

# CAMPAIGNING FOR CARE

in social services

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## BUILDING STRONGER WORKPLACE ORGANISATIONS

Building stronger trade union organisations at the workplace is a basic and very important part of fighting cuts and privatisation. Without good organisation, campaigns are hardly likely to get off the ground.

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This section is divided into three parts:

1. strengthening trade union organisation at your workplace
2. organising at branch level
3. building joint union committees





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## STRENGTHENING WORKPLACE ORGANISATION

● Make sure you have a **full quota of union stewards and safety reps** in your section and department. Encourage others to become shop stewards.

● Encourage those who are not union stewards or safety reps to **help distribute leaflets** and other campaign material. This is a very important job in departments like Social Services which have workplaces scattered throughout the local authority.

● Many workers in Social Services work alone or in small groups, for example home helps and workers in residential homes, so it is very important to have **regular meetings in worktime** if the council permits and try to reach agreement to extend these. Even short informal meetings at breaks and lunchtime can achieve a lot. Use these meetings to keep everyone informed of negotiations and proposals, discuss demands and tactics and distribute information. Try to time meetings for the convenience of those on night shift or organise separate meetings for these workers.

● Check that **everyone is in the appropriate union and organise to recruit** all those starting work in your department. You may have to start at the beginning to convince members and non-members of the role of the union and why it is increasingly important to be organised and prepared to campaign collectively.

● Ensure that as many members as possible, particularly those who are not stewards, **go on trade union courses** organised by NUPE, TUC, Workers Educational Association and local resources centres, as well as training courses run by the department or local authority.

● Ensure that your branch **draws up a list of all workplaces and trade union reps in your department**. Make sure this is circulated to all stewards.

● Make sure **grievances are taken up quickly and effectively** — you can't afford to ignore these basic issues which are a key concern of members. They may also be linked to management's proposals or part of a plan to harass and put pressure on the workforce.

● Produce a **special anti-privatisation bulletin** for your department when the need arises. This could start out as two sides of A4 paper and expand later if necessary. There are distinct and often separately run services in Social Services Departments so it is vital



to keep members informed who work alone or in small groups, but also to counter moves by management to play off one section against another.

● If there are stewards who do not regularly report back to their members, distribute information, ask for members' views on proposals, and carry out other duties expected of them, then raise it with the Branch Committee as a matter of urgency. **If some stewards remain relatively inactive then encourage other members to become stewards to replace them.** You can't afford to have weak links in your organisation leading to groups of workers being poorly represented or not involved at all.

● Discuss with the Branch Committee and with the membership **what industrial action should be taken if anyone is victimised by management for refusing to implement privatisation proposals or for carrying out agreed trade union duties.**

● Use the monitoring sheets not only to gather evidence but also to encourage workers to take a more active role and to increase your strength.

## ORGANISING AT BRANCH LEVEL

■ Try to make sure your branch meetings are stimulating and accessible to members. Review the time and location of meetings, how they are run, and the provision of child care. Invite speakers from campaigns and use part of the meeting for discussion on specific topics. Make sure members know when and where meetings are held.

■ Ensure that the NUPE Journal, union pamphlets and circulars are distributed at branch meetings.

■ Arrange with Divisional Education Officer to **organise regular half or one day educationals for members on privatisation, cuts, campaigning etc**, which can be very useful in sharing information, drawing more people into an active role, learning the lessons from other campaigns and so on. It may be an advantage for the branch to appoint an education officer to plan future educationals and to follow up each one afterwards.

● If there is enough support, **set up a branch anti-privatisation campaign committee** to coordinate the union's local campaign. Involve both stewards and members and try to ensure the latter are not dominated in meetings and gain experience.

■ **Start a branch newsletter** if you do not already have one. This could initially be two sides of A4

paper using one side to explain branch activities, the results of negotiations etc and use the other side for cuttings from local newspaper reports, Public Services Action featuring companies activities, news of similar campaigns elsewhere. Once you have gained experience in writing, layout and effectively organised its distribution to the membership, you could start expanding its size.

■ Try to ensure the branch shares out responsibilities for all activities to as many members as it is feasible and practicable in the circumstances.

■ Make sure that the branch has a delegate to the Trades Council

and is represented on local campaign committees. Delegates should understand what is involved, for example representing the branch, reporting back fully after each meeting. It is useful to also appoint someone to be a standby delegate because it is rare to be able to attend every meeting and it's better to have a stand-in delegate who may not be fully acquainted than no delegate at all. (See Action Notes on Being a Delegate, Community Action No 38, p.17-19)

● **Make sure your stewards attend the branch and district committee and that the branch is represented on the area committee.**



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## BUILDING JOINT UNION COMMITTEES

Privatisation and cuts cannot be fought alone. Few workers and no union can claim to be unaffected by privatisation. Conflicts and bitterness from previous disputes should be put to one side. Identify and focus on issues where there is a common interest to build confidence and support. Any lack of unity in resisting privatisation will be exploited by management to divide and rule.



