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FREE/DONATION

Catalyst

Issue #26

Newspaper of the Solidarity Federation

British section of the International Workers' Association



Winning the argument, or winning the fight?

THERE'S BEEN a lot of talk in the anti-cuts movement about the importance of 'winning the argument'. This strategy holds that the best way to go about fighting attacks on wages, living conditions and services is to point out the flaws in the pro-cuts arguments and suggest alternative policies which would avoid the need for cuts.

Some even seem to think that if the argument is won, the government will see the error of its ways, stop the planned cuts and everyone can go home happy.

It isn't hard to see where this strategy falls down. It certainly isn't the weakness of the anti-cuts arguments; it's been convincingly shown that these cuts aren't 'necessary' at all.

No, its mistake is the belief that society is based on rational arguments in the first place. Our society is not a debating chamber, but a power struggle between different groups with competing interests.

The government are making these cuts because they suit

the rich, the wealthy and the powerful. They can get away with it not because they are right, but because they hold power. They won't be swayed by argument, because from such a position of strength all arguments can be safely ignored. If necessary they can enforce their decisions using the media, police and courts.

Yet they are not invincible; the power of a government is based upon our compliance. We are the ones who have to turn the wheels, pull the levers and keep the system moving. We are the bedrock on which they have built

their authority, and that in turn gives us power. If the state wants to do something that we don't like, we can fight back with actual, direct action; work stoppages, occupations, blockades.

Our society is not a debating chamber, but a power struggle between different groups with competing interests.

Direct challenges such as this will cause more concern to politicians than any number of

marches, leaflets or arguments, because they undermine their authority. The more they lose their authority, the more people are able to resist.

We cannot shy away from the facts: the government attempts to force its decisions upon us, so we must force our collective decisions upon them.

This is where the true hope of victory lies. Not in winning some abstract moral argument, but in winning real battles, and rediscovering the ability to take control of our own lives and communities.



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‘Bread and freedom!’

North African revolts spread

ACROSS THE Arab world, unrest continues to mount. Though not revolutions in the full sense of the word, the uprisings in Tunisia and Egypt have set the example that more and more people are standing up to follow. As we watch history unfold before our eyes, it is hard to know what comes next. But talk of global revolution is certainly premature.

In Tunisia, Mohamed Ghannouchi is still prime minister, as he was under the now-deposed Ben Ali from 1999. Though most of the regime's senior figures have been removed from office following further unrest, the same repressive state apparatus remains in place. Demonstrators have continued to be killed on the streets since Ben Ali's departure.

In Egypt, the army has dissolved parliament and set a time frame of six months to hand over to a civilian administration. Meanwhile, they have effectively banned strike action, and reports are emerging of the detention and torture of demonstrators by the same people now handed the reigns of power. Tahrir Square has remained a focal point for demonstrators, while sporadic strike action has continued in defiance of the country's new military rulers.

It remains to be seen what the final outcome will be in either case. But the talk among elites continues to be of “reform” and “transition,”

in the name of “stability” and a return to normality. In other words, throw the people a bone, but leave the existing power structures in place. No doubt, where they cannot be put down entirely, the same argument will be made regarding unrest elsewhere.

In Algeria, the foreign minister promised to end 19-year-old emergency laws “within days,” hoping to quell the discontent there as people call for more protests. In Jordan, restrictions on public assembly are to be eased. Both countries are eager to placate their populations in order to avoid the scenes which overtook their neighbours.

On the other hand, both Bahrain and Yemen are going with the stick over the carrot. After a death during Bahraini protests, riot police further stoked tensions by opening fire upon the funeral of the man killed. This escalated in March with an intervention by Saudi troops at the Bahraini government's request. In Yemen, the state is deploying the tactic we saw in Egypt of plainclothes agents masquerading as “pro-government supporters.” Supported by police wielding tasers and batons, they have turned demonstrations into a violent battleground.

Kuwait, not yet caught up in the tidal wave, has announced the distribution of \$4bn and free



food for 14 months to all citizens. Between the concessions and the confrontations, it is clear that the rulers of the Arab world are finally starting to fear their subjects, as anger at unemployment and austerity merges with demands for political freedom.

The elites in the affected countries, as well as their foreign backers, will certainly wish to preserve the status quo - whether entirely unaltered or with a new face at the top and some appeasement.

The people, yearning for freedom,

are building their own vision for society as their movements grow - and self-organisation and mutual aid certainly appear integral to what they are forging for themselves through rebellion.

We don't yet know what will win out, and the result could be radically different in each place. But, as the struggles continue, our solidarity has to go to the working class of those nations now in upheaval. Not just against the dictators, but against the capitalist system that supports them.

Wisconsin strikes and occupiers for union rights

WORKERS, STUDENTS and activists have been pursuing an intensive campaign of direct action in response to attempts by recently elected Republican Governor Scott Walker's to shatter public sector unions by withdrawing collective bargaining rights. In a clear attempt to break the influence of the unions within the public sector entirely, Walker has forced through a bill which would not just remove collective bargaining, but legally cap pay increases, abolish union dues check-off and require annual union recognition elections - all this after unions accepted all of Walker's other demands, including a significant payout. The bill targets every Wisconsin state worker, with the exception of the police and fire service. However, despite their exemption from the bill, there has been much solidarity evident from firefighters and even in some cases, the police too.

The attempts to stop the bill's passage had been wide ranging, including strikes and ‘sick-outs’ by public sector workers - with schools across the state closing for several days, the state Capitol building in near perpetual occupation, massive demonstrations and even Democrat state senators and representatives literally fleeing the state as they attempt to block the passage of the bill by leaving the state legislature inouerate.

