

# Education Worker

Bulletin of the Education Workers Network - 2009 - issue 5

## Strike Action to Defend Jobs & Pay

**A**s for most public sector workers, there are tough times ahead for university staff. The government should have invested in public services to create jobs and boost demand. Instead it handed over billions of pounds to bankers who used the money to increase their own profits and pay. As a result we now face a prolonged period of savage public sector cuts as the government tries to claw back the money handed over to bankers.

This process has already started. University management, faced with cuts in government funding, are seeking to impose a 0.5% pay increase this year. This amounts to a pay cut in real terms, after the rising cost of such basics as fuel, food, gas and electricity are taken into account. And with prices and mortgages predicted to rise, many university workers will face real financial difficulties over the next 12 months.

On the job front the situation is equally worrying. Some 99% of universities have already signalled job cuts. This will only add to unemployment and increase the workloads of those staff who manage to avoid redundancy. And this may only be the start – with all the major political parties now committed to public sector cuts, years of job and pay cuts lie ahead for university staff.

But there are alternative strategies that the government could employ. A downward economic spiral of cuts leading to higher unemployment, resulting in

falling demand and yet more cuts, is not the only way forward. Instead of cutting, the government could increase public spending as a means of creating jobs and stimulating demand, leading



to greater economic growth and increased government revenue, which could then be used to pay off public debt.

It is this alternative strategy based on increased public sector spending that the unions should adopt and seek to impose on the government. Forcing this government, or for that matter, a future Tory government, to change its business orientated economy strategy can only be achieved through co-ordinated strike action by all public sector workers. This message, that only through united action can public sector workers win, must be at the centre of the campaign to defend pay, conditions and jobs.

### Victory at Tower Hamlets

**The Tower Hamlets College strike is over. After a month out on strike, and an incredibly impressive campaign, teachers returned to work on 25th September having secured a guarantee of no compulsory redundancies in the current dispute. The 13 teachers facing redundancy have either been redeployed within college or taken voluntary redundancy.**

The strike started as a result of management attempts to impose compulsory redundancies and cut courses.

The workers involved however did not limit themselves to just picketing their own workplace. They immediately started to visit local shops, workplaces and community centres to build support

for the strike. And there was a tremendous response, with regular collections being held and delegations of workers from the surrounding area visiting the picket lines and attending meetings organised by strikers.

The strike at Tower Hamlets has shown the way for all of us who work in the public sector. The strikers determined action and emphasis on building solidarity with other workers and the local community, gives a clear example of how battles against management should be fought and won.



*by workers – for workers*

## “Five HE Unions, One Demand”?

**G**iven that we face years of public sector cuts the need for unity among higher education workers, and public sector workers in general, has never been more crucial. But sitting back and waiting for the unions to organise united action is not really an option. Even with the threat of massive public sector cuts, the unions often appear to mistrust each other far more than they do management.

This year's university pay claim is a case in point. No sooner had the “five unions, one demand” campaign been launched than divisions between those unions emerged. UNISON refused to recommend a rejection of the 0.5% offer and made it clear they felt members were unwilling to take strike action over pay. With other HE unions taking a far tougher line, we may yet again see HE workers divided, with some taking action while others are

encouraged by their unions to cross picket lines.

This is hardly the united front needed to defeat the coming onslaught on jobs and pay. The reality is that if unity is to be achieved in HE and in the wider public sector it has to be built in the workplace and not through union structures. It is down to activists themselves to start organising across trade union lines to form a common front against a common enemy – management and the government.

The barriers that all too often exist between workers doing different jobs and organised in different unions have to be broken down. This can be achieved

through organising joint meetings and by making joint demands on management. It can also happen through organising support for workers involved in disputes. Joint campaigns in support of workers in struggle attract people and help break down barriers and develop a real sense of solidarity.



Through such basic methods, workplace organisation can be built as the starting point for organising resistance to government attacks not

just in HE but across the whole public sector. In the process, the labour movement will be revitalised and will increasingly challenge the reformism and bankruptcy of the existing unions.

