

## Wage strikes vs Defensive strikes

Looking at different strikes at the moment, with inflation so high the dichotomy implied in the title of this section doesn't hold as much water. A great many wage strikes in their character and approach are explicitly defensive. Aside from HGV drivers generally speaking most uplifts are at best breaking even especially when factoring in losses over the pandemic. The North Sea rigs wildcat strike also has this flavour with workers describing what they are asking for as a return to pre-pandemic pay levels. And almost all other pay disputes at the moment are couched in those terms- of protecting living standards as opposed to improving. This is no doubt determined by high inflation and prevailing uncertainty about the economic forecast but also obviously and in turn the low level of confidence and class consciousness dampens workers expectations. Only HGV drivers in some instances appear to be showing any ruthlessness in exploiting their bargaining position. Driver shortages caused by Brexit and pandemic related changes in immigration flows and a slow mass resignation accelerated by the pandemic from a shitty job that an older workforce didn't want to do anymore have increased bargaining power. Supply chain pressures and increase in e-commerce over the pandemic are keeping HGV driver demand high. However comparable numbers of workers are required in aviation, transportation, health, care, education but obviously many of these companies and authorities have less cash to bargain with and are willing to push workers further before making concessions. So workers level of organisation is more important. Whereas HGV drivers have had large increases with only the threat of strikes other sectors will be pushed all the way. In the same workplace at the moment HGV drivers have quite often been balloted along side workers in different jobs and been given substantially larger pay rises. At Luton Airport HGV drivers got 20% while front of house staff got 4% and everyone settled on that. We don't know all the details in all these disputes but it's a definite pattern and a bit of challenge for the likes of us to highlight and counter. The composition of this workforce is overwhelmingly white and male as well which seems worth acknowledging and considering in what way this plays a role in what's happening. There doesn't appear to have been any inter-company bargaining taking place within the HGV disputes and they have mainly gone through conventional union channels. Unite have been talking about creating more effective combines but not sure how much that is materialising.

Bus drivers and refuse workers are also involved in a lot of pay disputes at the moment all over Britain. This is also partly related to the demand for drivers. But again although some are getting good results tight companies and local authorities are putting more of a fight than a lot of the haulage companies.

Strikes at St Barts and GOSH by cleaners and porters combining demands for better pay and conditions with insourcing have been effective in inspiring other groups of workers in the vicinity to do the same. Challenging outsourcing and exposing its real purpose of fragmentation of the workforce does have potential to breakdown boundaries between workers and often a way to expose racial and gendered injustice. Also could help to combine "low skilled" workers with some of those designated higher skilled as both have been outsourced and both have the

detrimental effects. Obviously the tactic is limited as all your doing is ending up under a different manager and will normally realise your subjected to pretty similar conditions but it does have the benefits listed above.

Local to me at Heathrow disputes at Mercedes Benz and Vanderlande by technicians were marked by efforts by management to play union and non-union workers off against each other. Offering different pay and conditions. These workers will need support as it's easy to see why efforts from outside to increase confidence could make the difference between success and failure within workplaces that have a minority or diminished unionised workforce. A lot of workplaces will be in this position these days.

Solidarity networks in Manchester have been important in keeping strikes going at CHEP pallet (longest in Unite's history) and GoNorthWest buses before that. Ian Allinson wrote an article talking about the pros and cons. Talks about how SolNets can partially bypass some of the legal constraints on unions but how that can impede on the actual strikers agency and lead to awkward discussions about what the workers do or don't want this "third party" group to do on their behalf.

Some of the clearest defensive strikes are happening in education where pensions and other conditions seem regularly under attack.

The big national rail strike is also mainly a defensive strike against the huge cuts planned to the services. Even though they are still refusing to accept a continued pay freeze. If these strikes do go ahead, a strong victory would be a blow to the government and the whole outsourcing, corporate welfare agenda and could be a shot in the arm for workers with low confidence. We could think about how we can support and expand this struggle. And in what ways we can relate it to local things we've got going on. Depending on how it pans out it could get a relatively significant amount of international attention as well so opportunities may present themselves there.