Despite having a long tradition of workers militancy and a proud union tradition, Wisconsin has recently seen several huge attacks on the working class - for example, having one of the



most punitive anti-welfare schemes - with recent programmes cutting the numbers receiving welfare by up to 90% without creating any more jobs. These are the schemes which the current government in the UK seeks to import.

The new bill is seen by many as the American right testing the waters with extreme anti-working class measures in the wake of the financial crisis. It is widely thought that if they are able to get away with it in Wisconsin then similar attacks in other states will quickly follow - already similar legislation is being pushed in Ohio, which many commentators see as going even further than that proposed in Wisconsin, for example not even exempting the police. While the resistance has in many ways been inspiring,

many question whether there is the ability to go the full way - at present the movement has largely kept within the bounds of “acceptable action”, and has received support from much of the Democratic Party. There is also the problem that the unions had already acceded to almost all of Walker's demands - it was only at the point where their very place at the bargaining table was threatened that they felt the need to take any action. With the passage of the bill, more radical union elements have been calling for a state-wide general strike, something which would represent a significant escalation of the already high stakes struggle. However, this looks unlikely as long as union leaders and Democrat politicians remain in control.

Poland: factory go slow

WORKERS AT Wroclaw's Fagor Mastercook factory have been undertaking a work-to-rule strike. Despite exceptionally good output, increased exports and a healthy profit, most workers are still taking home a meagre 350 euros a month, much lower than wages in other nearby factories and certainly lower than for similar work in other European countries.

The parent company, Mondragon capital group enjoys, as a cooperative an undesired reputation as being fair to workers, however its exploitative practices in low-cost labour countries lay that mythology bare. In addition, Fagor Mastercook has a history of repressing organized labour.

Australia: construction workers strike

WORKERS AT a construction site in the centre of Perth, Western Australia, have walked off in protest over the working conditions of migrant workers. The Construction, Forestry, Mining and Energy Union (CFMEU) state secretary Kevin Reynolds said Chinese workers at the Equus apartment complex were paid as little as \$12 (£7.47) an hour - less than half the \$28 (£17.44) plus benefits paid to Australian workers doing the same work. He also said they had not been paid at all in the last week.

Of the total workforce of 180, there are as many as 50 Chinese workers mainly involved in plastering and ceiling work. There were also Korean workers on the site, while other workers from the Philippines claimed they were also paid less than Australians according to the union. The CFMEU had been raising the issue with the developer for “four or five months”, Mr Reynolds said.

Serbia: repression of union activists

MEMBERS OF Serbian union initiative ASI are being once more fitted up on dubious criminal charges. ASI General Secretary Milan Stojanovic is being investigated on five year old charges of “Motor vehicle theft with burglary, break-in and threat”. This comes after six members of ASI were charged with “international terrorism” last year. The so-called ‘Belgrade 6’ were acquitted after an international solidarity campaign spearheaded by the International Workers' Association, of which ASI is a part and whose General Secretary was one of the imprisoned six.

Of the latest charges, ASI comment that “in 2006 Milan was a witness in an investigation of the same crime. Now, five years later, the prosecution has dug up this case, and Milan has mystically changed his role from a witness to accused. To make things even more absurd, Milan cannot drive, actually he has never even started a vehicle.”

Victory in campaign to save Levenshulme Baths

20 days of parent-led community protests force council U-turn

ON 8 February Labour-run Manchester City Council was the first to announce its budget cuts - £109 million worth. Among community amenities being axed were several libraries, some advice centres and half a dozen fitness and leisure centres. The south Manchester neighbourhood of Levenshulme - ethnically and economically mixed with some pockets of severe deprivation was the worst affected - facing the loss of its leisure centre, Sure Start scheme and its historic swimming pools.

The baths were a contentious choice to cut by the council, which had spent more than £200,000 in 2010 upgrading the facilities but was insisting full refurbishment was too expensive at more than £300,000 and the only viable option was to close it.

At lunchtime that day, around 50 people demonstrated spontaneously outside Levenshulme Baths. Most were women concerned at losing their cheap gym facilities and swimming lessons for their kids. Many had never met before but were so angered by the cuts they decided to protest again at 6pm. This time the crowd numbered more than 200 as word spread and it attracted national news coverage.

The women met again next day to plan a campaign and formed working groups to make flyers and banners, and one to develop a viable business plan with a view to taking over the baths and running them as a community owned asset. A petition was organised on the

Government ‘war games’ against the working class

THE CABINET Office has reportedly been carrying out ‘war games’ to prepare for possible strike action against sweeping cut backs. Plans have centred on ensuring there's enough scab labour available to break strikes in key sectors.

Ministers have already suggested they will tighten Britain's already draconian anti-strike laws in the event significant strike action breaks out. A string of recent strike ballots have been ruled unlawful in the courts, using technicalities to annul majority votes for action. Both Prime Minister David Cameron and Chancellor George Osborne have threatened to further tighten the law “as a last resort” if union bosses don't co-operate.

Death and taxes: but not for big business



IT'S SAID that only the little people pay taxes. The government seem to agree. VAT went up to

20% in January. Barclays Bank paid £113m in corporation tax, which was just 2.4% of its annual



internet and paper copies were left in every shop in the area, while everyone was urged to contact the council to object during the consultation period. The Facebook group quickly attracted more than 500 people and a similar number turned out for a march through Levenshulme two weeks into the campaign.

The group also made sure it had at least two public events a week to keep up momentum and ensure media coverage. And despite the local Lib Dems (who are also councillors in Levenshulme) and a community association that is a front for Respect each setting up their own “save the baths” campaign and taking credit for the activity but doing little, the community-based and determinedly non-party-political Save Levenshulme Baths group was the one that scored a victory in the end.

Just 20 days after the budget cuts were announced, the council reversed its decision

Merseyside protest at planned plant closure

WORKERS AND supporters at the Burton's biscuits factory in Moreton have marched against plans to close the plant.