## PGCE cuts

Bursaries for trainee-teachers in England are to come into line with other non-teaching students. Prior to the recession, student-teachers received between £6-9,000 as income during the intense PGCE year. For the first time in over a decade, recruitment for many shortage subjects was met last year, partly attributed to many bankers and financiers, those responsible in part for the ‘credit crisis’, jumping ship for the ‘safer’ teaching profession. The significant projected decrease in income for student teachers is likely to make teaching even more inaccessible to many working class graduates.

-Organise\*

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## London Met Occupied

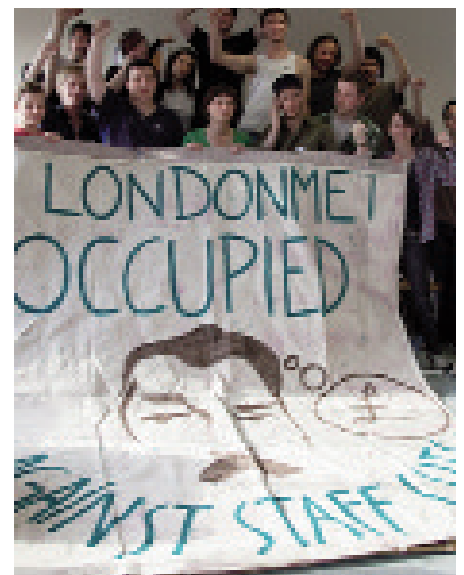
In May, London Metropolitan University (LMU) was occupied for 3 days as students from the university staged an occupation and took over the institution's Commercial Road building in a protest against job cuts.

LMU is London's biggest university and has a track record of providing higher education to many ‘non-traditional’ students. The protests were sparked after LMU announced plans to sack 550 staff and possibly put more at risk. LMU was motivated by a massive bill of £35m incurred for misreporting student degree-completion numbers to the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE),

The occupation ended after 3 days, when LMU successfully

obtained a court-order to evict the occupying protestors. Prior to the student occupation, staff had gone on strike over job-security.

-Organise\*



# Education Without Borders

**The flow of goods and capital between national borders happens without much restriction, but the same cannot be said of people in search of work or education.**

Non-EU residents are now subject to the new Points Based System (PBS) or Points Based Immigration (PBI), a five tier structure designed according to the objectives of the UK economy. Overseas students are part of the fourth tier. Each course offer from an institution is treated as unique and binding, so students cannot change to another institution easily without submitting a fresh claim, which can be a lengthy process. As such there are certain obligations on them and the institution they are attending.

Prior to this system, a student would receive an offer letter from the institution and could then enter the country on that basis with a student visa for an intended length of stay. They would be answerable directly to UK Border Agency (UKBA) or its predecessor. Now universities and colleges are under such severe scrutiny by the state that they are themselves becoming accountable for the

movements of students.

Institutions deemed to have failed to have sufficiently monitored students' movements will have their right to issue student visas revoked. Since Higher Education is propped up by extortionate overseas tuition fees (due to massive underfunding of HE by the government), this is a powerful threat from the government. In order to retain their ability to recruit (and overcharge) overseas students, universities and col-



leges are expected to turn into an arm of UKBA.

Unless faced with determined resistance by campus unions and student organisations, it is probable that students will be monitored by every facet of their institution, from advisors, lecturers and departments to central student services. There are further bureaucratic restrictions and monitoring imposed on students who study subjects deemed to be sensitive under the Academic Technology Approval Scheme (ATAS), while non-EU students generally have to register with the police once they enrol at university. The anti-terror raids against a number of Pakistani students in April 2009 in north west England show the danger of state paranoia, over-reaction and spite; arrest by armed police, a fortnight's detention, release without charge and, despite no evidence of wrongdoing, deportation for embarrassing the government, just for good measure.

As with all excesses of government, the initial victims are the most marginal and defenceless, before the state moves on to take task with the majority. The big white elephant that is biometric ID cards will be used against foreign nationals first, before it is universally imposed on the native population under the auspices of protecting us.

