

Healthworkers set to strike

By Brian Roberts

IT NOW seems certain that the long-running NHS pay dispute will come to a head this autumn. UNISON is set to ballot for strike action during August, over the government's "1% plus local bargaining" pay offer. A host of smaller staff organisations are likely to fall in line behind them.

The dispute is over two issues: the break-up of national pay and conditions by the introduction of local pay bargaining, and the limit of 3% effectively set by the government over any total rise. 800,000 NHS workers are facing a pay cut and the loss of national bargaining in one pay round!

The fact that all staff groups, barring doctors and senior managers, have been offered the same deal has led to a rare degree of unanimity amongst NHS unions in resisting the deal. So far, not one local pay deal has been accepted by staff across the whole country. As the time for talking has now long been passed, and the need for action is there for all to see, that unanimity is beginning to break up. The Royal College of Nursing and the Royal College of Midwives — or, rather, their leaders — have both approached the Tories for separate talks on pay, and now seem

unlikely to put up any opposition to local pay on principle. The RCN have campaigned under the slogan "3% for all nurses", effectively accepting the government's award.

UNISON have made two decisions during the campaign that may yet rebound on them, firstly dropping their 8.4% pay claim, and then tailing the RCN for the first months of the campaign, rather than preparing for action. The second has been disastrous in demobilising the campaign, leading to the union offering the government six weeks' "grace" to come up with a better offer, after a 9-to-1 consultation result for a strike ballot, because its membership records weren't in place to run a ballot!

The near-silence of UNISON officials over what their pay target actually is points towards the likelihood of them being willing to accept a consolidated national 3% award as a victory. Ironically, this could open the way towards the acceptance of local deals, as UNISON branches realise that they could win more by local industrial action. Activists should ensure that 3% is not regarded as a target anywhere.

There has not been national action in the NHS for 13 years, and the majority of those taking action will be doing so for the first time, if the strike ballot is won.

unelected bureaucracy who have refused to really fight for a big yes vote, despite the decisions of the union's elected Executive, or the feelings of activists on the ground.

If the ballots do show majorities for action then we need action co-ordinated across both the unions and on British Rail and London Underground.

All active trade unionists and socialists should get set to build railworkers' support groups as a focus for solidarity.

part of being "responsible" is disposing cheaply. Partly they were right. But what they never said was that it only really matters to them how much they spend disposing of Brent Spar because they have to pay dividends to their shareholders.

Dividends, and the waste involved in capitalist competition, represent money we could take to spend on safe disposal of all environmental hazards. Environmental responsibility costs a lot. But we can and have to afford it.

If oil companies were nationalised, if the public owned the oil companies and did not have to pay out in wasteful dividends, we would have a lot more choices. We might actually decide to dump at sea and then to spend the money we had saved on other environmental projects.

In strictly scientific terms, few people have the knowledge to say which of Greenpeace

Sheffield library workers strike

350 LIBRARY workers in Sheffield have been on all-out indefinite strike since 5 June over the council's threat to remove enhanced pay for weekend work, breaking national conditions of service. All workers in the Council's leisure department face the same threat, resulting in a pay cut of up to 7% for some of the lowest paid workers.

The strike is solid. Clare Renshaw, a libraries shop steward and striker, spoke to *Workers' Liberty*:

"This strike is about national conditions of service. We're not striking for more pay but to keep hold of our pay. We are low paid, and women workers. We can't afford to take a pay cut. If Sheffield council gets away with this, it will open up the floodgates for the rest of the country. Two years ago when council workers in Sheffield took a 2¼% pay cut, it gave the green light to other councils across the country.

"The support for our strike has been tremendous: both from the public and from other trade unions. 15,000 people have signed our petition. Morale is very high — we voted 4 to 1 to take the action, and support for the strike remains strong. Library workers have not been militant in the past but this strike has changed peoples' attitudes."

The Sheffield library workers urgently need donations to their Fighting Fund. All cheques should be made payable to "Sheffield UNISON 2" with "Fighting Fund" written on the back. Messages of support and requests for speakers should be directed to Sheffield UNISON 2, 175 Arundel Gate Court, Sheffield S1 2LQ (Tel: 0114-273 6307).

Railworkers ballot for action

As we go to press, RMT and ASLEF members on British Rail and London underground are balloting for a series of one day strikes over pay.

The RMT wants a 6% rise. ASLEF — the train drivers' union — want "a substantial increase."

If the RMT ballot is lost the responsibility lies entirely with the union's

Brent Spar victory for Greenpeace

By Joan Trevor

GREENPEACE scored a big victory over international giant Shell in the Brent Spar affair. Shell had got government permission to abandon a 20 year old oil installation at sea, despite many scientists saying it would cause terrible environmental damage. But they had to abandon the plan after bad publicity, and a boycott by drivers of Shell petrol stations.

Shell wanted to dump in the sea because it is cheaper than disposal on land. They said that they were being "responsible" when considering this disposal option, because

or Shell is right about whether disposal at sea or on land is safer, and really that is not the main question in this affair.

The main question is how we get more control over what the oil companies do.

It makes more sense to believe Greenpeace. You don't sail a boat out to the North Sea, 118 miles north of Shetland, skirmish with oil company ships, scale 28 metres of rusting and polluted iron, and camp there for weeks unless you know something. Do you believe the people who do that, or the half-a-million-a-year men who run Shell, whose only concern is to have an easy ride at the annual shareholders' meeting? Who do you trust most to fight for a healthy environment?

Greenpeace's action made and won the argument that public opinion should count in environmental decisions, not just the "responsibility" of oil company directors to their shareholders.