A march and rally, organised by the Unite union, saw several hundred people assemble at Moreton Shore car park. The march took in much of the surrounding area, with lots of

to close Levenshulme Baths because of the overwhelming strength of public feeling and show of strength on the streets. Not only has the executive has been ordered to find the money to build a new baths in two years' time when it has funds for capital expenditure again, but it has also been told to find the cash to keep the old baths open in the interim. As the campaigners chanted in celebration, “From Cairo to Levenshulme, people power really does work!”

Save Levenshulme Baths has now been renamed Friends of Levenshulme Baths and will work with the council to find the most practical and cost-effective ways of keeping all the facilities there running as normal. And it's also become Love Levy Hate Cuts, and is working with other anticuts groups in Manchester to fight the cuts generally as well as work to save the other neighbourhood amenities still threatened with closure.

support and banter from local people, a march past the factory before returning to the starting point for a rally.

The company had previously reached an agreement with the Unite union to guarantee work until 2012 and to make Moreton its flagship site. It has since reneged on that deal.

Brighton homeless housing farce

THE NUMBER of homes standing empty in Brighton and Hove outnumber the number of homeless families ten to one - but a Tory MP is leading calls to criminalise squatting. Brighton and Hove Council accepts responsibility for housing 368 homeless households, while 3,655 homes sit empty. Despite this, Tory MP Mike Weatherly wants to criminalise squatting, putting the interests of landlords and property speculators before those of the homeless. Home repossessions peaked last year following an increase in defaults on mortgages and rent during the recession.

Industrial accident claims two lives

TWO WORKERS have been killed at the Sonae industrial plant in Kirkby after they were reportedly dragged by a conveyor belt into the workings of a silo. It is believed that James Bibby (24) and Thomas Elmer (27) had been contracted in to carry out maintenance work at the plant which manufactures wood-based panels for use in the furniture and construction industries.

One Sonae worker told the *Liverpool Echo*: that “for a long time, staff have been warning about concerns over safety at the plant.” Previously, the plant has been the scene of chemical leaks, fires, as well as other industrial accidents. Residents on the nearby Northwood estate have also raised environmental concerns about Sonae, claiming that emissions coming from the plant were having an adverse effect on their children's health.

On top of industrial accidents, Hazards magazine says that “up to 20 per cent of the UK's biggest killers, including heart disease, cancer and chronic respiratory disease, are caused by work”, and “the risk is greatly higher in those lower down the workplace pecking order.” - *Workers' Memorial Day will take place on April 28th 2011.*

Asbestos law not up to Euro standard

THE UK version of a European Union-wide law on asbestos safety is illegally lax and must be amended, the government has been told. The TUC, which had warned against the dilution of essential safety measures, said the European Commission (EC) ruling nails the myth the UK “gold-plates” Euro laws.

Unpaid overtime worth £29 BILLION

BRITISH WORKERS are contributing £billions in free labour to their bosses every year simply by working unpaid overtime. The surplus is being squeezed out of workers through the threat of unemployment or reduced prospects. One in five workers regularly worked unpaid overtime last year, the highest proportion since 1997. Last year 5.26 million people across the UK clocked up an average seven hours 12 minutes unpaid overtime a week, worth a record £28.9 billion to the economy.

Over 50,000 NHS jobs face axe

DESPITE CAMPAIGNING on a promise to “cut the deficit, not the NHS”, the government's public sector cuts look set to slash frontline healthcare provision. The total confirmed, planned and potential NHS staff cuts across the country currently stands at just over 53,150 posts, with more set to be announced.

Austerity Britain

Making the country *ungovernable*

Remember the boom?

THE ANTI-CUTS movement should avoid the temptation of blaming public spending cuts on greedy bankers or Tory politicians. Given that bankers, and Tories, tend to be a pretty obnoxious lot it is perhaps understandable that they are used as hate figures by the left. However they are a symptom rather than the cause of the crisis.

The starting point in understanding the cuts are the changes in the ownership of wealth that have occurred over the last 30 years. The last three decades, under both Tory and Labour governments have seen the richest 10% of the population grab an increasing share of the wealth. Profits have steadily risen while the share of national output taken by wages has steadily declined, shrinking from around 60% in 1980 to 53% in 2007. Between 2000 and 2007, productivity increased at almost twice the rate of real wages. In other words, Britain worked harder, for less – and this was during the 'good days' of the economic boom.

The ability of the rich to grab the lion's share of the profits has resulted in the real terms pay of many workers either stagnating or declining. This is reflected in the fact the population working on low pay has almost doubled from 12% in 1977 to over 22% today. The massive transference of society's wealth to the

rich has had two effects. As profits increased, the private wealth of a small minority exploded leaving the rich with ever larger amounts of money that needed investing, a process repeated around the world. As the wealth of the world's richest grew they began to invest in ever-larger amounts, creating a tidal wave of hot money that circulated the globe in search of quicker and higher returns.

At the same time stagnating and falling wages in Britain meant that people increasingly turned to debt in order to get by. The banks acted as the brokers between the hot money and those seeking loans. Banks profits soared on the back of debt encouraging them to go on a lending frenzy handing out ever larger loans that could not be repaid. The rest is history; defaults on repayments began to grow and financial panic set in.

But even here we still have not reached the true cause of the financial crisis. For the crucial question is what has changed in Britain in the last 30 years that has allowed the rich to increase their share of the wealth? The answer is that there has been a dramatic shift in power in the battle between capitalism and organised labour.

From the second world war right up to the 1970's there existed in Britain a powerful workplace-based trade union movement which was able to demand ever higher wages and increased spending on welfare and services. This process came to an abrupt end when Thatcherism defeated workplace militancy. This meant a shift in the balance of class forces in favour of the rich, who used their growing power to drive down wages and cut services.