Education workers should oppose educational facilities being converted into an extension of UKBA or any other state, or quasi-state, body. Freedom of movement, as well as education, is a natural human right and something we must fight bigoted politicians to achieve.

[www.noii.org.uk/](http://www.noii.org.uk/)  
[www.noborders.org.uk/](http://www.noborders.org.uk/)  
<http://publish.indymedia.org.uk/en/2007/04/369098.html>

## Redundancies in HE

A survey by the Universities and Colleges Union (UCU) has reported that 6,000 lecturer jobs are expected to go in universities, with employers citing the recession as the reason. 4,593 jobs cuts expected in universities and 1,298 in colleges. One-third of those axed could be in London alone.

The job cuts are compounded by the announcement that university teaching is to have £65m slashed from its budget despite the government's plans for 10,000 new

students a year to be recruited – more students, less money to teach them, and less staff.

The findings come as employers recently offered a final pay rise of 0.5% to staff – far short of the 8% sought by union officials, and considered a slap in the face following news that university senior managers and vice-chancellors received average pay-rises of 5.5% and 9% respectively.

*-Organise\**

## Consultation? What Consultation?

**Evidence collected by EWN indicates that Unison HE Branches are failing in their democratic duty to fully consult their members over the employers final penny-pinching half-a-percent pay offer.**

Around the country in HE institutions where Unison has a presence, meetings are often *not* being called to put the offer to the membership, and strike ballots are being held, at best, remotely. At one Unison HE Branch AGM where the pay offer was on the agenda, the Chair merely noted that the offer was 0.5%, and went on to the next item without comment!

In a way this is not surprising, given the generally quietist (not to say invisible) nature of Unison branches on campus; and also that the Higher Education Service Group Executive (HESGE) did not recommend rejection of the offer, and has indicated that it does not feel that

there is support among members for strike action. Unison officials have concluded in fact that the membership is more interested in fighting redundancies in HE than for a decent pay offer. (The way to fight redundancies is to form a partnership with your employer to ensure no compulsory ones, not to actually fight them or to save a single job, according to Unison).

While HESGE isn't calling for a rejection of the offer, neither does it feel able to recommend it. It has acknowledged it is a "poor offer". It has also tellingly pointed out that "many institutions originally budgeted to allow for a much higher pay offer, *however those budgets have been heavily revised since*" (i.e. university management is robbing Peter to pay Paul; where Peter is you and me).

The question HESGE asked branches to ballot on is weighted against rejection of the offer, and strike action: "Do you accept or reject the employers full and final pay offer for 2009/10? (I am clear that should

I reject the offer I will be indicating my willingness to take part in sustained strike action)." Rather than simple "sustained strike action" (which could be taken to mean indefinite strike action), EWN argues for effective co-ordinated, *cross-union tactical strike action*, especially at critical times in the academic year, eg around exams (setting, sitting and marking), registration and enrolment, open days, graduation ceremonies and clearing. This way we can hit institutions in the most cost-effective way for strikers. The Tower Hamlets and Manchester college strikes, beginning during enrolment, as well as the UCU (AUT) "exams" action of a few years ago, show (part of) the way forward.

Education workers must realise that it is only through industrial action that we can defend jobs and pay. We have to challenge the notion that either strike action will fail (and so should not be attempted); or that members are unwilling to take action - which has long been the line pushed by Unison.

### 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; www.ewn.org.uk

### EWN Intro Pamphlet

*Building a Revolutionary Union for Education Workers*

Please send SAE to EWN (see address opposite)



### SelfEd Collective

*A History of Anarcho-Syndicalism* is a series of 24 pamphlets covering the role of anarcho-syndicalists and anarcho-syndicalist organisations within the international workers movement. All of them downloadable for free from www.selfed.org.uk.

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- Send me extra *Education Workers* - circle amount 5 copies; 10 copies; 20 copies; other (\_\_\_ copies);
- I would like to join EWN and be put in contact with my nearest SF group
- Send me a copy of *Catalyst*, the SolFed free sheet;
- Send a free *Direct Action*, the SolFed magazine;
- I would like to donate to EWN (cheques etc., pay 'EWN')

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(see above for EWN address)