

Education Worker

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Special Issue: Victimisation in education

Interview

EWN spoke to Patrick, a teacher and EWN rep who was victimised by the management and lost his job after years as a popular and committed teacher.

EW: Tell us how the situation started?

Patrick: The first few months when I started there were relatively peaceful. I'd had experience before of organising in the workplace including organising strikes. At the new workplace they didn't have experience of going out on strike together and I had the sense that there had been industrial peace. In my first year there were redundancies announced. As I'd been involved in fighting redundancies at other colleges I was arguing specific courses of action.

EW: Like strike action?

Patrick: It did include strike action but before we even got to strike action, for example at a union meeting I suggested going outside the college at lunchtime and leafleting

the students and passers by. Now certain people were reporting back to management from the union meetings. That's when it all started to turn sour. Managers would act like I wasn't there, ignore me, not look me in the face... it was the start of me thinking "They are singling me out." Then I got into a difficult situation with a colleague who was a scab and very right wing, she took out a grievance against me. I had to write reams and reams in my defence, it was a really stressful time, but I did clear my name. Then I thought things would settle down but in fact things got worse.

I'd had a death in the family and I had to travel for the funeral, and when I got back I was told that my leave hadn't been authorized. My manager had authorized the leave, but they thought "right, we'll have another go" and I was handed a letter saying that I was under investigation. Fortunately there was a meeting of the local NUT that evening and I went and showed them the letter and they said this is definitely victimisation. They

passed a resolution saying we have to defend our reps. I had to think, what do I do? I knew they were going to sack me and I had to fight, it was very stressful, I'd just bought a flat, I had debts that I needed to pay off. If I got sacked would I get a reference? If I didn't have a reference would I work as a teacher again? And I went off on the sick, I wasn't sleeping, I was anxious all the time, and my GP said you need some time off.

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The management called a hearing without actually having an investigation, and at this point the union officials got involved which had its pluses and minuses, I had to fight my union official because I didn't think

by workers - for workers

there was anything to investigate, this was a pure case of victimisation and I did that with the backing of the local NUT branch, who took the position that what was needed was strike action.

The reason why we could argue for a ballot was that working conditions were really bad in the college, hours of work were really bad, the management were always coming out with stupid paperwork, and there was a management culture of bullying, and as I had a reputation for standing up to them, I had the support of my colleagues, they backed me to the hilt.

We had an indicative ballot with 80% turnout and a 90% vote for strike action. The officials weren't particularly pleased with that as they had always wanted to make a deal. What they did, it was pretty disgusting but they organised a postal ballot which was held in the Easter holidays. This means there is nobody to go round and talk to people. The turnout was 75% and the official said that was too low to sanction strike action.

EW: I'm sure we've gone on strike when we've had turnouts of about 25%!

Patrick: And we've had national strike action with much lower turnout. I think that it was a conscious strategy, because what the bureaucracy

do, is they do deals. And they are not comfortable with workers taking direct action to defend their reps.

EW: And so in the end, basically, you left?

Patrick: In the end I was left with no alternative but to take a compromise agreement, because at least I'd have a reference.

EW: In our profession...

Patrick: You can't get a job without a reference. It was a difficult decision because I'd always been politically against compromise agreements. I was only in this position because the regional officials had maneuvered to prevent a strike.

As for advice I would say the only way you can fight it, is you have to collectivise it. As soon as you think this is happening talk to your colleagues about it, and if they come out with a charge, collectivise it, because this isn't about you or anything you have or haven't done, it's about them. Make sure you've got the support of your colleagues, pass a resolution at your branch meeting calling for strike action. Obviously if you can take wildcat strike action, so much the better. And if you do end up having to take a deal, remember it's not you, it's the balance of class forces at that moment. ■■■■

Halesowen Four: victimisation in FE

Earlier this term, members of the EWN in London had an early start to join a coach-load of supporters from SolFed, UCU, and NUT heading to the midlands to support the sacked teachers at Halesowen College. Dubbed the 'Halesowen 4', these four maths teachers, including UCU Branch Secretary, David Muritu were dismissed by the college in Dec 2012 and Jan 2013. The move stunk of victimisation - teachers judged as 'good' in internal observations were scapegoated for management shortcomings.



Once in Halesowen, we joined hundreds of other supporters and found a vibrant, demo outside the college, despite the cold weather and early start. We marched alongside local members of UCU, NUT, Unison, NAS-UWT and PCS along with Dudley, Wolverhampton, Shropshire and Telford Trades Councils are. The support for

the sacked teachers was overwhelming and inspiring. UCU members took strike action on Valentine's Day in support of their colleagues, as the campaign escalates.