The root cause of the financial crisis then is the defeat of organised workers. As profits grew at the expense of wages borrowing increased to make up the shortfall. Debt was used to pay the bills in the home and fund services and welfare provision. The rich having increased their share of the wealth then in effect lent the money back to us with the banks exploiting their position as intermediaries to increase profits. Bank lending then got out of hand leading to the current financial crisis. To fight the cuts therefore we need to organise and create a 'crisis' that will frighten the life out of capitalism.



ALL ACROSS the country there are rumblings of discontent. Town halls where cuts votes have been taken place have been stormed or occupied in Lewisham, Lambeth, Southampton, Haringey, Camden and Barnet. Hundreds have taken part in UK Uncut actions, shutting down the high street names engaged in the most blatant tax avoidance. New Cross library in South London, threatened with closure, was also occupied, while people in Stony Stratford, Buckinghamshire withdrew every single book in protest at plans to close it. This follows on from the student riots in November and December last year, which saw thousands take to the streets to demonstrate their anger at cuts to education funding and a tripling of university tuition fees.

For the most part these actions have been more than just symbolic, and have disrupted business as usual – whether that's the normal day's trading of a high street store or the passing of austerity measures in a council session. Disruption – and in particular economic damage – is something the government can't ignore. It's also something well within the power of ordinary people to do, as the aforementioned actions across Britain show. If we don't like what the government is doing to the country, we must make the country ungovernable! Only by making austerity measures the more expensive option can we prevent their implementation.

Such a strategy will be opposed by the official representatives of the movement. For them, the goal is simply to 'have our say'. Union leaders mostly hope to channel discontent with the Tories and their Lib Dem accomplices into an electoral swing to Labour in 4 years time – talking the talk but avoiding sustained industrial action in favour of symbolic marches and petitions. They conveniently forget the last 13 years of Labour government, and that many of the austerity measures today are simply an acceleration of Labour policies.

Labour politicians were first in line to milk the expenses system, tax pensions, send young working-class men and women to fight needless wars, enact increasingly authoritarian laws, privatise public services through the back door, as well as introduce university tuition fees despite promising not to, and the list goes on. As chancellor, Alistair Darling promised to implement cuts that would be "deeper and tougher" than during the Thatcher era if Labour won the last general election.



Battling the bureaucrats



National Union of Students leader Aaron Porter is rescued from his angry members by Greater Manchester police.



But in Glasgow he wasn't so lucky, and was 'kettled' by angry students, one sporting a borrowed riot police helmet.

THE TUC's response to the government's vicious cuts agenda has been milder than a diluted chicken korma, solely concentrating on an "orderly mobilisation" for the March 26 demonstration. Any other sort of movement by angry workers has been ignored or actively discouraged. Meanwhile, TUC-affiliated unions such as Unite and Unison have abandoned or even worked against militant workers in struggles such as at the Visteon car factory in North London, the Vestas wind turbine factory in the Isle of Wight and the Latin American cleaners in Central London.



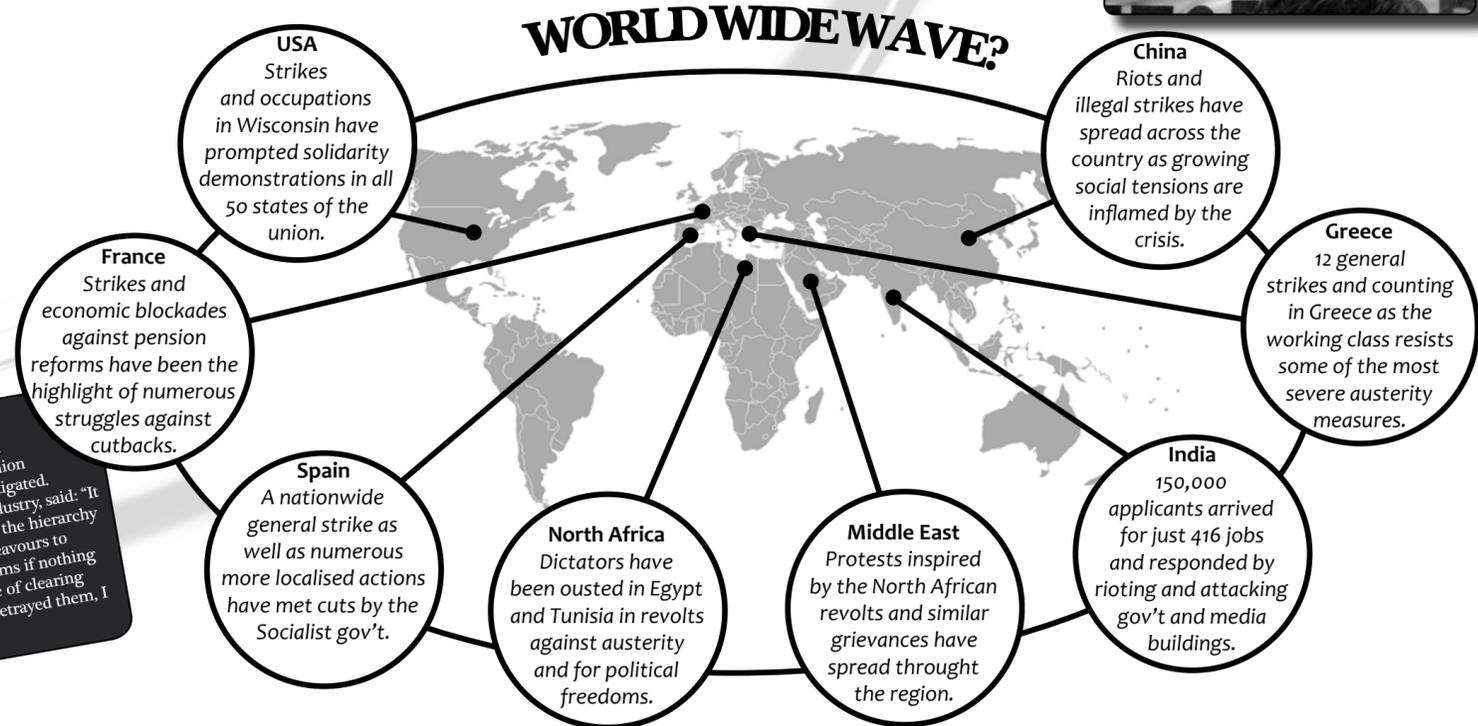
While TUC General Secretary Brendan Barber was heckled and egged at an appearance in South London, with the TUC branded 'Tories Unofficial Cops'.

