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FREE/DONATION

# Catalyst

Issue #29

Newspaper of the Solidarity Federation

British section of the International Workers' Association



Image: Arts Against Cuts

## THE GREAT WORKFARE SCANDAL

- **1,000s forced into unpaid work**
- **Household names profit from free labour**
- **Disabled people face unlimited unpaid work or cuts in benefit**
- **And the government's OWN report says it doesn't even work!**

“ There is little evidence that workfare increases the likelihood of finding work. It can even reduce employment chances by limiting the time available for job search and by failing to provide the skills and experience valued by employers. (...) Workfare is least effective in getting people into jobs in weak labour markets where unemployment is high. ”

Department for Work & Pensions (DWP) Research Report No 533

WORKFARE MEANS doing unpaid work for your job seekers allowance (JSA) of up to £67 per week. The government claims workfare helps the unemployed and create jobs, and yet their own report says this is not true, especially when unemployment is high (see quote left).

There are two main workfare schemes. The 'voluntary work experience' scheme offers job seekers work experience placements. However if they change their minds after a week, they cannot pull out without losing their JSA. This means they effectively become unpaid workers for a host of private companies, including Tesco, Holland & Barrett, Asda and more. Sainsbury and Waterstones have already withdrawn from the scheme under public pressure.

The second workfare scheme is the mandatory Work Programme. On this, jobseekers are referred from the Job Centre to one of several private workfare agencies.

These include multi-million pound companies like Avanta, Reed and A4e, where four arrests have recently been made in a fraud probe. These companies arrange mandatory full time work placements. Failure to comply can lead to JSA being stopped.

There is also a new policy that could mean disabled people on employment and support allowance (ESA) could be compelled to undertake unlimited, unpaid 'work experience' for charities, public bodies and high-street retailers.

Workfare doesn't help the unemployed, and the government knows it. According to the Brighton Benefits Campaign, the real aim is simple: "What boss would want to employ a worker they have to pay, when the government will give them someone off the dole to do it for free? The aim of workfare is simply to drive down wages."



### 'Belgrade Six' framed again

Page 2: Repression of union activists in Serbia.



### Victory for the Sparks

Page 3: Electricians win battle against 35% pay cuts.



### Letter: Pensions 'sell out'

Page 7: A healthcare worker shares their thoughts.

### Web resources for fighting workfare:

- [www.boycottworkfare.org](http://www.boycottworkfare.org) | @boycottworkfare - national campaign
- [www.consent.me.uk](http://www.consent.me.uk) | @consentmeuk - protect your privacy from workfare
- Twitter hashtags: #boycottworkfare | #workfare | #combatworkfare
- [www.solfed.org.uk/?q=campaigns/workfare](http://www.solfed.org.uk/?q=campaigns/workfare) Solidarity Federation workfare info, news and resources



# International round-up



## USA

### Arizona to ban unions

ARIZONA STATE employees' unions were caught off guard with news that the state's republican controlled senate was passing a series of bills which, amongst other provisions, would completely ban unions from engaging in any negotiation which effects the terms of a persons employment with state, county or city government.

The move, according to Nick Dranius of the Goldwater Institute – one of the bills shapers – once unions are no longer legally allowed to negotiate with the state, he concludes, workers will “realize that unions don't do much for them.” Similar laws were forced through in Wisconsin last year, despite an occupation of the capital building, unofficial strikes by teachers and calls for a general strike, which never materialised.

## RUSSIA

### Anti-fascist murdered

21-YEAR OLD anti-fascist Nikita Kalin was stabbed 61 times. No property was stolen, ruling out theft of as a motive. The suspect, whose clothes were covered in Nikita's blood, is a far-right activist. All the signs point to a politically motivated murder.

Due to the way the investigation has been handled so far, and a history of police collusion with fascist activists, Nikita's family fear a cover up. Donations to Nikita's family and towards the funeral costs can be made via the Russian anarchist black cross: [www.wiki.avtonom.org/en/index.php/Donate](http://www.wiki.avtonom.org/en/index.php/Donate)

## CANADA

### Hospital workers strike

HUNDREDS OF support workers at the Royal Alexandra and University of Alberta hospitals in Canada have walked out in a dispute over pay and conditions. Dozens of surgeries were cancelled as diagnostic imaging clerks, cleaners and technicians downed tools at at least 12 different sites.

The Alberta Union of Provincial Employees stated that they believed workers at Mayerthorpe, Radway, Peace River and Claresholm were also either taking or considering taking similar action, although no official ballot had taken place.

