

# UK health unions betray Mid Yorkshire trust dispute

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20 June 2013

The dispute involving around 400 clerical staff and administrative workers at the Mid Yorkshire Hospital Trust has been wound up by the Unison and Unite unions.

The trust comprises Pinderfields hospital in Wakefield together with Dewsbury and Pontefract hospitals. Last autumn the trust announced it had a £26 million deficit and would implement £24 million in cuts, including slashing jobs and “down-banding” the pay grades of the administrative workers. This would mean pay cuts of up to £2,800 for the already low-paid, mainly women workforce.

A one-day strike in November last year was followed by a three-day strike later that month. After the three-day strike, the unions met with management in an attempt to settle the dispute. The trust proposed to “protect” present salaries for 18 months before the cuts took effect.

The workers overwhelmingly rejected this and held a five-day strike at the end of January. Faced with the determined fight by the administrative workers, the unions held further discussions with management and put forward alternative proposals to save money.

They proposed the administrative workers remain on their current pay rates, but have their hours cut by an average four-and-a-half hours. The union argued that by implementing more “efficient” work methods, the same amount of work would be covered in the reduced hours. They also offered to put the proposed ballot of all 2,500 Unison members on hold. Management rejected the union’s alternative proposal, deeming it insufficient.

The ballot of the trust’s 2,500 Unison members went ahead in May. The result was announced May 28, with 76 percent of those voting supporting further strike action in support of the administrative workers, but on

a turnout of only 20 percent.

The unions sought further discussions with management under the auspices of the Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service (ACAS).

On June 12, the unions and hospital trust management announced the dispute had been settled. As part of the settlement, proposals for compulsory redundancies were dropped and enhanced salary protection given those facing down-banding of their salaries.

Management and unions were well pleased with their joint effort to impose attacks on health workers.

Speaking to the media, Director of Human Resources Graham Briggs stated, “I am delighted that all parties have been able to reach a compromise that gives a longer period of pay protection to *allow staff to adjust to the impact of the change (i.e., lower pay), whilst remaining affordable* and enabling our service redesign proposals... Of particular importance in this agreement is the recognition by both the Trust and the Trade Unions that we need a new working relationship and to work together in partnership going forward... Our staff and Trade Unions are vital to our future and we look forward to building a positive partnership approach going forward to deliver that success.”

Unison Regional Organiser Jim Bell added, “We look forward to forming a partnership arrangement with the trust, but this must be a partnership of equals.”

More than 70 jobs have already been lost through voluntary redundancy.

A major role in the dispute has been played by the pseudo-left Socialist Party. The Mid Yorkshire Health Unison branch secretary, Adrian O’Malley, is a Socialist Party member. Writing on the Socialist Party web site June 12, he explained, “The stewards ... decided to negotiate the best deal possible.”

To excuse himself and his colleagues, he added, “This year’s workforce reviews involve far fewer departments and staff. This influenced the turnout in the vote as most members were not facing pay cuts of job losses.

“As well as down-banding staff, the Trust imposed one year protection on all Trust staff, reduced from three years. Now the Trust has been forced through strike action to pay the admin staff the three years they were entitled to under the old policy ... they have to agree new job descriptions for all down-banded staff within six months, which opens the door for us to fight to get our members back on their original bands.”

Regardless of bogus claims that doors have been opened for future struggles by a defeat today, the trust has in fact achieved its policy of down-banding pay for the administrative staff.

Worse attacks will inevitably follow. From its inception the Mid Yorkshire Hospital Trust has suffered financial strictures. The new hospitals at Pinderfields and Pontefract were built under the Private Finance Initiative scheme and the trust now faces rising annual PFI costs, further restricting its already squeezed budget.

A Unison commissioned report, *Dead Weight—Mid Yorkshire Hospital Trust’s impossible £2bn PFI burden*, concludes, “As we have seen time and again in Mid Yorkshire, in South London and other PFI-burdened trusts, there is no local solution to problems which flow from sky-high and rising overhead costs ... and a continuing, tightening squeeze on NHS funding that is taking a heavy toll of jobs and services at the front line.”

The trade unions are playing a key role in enabling the government to push through its measures by restricting opposition to job losses to a local or regional basis. Groups such as the Socialist Party distinguish themselves as the loyal defenders of a bureaucracy into which they have become fully integrated and a propaganda department dedicated to justifying each and every sell-out.

To defend jobs and services health workers must mobilise independently of the unions and the Labour party and we urge them to study programme of the Socialist Equality Party’s NHS Fightback campaign, contact us and get involved.



To contact the WSWs and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

**[wsws.org/contact](https://www.wsws.org/contact)**