Clearly, those looking to actually defeat the cuts will have to go it alone, without the support of Barber and his £150,000/year salary! Barber and the TUC have pitted themselves against all those aiming to materially improve their lives, organising a call centre at Congress House (TUC HQ) in order to collaborate with police to detain 'troublemakers' on the March 26 demonstration, the very same police who violently suppressed student demonstrations over tuition fees late last year leaving scores injured and 20 year-old Alfie Meadows requiring brain surgery after an unprovoked truncheon attack.

But the bureaucrats and careereists aren't having it all their own way. National Union of Students leader Aaron Porter had to be rescued by police in Manchester, while his stand-in and a Labour MP were egged off the stage. In Glasgow he wasn't so lucky and was 'kettled' by angry students, while TUC head honcho Brendan Barber was also literally left with egg on his face following an uninspiring, half-empty TUC Rally on campus at Goldsmiths College, South East London.

'Name and shame blacklist collaborators'
A construction worker is calling for Unite union officers who colluded in the blacklisting of trade unionists to be named and shamed. Five union officers have been identified by the Unite, but only one is being investigated. Colin Trousdale, who was a victim of blacklisting in the building industry, said: "It appears to me that these officers will go unpunished if it is left up to the hierarchy of the union both past and present! We must continue with our endeavours to unmask these wretches and make them face the wrath of their victims if nothing else. I have seen three comrades go to the grave without the chance of clearing their name or at least having the knowledge of who in our union betrayed them, I will not go to mine without justice for them and myself!"

WORLDWIDE WAVE?



Know your rights Basic rights at work

REGARDLESS OF work status (temporary or permanent, agency, full or part-time) or our contracts of employment, most of us have certain basic rights. These include:

1. The right to be told in writing how much and when we are to be paid.

The Minimum Wage for those over 21 years of age is set at £5.93. For 18-20 year olds it is £4.92 and for 16-17 year olds above school leaving age it is £3.64. For agency workers, wages must be paid on the agreed day, even if the hiring company has not paid the agency.

2. The right to at least 28 days paid leave peryear (pro rata).

Any employment contract should set out leave entitlements. If it doesn't, then 28 days must be given (which can include public holidays). All workers, agency workers, homeworkers, trainees, so-called casuals and most freelancers are included in this. Holiday entitlement starts immediately, e.g. on day 1, we get 2 days leave, and, after 6 months, we get 14 days (for part time workers it is less, and it applies to jobs started since October 2001).

3. The right to breaks of at least 20 minutes aftereach 6 hours of work.

We are entitled to at least 11 hours' rest in each 24 hours and a minimum of a day a week off. Rest breaks for under 18s are minimum 30 minutes every 4 1/2 hours.

4. The right to refuse to work any more than 48 hours each week.

We cannot be forced to work over 48 hours per week unless we have agreed to it in writing (note that this is averaged over any 17 week period, so we can be forced to do more in any one week).

5. The right to sick pay whenwe are ill.

We are entitled to statutory sick pay if we normally earn over £97 per week and we have been working for over 3 months (or are deemed to have been in continuous employment for 13 weeks).

6. The right to maternity/paternity leave when we have children.

From April 2003, most mothers are entitled to 26 weeks' paid maternity leave and an additional 26 weeks' unpaid leave. To get maternity pay, we must earn over £77 per week and have been working for over 6 months by the time the baby is 15 weeks from being due. For the first 6 weeks, this should be 90% of average earnings, then a flat rate of £100 for 20 weeks. If pay can't be claimed,

Maternity Allowance may be claimed from the DWP. Fathers/male partners get 2 weeks' paid paternity leave (subject to the same qualifying conditions as for maternity).

7. The right to be free from harassment.

We are all entitled to a workplace where there is no racial or sexual harassment, bullying, prejudice or discrimination. Agency and part-time workers have the same rights as full-time workers.

8. The right to defend ourselves.

We all have the right to protection from dismissal for asserting our statutory employment rights. We also have the right to join with our fellow workers and organise ourselves collectively, and to join a trade union.

9. The right to refuse work that is unsafe orwhere training is not provided.

We all have the right to refuse to work if we find ourselves in imminent danger. Also, laws governing agencies mean they should not send us to jobs for which we are not qualified, and they must ensure that proper training is provided.

ARE YOU SAFE & HEALTHY?

The Working Time Regulations

The basic rights and protections that the Regulations provide are:

- a limit of an average of 48 hours a week which a worker can be required to work (though workers can choose to work more if they want to).
- a limit of an average of 8 hours work in 24 which nightworkers can be required to work.
- a right for night workers to receive free health assessments.
- a right to 11 hours rest a day.
- a right to a day off each week.
- a right to an in-work rest break if the working day is longer than 6 hours.
- a right to 4 weeks paid leave per year.