One worker told the Edmonton Journal “they are constantly adding more duties to our work, without an increase in pay... We're fed up with our conditions, our pay. Cost of living is going up, but my pay is not.”

Workers still provided life and limb cover for emergencies, and blamed their employer for provoking staff in negotiations around working conditions. The employer applied for a Labour Relations Board order to force strikers back to work.

## SERBIA

# Union activists facing renewed repression



'Belgrade 6' already cleared of charges in the High Court face renewed case despite widespread outcry

IN SEPTEMBER 2009 a bottle containing petrol was thrown against the security shutter of the Greek embassy in Belgrade, and some graffiti was sprayed on the building. According to the prosecution, this caused €18 damage. The act was claimed by a group calling itself 'Black Elijah', in protest at repression in Greece.

However, within days the Serbian police rounded up four union activists with the group Anarcho-Syndicalist Initiative (ASI) and two other anarchists. Because the bottle was thrown from the street into the embassy, it technically crossed an international border. The 'Belgrade Six' were charged with international terrorism.

This caused outcry in Serbia and beyond. A group of 22 Serbian academics wrote an open letter condemning the case as a “political trial”, and protests took place outside Serbian embassies across Europe. To place this into context, during a nationalist demonstration the previous year had seen the US Embassy had

been attacked with fire-bombs, killing one person. But in this case, the charge was a lesser one of 'endangering public safety', not the charge of 'terrorism' thrown at ASI. Meanwhile ASI, a union organisation, was placed under state surveillance for its activities.

“ Since forming our organisation in late 2002, not a single year has passed without our activists being arrested or legally prosecuted. ”

The Belgrade Six were held for 6 months in prison, before being cleared in a farcical trial in the Serbian High Court where the judge commented his ruling was “based on law, not politics” – tacitly admitting the prosecution had been politically motivated. The case against the six has now been re-opened, and they face a fresh investigation and charges. So why is the Serbian state so determined to persecute these radical union activists?

ASI activist Ratibor Trivunac, one of the six, says that “since the official forming of our organisation in late 2002, not a single year has passed without our activists being arrested or legally prosecuted.”

ASI have been prominent in opposing the ultra-conservatives and nationalists and supporting workers' unrest in Serbia and elsewhere in the Balkans. Protests have been banned in downtown Belgrade, as the authorities seek to control workers' unrest.

The Belgrade Gay Pride parade was also banned after threats from nationalist groups to attack it. Members of ASI supported that parade, and had helped physically defend it from nationalist attacks in previous years.

For these activities, ASI members were targeted by far-right groups, who attacked some of them and put up posters with names and addresses of ASI members. The suspicion is they got this confidential personal information from the police. The fabricated charges of 'international terrorism'

and the political show trial have to be seen in this context.

The trial was re-opened after anti-militarist protests against a NATO summit in Belgrade, where ASI members including Trivunac were arrested. In that case, he had been out of the country when the alleged offences took place and could prove it with passport stamps. However, ASI now face renewed state repression on the flimsiest of pretexts.

## CANADA

### Support needed for sacked shop steward

UNION ACTIVIST Nick Driedger was sacked in February for honking his horn in support of an Occupy protest, as well as supporting a strike while he was off work. The IWW union is calling for international emails and letters of protest to be sent by individuals and groups to the managers responsible.

Details can be found by following this short link: [www.bit.ly/ypGf3T](http://www.bit.ly/ypGf3T)

## EUROPE

# Adecco agency targeted for strike-breaking



EMPLOYMENT AGENCY Adecco has been targeted across Europe over their role in breaking a strike at a factory in Cordoba, Spain. Workers at the factory owned by multinational Asea Brown Boveri (ABB) were employed through a subcontractor called EULEN. The company miscategorised their work in order to pay them less. The workers responded by organising themselves to put an end to this abuse. ABB-EULEN responded by announcing they would be laid off and replaced with temps. Workers launched an indefinite strike.

The company responded by bringing in a 'scab labour' to break the strike, through the Eurocen agency - part of the Adecco group. After a month on strike, the strikers were sacked and permanently replaced - with temps!

The workers are demanding not only their reinstatement, but also compensation because for years they have been being paid according to the wrong collective agreement.

The workers are organising with the CNT union, which is part of the International Workers' Association (IWA). In solidarity, IWA affiliates and supporters have been targeting Adecco across Europe. In Valladolid, Spain, about 40 militants of the CNT occupied the Adecco office. Pickets of Adecco offices have been held in Spain, Russia, Poland, Holland, Norway, Germany, France and Britain. One picketer from Poland said: “we stand firmly in solidarity with the workers in their struggle against their exploitation by these multinationals and will continue with the actions.”

