



Liverpool City Branch

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LIVERPOOL SOCIAL WORKERS STRIKE

Social Workers in Child Care [including Alder Hey Hospital team] and the Emergency Duty Team have been on official strike since August 24th. This leaflet describes the background to the dispute and progress made towards achieving our aims.

WHAT'S IT ABOUT?

It's about a number of issues which all have a common thread – a management group which doesn't believe in consultation or following procedures but prefers bullying and threatening staff. A dispute was lodged at the end of 2003 about excessive caseloads, no caseload management system and failure to follow procedures. Staff were, and are, desperate to leave Liverpool to escape the atmosphere of intimidation and fear. Many of these remain vacant posts which puts pressure on those left to cover other work as well as their own, more stress, more staff leaving... circles don't come much more vicious than the one in Liverpool!

The Emergency Duty Team originally just supported their Child Care colleagues rather than cover their work but soon had their own dispute as the team was told it would be scrapped.

THREE DAYS STRIKE

In February/March staff took strike action for 3 days. This seemed to have worked when proper talks began. A number of agreements were made to address the problems so the next strikes were called off. But as soon as the local elections were out of the way all bets were off – management reneged on their commitment to do a stress survey until the dispute was resolved. Since 16/06/04 the issues were not discussed although UNISON made repeated attempts. Despite the outrage of the Social Workers they held off further action to allow officials to get the employer to negotiate. Instead of meeting the union they played games, eventually claiming they didn't know what the issues were. By August staff had had enough. They suspected the employer was provoking a strike to try to break them and UNISON, but felt they had no choice. A spontaneous movement erupted which demanded a strike until the issues were properly addressed. Management now slanders the strikers by claiming they were tricked into striking by activists. The reality was a group of experienced professionals, sick of having their judgements overruled and being treated with contempt, decided that hard though a strike inevitably is it was preferable to enduring the hell of life in the city council.

PROGRESS OF THE STRIKE

130 UNISON members walked out. The other unions voted not to strike but to boycott work. Our members remain solid despite the hardship and ruthless management tactics to try to break the strike. Letters delivered late at night threatening disciplinary action if they carried on picketing, vague charges about picket line behaviour, salaries paid in then withdrawn from bank accounts and deductions made, letters every week taunting strikers with how much money they had lost, managers abusing pickets and tearing down placards, etc etc.

Reports emerged from colleagues on the inside of managers confidently predicting a return to work when the second payday arrived, as they felt strikers were 'fair weather pickets'. How annoying then for

this management on that payday to see a defiant march of strikers past all council buildings pointing out the sham of Liverpool boasting of Capital of Culture when the council's behaviour is anything but cultured.

Worried at the stubborn refusal of the strikers to crumble and the backlog of work building up, the employer finally agreed to conciliation at ACAS. Despite this their nasty tactics continued with reminder letters to their home addresses telling strikers how much pay they have lost and lies about everything having been agreed to encourage strikers to return to work. Even more shockingly 2 people, one a steward, were demoted to support worker grade posts despite there being a shortage of Social Workers!

Also despite agreeing to look at all outstanding grievances – a major climbdown – the employer is now reneging on this and insisting that the EDT is finished. Yet this grievance has never been heard!

SCANDAL EXPOSED!

On 6th October the local paper published details of the risks routinely taken with the lives of children by the employer's overruling of professional assessments by Social Workers and constant pressure to save money even if children were at risk as a result. The employer threatened to walk out of the talks but stayed possibly realising they need to get this strike settled before more of their practices are exposed. The strikers were jubilant at the breach of what they felt was almost a publicity embargo by the media. They were further boosted by a donation to the Hardship Fund by the NEC to help avoid them giving up from not being able to pay the bills.

WONDERFUL SUPPORT UP AND DOWN THE COUNTRY

Strikers have spoken at meetings all over the country and received encouraging messages of support and, crucially, donations to the Hardship Fund. These meetings have been of other UNISON branches where colleagues clearly recognise the importance of this dispute not just for Liverpool but for them too. They know if

our employer succeeds theirs will take note and redouble their attacks in the relentless drive to downsize and privatise. But it's not just our union which has given support, many others as well as political and community groups have rallied round determined the strikers won't be starved back.

LOBBY OF LIVERPOOL CITY COUNCIL

TOWN HALL

4PM ON 20TH OCTOBER

JOIN US TO DEMAND THAT THE ELECTED REPRESENTATIVES OF THIS CITY LISTEN TO THE WORKFORCE AND STOP BEING DAZZLED BY THE TOP SHOW, GLOSS AND SPIN OF SENIOR MANAGEMENT.

Today, Tuesday 12TH October, all strikers have received the most disgraceful letter yet from our leader, David Henshaw. It appears to be a response to the Echo articles of last Thursday but is a direct attack on EDT workers and an attempt to set one striker against another. The letter is composed of lies and could be described as the rantings of a desperate and angry man.

WE HAVE NEWS FOR YOU, MR HENSHAW, THIS WON'T WORK. CONTRARY TO YOUR PROPAGANDA THE STRIKE IS SOLID AND YOUR INFLAMMATORY REMARKS ONLY SERVE TO STRENGTHEN US IN OUR RESOLVE TO SEE THAT THE PEOPLE OF LIVERPOOL RECEIVE A FAIR AND DECENT SERVICE.