

# Tackling the strikes

As the old year moves to a close I am urging Ministers to set out how they intend to create a new year less troubled by strikes. So far the government has worked hard on ways to limit the damage strikes cause whilst declining to enter talks with Unions over pay.

The government needs to differentiate between the strikes and tailor its response to their differences. The railway disputes are taking place in an industry that has lost a lot of its passengers and fare revenue. It has become very reliant on state subsidy, and runs too many near empty trains at taxpayer expense. Now its main revenue earner, five day a week commuting, has been changed by more homeworking it has lost bargaining power as well as fare income. The government should expect management and Unions to settle with something for something deals to improve working practises and manning arrangements. It should continue to make clear there is no increased subsidy on offer.

The NHS strikes take place in a service that has many unfilled vacancies, has problems with retaining staff and has a big waiting list of work. The senior managers should be required to deliver the much delayed manpower plan which should set out how grading, rostering, pay scales and conditions of employment will be improved to ensure full numbers and a motivated workforce. The immediate talks need to be between Health Secretary, Chancellor and PM with the top management of the NHS to agree a plan and to create a common response to the strikes. The strikes are said to be about more than money. Managers have flex over grading, bands, increments and promotions. There needs to be a recruitment and retention solution. Some of the top management seem to be on the side of the Unions. There needs to be a common agreement between Ministers and senior executives which managers then need to implement. There needs to be an agreed way of getting more value for all the extra cash channelled into the NHS.