# Electricians beat back BESNA

Firms drop proposed 35% pay cut after direct action campaign from 'Sparks'

ELECTRICIANS ARE celebrating a major breakthrough in their battle to stop a co-ordinated attempt by some of Britain's biggest construction firms to deskill their jobs and impose pay cuts of up to 35% after main players Balfour Beatty and NG Bailey threw in the towel. A source told a trade magazine that "one thing is definite, BESNA is finished." The news was later confirmed in *Construction News*.

The employers had wanted to kill off JIB, an industry-wide agreement on pay and conditions, so it could be replaced with the vastly inferior BESNA plan. This would have let contractors raise and lower hourly pay rather than maintaining a standard wage for skilled work. For some electricians this would have meant a fall in hourly rates from £16.25 to £10 – a 35% cut.

The victory comes after months of campaigning from 'Sparks' within the industry which saw grassroots organisers bring out hundreds of electricians on weekly protests for months and culminated in wildcat strikes last year after the Unite union backed down on an official strike due to



threatened legal action from the employers.

In September a group of around 1,500 electricians at the Lindsey oil refinery in Lincolnshire walked out to join demonstrating electricians and November saw one of the largest nationwide wildcat strikes of 2011.

Unite union negotiators announced the withdrawal and suggested that "high-level talks" are now going to take place on the

future of industry's pay formulas. While Unite officials have talked ominously of sharing Balfour's desire 'modernisation', normally another word for cuts, one Spark said that "the winning of this war is a long way off yet but we are constantly winning battles."

[jibelectrician.blogspot.com](http://jibelectrician.blogspot.com)  
@jibelectrician

## Women council workers win equal pay legal battle

COUNCIL WORKERS in Bury have won a legal battle over discriminatory bonuses. Although dubbed the "dinner ladies" case by the media, the settlement covers cleaners, carers and many other grades of council employees.

The fight, which at times included over 1,400 claimants, began in 2007 when UNISON launched a legal battle over unequal bonuses being awarded to male and female council workers in the locality. By the time the settlement was reached between the council and the union hundreds of individual cases had already been settled, leaving over 900 outstanding claims which will now be rectified in light of the decision.

Bev Hodgkinson, a Bury council worker who was involved in the fight, celebrated the decision: "I am delighted that the Council will not now be able to cheat us of our rights. They must start settling our claims now. My colleagues and I have already waited far too long." Similar claims are in progress around the country as the fight for equality goes on (see centre-fold feature over the page).

## Employment tribunal rules agency worker's blacklisting is legal

DESPITE RHETORIC that the new EU agency worker regulations will 'stifle business' and 'cost jobs', the extent to which the British government will go to use agency work to attack hard-won legal rights and undermine working conditions is becoming increasingly clear.

A case-in-point is the recent decision by the Central London Employment Tribunal that Dave Smith, a union activist and blacklisted construction

engineer, is not entitled to legal protection against blacklisting because he was employed through an agency. This is despite Carillion, the firm who ultimately employed Smith, admitting in a signed statement that their managers had supplied the blacklist with information about Mr. Smith.

The blacklist is maintained by the Consulting Association and contained Mr. Smith's photograph, address, national insurance number,

work history, car registration, information about his family, and pages of documentation detailing his union activity, including his raising concerns about asbestos on building sites. Evidence from Mr. Smith's file also shows that company spies had been attending union meetings and gathering information on Smith's activities outside work.

The blacklist, which has long been known about and has even been the

subject of parliamentary discussion, was shared by 44 of the UK's largest construction firms before being exposed and shut down. Companies paid a fee to the Association each time they checked up on a prospective or current employee.

Mr Smith, for his part, states that he "will be taking our case to the European Court of Human Rights." However, this is a lengthy process and justice is no more guaranteed

there than in the Central London Employment Tribunal.

Regular updates on the case can be found the website of the Blacklist Support Group:

[www.hazards.org/blacklistblog](http://www.hazards.org/blacklistblog)



## Interview: John Foley, the man behind 'Ryanair Don't Care'



WHEN A man handcuffed himself to the goalpost during Everton's premier league match with Man City, little was known about his cause. In 2008, John Foley's daughter was working as an air stewardess for Ryanair. Her contract was suddenly terminated during a shift, leaving her stranded abroad with no money and no way to get home. It soon became clear that this was happening to a significant number of Ryanair's cabin crew before their probationary period had finished. The airline, however, were still demanding a €3,000 training fee off these

former employees, earning Ryanair a tidy profit out of sacking staff.

