We're all on first name terms here...just one big happy family." Don't believe it. Bureaucrats perform the same role in public services as Management does in private industry. Their motivation is a bit different but not much. Where a manager in Foolem & Fleecem Plc is after bigger profits and a bigger salary, public service bureaucrats are after a better paid job somewhere else.

HOW TO SPOT A BUREAUCRAT

**** They are always on managerial grades, but not all managers are bureaucrats.***

****They don't tend to stay around for more than a few years in any one post. Too long in one job is bad for the CV, and would ruin your chances of being taken seriously for the Directorship in the neighbouring authority... *They are passionate about reorganizing things. This is because it always looks good on a CV. Have you seen how many high-power jobs are asking for people who can be "positive responding to change"? Never mind the needless disruption to services and workers' pay and conditions.***

****They contribute nothing at all to the service. If anything they get in the way. Services are provided by workers, not bureaucrats.***

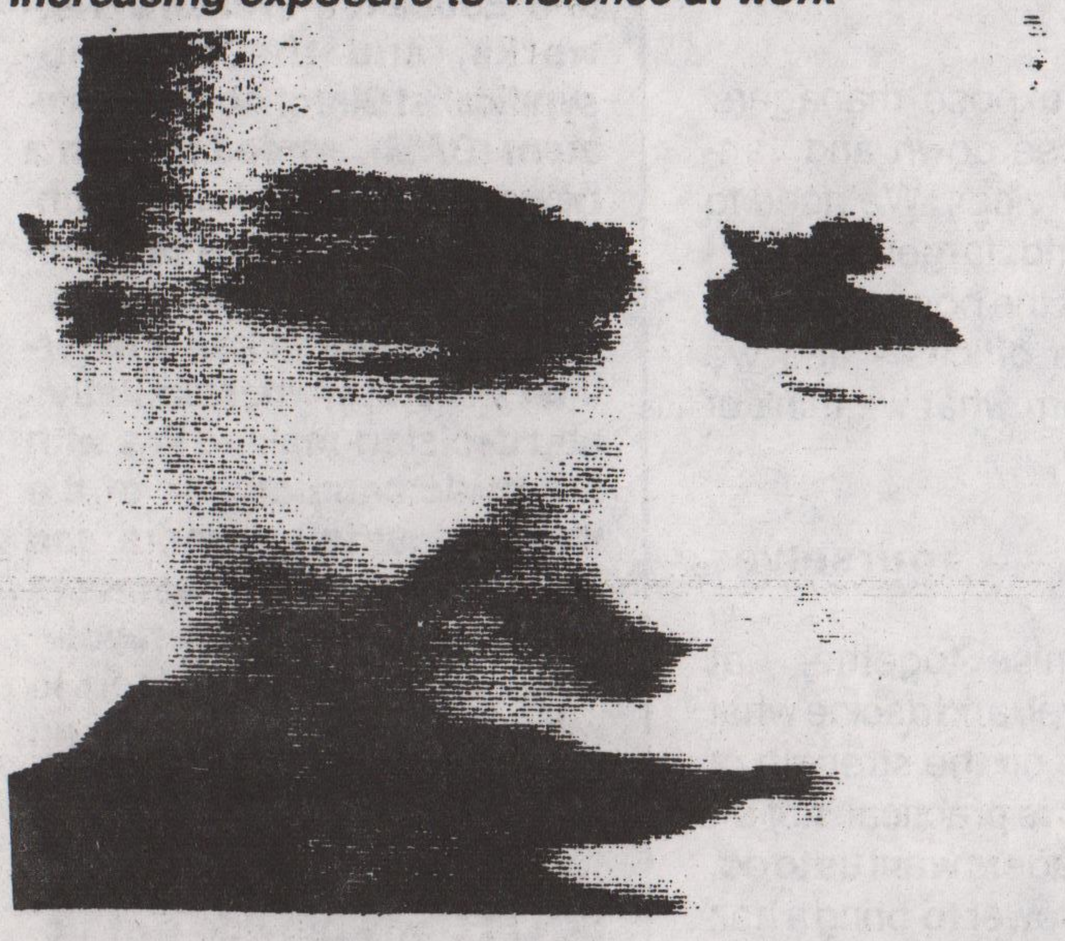
****They are increasingly difficult to tell apart from the private sector managers who are bringing their expertise at union-busting and mass redundancies into the NHS and local govt.***

WHAT CAN YOU DO ABOUT THEM?

Recognizing they're there is the start. Then you won't fall for any of this "We're all friends" bull. Remember, they're building their career on your work, show them the contempt such parasites deserve. And it follows that anything you can do to disrupt their career progression is hitting them where it hurts most. So resistance to their pointless reorganizations and new procedures is a good place to start. You won't get a directorship if all you've got on your CV is "Tried to carry out a major reorganization but failed due to concerted workers' resistance."

Confronting violence
IN THE WORKPLACE

Public service workers are increasingly having to face violent attacks from their clients. This often comes about through frustration on the part of the public who see their services cut yet are unable to reach the real culprits - the politicians and their lackeys, the management. Below, we look at how workers can confront the increasing exposure to violence at work



It is the workers on the "front line" who often have to communicate the effects of public service cuts to the public. Those workers who are also under threat of redundancy, and have often argued strongly against the cuts.

