

# CAMPAIGNING FOR CARE

## in social services—

6

# DIRECT ACTION BY WORKERS & USERS

**Direct action can play a key role in any campaign in helping building political support for public services whilst undermining the opposition. Direct action can help keep contractors out or delay their arrival whilst you strengthen your organisation and plan further action.**

The success of direct action by workers and users will depend on many factors including:

- how strong your stewards organisation is.
- how well you have established links and working relationships with other labour movement and community organisations
- the support you have built up amongst users.
- the effectiveness of your education and propaganda work so far.
- the kind of direct action you choose.

The commitment of NUPE members to their jobs and the people they care for is considerable. We must therefore recognise that many members will be reluctant or unwilling to take certain forms of direct action if they think it will affect standards of care. Moreover many members are often reluctant

to join in marches and demonstrations but can be interested in forms of direct action which show their work and the service in a more positive way. In fact, there are many direct action tactics which can be effective with little or no disturbance to those we care for.

**Remember, how well things are organised is equally as important as the kind of action you take.**

The following are some ideas for different forms of action:

★ **Picketing and lobbying of council and social services committee meetings** as soon as there is a threat of privatisation or use of consultants. To be effective, a good turnout is needed (just tell the press there will be a lobby; don't promise a mass turnout). Continue picketing at every subsequent meeting. Use your contacts with other labour movement organisations to encourage other people to attend. Then build on this to call for wider support at later pickets. Make sure you have leaflets to hand out to councillors, supporters and the public.

**Before deciding on any action, examine the following questions:**

1. What effect will it have politically. Will it make it more difficult to privatise — if so, how?
2. Can other aims be achieved by taking this particular action?
3. What effect will it have on users and the wider public?
4. Have you planned how to counter attempts to make you look uncaring and self interested? (Show how they are uncaring. Collect information about effects of cuts, of old people being neglected etc through lack of resources before you take action)
5. What support can you attract from other unions and other community and labour movement organisation?

6 Will it be divisive with other workers?

7. Have you the resources and enough people to carry it out?

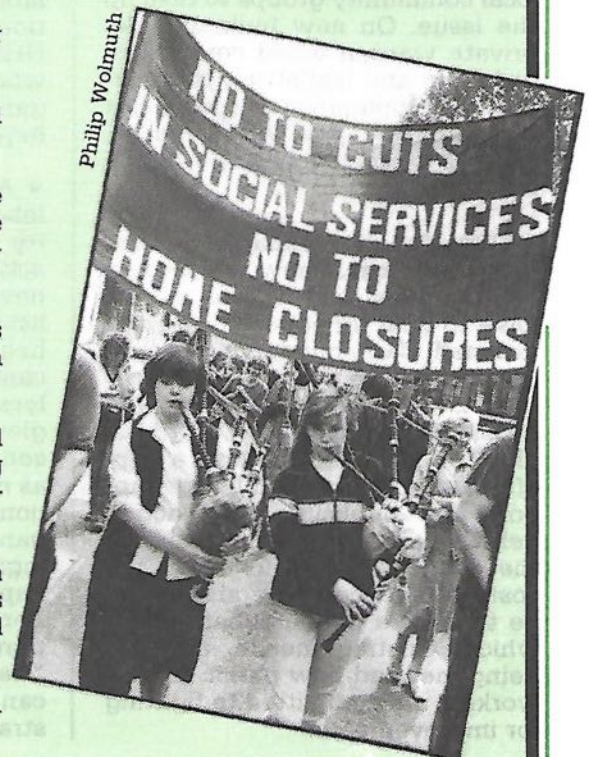
8. Will it help draw in more members, more users and the wider public into your campaign?

9. What are the likely responses from the authority and how can you respond to these?

10. How can the action be timed to have the maximum effect, eg before a crucial council meeting?

11. Is taking this form of action the best use of your resources at this point in time, or could other action be more effective?