HEALTH & SAFETY BASICS

Employers should:

- Provide safe and healthy working conditions;
- Provide proper information and training for everyone in all types of workplaces;
- Draw up and circulate procedures for dealing with risks at work;
- Inform all workers of Health and Safety agreements, policies and practices before we start work.

Health and safety in the workplace costs money and time and hits profits, so bosses inevitably try to avoid their legal responsibilities. By law, they have to provide health and safety for all workers in their employment. Remember, you have a legal right to walk off the job if you feel in imminent danger.

GRIEVANCE PROCEDURES

Since 1st October 2004, all employers have had to have a disciplinary and grievance procedure, and to notify their employees of it. However since 6th April 2009, the statutory disciplinary and grievance procedures have been repealed.

Although any ongoing disciplinary or grievance (here after D&G) started before that date are still covered. The original intention of making D&G procedures statutory was an expectation that claims for unfair dismissals would be significantly reduced, in fact the reverse happened with year on year per cent age increases (last year by about 15%).

So instead ACAS have produced a Code of Practice that sets out what the features of D&G procedures should contain. The code is not legally binding and a failure to follow it will not make any dismissal arising out of a disciplinary matter automatically unfair.

However the recommendation set out in the code (not applicable to redundancy dismissals or the non-renewal of fixed term contracts) will be taken into account by tribunals. Specifically, an employment tribunal will be able to adjust the amount of compensation (by up to, plus or minus 25%, which is down from the 50% previously) if it has not been reasonably followed.

Employees facing disciplinary action should be given adequate time to prepare a defence, and should have the opportunity to give and call evidence and to call witnesses.

You have the right to be accompanied and for you to chose either a full-time union official (whether or not the union is recognised), a certified lay official (someone the union has trained to accompany individuals to hearings) or a workplace colleague.

The worker and companion have protection against any detrimental act or dismissal in connection with excising this right of accompaniment. Hearings must be heard within a reasonable time period. The guideline steps are as follows:



1. Written statement

You should set out your grievance in writing (often called a 'step one letter'). Your employer's grievance procedure should say who to send your letter to. If that's the person causing the problem, or if they've ignored previous complaints, send it to the HR department or to the person's boss.

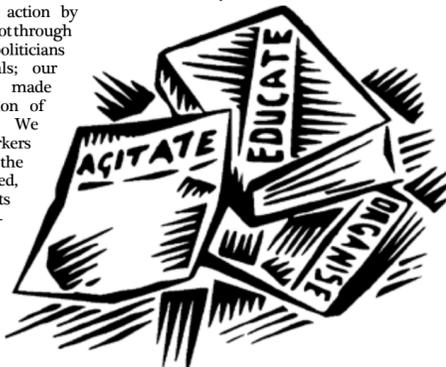
2. Meeting

Your grievance should be looked into in a fair and unbiased way. Your employer should invite you to a meeting (sometimes called a hearing) to discuss the problem and you should attend if you can. If there is someone else involved, they might also be there (but you should tell your employer if you are uncomfortable with this). If you ask your employer beforehand, you have a legal right to take a 'companion' (who is a colleague or trade union representative) to the meeting with you.

3. Appeal meeting

If you're not satisfied with the decision, or you think the procedure followed was seriously flawed, you have the right to an appeal. Your employer should give you enough time to appeal. If they don't, make your appeal anyway, and say that you'll provide more information later. If you are considering taking your issue to an Employment Tribunal you may want to appeal even if it seems pointless, because a tribunal award could be reduced if you don't.

All information correct to the best of our knowledge as of March 2011.



The Solidarity Federation - for revolutionary unions

The Solidarity Federation is an organisation of workers which seeks the downfall of capitalism and the state. Capitalism because it exploits, oppresses and kills working people and wrecks the environment for profit worldwide. The state because it can only maintain hierarchy and privilege for the classes who control it and their servants; it cannot be used to fight the oppression and exploitation that are the consequences of hierarchy and the source of privilege. In their place we want a society based on workers' self-management, solidarity, mutual aid and libertarian communism.

That society can only be achieved by working class organisations based on the same principles - *revolutionary unions*. These are not trade unions only concerned with "bread and butter" issues like pay and conditions. Revolutionary unions are means for working people to organise and fight *all* the issues - both in the workplace and outside - which arise from our oppression. We recognise that not all oppression is economic, but can be based on gender, race, sexuality, or anything our rulers find useful. Therefore, revolutionary unions fully support and encourage organisation in all spheres of life that consciously parallel those of the society we

wish to create; that is, organisation based on mutual aid, voluntary cooperation, direct democracy, and opposed to domination, hierarchy and exploitation in all forms. We are committed to building a new society within the shell of the old in both our workplaces and the wider community. Unless we organise in this way, politicians - some claiming to be revolutionary - will be able to exploit us for their own ends. The Solidarity Federation consists of Locals and Industrial Networks which seek to take on the functions of revolutionary unions - supporting our organising efforts where we live and work. Our activities are based

on direct action - action by workers ourselves, not through intermediaries like politicians and union officials; our decisions are made through participation of the membership. We welcome all workers - including the unemployed, retired, stay-home parents and students - who agree with our Aims and Principles and seek to create revolutionary unions to fight the class struggle.

Comment & Opinion

Crisis in care Sam, Sheffield

I work as a support worker for a private company that provides social care for people in Sheffield for people with learning disabilities and mental health issues. The company I work operates across the city. According to government officials, cuts to public spending will not harm front line services, workers, or service users. The reality of the situation is that working conditions are getting worse, day services are closing down, and those paying for the support services are being excluded from any of the decisions relating to care they supposedly direct and influence.

