

# RSSN READING RISING



## STRIKE



## VICTORY for Devon NHS WORKERS!

**The** strike conducted at North Devon District Hospital on 5th-6th January has resulted in a victory for the UNISON members there. The NHS Trust and private contractor, Sodexo gave in to our demands for NHS terms and conditions for the outsourced porters, cleaners and catering staff. They've won 7 days extra annual leave, sick pay, NHS pay levels with increments, increased Maternity pay and back pay worth up to £3,600 for each member of staff.

We celebrated on the town square that weekend at a rally. One of the highlights was listening to a senior consultant describing how hospitals could be run without managers and advocating that the current lot should all be sacked to

improve staff morale. At the end of the rally everyone sang the old IWW song "Solidarity Forever". Hearing my fellow hospital workers sing a union song amongst union banners and clenched fists on Barnstaple Town square was a wonderful experience that I'll cherish for the rest of my life.

What I've learnt from this dispute is that a union is at its strongest when the distinction between activist and member is at its most blurred. The only type of union that can be guaranteed to fight immediately and every time is one that is directly controlled by its membership so that the union truly is the membership and can draw confidence from itself. A union of this type can never be attached to any political party that intends to put the interests of capitalism above the interests of the workers.

## PUBLIC SERVICE BALLOT

**As** we go to print a crucial strike ballot has begun for over 270,000 civil service workers. It could mean major strikes in the run-up to the general election to defend workers' conditions and to halt job losses and privatisation.

Labour is slashing the current compensation (redundancy pay) scheme. A worker on a salary of £24,000 who has worked for the civil service for over 20 years would have redundancy pay cut by over £20,000. The government wants to get rid of 100,000 jobs—on the cheap!

Gordon Brown, in his last days as prime minister, is ripping up terms and conditions to clear the way for himself or Tory David Cameron to sack masses of people.

Tory prime minister Margaret Thatcher was pushed to introduce the compensation scheme, but ministers now say it is too generous and wants to rob hard-working, low-

paid public servants. Labour wants major losses across the civil service and in crucial public services to pay for the billions handed to the bankers and the bosses.

Ironically, former World Bank economist Joseph Stiglitz has recently warned the government against public spending cuts, stating this will not help the economy.

The PCS plans to kick-start the action with a two-day national strike on 8 and 9 or 11 and 12 March, followed by regional action. Much more importantly, there is a growing fightback against cuts in health, education and in the private sector. The PCS can spearhead general resistance. The ballot ended on 25 February.

But it will take serious resistance to gain victory. Activists are arguing that a campaign of hard-hitting national strikes can win this fight. This is not just a fight for civil service workers. This is an early battle in the government's war on public services.

ANTI-AD

## ARMY CAREERS



**"i wanted a job delivering more than just pizza"**

