

Front page

KEY WORKERS UNITED

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THE NHS FACES THE MOST SERIOUS CRISIS IN ITS 73 YEARS: DON'T THE HUNDREDS OF NHS WORKERS WHO HAVE DIED IN THE LINE OF DUTY COUNT FOR ANYTHING?

Below the radar, the Tory government continues to attack the NHS, making a mockery of the sacrifices made by staff during covid. Everything the founders of the NHS took for granted- full employment, a welfare system, comprehensive education, union rights, rail, steel, coal, power- have been sold off or destroyed. Now free health care is up for grabs by private companies just as covid-related contracts have been handed out in an orgy of cronyism and a new Health & Care Bill will usher in even more private companies. So if we thought this government was 100% focused on covid, we find that this could not be further from the truth as the government acts as CEO for UK PLC. This government has a strategy based on its 'free' market thinking that includes a two-tier NHS. We urgently need a strategy to halt this attack and to support NHS workers in their fight for better pay and conditions with participation by all trade unionists and service-users. It's time to form organising committees throughout East Anglian cities, towns and villages to develop public health plans with NHS workers, support unemployed people, prepare for wage claims as inflation bites and produce hundreds of thousands of leaflets to reach the whole region.



Barney the train guard writes on the Great British Railway Con.

Hello Friends, hope you are well ? Barney here, your friendly train guard here. Well, it will be highlighted here elsewhere but big changes are coming to the railways. Cuts are coming and we all know that will mean thousands of job cuts. Yes, rather than pay people to do an important job on the railway and pay tax, the Government will pay them to stay at home. Dole, not furlough.

Strange? Yes, it is. No details yet but they will be brutal. Like Thatcher hated the miners (NUM), Johnson hates the RMT and will do his worst. I am relatively lucky that I am 62 next birthday so retirement is not too far away. It's the kids I feel sorry for. Young lad at work. A baby on the way and he's just bought his first home. He's worrying about his job, and not the only one.

I have always been a believer in, if jobs have to go, then voluntary redundancy should be the first port of call. Let's see what the near future brings!! Sorry to sound like a right moaning minnie. Everywhere, people are struggling with job cuts, etc. Best wishes to all who are struggling. Just remember the following: Don't read The Sun, Daily Mail, Express, etc. Never vote Conservative. Never trust a Tory.

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The Union Makes Us Strong by Rachel Henderson (UCU)

Union organiser, activist and academic Jane McAlevey is sharing her techniques with the world. Through 6 weeks in May/June I took part in Workers Rising Everywhere, an international 'strike school'. Most participants join via their trade union, but there are also tenant associations, environmental groups, anyone with a campaigning agenda.

Stretching Zoom to its limits, there were six 2 hour sessions (repeated twice for different time zones). Usually there were between 2 and 4 thousand participants per session from across the world - North and South America, Africa, Europe, with translation into multiple languages.

At the start Jane reminded us why we were there - Workers' labour in 2020 produced:
One new billionaire every 80 hours in the US
One new billionaire every 36 hours in China
There is an urgency because strong unions mean less inequality.

She and other organisers, many of them Latina and Hispanic women, introduced ideas such as organic leaders, majority petitions, structured organising conversations and structure tests. The essence is to build your organisation by small actions that test whether your membership are ready for action, or remain to be convinced. The majority petition provides safety in the initial stages for the hesitant - the petition will not be published until a super majority of workers (70%+) have signed. Difficult conversations are essential. As all good communicators know, listening is key. Then reflecting back what you have heard, both to check your understanding, and to bring the individual's issues to the fore, the reason why their involvement will be meaningful to them.

McAlevy has written about campaigns in nursing and teaching unions in the US, describing how in 2019 Los Angeles over 30,000 teachers took part in a 6 day strike that achieved their goals. While there are criticisms that can be made of the approach, the energy and ideas could spark renewed activity among UK unions, and move to address the growing inequalities and divisions that the Conservative government enact.

Cracking the whip

“Office! Office now!” Those are the dreaded words. They mean you are on the route to dismissal. If a manager asks you to go to their office like this you wonder what you’ve done wrong. Recently the penal code has been changed without any consultation whatsoever to a three strike rule, which managers are implementing with some degree of viciousness. You may be called into the office for talking too loudly, or perhaps your face wasn’t as smiley as a manager wanted it, under that facemask of course. How could they tell ? We all have to be super jolly now.

So you go to the office where you are interrogated about everything. Say you went to the canteen for a glass of water to take an aspirin. The manager demands to know if the pain you’ve got is anything the company should know about. “You know we can’t keep having people go for glasses of water” they say. “We need to put on record all medical concerns as this can affect your ability to work and your attendance” you’re told. And if you asked a colleague to cover for you whilst you went to get that water they themselves will be hauled into the office!

What you’re not told is that this informal meeting could count as a strike. You’ve broken the company “rules” with some insignificant and normal action. On the third it’s a written warning. Two written warnings mean dismissal. Even the new company disciplinary code say’s an employee should be told the purpose of the meeting and also what is expected from them and a timescale for a review. Written warnings should only be for serious breaches of rules and not for invented infringements on the whim of a manager. So what’s this all about? It’s about getting a compliant and cowed workforce who will be too frightened to complain about anything or stick up for themselves.

Attila the shelf stacker

Printed & published by KEY WORKERS UNITED (Norwich). If you would like to contribute to the next issue, please email davidwelsh83@btinternet.com Cartoon by a member of Tuesday Art Group.

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Rallies and marches took place throughout East Anglia on the 73rd anniversary of the NHS. In King's Lynn, former Labour leader, Jeremy Corbyn (left) next to Jo Rust (secretary of King's Lynn Trades Union Council), spoke at a rally in support of the call for a new QEH. Credit: EDP

