Catalyst

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Newspaper of the Solidarity Federation

Part of the International Workers' Association



Cleaning up an industry

Page 2: Round up and analysis of recent cleaners struggles for a living wage.



You can't take our education

Page 3: What happened with the wave of occupations of schools by parents across the country, and why were they frequently successful?



College bosses get schooled?

Page 5: A look at the recent Tower Hamlets College ESOL workers dispute, claimed by the union as a complete victory.

Crisis, cuts and class conflicts







2009 has seen a wave of workers' struggles against the effects of the recession.

Firstly, workers at Lindsey Oil Refinery (LOR) in Lincolnshire staged an unofficial walkout over claims that foreign workers were being used to undermine a national agreement on pay and conditions. Solidarity walkouts rippled across the country at 13 refineries and power stations from Longannet in Fife to Milford Haven in South Wales to Langage Power Station near Plymouth, involving in total upwards of 4,000 workers.

While the media were quick to pick up on the slogan 'British Jobs for British Workers' that some strikers echoed back to Gordon Brown, the reality was the demands of the LOR workers reflected working class solidarity - making no reference at all to 'British workers' and calling for assistance to migrant workers.

Not only that, the refinery strikers openly defied the laws banning solidarity strikes with impunity – and won – providing the latest example that 'direct action gets the goods!'

Shortly after the refinery strikes, laid-off employees at Prisme Packaging in Dundee occupied their plant. They suceeded in reopening the factory as a workers' co-op, securing the income of the

nine workers after bosses had tried to withold even redundancy pay.

Following hot on the heels of the Prisme occupuation, workers at Ford-Visteon in Belfast responded to being laid-off with only 6 minutes notice and no redundancy pay by occupying their factory. As news spread, workers at Visteon's two other UK factories in Basildon and Enfield followed suit.

OCCUPY! RESIST!

The Belfast occupation was maintained for over a month, ignoring union 'advice' that the occupation was illegal (it wasn't) and ceremoniously burning court possession papers granted in favour of Visteon.

When the dismissed Visteon workers began preparing a delegation to visit Ford's UK factories to encourage solidarity strikes, bosses suddenly returned to the table (as union bosses tried to call-off the delegation).

A partial victory was won, although some issues, such as pensions were left unresolved.

Coinciding with the Visteon occupations, several schools in Glasgow and South London were occupied by angry parents protesting against closure plans.

The occupation of Lewisham Bridge primary in South London was inspired by the ongoing Glasgow 'Save Our Schools' campaign and the Visteon occupations.

Workers from Visteon visited the school and spent some nights on the roof in solidarity with the occupiers. Charlotte Turner primary in nearby Deptford was also occupied after the council ignored a sham 'consultation' exercise which returned 296 out of 297 responses opposed to closure. Lewisham Bridge was a resounding victory, with parents forcing the council to abandon their plans to demolish the school.

PROFIT BEFORE PLANET

Another high-profile occupation began in July after 625 workers at Vestas Blades, a wind turbine manufacturer in the Isle of Wight were laid off in similar circumstances to the Visteon workers earlier in the summer.

Around 20 workers responded by occupying the plant, pointing to the farce that the closure of the UK's only wind turbine plant came just hours after the government announced plans to build 10,000 more wind turbines as part of its green energy 'commitment.' Vestas had had no problem pocketing several million pounds in government cash just before the redundancies were announced.

After resisting management and

police attempts to literally starve them out – one worker was taken to hospital with low blood sugar levels but supporters risked arrest to break the siege and deliver much needed supplies – the workers ended their occupation after nearly three weeks.

Whilst the occupation did not achieve its goal of keeping the factory open, it highlighted the severe lack of jobs on the island and drew attention to the fact that despite the rhetoric, the environment will also be made to pay for capitalism's crisis.

There have also been ongoing official and unofficial postal strikes up and down the country before voting overwhelmingly, for national strikes (see page 8), disputes including refuse workers in Leeds, Edinburgh and Brighton, and an indefinite strike over cuts by education workers in Tower Hamlets, London which secured a partial victory guaranteeing no compulsory redundancies.

BACK TO THE FUTURE?

This resurgence in working class militancy has already got sections of the ruling class scared. The 'favourite think tank' of Tory leader and likely next Prime Minister David Cameron has even warned of a "new age of militancy."

TURN TO PAGE......3

2 tube dispute, cleaners' living wage Catalyst Winter 2009 www.solfed.org.uk school occupations, drugs 3

Troubled tracks as pay claim looms for the underground

The triple dispute on London Underground (LUL) over redundanth The redu cies, pay and victimisations apresolved for the time being by a redundant, for now. pears at first sight to have fizzled out after the initial 48 hour strike

compromise where management have not conceded the principle



The deadline for unions to accept or reject the pay offer has been extended until the beginning of October, as ASLEF, Unite! and TSSA have asked for more time to

Activists from these unions have admitted that they had been waiting for the RMT to "punch itself out" fighting Transport for London (TfL) management on its own, intending to come in, win the dispute and poach members from it at the last minute.

RMT activists are now biding their time and seeking to get the other unions involved in any future

The single 48 hour strike followed by a long wait for further industrial action jarred with RMT's reputation as Britain's most militant union.

The lack of sustained strike action compared unfavourably with the postal strikes in London which have occurred weekly for months and even the successful united action RMT took with ASLEF on mainline services from London's Liverpool Street station.

The cynicism of the other unions

The redundancy issue was but no RMT member will be made and some activists to winning shown indecent haste in agreeing

Much of the RMT's reputation for militancy at LUL stems from the engineering workers employed on **The union's** what was the Metronet contract.

unscrupulous private consortium for years but the work involved fighting privatisation meant that the officials had to leave the work haste in agreeing to lay activists, ceding control to them in the process.

