Lambeth UNISON

Consultative ballot: YES
take action to support libraries and defend jobs

By Jon Rogers

Your Branch Committee has agreed to hold a consultative ballot of all UNISON members employed by the London Borough of Lambeth to ask you if you would be willing to take strike action as part of our current dispute over the Council’s plans for Libraries.

As you probably know, the Council plan to keep only five of our ten libraries open as libraries. UNISON opposes this attack upon public services – and we have the strong support of the very active Friends of Libraries groups in the community.

Following unofficial action before Christmas, our members in the libraries took a day of official strike action on Monday 8 February. This action was totally solid and closed every library.

This has kept the pressure on Council management and Councillors, who are considering an alternative proposal from the Head of Libraries which would keep all the libraries open.

UNISON members in libraries will be considering further action (and I will keep you informed about this). However, the Branch Committee has agreed that now is the right time to consider escalating this dispute.

This month you will be consulted on whether you would be willing to support strike action across the Council in support of the libraries dispute. I hope that when you are consulted you will vote “YES”. (This will be a consultative ballot and a further official ballot would be needed before any action could be called).

Your Branch Committee believe that, if the Council can defeat the well supported campaign of our members in libraries, who are the most strongly organised group of workers in the Council – that will pose a great threat to all our jobs and conditions.

We know that – even though hundreds of colleagues will be leaving as part of the severance trawl – the Council is refusing to give the guarantee of no compulsory redundancies to the whole workforce which UNISON is seeking.

A positive result in the forthcoming consultative ballot (which will be by email) in support of the libraries dispute will send a strong message to the Council that they should be doing more to assure the job security of all Council workers.

Support the junior doctors!
By Rebecca Townsend

Junior Doctors have struck for two days against new contracts which would cut unsocial hours’ payments and take away financial penalties on hospital bosses who make junior doctors work a dangerous number of hours. Their fight is all of our fight. Their struggle is integral to the fight to save the NHS, we are all patients!

Show solidarity to junior doctors during their strikes on Wednesday 9 March from 8am, Wednesday 6 April from 8am and Tuesday 26 April from 8am.

To contribute to next month’s issue, please submit articles, pictures, letters or arguments to MAthini@lambeth.gov.uk

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If the council won't budge... we’ll have to budge-It!

Jeremy Drinkall unpicks the latest cuts budget from Lambeth Council

Lambeth’s Labour Group of Councillors passed its annual budget on a bleak mid-winter night at Elmgreen School in Tulse Hill. It was the third in the series announced two years ago in their attempt to cut £90 million from the council’s budget. This year’s tranche is if anything more severe than the other. And it won’t be the last.

The people of Lambeth will be the biggest losers, many already suffering from low wages, a lack of affordable housing and diminishing local services. But there are others. The Labour Party is demoralising its own supporters by passing on the Tory cuts, a massive 58% reduction in government funding. Why vote Labour when you get Tory cuts?

But we too will pay heavily for this cowardly budget. A thousand staff have already lost their jobs. Another 524 will go with Voluntary Redundancy in April. No one would deny them the right to move on and be compensated, though their workload and/or cuts in the services they provide will land on those who remain.

There is an alternative. The Council could defy Cameron and Osborne’s Tories and stop all the cuts. On their ironically named love.lambeth.gov.uk website, they warn, “unelected civil servants appointed by central government” would make “huge damaging” cuts. Let them try – we can resist!

National FE pay strike

Staff haven’t had a pay rise since 2009

By Jim Delaney

The strike for fair pay in FE on 24 February was the first joint UNISON and UCU pay strike in over 10 years. Members are furious about the Association of Colleges insulting 0% pay ‘offer’ and we made our opposition felt at colleges across the country.

Since 2010, funding has been cut by 27%. The squeeze on pay has meant that workers in FE have experienced a 17% real-terms reduction in wages over the last 5 years, equivalent to a £3,000 pay cut for some. Courses and jobs have been cut and workloads have increased. The steady loss of staff due to job cuts, overwork and low pay only adds to the harm being done to the sector and to society.

Meanwhile, college Principals have been getting big pay rises—up to £200,000 or more a year. At Lambeth College, the Principal’s pay rose by £17,000 to £149,000 in 2013 and by a further £5,000 to £154,000 in 2014. At the same time, we get a pay freeze and some of our members, not even the Living Wage.

The joint UNISON and UCU picket lines were solid at all college centres. Strikers then went up to a rally in Central London. In her speech, Sally Hunt congratulated strikers and paved the way for further action: “If we have to do this again, then we do. Every step of the way challenge AoC’s policy. We should be very proud”.