John began a direct action and information campaign against Ryanair, which has included gatecrashing its 2011 AGM and staging a protest on the roof of Liverpool John Lennon Airport. Ryanair's management all know John by name and his presence is anticipated at events involving the airline. Ryanair has also been logged visiting the campaign's website on a regular basis. Catalyst spoke to John about the campaign.

**Can you tell us briefly when the campaign started and why you set it up?**

The Ryanair Don't Care campaign was set up on 26th November 2008 to inform young students about the dangers of working as Probationary Cabin Crew at Ryanair. I have aimed to do my utmost to inform others what can happen at a young people working for a capitalist bully like Ryanair.

**Three years on, what motivates you to carry on campaigning against the airline?**

My main motivation is stopping young students joining Ryanair as Probationary Cabin Crew as I know the abusive, profit-driven practises of the airline towards these young students damages them forever. This motivates me to carry on campaigning against Ryanair week by week, month by month, year by year.

**What kind of activism have you done against Ryanair?**

In the last three years, my direct action protests have included running on the field of play with a banner at the England ashes cricket test match 2009, a roof top protest at the Ryanair cabin crew training camp in London 2009. Last year, I staged a roof top protest at Liverpool Crown Plaza Hotel 2010 where Ryanair held a recruitment day. This year, I did a roof-top protest at John Lennon Airport and climbed up the RTÉ radio mast in Dublin and placed a 14-ft banner

highlighting exploitation by Ryanair. During the company's AGM this year, I got access to the room and interrupted the meeting, even though police and 5 extra guards were in place. Peaceful and Direct Action protests will continue in 2012.

**What sort of support have you received?**

I get a lot of information and support from pilots and cabin crew staff. I can't say too much regarding help from Ryanair staff I know the management keep an eye on everything I put into the public domain. I cannot thank SolFed enough for their support and help in spreading the word.

**Finally, what would do want the campaign to achieve in the end?**

My end goal comes in two parts. One is for shareholders to sack the whole board at Ryanair and for the airline to adopt a different employment, recruitment and termination module, without the abuse. I want Probationary Cabin Crew to be treated with respect and dignity. Secondly, I want all the people in authority in aviation, as well as the Irish and UK governments and others, to be named and shamed for turning a blind eye to this injustice.

To read more about the Ryanair Don't Care campaign visit:  
[ryanairdontcarecrew.blogspot.com](http://ryanairdontcarecrew.blogspot.com)



# ng, creating... l Women's Day

## The economy of making women care

The supposed 'solution' to the economic crisis is premised on cutting costs. It is therefore important to highlight the role that women's subordinate position in the economy plays, as this will allow - and is allowing - for many activities to continue on an unpaid basis.

History has already shown how women are used differently at different economic junctures. Whereas the war economy of the 1920s and 1930s put women to work, it sacked them in the 1940s to give their posts to the soldiers coming home from the front. The 'marriage bar', that is, the prohibition of married women to enter certain better-qualified professions, which was in place in some industries until the 1960s, kept women in low paid jobs. According to Maria Angeles Durán, 2/3 of the total working hours today are unpaid caring-type of activities - done almost entirely by women.

In this process, men remain the rightful workers and economy managers whereas women's involvement in the labour market is dependent on their caring-burdens and market needs. A 2007 research paper by Aguiar and Hurst shows

that in industrialised countries full-time working women spend an average of 23 hours per week in unpaid housework and between 6 and 12 hours in unpaid childcare, this latter being between 2 to 4 times more than what men do.<sup>1</sup> In the UK, this can be up to 60% of the total activities women do.<sup>2</sup>

“ Working women spend an average of 23 hours per week in unpaid housework and between 6 and 12 hours in unpaid childcare. ”

According to the latest data on occupation by gender in the UK 69.4% of the cleaners, 81.5% of the social workers, and 87.7% of the nurses, are women. But women only make up 6.8% of engineering professionals.<sup>3</sup> Women overall earn about £90 less per week than men. As such, women do the bulk of unpaid caring activities, they represent the biggest percentage of care-type jobs, and of the lower-paid professions.

Keeping care as an unpaid or poorly paid activity not only allows for huge savings to the economy, but also it creates an economy based on competition, the market and growth, rather than on need and affection.