RMT activists directly employed by LUL and TfL by contrast have **transferring** had a cosier relationship with management and their stomach Metronet workers for a fight is questionable.

their rank-and-file organising model, based on a standing strike their reps' committee, into LUL with them.

The strike committee was subject to sniping from established LUL activists, and Bob Crow and Pat Sikorsky took control of the

The latter pair, who had victimised LUL Regional Officer Bobby Law also sidelined his successor in the role.

of no compulsory redundancies commitment of RMT officials The union's leadership had the disputes to make much of the terms for transferring Metronet the membership reluctant to lose workers to LUL without their reps' pay for strikes which might prove agreement and are suspected of

> Not only did they square up to an leadership had shown indecent the terms for The ex-Metronet workers brought to LUL without agreement

> > not wanting a fight over pay and redundancies.

Nevertheless, what was originally billed as London Mayor Boris Johnson's attempt to break the

Contract cleaners fight poverty pay

Workersincontractcleaningfacelow wages, a lack of basic employment rights, bullying management and victimisation for union activities. However, especially among Latin Americans, self-organisation has sustained struggles against their unscrupulous multi-national employers, and the fight against the immigration controls which are used to sack unwanted workers and victimise union activists.

Contractors use immigration controls to sack unwanted workers A favourite tactic is to organise an immigration raid under the pretext of "health and

safety" training, where

and immigration officials and subject to fast track deportation if in the UK. Another is to claim that National Insurance numbers under which NI has been paid by workers for years are "suspicious" and to call workers in for immigration checks, knowing that anyone whose status is questionable will disappear – redundancy without the costs.

Grassroots struggles highlight the inadequacy of the "organising and to punish them for organising. model" of trades unionism favoured by the social democratic unions who believe that capitalism can and should be managed

workers are detained by riot police do this they have to work with the bosses, and get the Labour Party to provide a legislative framework they can't prove the right to work to force the former to do so. A top-down model of large, passive unionised workforces, negotiation controlled by full-time officials and a concentration on "headline" issues such as the London Living Wage rather than the full range of workers' concerns is their

Social democrats see the fact that these cleaning contractors are rich multinational companies as meaning they should be more willing to pay better wages to their workers as they can "afford" it. In better to benefit workers. To fact, they are rich precisely because



As well as giving their investors a investment and keeps the share price up. Their wealth proves attractive "partners" for the social democrats.

Consequently ustice4Cleaners neglected small groups of workers actions. in "hard to organise" workplaces. Our aim should not just be to Cleaners sacked by Amey at the shame capitalists into acting against (NPL) in Teddington outside their true nature and to advocate London, working for Lancaster at their abolition. The existing unions Schroders bank and for Mitie at cannot and will not do this; it is not Willis insurance company in the just the methods but the aims and City of London have organised objectives of the social democrats

American Workers Association, greater return this attracts further No Borders and the Campaign Against Immigration Controls. Other supporters have included they are ruthless, but makes them SF members from the two London Locals. Noise pickets have been organised at contractors' offices, the and outside events organised campaign or attended by their clients, to organised by T&G/Unite! has embarrass them into taking concentrated on "easy targets" and responsibility for the contractors'

National Physical Laboratory their own interests, but to expose themselves, and showed up the which fail the working class.



and, in several cases, occupation. The first occupations occurred in Glasgow where twenty-two schools are threatened with closure, as part of a council plan to left to the parents. plug a £6 million overspend. Wyndford, St Gregory's, Our Lady of the Assumption and

after the council voted to demolish the site and hand the school over to the medieval In early May parents at Charlotte Turner,

a primary in Greenwich, took the building to fight a planned closure. In all cases there had been a 'consultation' resulting in UK have resisted with grass-roots campaigns overwhelming majorities opposed to the changes and in all cases these were ignored. With official lines of negotiation an obvious sham, direct action became the only weapon

Of the occupations, only Lewisham Bridge has achieved some of its goals; the Victoria primary were occupied in April and Wyndford was subsequently reoccupied in November, the building remains and it

Heritage listing, the force of the campaign and the media attention it got undoubtedly played a big part. Even without victories Wyndford and Charlotte Turner have been closed), the occupations have brought selfconfidence to participants and bolstered campaigns frustrated by officialdom. There schools and every occupation is an example to the next.

Rise of school occupations

With coming cuts in education and the occupations. Both main parties plan to attack Balls' claims of savings in education can only College (see pages 4-5). be achieved by merging schools and making

is still not an academy school. Although them ever bigger. The Tories intend to take this was nominally achieved by an English more schools out of local authority control and into unaccountable companies.

Lewisham

Bridge

With a pay freeze on the way, education workers will be involved in their own struggles. If the school campaigners and workers can act together we could see more victories in this academic year.

The workers will be able to draw is a new willingness to take action for our confidence from the support of parents, so long as parents are actually able to speak to staff, something that the unions have tried to block in some cases. However, the student onwards march towards privatisation, we occupation at SOAS in support of detained should expect more campaigns and more and deported cleaners demonstrated the solidarity links that can be made, as did the education after the next election. Labour's Ed vociferous student support at Tower Hamlets

From Page 1

Against this backdrop, the BBC's economics editor writes that "the crucial difference between Labour and Tories is the timing." The Liberal Democrats say no public services should be "ring-fenced" from

The political consensus is clear: drastic cuts are on the way, with talk of spending being slashed by at least 10% over the next

of the cuts."

The last years of the 'economic boom' saw economy is in boom or bust. numerous workers' struggles against subinflation pay offers and deteriorating terms enough to fear this; it's up to us to make and conditions, which came following years their fears into reality. of real-terms decline.