12. What kind of follow up action could be taken?





Some campaigns have occupied council chambers to prevent council meetings taking place and held their own meetings. Remember important decisions may be taken before these council meetings in key closed meetings of the political parties. If privatisation is threatened, consider picketing and lobbying Tory group meetings or key meetings of the Labour Party, eg General Management Committees, District Party or County Party meetings as well as Labour Group meetings.

**★ Organise open days and events.** Another way of taking the initiative in showing the value of public services. Try and encourage management to support a variety of open days where the public can come round buildings, talk to staff and appreciate what's involved in a service. If management refuse, consider how you can run them yourselves. Alternatively mount an exhibition or photographic evidence in places like busy shopping areas designed to encourage the public to stop and talk to you.

**★ Campaigns against private homes, private warden complexes and other private facilities.** This could involve various forms of lobbying and action aimed at getting planning permission rejected and forcing a public debate on the expansion of homes. Tactics could include token pickets of buildings, objections to planning applications, preparing and submitting alternative plans for the site, encouraging local community groups to take up the issue. On new buildings like private warden aided complexes, picketing and leafletting is important for propaganda purposes but it is unlikely you will have resources to effectively stop work on site.

**★ Organise a campaign to improve services.** Show what could be improved and where people have to wait for service or have it rationed. Carry out surveys, follow the ideas from section 1, prepare reports and leaflets. The 'Who Cares' Campaign in the Oxford Region found health surveys a very effective way of mobilising support and publicity. Such action helps take away the initiative from the council and its focus on the costs of services. The aim would be to force a public debate about which existing needs are not being met and how public service workers are committed to fighting for improvements.

**★ Organise members to investigate private homes.** NUPE members are in an excellent position to judge the standards in private homes. Organise some members to visit these homes perhaps looking for a place for their parent. Or see if you can find people to work in them. Take careful note of everything seen and heard. Publish this and all evidence of the scandal in private homes. NUPE Birmingham are currently investigating homes in this way. COHSE in Southport produced evidence which gained considerable national publicity.

**★ Encourage users to take direct action.** Whilst many users of social services may be unable to take part in direct action, many will but may need support and encouragement. Moreover don't forget their relatives or friends. Through your work and leaflets find out who might be interested in joining in action or forming groups. You could help form action groups, user committees or "Friends of Brierly House".

In many areas such groups are dwindling or focus only on fund-raising for social activities or



**★ Set up a community enquiry into the service** which could cover unmet needs, resources, improvements, control, management etc. Tower Hamlets and Sheffield have recently carried out enquiries like this. Organise labour movement organisations to be on a small panel who would hear and receive evidence from a wide range of labour and community organisations. Involve workers from the NHS, District Nurses and others whose experience is relevant. Organise regular publicity during the inquiry.

**★ Actively encourage the wider labour movement and community organisations to take direct action themselves.** Time spent now contacting all the groups listed in section 4 will enormously help build towards successful campaigns in later months. A key lesson from privatisation struggles to date is that building personal and political contacts as well as more formal alliances cannot be done too early. Contact these organisations and go to their meetings to spell out the dangers. Most importantly suggest positive actions they can take. 19 possible actions are listed on page 29 of "Cashing In On Care" but others can be developed from this 7 point strategy.

equipment. However they can have political muscle and may have potential to become active in your campaign. Perhaps a branch or section can 'adopt' a nearby home. In Canada and the United States many such groups have been formed. Such groups may need some initial help in basic organising skills, but once formed they should be powerful allies in fighting for a caring service and joining in direct action.

**★ Organise publicity and a demonstration** outside a building or office to coincide with the release of a dossier on the shoddy work, cost overruns etc by contractors.

**★ Marches and demonstrations** should be jointly organised or sponsored with other Labour movement organisations whenever possible to help ensure maximum support. They can be an effective way of showing strength of feeling and political support (or the lack of it!). Think of other forms of action before planning a march — sometimes it is too easy to resort to traditional forms of action when other types of action might be more successful. There is often a resistance to join a march unless the issue is a very major one.