The Sheffield city council budget has been slashed by 8.35% for next year, and this has amounted to a huge cut to front line care. What this has amounted to on the ground is a huge reduction in staffing levels, pushing local unemployment even higher. Those left in the job are left with the unenviable task of filling in the gaps, which means being over worked, and stressed. Many care workers, some with over 20 years experience, are finding it too stressful to carry on, and are walking away from the job, meaning that the most qualified staff in the company are leaving, while new employees, who often aren't given a decent (and legally required) level of training before they are left to work with clients. This is dangerous to both clients, who often have serious health issues, and to workers, who are not given help to do the job safely (some clients have histories of challenging behaviour, violence etc)

Many of the people I work with have been sent into intense panic, fearing that their disability benefits will be cut and that they will be forced onto a work fare scheme in order to claim. This has led to increased difficulties at

work, which again impacts upon the well being of clients and staff. For staff, we have been given an indefinite pay freeze (rates of pay are already extremely low - and the price of food, bills, rent etc has risen fairly sharply in recent months) and a loss of a chance of promotion and advancement within the company. The tactics of management have in recent weeks been an attempt to shift responsibility downwards. In essence, this means an unpaid promotion - increased work hours and responsibilities without extra pay. People are worried, and the constant upheavals in company policy leave staff and clients confused. Many people within the company care deeply about the people they support, and the fact that they are leaving is causing massive emotional stress on all sides.

The company I work for claims to be not-for-profit, this tends to give people the impression that the company operates with some kind of ethical policy. The reality is that instead of money being invested in desperately needed equipment for staff (such as computers that are less than a decade old) instead money has been spent on redecorating the offices of the executive managers and the reception area of

the company (in order to make it 'look more professional' - the appearance of good care being more easily achieved than the practice of good care).

The company has also engaged in the bizarre tactic of employing agency staff to work as short term "bank workers" in order to plug the gaps created by the redundancies they have introduced. This means that for every worker the company gets from an agency they are paying for two (agencies charge 'service rates' which are roughly the same as the employees wages). Essentially this means that the company is firing experienced and dedicated workers to employ untrained and short term agency workers, while paying double the cost for the privilege. The reasons behind this plan seem fairly obvious. Agency workers are in a precarious position, and if they complain about being over worked, and under paid then they can be fired with no notice, whereas an employee cannot. The changes that management want to bring in over the next few months require a work force that does not feel secure, and able to resist the exploitation that is happening.



Casualisation at BFI

Casualisation has not evaded the British Film Institute and its effects are well known: less staff, a higher workload, divided workers, deskilling, fear and disinterest in our rights - all of which makes corporate moves easier and less accountable, even in public institutions. If we are to fight casualisation, we cannot rely on a change in consciousness without a change in contracts.

A classic case of chicken and egg: the casuals will not fight for their rights because they have no rights. Here the work of the reformist unions can be a useful supplement to self-organised workplace militancy. Two aspects are worth noting: through small victories the workers are brought together in our grievances and power, and union density is directly correlated to a drop in casualisation. The process of pursuing workplace grievances and a change in contracts should be used to demonstrate the interests of the managers, their incompetence, the weaknesses of workplace hierarchy and the limits of union interests.

The attack on casualisation will then come from different corners and using different methods. Through maintaining self-organised agitation and direct action alongside any union dispute we make sure that our horizon is not social democratic reformism, but class struggle. We also open up a space between the unions and management which makes easier our self-organised direct action.

Jan, South London

Letter: the pitfalls of professionalising negotiation

While surfing around the week's upcoming events listings I came across one which is fairly typical of trade union umbrella the TUC, to train negotiators ahead of pay rounds which are likely to be marked by austerity cuts.

The idea of training days like The Pay Challenge in 2011 is, ostensibly, to give people a solid overview of the state of play nationwide and an idea of the tactics that could be used when talking to management in negotiations to push up claims.

So far, so average. But what caught my eye was the prices. To get such information is £125 plus VAT if you're a registered TUC affiliate or an eye-watering £215 plus VAT for anyone else. Exclusive much?

I'm pretty skeptical of the actual value of these things in any case - in the end all negotiation comes down to leverage and either you've got it or you ain't, the best training under these circumstances boils down to giving newbie shop stewards the confidence to tell their manager where to get off when they have the backing of their colleagues. Being able to mouth off convincingly about the economic implications of cuts and their relation to prices,



extraneous when managers can simply say "good point, but I'm just the monkey and the organ grinders, they're saying no." Nevertheless I'd have thought that given training is supposed to be one of the TUC's few specific, ongoing responsibilities the price of something like this would be incorporated in the millions upon millions of pounds we already pay through our collective union membership dues. But I suspect this is not what these little soirees are actually meant for. This is the sort of

high-up circus which paves the way for union bureaucrats to waltz into offices up and down the country sounding like they're the only ones competent to do business with our bosses. Having been on the end of that myself as a newbie shop steward, it does sound pretty impressive when the boss's arguments get shot down by a confident professional from the union (less so when it becomes clear that such arguments have made very little impact and in the end amount to a complicated form of begging). But such professionalising of negotiation - and at those prices

it's got to be if you're ever going to recoup your outlay unless you can directly pick up £200-odd extra in wages for the year off the back of it - in the end amounts to another means of deadening grassroots initiative. It helps give bureaucrats the assumed authority to tell lay reps to pipe down when they complain about sell-outs on the grounds that "I've been at this for years, I'm a trained negotiator who's dedicated my life to the movement, who the fuck are you?"

Rob, Hackney

Sudoku

Fill the grid so that every column, row and 3x3 square includes all the numbers from 1 to 9.

			3			6		
3			5				9	
5			2	1		4		
								3
6	5			8	1			7
7	4					1		
	6			2				
1		2						
		9	1		6			

Graduates: no future?

WITH UNEMPLOYMENT around 2.5 million and up to a million job losses yet to come through austerity measures, students are facing an uncertain future when they graduate.