Then when the recession hit, workers were urged to tighten their belts for the good of the economy, as unemployment rocketed, not so much the scale of spending cuts - but pay was slashed and home repossessions reached record levels. Now there is talk of economic recovery, politicians of all stripes are already planning how best to make

This underlines a simple fact absent from most mainstream commentary: it is not the health of the economy that determines Reportedly the favoured model is Sweden, workers' living standards, but our ability to where major cuts were made following a collectively impose our needs on the bosses. budget crisis in the 1990s. According to the Without this collective power, economic BBC "even though it was a Social Democrat growth is simply accumulated by the bosses wielding the axe, it was Sweden's over- as profit, and economic crises have their arching welfare state which received most costs passed on to weak and disorganised workers.

With an election looming all the politicians

By contrast, when workers take collective will deny it, but there's no doubt they intend direct action, they are able to improve to make the working class pay for the crisis. their conditions regardless of whether the

Sections of the ruling class are alert

Prescription heroin'cuts crime'

However a recent government-backed committed by the participants. study has cast doubt on the wisdom of this

colliery areas in south Wales and the north of England having some of the highest rates for society as well – is that you can," he said.



When it comes to drugs, the state's policy drug related. The Randomised Injecting has traditionally been hard-line; blanket Opioid Treatment Trial (RIOTT) reported prohibition and the criminalisation of users. over a two-thirds reduction in crimes

Professor Strang, who led the RIOTT approach, by showing that prescribing programme, said that the aim of the trial was heroin to addicts both drastically cut the use to determine whether prescribing heroin or of street drugs and markedly reduced crime. similar substitutes could help turn addicts' Drug-related crime is a major problem lives around and prevent the cycle of crime in working class communities, with former and imprisonment. "The surprising finding - which is good for the individuals and good

of heroin addiction. Research suggests that Will the evidence influence policy? Or between half and two thirds of all crime is will the upcoming election see another futile contest between politicians to appear the most hard-line on those already at the bottom of capitalist society? While the government has indicated it will "roll out" a supervised prescription program, concerns have already been raised about the £15,000 per person annual cost. However, compared to the £25,000 per person annual cost of imprisonment that seems like a bargain - even in the crude cost-benefit terms of government ministers. That's before even taking into account the broader social costs of widespread heroin addiction.



www.solfed.org.uk tower hamlets college 5 Catalyst Winter 2009 4 public sector struggles

Take the public sector and squeeze

May 2010 will see a general election where the main parties will compete with each other in promising cuts in public expenditure and attacks on public sector workers pay and conditions.

This offensive is egged on by the media and parts of it are fast becoming accepted wisdom - even if the supposed facts underpinning this version of events are wrong.

While the media like to talk about public sector bureaucracy, the vast majority of public sector workers do things that are useful – nurses, doctors, street cleaners, library assistants, mealson-wheels drivers, carers, teachers – are just a few examples. Whoever gets in after the next election, these groups of workers are a prime target for cuts to balance the State's books after the multibillion pound bank bail-outs. The bureaucrats will for the most part not be the victims of these cuts, but those doing the cutting.

The attacks will be three-pronged - straight cuts in numbers of workers doing a job, cuts to pensions and speeding up privatisation. Pensions have been demonised in the press. A decade ago many workers in all sectors had final salary pensions. Most private sector bosses have now closed these, whether for new starters or all workers, and if replaced, it has been by inferior 'money purchase' pensions, where the individual worker takes more of the risk and the company pays less.

All the media talk of 'gold-plated' public sector pensions is part of the agenda to drive down workers' wages across the board through divide and rule. It turns out the average public sector pension is about £7,000, but many have pensions of less than £5,000 per year. This is hardly 'golden', and is low enough that many pensioners will qualify for additional benefits because their income is so low.

All main parties are also committed to selling off more public services on the pretext that the private sector is more efficient and cheaper at providing services. This is just free market dogma. Privatisation is about cutting both pay and conditions of workers, and the level of service received. Sometimes, under accounting scams like the Private Finance Initiative (PFI), the cost is actually higher and the service poorer, with examples such as a £75 fee to change a light bulb

But the political consensus of pay cuts, attacks on pensions and privatisation need not go unopposed. Workers in other sectors have already shown the way with a wave of direct action from strikes to occupations putting a stop to bosses plans for cuts. Public sector workers can do it too but there are obstacles to overcome.

One of these is that even within one place of work in the public sector workers are often divided up into two, three or more different trade unions. For example a typical university campus will have academic staff in UCU, administrative staff in Unison and perhaps cleaners and manual workers in Unite. When we consider the whole public sector, this problem is magnified. Each union organises independently of the others, and none of them organise with those workers who are not union members - but who also have a class interest in opposing cuts.

A first step to overcoming this is to open up workplace meetings to all workers. Getting members of other unions as well as non-union staff to discuss the cuts and how to resist them shifts the discussion from sectional trade interests to united class interests; united we stand, divided we fall. Against the cuts agenda, we should be pushing for coordinated strike action by all public sector workers. We cannot rely on the trade unions to do this on our behalf – workers need to network, agitate and organise to make the solidarity we need to resist the cuts a reality.

Why did we risk it all? Because we will not go down without a fight.

Catalyst

talks to the Tower Hamlets strikers

While the recent media spin is suggesting that we're 'on our way out of recession', the reality on the ground is that workers are still facing attacks across sectors in the forms of job cuts and community provisions. Education has been one of the sectors worst hit in this period, with £65m slashed from higher-education (HE) budgets, schools closing left, right and centre, and jobs to go at approximately 100 of the 150 HE institutions in the UK. The situation is as bleak as ever.

In August, around 250 members of teaching staff at Tower Hamlets College (THC), East London went on indefinite strike over threats of compulsory redundancies, and cuts in provision of ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) courses. Catalyst spoke to Rachel, a member of the striking staff, about the background of the dispute, the issues at hand, and the feelings after the strike came to an end in late September.