Gorden Marsden showed Labour support for our strike, for our vision of education and our concerns about the upcoming area reviews.

There was a lot of coverage of the strike on social media with colleges across the country from Manchester to Birmingham and from Bristol to Southport. Well done to everyone. UNISON’s National FE and 6th Form Committee are meeting on Friday 4th March to discuss next steps in the campaign for a fair £1 an hour extra for all staff.

“Why vote Labour when you get Tory cuts?”
Local Government pensions under threat

Osborne plans raid on LGPS and other pensions schemes - by Angela Boyle

News has emerged that George Osborne wants to force pension schemes to invest in his “pet infrastructure projects”.

This comes after a lot of other negative changes to our pensions. From April 2014, your pension was calculated on career average earnings rather than final salary (something that affects women workers more than men). It is a defined benefit scheme (you know exactly what you will get), better than defined contribution (you know what you pay but not what you’ll get). So it’s still a good deal.

The government however has plans for the £210 billion in the LGPS.

In preparation for the new regulations, the government invited LGPS authorities to develop proposals to invest their assets through pools of at least £25 billion to achieve cost savings and benefits of scale. These are known as CIVs - Common Investment Vehicles. George Osborne calls these British Sovereign Wealth Funds - but they are not government money. This is worker’s capital - it was contributed by scheme members and employers, not government or business interests.

Because Osborne will classify them as Sovereign Wealth Funds, he will be able to force them to invest up to 25% in various state run infrastructure projects.

However, restrictions will exist on where and how funds invest - e.g. the government can intervene if they disapprove of investing in support of Boycotting Israeli Apartheid projects in the West Bank, or environmentally friendly companies. We could be forced to shore up government pet infrastructure projects.

Redundancies will also affect our fund - money goes out to pay lump sums and benefits, contributions decrease with the workforce.

Heed this warning - it is reported that Osborne plans to scrap the facility to take 25% of your pension as a lump sum.

UNISON monitors pension issues nationally, regionally and locally. At UNISON’s Greater London Pension Forum on March 1st, Glyn Jenkins will update us, with a further briefing on March 21st. Branch Secretary Jon Rogers sits on the Pensions Committee for the Lambeth Pensions Fund: I am a trade union representative on its Board, meeting March 23rd: retired members also serve you.

Your pension is no perk - you earned it, you contribute to it, it will fund life after Lambeth. Look after it!

Stand Up to Racism—protest

Lambeth UNISON is supporting the Stand Up to Racism demonstration on UN Anti Racism Day on 19 March to say no to Islamophobia, Anti-Semitism and the scapegoating of migrants and refugees and yes to multiculturalism! The appalling treatment of refugees across Europe and the staggering rise in anti-Muslim hate crimes must be challenged. We say refugees are welcome here! Read more about Trade Unionists 4 Calais here: www.standuptoracism.org.uk

Corbynomics in Brixton

Campagners and Labour Party activists from across London came to Brixton on 13 February to take part in an event called Corbynomics. The meeting was organised by supporters of the new Labour leader and looked at issues including the growing housing crisis, busting Tory myths about the economy and how local councils have resisted cuts in the past.

Lambeth UNISON members were in attendance, talking to people involved in campaigns and trade union issues. A lot of people were very interested in the campaign to save the libraries locally.

“In 1921 when the Labour councillors went to prison rather than make the poor pay for the cuts”

We heard speeches from Neil Faulkner about why the Tory arguments about “the deficit” are actually just an excuse to make massive public sector cuts. We also heard from John Burgess from Barnet UNISON who have been taking strike action to stop huge cuts going through.

Janine Booth from the RMT gave a very interesting history lesson about Poplar Council in 1921 when the Labour councillors went to prison rather than make the poor pay for the cuts of central government (hint: they won!).

Lambeth UNISON agreed to affiliate to Momentum at its recent AGM.
March Cross word — Famous Lambeth Landmarks

This month’s theme is famous landmarks in the borough

Across
2. Recently deceased rockstar image (5,5)
3. Our refurbished offices (7,4,4)
6. Don Quixote rushes ahead!
8. Not Crows, but otherwise birds (3,7)
9. Don’t compare meerkats down here! (7,6)

Down
1. Money safe away from Northerners
4. A cold drink in Brixton? But not for long! (6,3)
5. "Rock on down to..." (8,6)
6. Geometric fast air (8,6)
7. Capital Sight (6,3)

Last months answers: Across 1. Bookish Gyms 5. Mirror
6. Independent