★ Have regular meetings of the social services department's joint shop stewards committee or anti-privatisation campaign committee to discuss the effects of legislation, management's proposals, work out demands and tactics, and coordinate inter-union action. Departmental JSSC's or campaign committees should have representation from both manual and white collar workers and all major sections in the department.

★ If a local authority joint shop stewards committee (JSSC) covering all departments does not already exist, make contact with activists in other departmental JSSC's to discuss ways in which one can be set up. As with departmental JSSC's it is important to have white collar and manual union representation. The planned introduction of statutory tendering and cost comparisons for most local authority services should be used to strengthen trade union organisation. Where a local authority JSSC already exists, it may be an advantage to set up an anti-privatisation sub-committee to coordinate action and monitor the council's response.

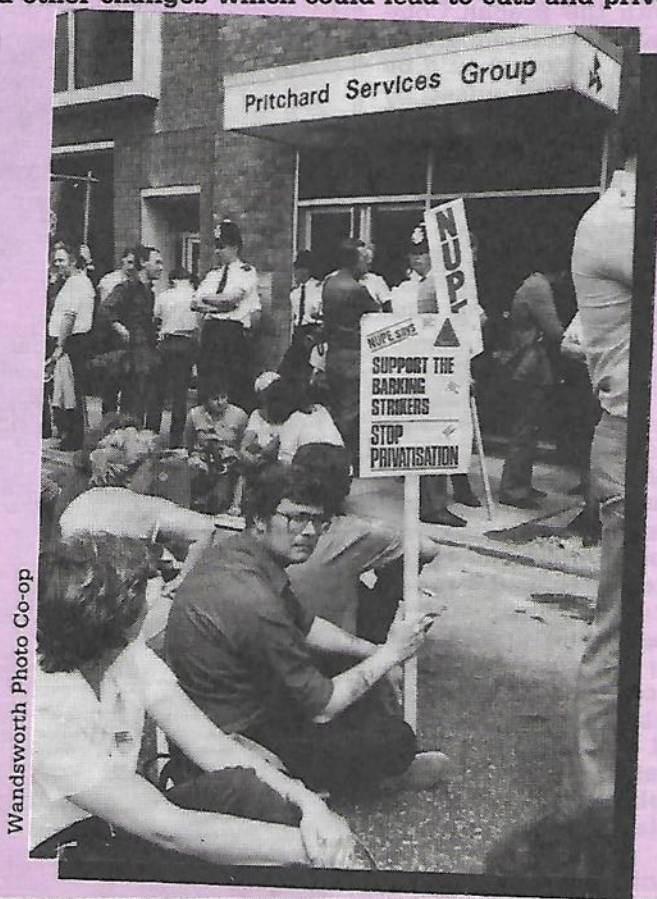
★ Some local authorities eg Sheffield, Manchester, have set up departmental committees or working parties of shop stewards and management reps to work out ways of opposing privatisation and rate capping. Make sure there is wide representation on such committees and there are regular reports back to the joint shop stewards committee. Don't wait for management's cost cutting proposals to prepare the ground for in-house tenders — use the committee/working party to put forward your demands to maintain/re-establish good quality standards, improve services, changes in the way services are organised and run.

★ Try to establish contact between departmental and/or local authority JSSC's in neighbouring authorities to share information, support each other's campaigns, and work towards joint action. You can use the NUPE Area Committee to make links.

★ Invite speakers from JSSC's in other councils to draw on their experience of organising the sustaining inter-union action — learn from their mistakes and ideas.

## UNDER IMMEDIATE THREAT

- Organise regular section/department wide mass meetings as soon as privatisation is clearly threatened. Regular bulletins and leaflets (see previous section) to the workforce are also essential.
- Work out and publicise the knock-on effects of privatisation for other workers and departments including central services, for example, contractor purchasing their own supplies and maintaining their own equipment, fewer wages to prepare. Get over to management and white collar workers how they will be affected.
- If you obtain evidence and/or where there are clear conflicts between different unions or sections eg NALGO members preparing tender documents against their own union's policy, first try to discuss it with NALGO branch officials to see what action they can take before proceeding with other action.
- If you don't already have any sympathetic links in management, work study etc, try to establish them. The discreet exchange of information will help to alert you to any planned re-organisation proposals and other changes which could lead to cuts and privatisation.



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## JOINT UNION ACTION

● It is official NUPE/NALGO policy to set up joint union committees and take joint action against privatisation.

● In the London borough of Croydon, the trade unions in social services — NALGO, NUPE & GMBATU — joined forces in 1984 to fight the council's plans for the closure of two residential homes for the elderly — threatening workers and residents previously compelled to move by earlier home closures. Though one of these homes was closed, the other was still open in April 1985, with a strong likelihood of sur-

viving. The unions maintained their campaign and collected over 7000 signatures from members of the public in support.

● NUPE and NALGO have successfully joined forces in many areas in the last few years to defend jobs and services. In Bury, Lancashire, a joint union campaign defeated the threat to privatise refuse services and deterred the council from further privatisation moves. In Westminster where the council is engaged on a massive programme of cuts and closures, a joint NUPE-NALGO campaign saved a library from closure.