More importantly, these parameters allow "the economy" to be defined quite apart from many activities relevant to our lives, such as childcare. This tends to assign responsibilities and value through constructed social hierarchies, ultimately giving privileges and control to heterosexual white rich men.

Looking at the economy of care brings up that 'caring' is not so much something that women do because they are born to do so, but because of very precise and at times coercive economic measures. It is on these bases that our feminism needs not to aspire to the privileges men have but to attack and subvert the social hierarchies that sustain capitalism.

1. Aguiar, Mark and Erik Hurst. 2007. "Measuring Trends in Leisure: The Allocation of Time over Five Decades." *Quarterly Journal of Economics* 122(3): 969-1006.

2. Office for National Statistics. 2006. *The Time Use Survey, 2005. How We Spend our Time*, London: HMSO. Table 4.4

3. Office for National Statistics. 2011. *Emp16: All in Employment by status, occupation and sex. Quarter 2 (Apr - Jun)*. <http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/publications/re-reference-tables.html?edition=tc%3A77-215723>

## The 1976-78 Grunwick strike

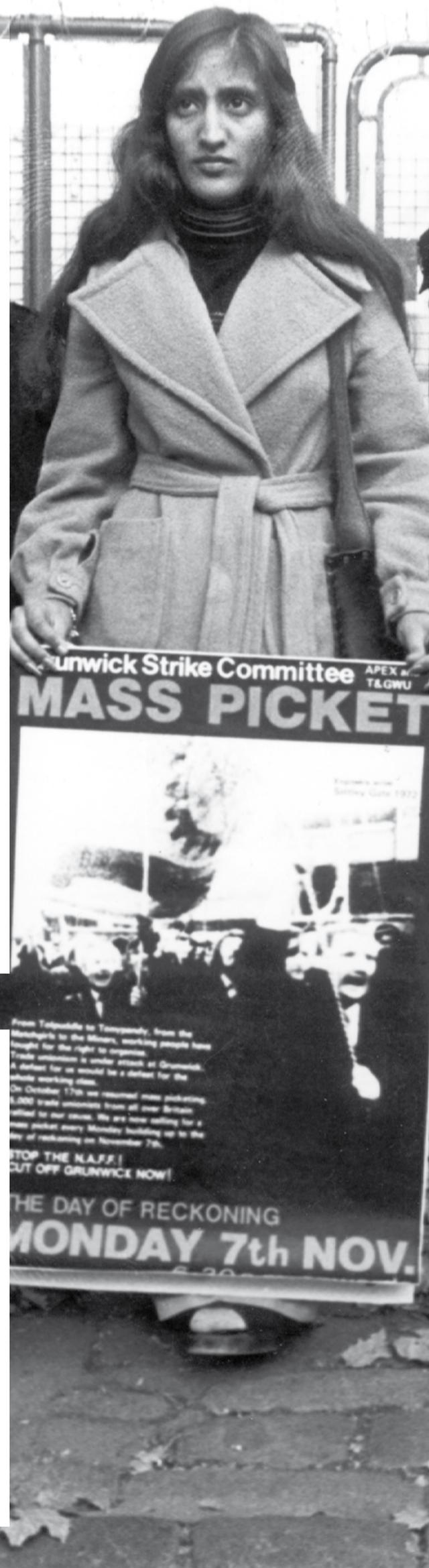
THE GRUNWICK dispute started in August 1976 in a film processing plant in Willesden. It lasted for nearly two years, the SPG (riot police) were used for the first time in an industrial dispute, and it involved mass pickets, over 500 arrests, strikers run down by cars, hunger strikes outside Congress House, and ended in defeat. At Grunwick nearly all the workers were Asian women. In the 70s large numbers of women from the subcontinent worked in manufacturing and in the years before Grunwick there were big strikes in the midlands involving mainly Asian women, such as the Imperial Typewriters dispute in Leicester in 1974.

Conditions in the factory were awful, the workers were subjected to constant speedups, pay was very low, at £25 a week, and there was a colour bar in operation. The dispute was sparked when a worker was sacked and three others walked out in support. This started a mass walkout and picketing, and the workers went to the CAB to ask how to join a trade union and joined APEX. The strike was made official at the end of August and two days later all 137 strikers were sacked by the company. In November the postal workers union, at the time the UPW, voted to refuse to handle mail to Grunwick, which would have been very effective as the company got sixty per cent of its work from mail order.

However the union backed down after a threat of legal action in exchange for a pledge that the company would have to co-operate with the arbitration service ACAS, which it was refusing to do.

