

Scottish cleansing workers maintain unified picket lines involving members of three unions

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Twelve days of solid and well supported strike action in Edinburgh by local authority cleansing workers are being followed by ongoing actions in many councils across Scotland. Well attended and effective pickets have been reported on social media at depot after depot, with workers from Unite, Unison and the GMB unions all supporting the strikes, respecting each other's picket lines and winning broad public support in pursuit of their pay claim.

The Edinburgh strike, which started August 18, concluding 30 August, saw large pickets held at the city's recycling and roads depots and a near complete halt to normal rubbish collection. Piles of festering garbage accumulating around the Grassmarket, the city's many tourist attractions and elegant streets, were broadcast around the world. Edinburgh's unsanitary mess testified to the enormous social power of cleansing workers, underscoring their daily essential contribution to public health and safety, keeping the city functioning for its 527,000 population.

On August 24, the strike was joined by thousands more cleansing workers across Scotland. Members of Unite, GMB and Unison all struck together, although officially the GMB and Unison strikes did not begin until August 26. Unite's strike was scheduled to run until August 31, while GMB and Unison struck from August 26 to 29 August. Workers explained that they had all decided to "take the hit" to their pay packets and refuse to work on days when their colleagues in other unions were on strike.

Bin workers had responded in a principled manner to the refusal of the Unite, Unison and GMB leadership under Wendy Dunsmore, Johanna Baxter and Keir Greenaway to agree coordinated strike days. On August

17, the trio wrote to local authority workers explicitly endorsing crossing another union's picket lines. Instead, workers at many depots signed on for work, if not covered by a strike mandate, before promptly walking out to join their officially striking colleagues, accompanied by much cheering. As a result of this unified stance, the strikes were as solid at the end of the first wave as at the beginning.

A second wave of cleansing strikes, again with staggered dates, is due to begin September 6, with Unite members striking for seven days, while GMB and Unison members will strike from September 7 for three days. 25 local authority areas are affected including Edinburgh, Glasgow, Dundee and Aberdeen City. 13,000 school and early years workers will also strike for three days from September in 9 local authorities, and from September 7 in three more.

In the face of this united and determined stance by workers, the Scottish authorities, backed by the Scottish National Party (SNP) government, have refused to budge. After the opening of the strikes, five days of negotiations between the Council of Scottish Local Authorities (CoSLA), the Scottish government and the trade unions concluded August 29 and produced only an additional £120 million. Council workers are now being offered a package still only worth 5 percent, along with a lump sum. According to Unite, this would mean that the lowest paid workers would only get £1,389 more annually along with a one-time cash payment.

The new offer remains far below inflation. The initial trade union demand for 7.1 percent average paid as a £3,000 flat rate has also been left far behind spiralling price increases. Dictating the callous response of Nicola

Sturgeon's SNP government and the entire British ruling class is the fear that any concession to Scottish council workers will encourage other section of workers while undermining the trade union bureaucracy's capacity to maintain control.

WSWS reporters spoke to workers at **Glasgow City Council's Easter Queenslie** recycling centre.

Matthew, a young cleansing worker said, "No progress has been yet, the offers they are making us are not the best. The offer they made us last night was worse than before. It is a bit of a joke. We have just got to stick together. As soon as one or two people decide that is enough, then you start to crumble. You have got to stay together, be stronger together."

Ricky, a refuse collector, said "We are just waiting for a better offer. The offer they have given us is not good enough. They are offering £925 over the year, which is less than the 5 percent they were offering previously. They are dangling the carrot of a £1,000 cost of living payment but that is a one off, which is no good to anybody."

Asked about CoSLA and the Scottish government's refusal to offer an improvement, Ricky said, "It is absolutely shocking. All these energy companies are making millions for the shareholders. The politicians are awarding themselves 11 and a half or 12 percent pay rises, but our first offer was 2 percent. All the multi-millionaires are getting richer while the poorest in society are getting poorer. They don't care, they never have cared."

"Even if we get a 10 percent rise it would still be a cut in our wages, not an increase, but we are trying to afford all these extras we are going to have to pay. Energy prices are going up in three months' time and again three months after that."

John, also a refuse collector, said, "We are all sticking together, as we did last time. The strike shows how much we are needed. Somebody said it has made an invisible job visible, the work that we carry out, making the city safe and clean. It highlights that to the people. We have had a lot of support from people driving by, beeping their horns, some people have come and spoken to us."

"As far as I know their latest offer has been rejected. We will just keep striking, that's all we can do, carry on this industrial action."

"It's the working class, they have just had enough."

Everyone is striking up and down the country, it is not just us. Everyone has had enough and is saying 'No'. I think we should have a pay rise of 15 percent, to be honest.

"I think a general strike is a good idea. If the whole country downed tools, they would have to give us something substantial, whether that would happen depends."

Daniel, another striker, said, "We are all fighting. Solidarity, we are all sticking together in the face of the crisis that is happening. The cost of living is shocking. Electricity is going up, everything is going up. We have all got families, half of them are going to food banks, but CoSLA and the Scottish government don't see it like that. They are on big wages anyway. They are quick enough to ask for your money, but when it is us wanting to be paid its another matter entirely. But without us all the rubbish accumulates and Britain looks like a shambles."

"I am scared. I have a young family. These wages don't pay enough for bills and mortgages. I am on the minimum wage. Some will be struggling to keep payments up. Even if the initial demand is agreed it is still not going to be enough. I agree with a general strike to get them out. But regardless of that, the next person you are going to get is going to be as corrupt as the last."



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