We began by discussing the background to the strike, going back to June of this year, - "There was new management, a new principal, new senior managers ... and in June they issued a document 'Securing the Future'." The nature of this document turned out to be a plan for "very brutal cuts in provision and jobs, and on June 5 there was a 30 day notice for consultation", with the projection in June being that "40-60 jobs in THC would be cut, while approximately 50% of ESOL course places would also be lost, and some in A-level teaching."

Prior to the attack on jobs and provision, Rachel said that she had experienced "good working conditions with a strong union ... we were comfortable". But that all changed, and with a suddenness typical of many disputes, the plans to cut jobs and ESOL provision were an aggressive assault on the

Ways to fight back: London Education Workers Group

(LEWG) was established so that education must democratically and collectively workers throughout London can come control their own organizations. together to oppose the coming assault on education.

The London Education Workers Group the grassroots and that education workers,

THE STRIKE

Besides supporting fellow education must be our weapon. Power comes from can be contacted at londonewg@gmail.com they were out.



summer" – indeed the choice of timing had put the workers in a more difficult position to fight back, but they had no choice.

CAMPAIGN AGAINST CUTS

"A campaign started against the cuts, they were talking about 60 people being made redundant but they offered voluntary redundancy and a lot of people took that which was unfortunate but meant fewer compulsory redundancies". The campaign began right away, and on 27th June in Bethnal Green, a demonstration of workers, students, and supporters marched to Altab Ali Park in Whitechapel. In addition, staff and students were writing letters in anger at the proposed job and course cuts, but it was clear that direct action would be the only way of fighting back if the workers were to have any hope of defending themselves.

In early July, the attempts to formalise the redundancies had become more concrete. Rachel told us of a "letter sent by courier at night" which targeted 19 people at that stage for compulsory redundancy, which had made a ballot for indefinite strike action all the more vital. In the meantime, over the summer weeks, some people accepted voluntary redundancies, and some appeals had continued between July and August.

STRIKE BALLOT

workers and students. Management were The teaching staff, who were members of strategic in their timing - "proposing to do" the University and Colleges Union (UCU), it all at once, and at the end of term so it was decided to step-up the fight-back. "We balloted hard to do anything about it... coming up for strike action in late-June and we had a

it was about." The initial demands of the strike at that point were solely around the issue of compulsory redundancies. "We were down to 13 compulsory redundancies because others had won appeals or taken voluntary

term". While feeling that in and of themselves

they were ineffective in combating the cuts,

Rachel says this was a useful process; "it was

a way for people from the different sites to

meet and discuss things... we then had an

unofficial union action – we refused to take

part in a staff development event that we

and been required to do- this brought people

together". The same day, staff voted for

The strike was due to start on 27th, August,

before students began to enrol for the new

academic year – "were we going to be able to

carry it out from first day of term?...we had

a union meeting first day of term" and they

affirmed the strike from then on. Rachel

described some of the debates and internal

dynamics involved – "some people thought

we shouldn't do it during enrolment because

of students, since the college has competition

from other 6th forms, but we decided to do

From the beginning of the campaign

students were on-board with the staff action

"students did show support...at Poplar

[another THC site] students respected the

picket line and on the adult sites they mostly

didn't cross the picket line. We took great

pains to make sure they could understand.

The students knew us and they knew what

redundancy under pressure. Other things

were dropped... saving some of the jobs did

ndefinite strike in September.

STUDENT SUPPORT

During the strike Rachel says feelings of solidarity were high - "morale was fantastic... workers, LEWG extend solidarity to there were so many on picket-lines and LEWG reject the division of workers student and community struggles, doing other things and people feeling into separate unions and recognise that believing that in the long term, it is only good... busking, collecting, daily meetings, politicians, political parties, and union through opposition to both capitalism not much problem with scabs". The busking bureaucrats have nothing to offer workers. and the state that the problems that face and collecting helped the strikers to support Instead, LEWG believe that direct action education workers can be solved. LEWG themselves financially during the month

"We got strike pay from national union sold through with the most outrageous (UCU), but we don't quite know how much manipulation of the mass meeting where for full-time staff. There were 250 people on strike; we were able to collect a lot of the meeting as far as possible, with members money, about £20-25k, through colleges being shouted down by union officials. and workplaces, especially FE colleges, and places like local fire station. There was a hardship fund and any striker can say 'I need this much money' on the basis of trust and

"In the end officially there were no compulsory redundancies, but in a few cases I saw them as compulsory because certain people were selected through a scoring process, put through a meat-grinder, going over summer, in the end offered redeployment/demotion or voluntary redundancy." Basically some had been forced into taking 'voluntary'

"Six teachers got their jobs back... seven people I believe took voluntary redundancy. Nothing else was included in negotiations about what happens next." Rachel was very honest about the shortcomings, but she does feel that the gains that had been made, which were mostly in confidence terms, are worth building on. Despite the feeling that they could have achieved more, she says, "we are strong going back, heading to more of a shop-steward model. If we keep that going where we can meet and continue the feeling of strength.

"I think people thought we couldn't stay out too much longer. If we carried on we'd be divided. I think people want to feel good about it and we did accomplish a lot. It could have been much worse without our action."

So was it a 'victory'?

In the immediate aftermath of the vote, Rachel had written on the class struggle

manipulation of the mass meeting where discussion was suppressed before and during

"In the short time there was for debate, many people spoke against accepting the deal but in the end there were 24 votes against, many abstentions and the clear majority voting to accept and go back to work. (though the meeting was of course smaller than our usual weekly meetings)."

outcome by the time we spoke, Rachel was acknowledging that there were positive elements in the outcome. While compulsory redundancies were defeated, and this would also mean some ESOL provision would be saved (though not nearly as much as the 1,000 places under threat), Rachel and many of her fellow strikers are not getting carried away in the euphoria expressed by some on the left and higher up in the UCU.