The strike was backed both by the TUC officially- they received full strike pay from APEX- and by a massive rank and file mobilisation for pickets, with busloads of Yorkshire miners coming down to support them for days of action. However the strikers were encouraged to look for a victory from the ACAS report and union recognition rather than stopping production at the factory. The support they really needed was blocked, and when postal workers stopped deliveries again they were suspended by their employers and fined by their union. The ACAS report was not complied with by the employer and most of it was overturned in a further court ruling.

After this the strike moved slowly towards defeat, with some of the strikers holding a hunger strike outside Congress House (TUC HQ) to protest the TUC withdrawing support. The strike ended in July 1978 after 693 days without the workers winning their demands. However, the dispute remains an inspiring battle by working class women and a caution against the trade union bureaucracy's complicity in the quelling of rank-and-file militancy.



# Industry focus:

## ‘Phantom Ofsted’ at a London Academy

An interview with ‘Mike’, a London education worker, about the phenomenon of ‘phantom Ofsted’ inspections, casualisation and mass dismissals of agency workers.

IN LONDON there is a local authority which claims to be the richest in Europe. Despite this, one-third of children in the borough live below the poverty line. In contrast, half of school age children in the locality are privately educated. This means that students left in the state system are overwhelmingly from the local estates. A sizeable percentage of them come from recently settled immigrant families. It is against this backdrop that this particular council began a program which has seen nearly all of its comprehensive secondary schools converted into academies.

Mike worked at one of those academies. Sponsored by a wealthy executive and specialising in “international business and enterprise”, the school boasts of “a strong commitment to education and business in the area”. A link to the Youth Enterprise Program is displayed prominently on the school’s website—which also offers the building out for “corporate hire”.

“No clear explanation was ever given for the mass dismissal and that’s the entire point: management didn’t need to. And that’s exactly why employers use agency workers in the first place.”

Having recently completed university, Mike was hired as a graduate support teacher. “My first impression of the place was pretty good. The pay wasn’t great, only sixty pounds a day, but that’s pretty standard for agency work in a school. But the hours were reasonable and the job was rewarding.”

While Mike was critical of the academy model before beginning work there, the conditions were okay. He didn’t feel the school environment was especially warm, but staff got along with each other.

When asked how the permanent staff related to the agency workers, Mike responds, “Well, there was no resentment or anything”. But there was no discussion of the implication of the academy’s widespread use of agencies, either.

As far as Mike could tell there was no active union presence. “Although since I was only there a short time, I can’t really say. I was never asked to join the union and, if there was a rep, no one told me.”

On November 30th, the day of the mass pension strike that brought out just about every union in the education sector, Mike’s school was shut for students. “Management told the agency staff there’d be no point in us coming in” and, as far as he knows, none of them did. No permanent member of staff approached him to discuss the strike or ask him to participate. “If there was a picket line, I wasn’t told about it.”

The entirety of the student support—graduate teaching

and learning support assistants—was comprised of about twenty staff, all from various agencies. Mike’s contract was only secure on a month-to-month basis and there was never any talk of moving to a directly employed post. Yet, when management announced that all support staff agency workers would be let go, it still came a shock.

At the time, the official line was “finance”. The school was in debt and couldn’t afford the luxury of so many support staff. So, after three months service and with only three weeks notice, agency staff were informed they’d be again entering the harsh world of the credit-crunch job market. Shortly after, the rumours started.

The first went like this: when Mike and his co-workers had been hired in November, the academy thought it’d be facing an Ofsted inspection that year. However, it was later discovered the school would be spared the pleasure of having the inspectors round. Management’s original plan to move from “satisfactory” to “good” by beefing up support staff no longer applied.

The second rumour involved the new EU agency worker directive that came into effect October of last year. The new rules state, in short, that after twelve weeks of continuous employment agency workers’ pay and conditions must be the same as if they were directly employed. Mike and his co-workers were let go after eleven weeks. Since then, there’s been talk of the same positions again becoming available, presumably on the same inferior contracts.

Citing his insecure contract Mike says his dismissal “didn’t come as a total surprise”, but that the entire experience has left him “bitter” and even more critical of academies.

“I was lucky, I found work quickly”, although it was another agency position, this time in a state

school. “But for other people, especially those in the special needs department, they had more invested in the job. It’s what they wanted to be doing long-term.”

And how were the students affected by this mass exodus? Students who get learning support tend to develop a close bond with their support teachers. These are often those most vulnerable in the education system and trust does not often come easy.

“The students were the main reason I didn’t want to go”, says Mike. Even in three months they’d developed a strong attachment to him. Before he left, students made cards expressing

their sadness that he’d be leaving. In the final analysis, it doesn’t really matter why Mike and his co-workers were sacked.

