

Surrey county UNISON members demand that the Chancellor Pay Up Now!

On the 7 April, Surrey County UNISON members turned out, alongside activists from across the South East Region for one of the best local demos for many years. The rally held in Philip Hammond, the Chancellor of Exchequer's constituency was symbolically held at the site of the signing of the Magna Carta on the banks of the River Thames at Runnymede. UNISON banners were joined by FBU, RMT and Unite banners as well as several local Labour Party activists.

Paul Couchman, Surrey UNISON Branch Secretary, told the demo that "Surrey has a long history of struggle. From the Diggers at St George's Hill in Weybridge, to suffragettes Emily Davison stepping out in front of the King's Horse at the 1913 Epsom Derby and Emmeline Pankhurst who was arrested for her part in blowing up a house being built for the then chancellor David Lloyd George. All very apt in the centenary year of women achieving the vote but the Gender Pay Gap figures released last week show we still have a long way to go in the fight for equality".

The demo was called because 30% of children in parts of Surrey live below the poverty line. Foodbank use amongst working parents is up fourfold in the last four years. It is



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impossible for the average worker to get somewhere decent to live. One recent report showed that you would need to earn £85 per hour to afford to buy the average Surrey home. The demo's call for a minimum wage of £10 per hour is a modest step towards fair wages for public sector workers in the area when Surrey County Council has imposed an effective pay freeze for nearly a decade.

The mood was buoyant but frustrated. Speaker after speaker called for a serious coordinated national campaign on pay, including in the fragmented outsourced sectors. This protest could not have come at a better time with all the frustrations over pay and austerity at the moment.

In closing, Paul Couchman said "we will use the mood here and the photos from the day to build our local campaigns on public sector pay. We can and will achieve a minimum wage £10 per hour in Surrey and beyond. We will continue to fight for a fair local pay increase this year.

Union win: NEU campaigns sees academy plans for Avenue primary scrapped

A vibrant campaign that included nineteen days of strike action by National Education Union (NEU) members to oppose academy transfer has achieved victory. In early May, the Governing Body of Avenue Primary School in Newham took a decision not to move forward with plans to convert the school to academy status.

The NEU made clear from the start that they opposed academisation at Avenue because it would damage education and transfer the school to an unaccountable Multi Academy Trust. As a community school, parents will continue to be able to call on an elected Council for support.

Unity was forged around the demand for a binding ballot of staff and parents to decide on academy transfer. The NEU offered to halt its strikes if such a ballot was agreed and proposed that meetings were held, and information circulated in the languages spoken in the community, so that parents could fully participate in deciding on the future of their school.

The lively rallies on the school gates on strike days, always supported by dozens of local parents, left governors in no doubt that the campaign showed no signs of weakening. The determination and unity across the Avenue school community over the last six months is inspiring other anti academisation campaigns.

Avenue Governors knew that



“The determination and unity across the Avenue school community over the last six months is inspiring other anti academisation campaigns

the mounting evidence exposing academisation would mean a genuine debate could only reach one conclusion – to oppose transfer – and simply decided to withdraw their plans altogether. The energy and unity shown by both staff and parents in the campaign can now help Avenue School to further support children’s education. If there is any future attempt to revisit academisation, then the opposition will be even stronger.

The Avenue campaign and other

Newham based anti-academisation campaigns helped convince Newham councillors when they voted in February to oppose academisation and to support the call for staff and parental ballots. The NEU will now work with Newham’s newly elected Mayor, Rokhsana Fiaz, in developing plans to support Newham schools, including through developing partnership arrangements that avoid the unnecessary educational risk and fragmentation that academisation inflicts on local schooling.

This is an example of what community campaigning can achieve when we come together collectively. This campaign, alongside others being organised across London, is turning the tide of public opinion against academisation.

More than a day off work for the trade union movement

May the 1st has a unique place in the international trade union and labour movement. It is the day we celebrate our achievements and what we still have to do.

May Day was always a day of celebration but it took on its importance for trade unions after struggles for the 8 hour day. In 1884, the US Federation of Organised Trades and Labor Unions agreed 1 May 1886, as the date to secure the 8 hour day. There were many strikes and clashes with police culminating in the Haymarket Massacre in Chicago. This led to the Second International to adopt the demand for an 8 hour day to be celebrated across the world on the 1st May 1890. Ever since, May Day has been adopted as an annual event to celebrate international workers solidarity.