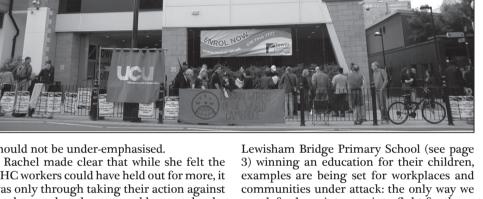
very quickly in those celebrations.

The action by teaching staff has had a ripple-effect in terms of other staff – "the Unison people were promised no compulsory redundancies because we were on strike." So despite the mixed feeling concerning

Having had a few days to reflect on the

"It was quite a bittersweet thing. A lot of people don't wanna talk about it as a victory - we could have done more heading back to work, but we feel great about what we did.. I think at Poplar you've got an SWP branch, they were the ones that kind of ended it when it ended. They wanted that result and got it in the mass vote – This is a great victory lets go down to the Brighton Labour party conference.' But cracks have started to appear

"People feel it's a mixed bag. It's not just me – 24 of us voted against going back. I didn't think we could stay much longer, but the vote wasn't done in the spirit that other meetings had been done."



should not be under-emphasised.

THC workers could have held out for more, it was only through taking their action against the bosses that they were able to make the gains they did. A feeling among many of the THC staff that were on strike is that they learned the value of fighting back and standing side-by-side in solidarity with each other – had they allowed these attacks to go unchallenged, they'd certainly have been in a considerably worse position. While there are many lesson to be learned from the strike, Rachel felt that many of her colleagues gained a sense of confidence in what they could achieve when they took collective action, and in times when indefinite strikes Michael Farley and all those seeking to make are almost unheard of, the THC workers have cuts in education that we will not go down set an example for workers everywhere.

The fight-back in education is on, and there have been glimmers of hope. From THC website libcom.org that "this deal was the outcome, the are definite positives that to the victorious parent-led occupation at

can defend our interests is to fight for them. One of the lessons learned has been that it was not the union that 'won' this 'victory' for the Tower Hamlets strikers; it was the collective action and solidarity of the workers In a support leaflet for the strike, the London Education Workers' Group said, "The

Tower Hamlets strikers have set a fantastic example for the rest of us in education to follow. Through their direct action and solidarity they have shown [principal] without a fight."

Rachel has been very honest about the shortcomings after the strike, but the most important thing coming out was the sense of confidence and solidarity they felt going back to work, and no-one can take that away from the Tower Hamlets College workers. Catalyst thanks Rachel for taking the time

out to chat about her experiences.

Uniting across all job roles: The EWN

The Education Workers' Network (EWN) is an industrial network for revolutionary workers in education, uniting workers across all job roles, whether they be porters, lecturers, cleaners, teachers, clerical staff, technicians, or anything else in the education sector. The Network seeks to organise through the entire education system, from schools, to colleges, to universities.

The EWN works to support education workers' struggles through selfeducation, agitation and activism, both to win immediate demands, and also with the long term aim of building a revolutionary labour movement in the anarcho-syndicalist model (see page 7).

The EWN publishes a regular newsletter 'Education Worker'. Contact details for EWN can be found in the contacts section on page 6.



6 know your rights, contact Catalyst Winter 2009

Know your rights

certain basic rights. These include:

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

The Minimum Wage for those over 22 years of age is set at £5.80,. For 18-21 year olds it is £4.83 and for 16-17 year olds it is £3.57. 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.

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

3. The right to breaks of at least 20 training is provided. 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 **a** limit of an average of 8 hours work in 17 week period, so we can be forced to do 24 which nightworkers can be required to more in any one week).

5. The right to sick pay when we are

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 a right to an in-work rest break if the are deemed to have been in continuous employment for 13 weeks).

6. The right to maternity/paternity Health & Safety Basics leave whenwe have children.

From April 2003, most mothers are entitled to 26 weeks' paid maternity leave and an additional 26 weeks' unpaid leave. To get conditions; maternity pay, we must earn over £77 per Provide proper information and training week and have been working for over 6 for everyone in all types of workplaces; months by the time the baby is 15 weeks from Draw up and circulate procedures for being due. For the first 6 weeks, this should dealing with risks at work; be 90% of average earnings, then a flat rate ■ Inform all workers of Health and Safety

permanent, agency, full or part-time) or our Maternity Allowance may be claimed from contracts of employment, most of us have 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

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

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** 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.
- working day is longer than 6 hours.
- a right to 4 weeks paid leave per year.

Employers should:

- Provide safe and healthy working

start work.

agreements, policies and practices before we

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

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

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%).

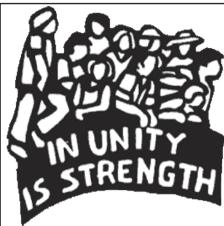
So instead ACAS have produced a Code of Practice that sets out what the features of D&G procedures should contain.

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.



otection against any detrimental act or lismissal in connection with excising this right of accompaniment. Hearings must be neard 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 gnored previous complaints, send it to the IR 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

3. Appeal meeting

f 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. Further information on workers rights can be found at www.stuffyourboss.com

Contact the Solidarity Federation interested in obtaining copies of Edinburgh:

NATIONAL CONTACT POINT -

PO Box 29 South West D.O. Manchester M15 5HW solfed@solfed.org.uk www.solfed.org.uk 07984 675281

CATALYST -

If you would like to distribute Catalyst, please get in touch at catalyst@solfed.org.uk

In addition to publishing Catalyst, Solidarity Federation also publishes Direct Action, our Quarterly Magazine. If you would like a copy, or are interested in subscriptions, get in touch at:

DA-SF, PO Box 29, SW PDO Manchester M15 5HW www.direct-action.org.uk

Subscriptions (4 issues) cost £5 per year basic, £10 supporters rate.

