

MANCUNION

August 2008



OFFICIAL
PICKET

UNISON

UNISON

HOOT YOUR
HORN!
FOR FAIR PAY!

" RONALDO "

We really are
SLAVES!!



The strike action on July 16 and 17 was solid across all Manchester City Council workplaces, shutting the vast majority of schools and affecting all city council services.

Across the country, well over half a million local government workers took strike action on both days, closing thousands of schools, sports centres, libraries, municipal offices and disrupting a wide range of local public services.

For those who've been on another planet, the strike was UNISON members' reaction to being given a final offer of a 2.45% pay 'rise,' despite local government pay being the worst in the public sector. Indeed, just the day before the strike, the Bank of England reported that rising food and fuel costs pushed UK inflation to an 11 year high of 3.8%, or 4.6% when housing costs are factored in. On this basis, what the employers were offering represented a real pay cut and members across the country made it absolutely clear that this was entirely unacceptable. Members didn't want to go on strike, and they didn't want to cause disruption to local government services, but the truth is that low and declining pay is causing serious disruption every single day for our members, and most particularly for

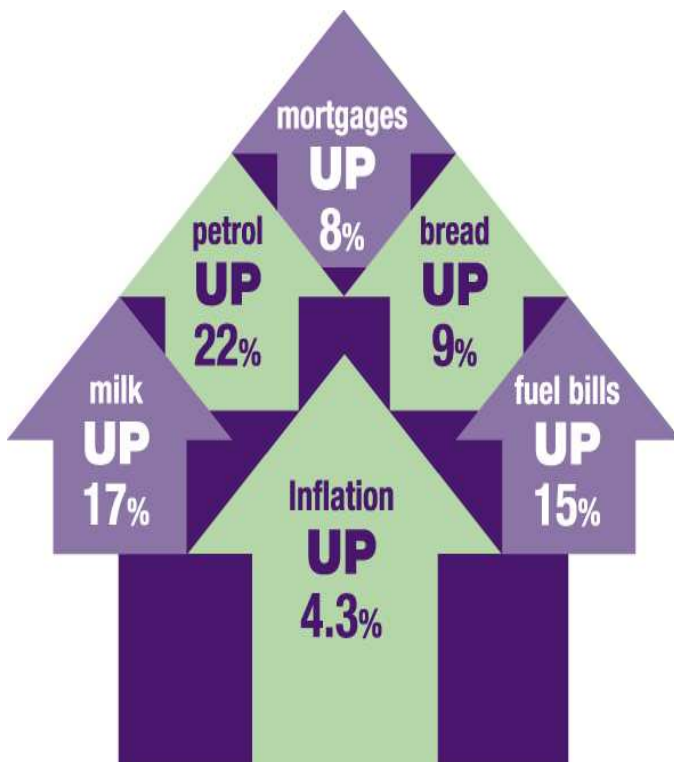
low paid, women employees.

The media covered the strike comprehensively, and effectively disproved the employers' view that only a few local government workers had bothered to take action. Indeed, there was a huge amount of media attention here in Manchester, with Branch officers and members being interviewed by BBC national and local news, Channel 4, Granada, Sky News, Channel M, Manchester Evening News, etc. But perhaps the best media scoop goes to the pickets outside the North Manchester school whose 'Ronaldo' caption (pictured on the front page) got our 'fair pay' story national tabloid coverage in the Mirror and also in the usually union-unfriendly Sun. However, in typical media fashion, the tabloids appeared to forget about the second day of action, although if anything the strike was even stronger on Thursday.



The strike in numbers

- Over 500,000 members went on strike across England, Wales and Northern Ireland.
- 2 million items of campaign materials (leaflets, posters, placards and stickers) were distributed to branches and members.
- 1,300 messages of support were logged onto the Google earth map www.unison.org.uk/paymatters/support
- Nearly 400 photos of strikers and picket lines were emailed or sent from mobile phones into the national website on the day.
- There was huge national and local media coverage on the two days and those leading up to the strike.
- Widespread support came our way from the public



So what did the strike achieve? It told the employers in no uncertain terms that their policy of year on year effective pay cuts is not sustainable. It proved that hundreds of thousands of local government employees were prepared to unite in taking serious industrial action to secure a better pay deal. And of course it forced the employers to do what they said they wouldn't; so now they have announced that they **will** return to the negotiating table to begin talks aimed at settling the current dispute over pay.



These joint talks are scheduled to start on 13 August, and in light of this positive sign, the NJC agreed not to name a date for further strike action. Progress will be monitored and the decision reviewed in September, and if no real results on securing a fair pay rise are visible, then the union will consult again with members on how to step up industrial action.

So whilst we've made progress, there's still some way to go in getting the employers to improve on their measly 2.45% offer, although this time the trade union negotiators are armed with two successful days of strike action. Nor has the campaign stopped – nationally and regionally, UNISON will continue to put pressure on the local government employers to nail the myth that they can't afford a better offer. The truth is that councils have exceeded the

efficiency savings target by over £1 billion last year. There's also a key role for us all to contact our local councillors to remind them that pay cuts and using expensive temps and consultants are not the way to motivate a workforce to provide first rate public services.

Thanks are due to all the Branch Officers and stewards who effectively organised the two-day action and to the thousands of members who supported the strike, especially those who attended the picket lines. It's never a great deal of fun being on a picket line from before 6am on a cold and rainy morning to greet those few lonely people who choose to ignore their conscience and their colleagues by crossing picket lines.



Picketing however is always important, not only to remind the Seriously Concerning Antisocial Buffoons that their selfishness actively undermines everyone else, but also to talk to the public and service users to let them know why we've been forced to take collective action. And what was genuinely encouraging was that for the most part the public and service users have been really supportive. The experience of pickets at North City Library was typical, with members of the public enthusiastically supporting the action and car drivers beeping their support. Service users were also very concerned that some employees had crossed the

picket line, saying that 'if you're out, then all staff should be out' and refusing themselves to cross the line. Thanks then are also due to the huge support that we received from the public and also from fellow trade unionists. UNITE (formerly the T&G) were out on strike with us, but the Branch has also received messages of support as well as contributions to the strike fund from other local trade unions.

"Once again, UNISON members in Manchester have done themselves proud by their fantastic support for the strike action in support of fair pay. Hopefully, the employers will now see sense and return to the table with an improved offer. I'd like to thank everybody who took part in the action and particular thanks should go to those Branch Officers, stewards and members who assisted in picketing of workplaces - you all helped to make the action a great success."

Tony Caffery, Branch Secretary

How to contact the Branch

Address	3 - 5 St John Street Manchester, M3 4DN
Telephone	0161 254 7500
Fax	0161 254 7515
Web	www.unisonmanchester.org