May Day has grown and grown in importance for the trade union movement. Workers in many countries have faced death and imprisonment for celebrating May Day. It's emphasis on workers supporting each other



in struggle has become even more relevant with multinationals and the global economy.

London, UK, most European and some global trade unionists have maintained the 1 May as the day when workers come together to celebrate our movement, with the Labour government of the 1970s making the first Monday in May a Bank Holiday.

May Day is a day of celebration

but also unites many workers from different communities and ethnic backgrounds in our struggles. This show of international solidarity is maintained and recognises many other workers are risking life and freedom for celebrating May Day. In Turkey, for example, workers have faced massive repression celebrating over the years. In Chile under Pinochet workers defied the fascist dictatorship.

Union win: Unite Bromley library workers

Bromley library workers have won a huge victory. This follows all out, indefinite strike action which began on 28 March. A mass meeting on 18 April agreed to accept proposals recommended by union representatives who attended negotiations with the employer the previous day. The campaign has won concessions from the employer on all the main items in dispute. This includes:

- the immediate filling of 17 vacant posts
- protection for pay and conditions that goes beyond the legal protection provided by 'TUPE' (workers were transferred out from the council to Greenwich Leisure Limited (GLL) in November 2017)
- a pay increase from April 2018
- implementation of the London Living Wage
- Paid trade union facility time.

This is a hugely significant trade union victory. GLL took over the service promising to make "efficiencies" i.e. inevitable staffing cuts. GLL attempted to run libraries whilst deliberately keeping posts vacant. This led to the service being stretched to the point of collapse and was the final straw leading to the walk out.

This is clear example of how collective action can beat austerity which we can all learn from.

Show council workers some ‘Dacorum’



Household waste and recycling depot staff took two days of strike action over Easter over plans to rip up redundancy terms.

In conservative controlled Dacorum District Council, staff have kept services going despite numerous cuts to staff and their conditions over the years. Last summer the Council approached the unions to ‘consult’, forgetting we have collective bargaining rights, on major changes to terms and conditions. The proposals included cuts to mileage rates and car allowances. Into this mix, they threw in reduction to redundancy pay. This was a naked attempt to attack terms and conditions without justification. It’s worth noting that that reducing redundancy payments do not reduce operating budgets. It just makes it easier to get rid of staff on the cheap.

Through talks, UNISON managed to mitigate against some of the more detrimental aspects of the proposals but the reduction in redundancy was a red line for members fed up with the Council trying to push staff around, using austerity as an excuse.

After a failure to reach agreement,

“The message was loud and clear from council workers – austerity has to go and it’s time to fight back

the employer refused to negotiate and imposed the changes. This followed consultation with our members who agreed to ballot for industrial action.

The first hurdle we faced was how to overcome the anti-working people trade union laws – the Trade Union Act. The requirement under the Act that 50% of members balloted need to vote was a big challenge. We decided to work to our strengths. We have the most brilliant members working in the depot and decided to only ballot areas with high density and it worked. We got the 50% with large numbers voting for strike action. The message was loud and clear from council workers – austerity has to go and it’s time to fight back.

So far two days of strike action have been taken with further strikes planned involving cemeteries, street care, and grounds maintenance staff if the dispute is not resolved.

DIARY DATES

Tuesday 12 June 2018

Public Services Committee AGM

11:00 am – 1 pm

TUC Congress House

Members from public sector unions

welcome as observers

Saturday 30 June 2018

#OURNHS70 – FREE, FOR ALL, FOREVER

Assemble at 12 noon

Portland Place, London W1A 1AA

29 June – 6 July 2018

Peterborough Pride

Various venues across Peterborough

Fri 20 – Sun 22 July 2018

Tolpuddle Festival

Tolpuddle Martyrs Museum,

Dorchester Road, Dorset

Saturday 28 July 2018

Norwich Pride

The Forum, Norwich, Norfolk

Sunday 2 September 2018

Burston Strike School Rally

Village Green, Burston near Diss

Editorial team

Public Services Committee Officers:

Martin Powell-Davies: Chair

Sharon Leslie: Secretary

Greta Farian: Assistant Secretary

If you would like to submit an article for a future edition of the SERTUC Public Services Committee newsletter email:

sharonl@pcs.org.uk