EDUCATION WORKERS NETWORK

The Education Workers Network all education workers. If you are www.brightonsolfed.org.uk

Education Worker, or in the EWN itself, they can be contacted at:

c/o Liverpool SF News from Nowhere 96 Bold Street Liverpool L1 4HY ewn@ewn.org.uk

STUFF YOUR BOSS

www.ewn.org.uk

The Stuff Your Boss website and pamphlet is a constantly updated resource, keeping workers up to Northampton: date with their rights under law. Copies can be obtained from the Avenue, Northampton, NN1 4JQ National contact point above, or from northamptonsf@solfed.org.uk the website : www.stuffyourboss.com

Solidarity Federation Locals operate up and down the country. To get in touch with your nearest local, use the contact details found below -

Brighton:

(EWN) publishes a bulletin for brightonsolfed@googlemail.com

17 West Montgomery Place,

Edinburgh, EH7 5HA 07 896 621 313 edinburghsf@solfed.org.uk

Liverpool:

c/o News From Nowhere, 96 Bold Street, Liverpool, L1 4HY liverpoolsf@solfed.org.uk

Manchester: PO Box 29, SWDO, Manchester, M15 5HW

manchestersf@solfed.org.uk e-list: manchestersf@lists.riseup.net

Blackcurrent Centre, 24 St Michael

North London: PO Box 1681, London, N8 7LE

nelsf@solfed.org.uk **Preston:** PO Box 469, Preston, PR1 8XF prestonsf@solfed.org.uk

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c/o National contact point sws@solfed.org.uk West Yorkshire:

PO Box 75, Hebden Bridge, HX7 wysf07@gmail.com

OTHER LOCAL CONTACTS Bolton: c/o Manchester SF

Coventry / W. Mids: c/o North

Ipswich & Suffolk: c/o N. London SF Milton Keynes: c/o North London SF Scarborough: c/o West Yorkshire SF Sheffield: c/o West Yorkshire SF

Hertfordshire: PO Box 493, St



www.solfed.org.uk

Who are the Solidarity Federation?

control of our lives where we live or work, rather than leaving things to the dictates of 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 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. Because our organisation comes from the

bottom up, what Locals do is the basis of our activity, towards our goal of building a libertarian solidarity movement.

Members of our London locals were

Solidarity Federation (SF) believes in taking heavily involved in the Lewisham Bridge school occupation, struggles by London Underground cleaners and the Visteon and politicians, managers and so called 'experts'. Vestas factory occupations. Brighton were also very active in supporting the Vestas struggle. They made collections, which were used to buy some of the food that was broken through the blockade and helped found the Brighton Vestas Workers Support Group. As well as supporting the Vestas workers, the Liverpool local has also been involved in supporting a refuse workers strike at industries, we organise in Networks; Enterprise Liverpool, while the West Yorks has been active supporting the Leeds refuse workers' indefinite strike.

In London and Brighton, members are actively involved in the disputes of RMT London Underground workers and Unison local government workers respectively. Locals in London and Brighton are also involved in the National Shop Stewards Network, while the Education Workers' Network has members from Manchester, West Yorkshire, Liverpool and Brighton who

distribute 'Education Worker' across their respective areas. Our London Locals have also organised two pickets of the Serbian Embassy in solidarity with the Belgrade Six. The London groups have fairly regular discussion meetings and regular socials, and also have links with the Goldsmiths college group Autonomy and Solidarity and the Anarchist Federation (AF) in London. The latter has been the basis for a joint meeting on the crisis, a May Day social and a new group, London Education Workers Group, for those working in the sector.

> We are also involved in anti-fascist activity. Liverpool SF are very involved in the local anti-fascist group and have helped organise several successful protests against the BNP in Liverpool, most recently around the court appearances of a prominent local BNP member who is charged with assaulting an anti-fascist. The Manchester Local have been involved in similar activities, such as regularly regionally. opposition to the recent 'English Defence League' march there, while the Brighton Local helped prevent the BNP launching a public branch

In Manchester, London and Brighton, Locals have organised numerous public meetings on topics such as the economic crisis, anti-militarism, combating the far right and anarchism and sexuality. In Liverpool, the Local regularly leaflets political events, and recently attended the James Larkin commemoration and a Peace & Ecology fair in the city in July for this purpose. West Yorkshire SF have done stalls in

to be based in the workplace, and must involve all workers, regardless of which union they are in - or whether they are in a union at all. Pay rises, job safety

vould-be representatives. "Workers rights" will only be won by Bradford city centre and attended events lirect action, or by negotiations backed such as the Stop the War Naming the Dead up by the credible threat of direct action, ceremony in Leeds. Brighton SF organised regardless of legislation. To act in our the English end of an international day interests as workers we must build

Sussex University.

pregnant. The Local also attended the Smasl

EDO May Day and Labour Party conference

demonstrations. Brighton SF have also

established the monthly Brighton Class

Struggle Forum, originally with Brighton AF

and set up an embryonic workers group at

twice a year. Our conference decides our

positions and priorities, we make space for

debates at a weekend school. We also meet

Organising on the job

We believe workers' organisation has

and control over how we work will

not be won by representation, but by

workers taking action for themselves,

independent of their bosses or any

As a national organisation we meet at least

of action for Natalia Szymanska, who was effective organisation in the workplace. sacked at Subway in Belfast for being Anarcho-syndicalism at work

There are political and economic
CLASS STRUGGLE assumptions in the way the existing, social democratic unions organise. They think workers and management have common interests, and that it is in their best interests to form partnerships. For example, to win the support of bosses in catering for the National Minimum Wage, in 1997 Labour allowed them to include workers' tips in calculating it, in spite of the NMW being a key election

manifesto point. Workers' interests are considered to be those of the Labour Party or the union bureaucracy. Representation, where politicians, union officials, or lay representatives deal with management works to resolve problems without harming the latter's interests. Business is seen as the goose which lays the golden egg, but we think that wealth is created not by business but by workers. In contract cleaning, for example, cleaners create the wealth but are sidelined by both unions and management.

idea that workers and management we try to organise at work in a the interests of management into

AN INJURY TO ONE IS AN INJURY TO ALL!