The combination of factors—Ofsted (and the phenomenon of the “phantom Ofsted” familiar to any education worker), agency contracts, and work at an academy—left the support staff at Mike’s school in appallingly precarious employment. No clear explanation was ever given for the mass dismissal and that’s the entire point: management didn’t need to. And that’s exactly why employers use agency workers in the first place.

**The Education Workers Network**  
EWN is made up of Solidarity Federation members who work in the education sector. Joining EWN also means joining your nearest SF group (solfed@solfed.org.uk or PO Box 29, S.W. DO, Manchester, M15 5HW for details). Even if you don’t wish to join us, we welcome requests to join our discussion list (ewn@lists.riseup.net) and / or for bundles of Education Worker. Also available: EWN intro pamphlet; basic EWN intro leaflet; back issues of Education Worker. EWN, c/o News From Nowhere, 96 Bold Street, Liverpool, L1 4HY.  
ewn@ewn.org.uk | solfed.org.uk/?q=network/ewn



# Opinion & Letters

## Throwing in the towel, trade union style

A healthcare worker writes about the recent pensions 'sell out', with the union capitulating to pension cuts.

It was less than three weeks following the Trade Union Congress' (TUC) much-vaunted 'day of action' against the assault on public sector pensions when we heard the news that some of the unions had reached initial agreement with the Government on the proposed changes.

TUC General Secretary Brendon Barber appeared on national media crowing that the action at the end of November had brought 'a new atmosphere' to the negotiations and that in the local government and health sectors there was 'a strong sense that some real progress has been made'. Although Barber was keen to stress that 'at this stage, no agreements have been reached' it was clear that this statement signaled the leaders of the major unions scurrying to the heel of the establishment.

True to form, public services union UNISON behaved in an appalling Stalinist fashion, giving its branches only a few days to consult with their membership in relation to the proposed 'heads of agreement'. The published opinion accompanying this consultation was about as balanced as a cup tie between Barcelona and Northampton Town.

The proposed deal, which in reality amounts to little more than a handful of concessions designed to divide those affected by the changes, was presented in such a way that left you with the impression that a great victory had been won and all that was required was a rubber seal. Who on earth could possibly oppose this?

The 'executive committees' of the union, liberally populated by individuals more concerned with their next conference expenses claim than any serious organising, didn't bother to find out by asking its membership. Instead, in a manner befitting of a scene from the

Ragged Trousered Philanthropists, they agreed with each other that this really was as much as we could hope for and we should be thankful to have a pension (or a job) at all.

The surrender of branches to this propaganda was greeted enthusiastically by regional officers, heralding 'a green light' for negotiating the finer details of their capitulation. Any opposition was dismissed as external political interference and the union's executive officers skipped off to sell out its membership yet again, safe in the knowledge that it wasn't their own pensions at risk. Union reps were left having to explain to a bewildered membership that the union had done a deal without even bothering to ask them properly.

Now, we've been here many a time before and rather than endlessly

slate the unions for selling us out and lobbying for a change of policy we should look to the fundamentally undemocratic nature and structures of the social democratic unions.

The power lies far away from the workers and this severely dilutes militancy and enables the politics of social partnership. 'Let's all make sacrifices in the interests of Great Britain PLC!' they cry. Yet again we've been reminded that the hands on the levers of power may be few but they are manipulative and without organisations directly controlled by the workers charged to resist them they can feed, co-opt and satisfy their supposed opponents with ease. 'Sell outs' like this are inevitable so long as we don't take matters into our own hands.

Sarah, Bristol



## SOLIDARITY FEDERATION WORKPLACE ORGANISER TRAINING PROGRAMME

Whether you've got a union or not, join us for a workshop on how to create strong organisation in your workplace.

Learn the basics of organising. Topics include: building a 'shop committee', cross-union activity, collectivising grievances, and building for direct action. What our attendees have said:

"This is great! I can't wait to start talking to my co-workers and get my organising committee up and running!"

"I've been a union rep for 15 years. I've learned most of these things in that time, but it makes so much sense to have it all collected all in one place."

"I love the practical advice. Some of it's so simple, but you don't realise it until it's there in front of you. I can't wait to go apply it at work."