Childrens' homes-Containing the anger

One area where there has been a sharp increase in the level of violence is in residential children's homes across the country. The cuts in services, a chronic lack of resources and money have created situations where young people are shoved together into homes with no coherent plans or prospects, and the residential workers are expected to contain their frustrations, grievances and the resulting violent outbursts.
Very disturbed young people who in the past would have had some chance ofbeing placed in a supportive therapeutic environment, with staff who had the time to do more then police them, are now given the cheap option of Local Authority care. We are now seeing the abused children are placed with covicted abusers. This creates a volatile mixture which explodes against the only adult figures they can physically reach - the residential staff.

Workers' frustration

At the same time, workers in the homes are saying that they are unable to do their job because of this very lack of resources. The majority of us didn't go into this work expecting to be used as glorified cops. We too are becoming increasingly frustrated while still trying to support the young people in our care even while they are subjected daily to physical attack, which most of us are not trained to deal with.
There is no support whatsoever from the management for the residential workers. Instead, sickness records are being examined and the level of stress that workers are under is usually discounted as a valid reason for absence. Despite daily verbal abuse that can often be racist and sexist, regular physical attacks and threats, managers simply reply that workers will just have to cope. If they can't cope, they are victimised and toled that it's their problem. The days of having access to courses to deal with stress or violence, are long gone.
It is time to organise ourselves to get recognition of the extent of the problem we face, and then to do something positive to stop it. This will mean everything up to industrial action to make the management listen. In Manchester residential staff have begun to meet on a regular basis and have begun to measure the levels of abuse independently. We then plan to formulate a joint policy of action and mutual support.
This issue needs to be taken seriously, no worker should have to endure such levels of violence. We need to unite amongst ourselves, and then to point out to the public the real villains - the politicians and the management - who create such situations then leave workers to deal with them. Public support alone will not be enough to force management and bosses to do something, however.
Although we don't have any faith

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COMMUNITY CARE FIGHTING B A C K



fighting for scraps

There is enough money around to provide work and resources to meet the needs of everyone. But the Government and the bosses are happy to keep it for themselves, and for us to fight over the few scraps that they throw us. It is vital that we start organising across our services in a massive campaign of workplace unionisation.

taking them on

We need to take on the bosses at their own game. We can sabotage their profits and lies by "whistle blowing": Publicising the truth about what is happening to services. We must fight the many ruthless anti-union companies now taking over services with direct action: Workers' and users' occupations of services that the bosses try to close. We have to work with users- taking strike action, if necessary - lobbying and occupying meetings to expose managers' threats to close down and vandalise our services. We need to respond in kind, targetting demonstrations at the bosses' banks and business offices - and we can show them what we think of *their* property.

organising ourselves

If we organise together at workplace level, and decide what action to take on the strength of what we think is practical, not on what union leaders want us to do, we have the power to bring a halt to the destruction, and to start to build for a different system in which we look after each other as a community.

care workers' meeting

As a starting point, community care workers from around the country, who are involved in the Public Service Workers' Network have called a conference this September in Manchester. We are inviting any workers who want to plan how to build genuine, combative rank and file resistance to the attacks on community care. We believe this will be the first time that ordinary care workers have met together outside the control of the union leaders. It is hoped that this will be the first of many, and that it will be the beginning of a network of activists, workplace and authority-based groups throughout the country. (See back page)

NETWORKS FORM NEW FEDERATION

At a conference in March the Public Service Workers' Network, along with the Transport and Education Workers' Networks, and the anarcho-syndicalist Direct Action Movement (DAM), agreed to form a new organisation of revolutionary unionists., called the Solidarity Federation (SOLFED).

The organisation has a federalist structure, where initiative and decision-making lies with the basic components of the three industrial networks, and Locals composed of members of the networks, and revolutionary unionists working in other sectors. It is based on direct links between networks and locals, not on any central organisation.

SOLFED will provide a structure for revolutionary unionists to support the development of both the existing networks and new ones. It also provides a framework for addressing issues which affect the working class as a whole, not just particular sectors covered by networks.

SOLFED has become the British section of the International Workers' Association (IWA/AIT), the international organisation of revolutionary unions, replacing the now-defunct DAM.

Members of PSWN attending the founding conference of SOLFED agreed national subscription rates, elected a secretary and treasurer, and renewed the mandate of this editorial group. We hope to produce NETWORK four times a year (copy permitting, so get writing!)

PUBLIC SERVICE WORKERS'

NETWORK

Who we are

Network is published by a group of militant public service workers to promote the idea of workers' self-management and revolutionary change in society. It is also an open forum for all public service workers to share, discuss and analyse our experiences, and to develop solutions to the problems we face. We welcome your letters, comments, articles, photos and graphics, although we cannot guarantee to publish them. We are also seeking to network as widely as possible with like-minded workers.

We see no point in wasting time and energy in trying to reform the existing unions or trying to elect more left-wing leaders. We want to see workers' organisation which is not divided by union affiliations, bureacracy or political parties, and which embrace all public service workers, whether they are employed by local government, health institututions, voluntary organisations, or private contractor, on the basis of practical solidarity.

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ORGANISING IN THE CARE INDUSTRY

CONFERENCE FOR CARE WORKERS

RESISTING CUTS
DIRECT ACTION
ORGANISING WITH USERS

MANCHESTER TOWN HALL
SAT SEPT 10TH 11-5PM