The class war is the process by which workers are put in our place by management. The result s that workers are reduced from being human beings to being mere production units, and the product of our labour is owned by those who produce nothing. Employment law restricts or qualifies the rights of management to sack and exploit workers both because we are valuable to the business, and because replacing us is costly. Union epresentation is the application of his law to regulate management relations with workers, in the interests of the management. We want to end the exploitation of our labour to benefit parasites, and to be treated as human beings not uman resources.

SOLIDARITY FEDERATION

DIRECT ACTION

Direct action is action taken by workers on our own behalf in our own interests. It is in opposition to Anarcho-syndicalists reject the politicians and union officials acting practices to benefit workers, going the anarcho-syndicalist idea of media this reinforces the idea that our behalf.

WORKERS' CONTROL

immediate purpose of workplace organisation should be to contest control of the workplace with management. When there needs to be negotiation any stewards have to be transformed from being representatives, whose role is to reconcile workers' demands with the interests of management, into being delegates. Those delegates must be given mandates and decision-making must lie not with them but with the workforce at mass meetings. In order to establish workers' control over a job, decisions have to be made collectively by the people who will carry them out.

the representation of workers by subcontractors, with different pay for British workers" we have to act have common interests, and with it those of management. It means make it even more difficult to workers of many nationalities in across industries on a federal the idea of social partnership and taking action to force management legally organise effective industrial Britain. Many migrant workers are basis, and use that geographical the method of union representation. to concede our demands by causing action. These divisions can only working illegally, or semi-legally; organisation to tackle social issues Many of us are members of the economic damage to the business. be overcome through struggle; their employers know this and outside the workplace. Decisionsocial democratic unions, but Unlike partnership, it rejects taking through the giving and receipt of use it to victimise them if they making power must always rest with different way. Anarcho-syndicalist account and limiting demands and of workers and through common immigration controls undermines with the working class, as a whole; workplace organising is based on actions in order to avoid harming struggles in workers' interests. We the ability of migrant workers to those who are delegated to carry out six principles: class struggle; direct them. It can take many forms think all workers have common organise to improve their conditions. those decisions must always remain action; workers' control; industrial from boycotting management interests and, therefore, should act Allied to the scaremongering about in possession only of a mandate and unionism; internationalism; social initiatives, changing working in solidarity with others. However, immigration in politics and the hold no power to make decisions on

production costs to striking.

INDUSTRIAL UNIONISM

We advocate the industrial union, one union for all grades and trades of worker in an industry. In larger workplaces there are often also different contractors and membership. Multiple employers countries, and also with the migrant which organise geograp

industrial unionism is not to create One Big Union for all. Rather the union is made up of those workers committedtotheanarcho-syndicalist aims and methods outlined here. Such a union would be run on a

directly democratic basis, while it

struggle according to the principle

The underlying purpose of organises in the workplace through workplace organisation should be mass meetings which approach the

of workers' control. INTERNATIONALISM Rather than demanding "British jobs

they are second-class workers who should be paid less, and therefore allows bosses to undercut the pay and conditions of British workers.

SOCIAL REVOLUTION

social transformation. Workplace organisation should not leave "politics" to political parties, but should address them itself. That means producing propaganda which doesn't restrict itself to "bread-and-butter" issues like pay and conditions and levels of union in solidarity with workers in other and conditions. It also means unions solidarity between different groups try to organise. The system of the membership of the union, or

When equality means cuts Councils attack pay in the name of 'fairness' In 1997, councils across Britain came to an agreement with unions lower men's pay rather than raising of council leader Richard Brett's happened in Leeds, the council has happened in Leeds, the council has lower men's pay rather than raising of council leader Richard Brett's happened in Leeds, the council has

came to an agreement with unions to undertake 'Single Status' job evaluations to end the discrepancies between manual and white collar jobs. Parallel to this, claims made about the historic pay discrepancies between traditionally male and traditionally female jobs were won at various Employment Tribunals. Historically, workers in female dominated jobs (such as those working around childcare) have been paid significantly less than those in jobs usually seen as 'men's work', such as refuse collection.

Since the Equal Pay Act in 1970 these pay discrepancies had been open to legal challenge, but Single Status was supposed to be an across the board solution that would see every job within the councils evaluated and regarded equally based on the content of the job. In theory, this was of course a good thing.

However, perhaps predictably, things did not go so smoothly. Many councils ignored this, and those that did look at it spun the process out for so long that they are still ongoing 12 years later.

lower men's pay rather than raising women's. The results of this differed across the country - in some places it was accepted by unions with little protest, in Birmingham there was unsuccessful strike action against the re-grading, while Greenwich UNISON ran a largely successful campaign demanding "Equal pay, not low pay".

Fast-forward to 2009, and several councils are now attempting to force through far more punitive settlements, often using the recession as an excuse. In several places the level of pay cuts demanded have been so great that unions have been unable to ignore it. Perhaps the most militant response has been in Leeds, where at time of press refuse collectors have been on strike for over a month, after wage cuts of thousands of pounds per year were demanded from these already low paid workers.