SolFed is happy to offer our one-day workplace training to any interested groups. We've all got grievances at work, so why not gather some pissed off workmates and get organising? Contact the SolFed national training coordinator at [training@solfed.org.uk](mailto:training@solfed.org.uk)

## Letters

Write to [Catalyst catalyst@solfed.org.uk](mailto:catalyst@solfed.org.uk) - We try to publish a range of views, with responses where possible. Comment on articles or current events is welcome. Letters may be edited and names/locations will be anonymised by default unless you specifically request otherwise.

# Know your 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 £6.08. For 18-20 year olds it is £4.98 and for 16-17 year olds it is £3.68. Apprentices under 19: £2.60. 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 per year.

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 after each 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 hrs 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 when we are ill.

We are entitled to statutory sick pay if we normally earn over £77 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 DSS. 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 or where 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.



# Rogue letting agents back down Rough sleepers up 23%, set to rise more

THREE TENANTS discovered that it is illegal in Scotland for letting agents to charge tenants fees apart from rent and deposits. Their letting agent, Martin & Co, had charged the three of them a substantial £250 'check-in' fee before they had even paid their deposit.

They first submitted an official complaint but received only the receipt listing the fees they had paid as a reply. The charity Shelter advised them that they could go to the small claims court, but the court fee would have been £65 with no guarantee of a win.

So instead, on 3rd February, they and 15 friends from the Glasgow Solidarity Network delivered a letter in person to the head of the Martin & Co West End office (to the amusement of other staff) giving the company two weeks to return the money.

They left quickly, took a picture outside for posterity, and dispersed. The manager must have called the police, because two officers came by the flat on Saturday to talk to them. However, thanks to helpful information from the Scottish Activist Legal Project, Solidarity Network members



know their rights, and the police left without even taking names.

On Tuesday 7th February, just four days later, the tenants received a cheque for the money in full, without any further action or the cost and time of legal proceedings.

THE LATEST official statistics show that on one night in 2011 there were 2,181 rough sleepers in England, up 413 from 1,768 on the same night the previous year. London and the South East had the highest number of rough sleepers with more than 400 in each region.

The news comes as measures to criminalise squatting continue to progress through Parliament. The plans have been pushed by Hove MP Mike Weatherly. In Brighton & Hove last year there were 368 households classified as homeless, but 3,655 empty homes.

Howard Sinclair, the chief executive of the Broadway charity, told *the Guardian*: "do I think that the figures will get worse? Yes, I think this is the start. As people get into debt, as the benefit changes take effect, as people get evicted, this problem will become more acute. Yes, the government has kept the homelessness grant. But most prevention and support services are funded out of Supporting People budgets, which have been cut by 20% by local authorities."

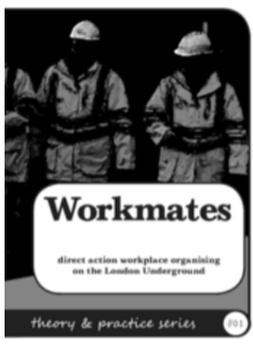


## Sudoku

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

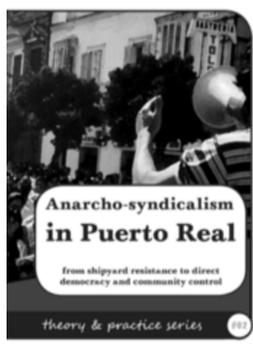
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## Theory & Practice series pamphlets



### #1 Workmates: direct action workplace organising on the London Underground

In the late 1990s, plans to outsource track maintenance on the London Underground were being pushed through by the government. Workers at one depot responded by forming a new workplace group, both inside and outside the existing union, the RMT. This pamphlet charts the highs and lows of the Workmates collective, highlighting their successes and failures, their radically democratic organising method and their creative forms of direct action. We hope it can provide an inspiration to other workers frustrated with the limits of the existing workplace organisations.



### #2 Anarcho-syndicalism in Puerto Real

The 1987 struggle against threatened closure in and around the shipyards of Puerto Real, Spain, in both workplace and community witnessed the anarcho-syndicalist union CNT playing both a prominent and decisive role. The CNT's involvement meant that the methods of organising and the forms of action taken departed from those common to reformist unions - with dramatic consequences. Mass assemblies both in the yards and surrounding localities involved workers, their families, neighbours and all supporters.

[www.solfed.org.uk/?q=pamphlets](http://www.solfed.org.uk/?q=pamphlets)

## About the Solidarity Federation

[www.solfed.org.uk](http://www.solfed.org.uk)

The Solidarity Federation is a revolutionary union initiative: an organisation of workers which seeks the abolition 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 will work within our Aims and Principles and seek to create revolutionary unions to fight the class struggle.