The careers advice in one course handbook points out that “while a good degree in a relevant subject from a good university is vital, all your competitors will have one too.” Instead we’re expected to scour and beg for internships, usually unpaid or at best, low paid. This acts as a class filter, since only those with sufficient parental support can afford to work for free for months on end. But even internships are far from a guaranteed path to paid work.

If you are willing to provide months of labour for free, the handbook says, “if you can get a foot in the door this way, work as hard as you can, make yourself indispensable and you might – might – get paid work later on.” In other words, if you’re really, really lucky you get to write on your CV ‘I’m willing to bend over backwards and work for nothing’. Employers like that skill-set.

The skills, habits, and discipline acquired via a university education



are those appropriate to the modern flexible labour market: self-directed labour with minimal supervision, strong communication skills, the ability to digest and present complex information and the ability to produce work on-demand to more or less arbitrary criteria.

The vast majority of graduates will be thrust back into the stagnant labour market to look for jobs with no direct relation to their degrees, having paid thousands of pounds for: ‘transferable skills’ to better market themselves for interchangeable drudgery. Student debt will help keep

graduates locked on the treadmill, moving from one low-paid cul-de-sac to another. BBC Newsnight’s economics editor Paul Mason has suggested of the unrest in Tunisia, Egypt, Greece, France, London and elsewhere that “at the heart of it all is a new sociological type: the graduate with no future”. Will we see a return of last winter’s student revolts?

A longer version of this article is available online on the Unwaged Workers Network page: <http://www.solfed.org.uk/?q=network/unwaged-workers>

Where are the St Thomas’ disappeared?



FEARS ARE growing for the 72 immigrant workers detained by the UK Border Agency (UKBA) at Guy and St Thomas’ Hospital, London in February. Very little is known of the whereabouts of the 72 disappeared, who had been contracted to work as ancillary staff in the hospital by Reed temp agency.

The only definitive update to emerge since the raid is that three of them have pleaded guilty to ‘fraud’, a charge levied against

them for collecting their ‘illegal’ wages from the hospital (as if cleaning toilets for minimum wage wasn’t bad enough).

A demonstration was called by the Latin American Workers Association outside the hospital a couple of weeks later, but still no word was forthcoming on the whereabouts of the 72. The raid sets a worrying precedent, being, as it was, a joint operation between UKBA and the Metropolitan

Police with the collaboration of the NHS Counter-Fraud Service and Guy and St Thomas’ NHS Trust itself.

The NHS bosses’ silent cooperation with one of the British state’s most ruthless entities will be especially bitter for the 72 and their families, who are now unable to even locate their loved ones, now that the British state has deemed them surplus to requirement and therefore ready to be returned to their countries of origin.

This follows on from an earlier raid in Nov 2010 on a McDonalds in Catford, South East London, in which local UKBA agents trumpeted the deportation of ‘illegal’ workers as ‘successful’. In June 2009, a UKBA raid at the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), in collaboration with SOAS management provoked an angry student occupation of management offices.

Campaigners point out that the precarious situation of migrant workers is no coincidence, but is part of wider cutbacks. “Exactly when cuts and privatisation are threatening our public health service the exploitation of migrant labour increases. This is an attack on all workers.”

Labour councils: no ally of the working class

JOE ANDERSON, the leader of Liverpool City Council, is trying to paint himself as some kind of anti-cuts rebel. In January he joined an anti-cuts march in Liverpool, not long after he wrote to David Cameron to withdraw Liverpool from the Big Society, and then had the cheek to lead a march against cuts in February. This is nothing more than cheap political opportunism, and it should be rejected.

He tells us that the council is “bracing itself” for the cuts. He “warns” us that compulsory redundancies in the council will come. He is “incensed” by Liberal Democrats accusing him of having a “politically motivated” approach to job cuts.

But, for all the talk, HE and HIS COUNCIL are the ones who will be wielding the axe in Liverpool, and who have already promised that 1,500 jobs will go, and who has made the decision to rob people of their livelihoods whilst their own pay and pensions are entirely secure.

Anderson claims that cuts aren’t “what I’m about,” but in the same breath states that “we’re not deficit deniers.” He accepts the arguments put forward by the government that

cuts are needed, and all claims to oppose what is happening amounts to crocodile tears.

That is why when he has attempted to join or lead anti-cuts marches, he has consistently faced heckles, jeering, and angry confrontation from protesters. People are beginning to see through the lie that Labour are in any way a party of the “left” or of the working-class.

Despite his gestures, Anderson and other Labour politicians on local councils are greasing the wheels so that the government’s attacks filter smoothly down to a local level. But when both Ed Miliband and Ed Balls accept the need for public spending cuts, who would be foolish enough to think otherwise?

Party politics does not serve the interests of the working class, either in this fight or more broadly. This struggle does not hinge upon arguments but upon the balance of class power, and we will only see those in power yield when we can shift that balance through direct action.

Those who claim to represent us are nothing but a dead weight. We must continue to call out and cast off parasites such as Anderson, in favour of militant working class self-organisation.

Catalyst

Catalyst is the free newspaper of the Solidarity Federation (SolFed). SolFed is an organisation of workers who believe in taking control of our lives where we live or work, rather than leaving things to the dictates of politicians, managers and so called ‘experts’.

Our members are workers across all industries, students, pensioners and unemployed. Through solidarity and acting together, we can deal both with our local problems and at the same time work to change the bigger picture, and change

the system that means power and profit for the few.

We believe we should apply the same principles to actions we take around local issues to those we take at work. Across industries, we organise in Networks; geographically we organise in Locals, to support each other in our struggles and to fight for our interests, both in and out of the workplace. We are part of the International Workers Association, organising with like minded people across the world.

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