The strike began on 7 September and has so far been largely solid, with a demonstration of over 200 marching on Civic Hall on the first Friday of the strike. On the 15th September, 16 bags of rubbish

of council leader Richard Brett's home. On the 16th, six workers were arrested for repeating this, allegedly under anti-terrorist legislation! The council has bussed in strike breakers from the Prestonbased firm Noblet Municipal Services, but the majority of the city's rubbish has remained uncollected.

Similar disputes are appearing elsewhere in the country, for example in Brighton, refuse workers have balloted for strike action after they were told to take pay cuts in some cases up to £8,000 per year. The Brighton bin workers have a long militant tradition in 2001 launching wildcat strike action and an occupation against the private firm who held the tender, forcing the council to take refuse collection back in-house.

They have made it clear they are not prepared to take these attacks and announced in no uncertain terms that they will strike if the council attempts to implement them. Other workers facing pay cuts are also pushing for a ballot for strike action against these

happened in Leeds, the council has unsuccessfully attempted to divide the GMB refuse workers from those in UNISON by offering separate negotiations.

In Edinburgh, UNITE refuse workers are on overtime ban and work to rule against similar cuts, with the council threatening redundancy if they are not accepted. Scabs have been brought up from Liverpool to cover the work. Responding to this, several lorries have been blockaded by supporters. Other manual workers affected look set to join the action, as UNISON also rejected the deal.

These disputes show that bosses are prepared to use any possible opening to attack workers' wages. Taking progressive demands such as equal pay and turning them against the working class is a New Labour hallmark. The unions, who pushed for the deals in the first place have frequently been impotent now they have been turned against them - such attacks can best be resisted where workers take control of the struggle themselves, and do not allow a union backroom deal to



sell them out.

They also show that legislative solutions offer no answer for the working class - if we are not strong enough to defend our gains and back up law with industrial strength, then such attacks will continue to be made against us.

Direct action not legal action is the terrain on which to fight. While the principle of equal pay is something that must be supported and fought for, it needs to be won on our terms. We must fight to ensure women's pay is raised rather than the state's preferred option of attacking the pay of male workers

Mail strike's roots in unfinished business



Workers at Royal Mail have voted overwhelmingly in favour of strike action over management plans for job cuts.

76% of workers who responded to the ballot voted in favour of industrial action. The roots of the dispute go back to the settlement that ended the 2007 national postal strike.

At the time it was announced as a victory, but in fact the CWU union agreed to management plans to cut jobs. The 'victory' was that the CWU and Royal Mail management would negotiate the details of the cuts at a local level.

Now postal workers are unhappy with the results of those negotiations. One trigger is the Royal Mail's refusal to "Pay for Change."

In unilaterally imposing such changes by so-called 'executive action', Royal Mail have reopened the dispute.

Other issues behind the strike include 'absorption', where workers are expected to take on the workload of those that lose their jobs for no extra pay, and the increased levels of bullying and harassment that have accompanied such attacks.

A further issue is pensions. First the final salary scheme was closed on the grounds of expense, now the replacement scheme is due to suffer the same fate. Royal Mail are demanding year-on-year 10% cuts to expenses.

The pretext for this is to enable Royal Mail to compete with rival private firms. However, this is a cleverly devised scam.

The government has opened all of the profitable areas of the business up to private competition, whilst retaining control of the costly 'final mile' delivery which delivers 99% of small letters.

Then the government says this 'proves' the inefficiency of the public sector, justifying further moves towards privatisation, attacks on workers conditions and service levels.

Government privatisation plans were only shelved in July after they were unable to find a buyer in the current economic climate.

In 2007, as soon as the strikes began to exert serious pressure on Royal Mail management, the CWU called them off for "meaningful negotiations", the outcome of which was the 'victory' at the root of today's dispute. Postal workers have already shown a willingness to fight this summer with a series of local official and unofficial actions. There is also a widespread realisation that far more than their immediate terms and conditions is at stake.

Freedom for the Belgrade Six!

Six anarchists from the ASI, Solidarity Federation's Serbian sister organisation are currently imprisoned by the Serbian state. Tadej Kurep, Ivan Vulovic, Sanja Dojkic, Ratibor Trivunac, Ivan Savic and Nikola Mitrovic are accused of attacking the Greek embassy in Belgrade remain imprisoned, with (at time of press) no charges yet levelled at them.

The six have been targeted by authorities because of their politics and visibility, and face the ludicrous prospect of international terrorism charges - on the basis that as the embassy is sovereign territory, the attack had crossed an international border. The attack itself caused negligible damage, and has even been claimed by another group. If international terrorism charges are brought, the Six face over 10 years in prison.

October 4th marked thirty days of detainment, at which point charges would normally have to be made or prisoners must be released. However, as the charge holds a sentence of at least ten years, they can be held for a further 6 months, before they even get to see charges.

Anarchists from across

Europe have held a series of demonstrations demanding that their release, with demonstrations held at Serbian embassies and consulates in several countries, including Poland, Germany, Switzerland, Spain, Norway and Holland. In Britain, members of the Solidarity Federation were joined by comrades from the Anarchist Federation and others for a series of demonstrations outside the London Serbian embassy.

This repression unfortunately demonstrates the lengths the state will go to the attack those it sees as a threat, and is a chilling reminder of the depths the state will sink to. Unable to repress the work of the ASI in a conventional manner, they are forced to resort to an obvious fit up. However, the situation does demonstrate that the work the ASI do is perceived as a danger by the Serbian ruling class.
Until the 'Belgrade Six' are

released, it is important to keep up the pressure on the Serbian government, and not let this attack go unchallenged. Further updates to the situation, and ways you can support the campaign to release them can be found at: http://asi.zsp.net.pl/