The campaign demands that management reinstate the teachers immediately, and that people send solidarity and support to fight the sackings and defend trade union rights in Halesowen College. Just this month it emerged that their A-Level maths results showed 100% pass rate in the latest A2 exams, further undermining claims of 'underperformance' by management. Management had even acknowledged that they did not follow their own disciplinary procedures in these cases.

Updates and contacts for the campaign available at <https://www.facebook.com/groups/justiceforhalesowenfour/> ■■■■

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Human Resources resigned.

Unless management back down, it is highly likely that the UNISON and UCU branches will be balloted for industrial action, in which case they will have support and solidarity from many education workers.

To keep up to date with this case, have a look at the campaign blog: <http://stopthewitchhunt.wordpress.com>, join the Facebook group and follow @MaxJawadSteve on Twitter ■■■■

Shut up and sod off!

Tory health minister Jeremy Hunt announced in late March that gagging clauses in so-called "compromise agreements" within the NHS (and only the NHS) are no longer to be permitted.

A compromise agreement is a restrictive legal document used to stop Employment Tribunal claims and buy the silence of aggrieved workers. It means the end of the worker's contract of employment, in exchange for a financial payoff and agreeing not to take the employer to ET. A bit like a superinjunction, even referring to the existence of a compromise agreement is forbidden by its terms. Further gagging clauses may also prohibit discussion by the worker of the reasons for leaving, or saying anything critical of management.

A worker may choose to accept the offer of a compromise agreement and payoff rather than endure the slow motion lottery of an ET, especially if offered a sum comparable to what can be expected if successful at ET. Managers in the education sector can continue to use compromise agreements to silence victimised workers, and effectively bypass statutory employment rights. ■■■■

NUT executive blocks strike call

In January, the national executive of the National Union of Teachers (NUT) blocked calls by members for strike action this term over pay, conditions, workload and pensions. Despite having a live ballot for strike action after YES votes in summer 2011 (pensions) and 2012 (workload, conditions, pay) the executive voted 22-20 against strike action. This all came after 300 reps in London alone got together and expressed their overwhelming support for strike action to members of the executive at an emergency reps meeting.

At a time when education is facing unprecedented attacks and teacher conditions are being eroded at an accelerating rate, the NUT executive has shown its true colours in blocking the calls of its rank and file members. Performance-related pay is being introduced, smashing the national-pay scales. Unqualified teachers are deployed in academies to depress wages of classroom teachers and exploit these unqualified teachers alike. Schools are sold-off wholesale to used-car salesmen and carpet moguls with profit in mind.

The executive's actions make clear that if we are to beat these attacks, it will have to come from below, a rank and file education workers initiative taking direct action "C our 'leaders' apparently have no interest in winning this battle.

Suspensions at London Metropolitan University

London Metropolitan University made the news worldwide last year when, due partly to their connections to the London School of Business and Finance, they were investigated by the UKBA and were prevented from recruiting international students (see EW 9). Now that the dust has settled from this scandal, London Met is again in the news, this time because it has suspended three of its workers, in very suspicious circumstances.

The reason given for the three suspensions is the recruitment of Jawad Botmeh to an administrative post in the London Met's Working Lives Research Institute (WLRI). Jawad has worked in the WLRI for five years, initially in a temporary role. When he applied for the job he was honest about the fact that he had been in prison for some time. Jawad served 13 years in prison on a con-

spiracy charge. He has always maintained that he is innocent, and his case is seen by many as a miscarriage of justice. Amnesty International have concerns that he was denied the right to a fair trial, and pointed out that he had an alibi and there was no direct evidence against him. Jawad also had support from MPs Harry Cohen, Tony Benn and Jeremy Corbyn and from UNISON nationally.



WLRI chose to give an opportunity to a former prisoner, and have had no concerns about employing Jawad and there have been no complaints about his work. London Met were made aware of his conviction when he applied for his job, and when he then applied for a permanent post. It was only when Jawad was elected as the staff governor that

London Met suspended him. Here's where the plot thickens. As well as suspending Jawad, London Met suspended Max Watson, who is chair of the London Met UNISON branch, as well as being on the UNISON NEC. London Met UNISON are one of the most active and militant higher education UNISON branches. They have stood up to management over threats of redundancies and outsourcing, they have taken strike action on a number of occasions and have achieved at least partial victories. They have also supported the already outsourced workers and helped them to win their Living Wage campaign, which is a considerable achievement given London Met's current circumstances and management's attitudes. Outsourcing is still on the cards for a lot of non-academic workers. Management have recently been targeting Max as he has been outspoken about the union branch's opposition to outsourcing. Max's suspension may well be an attempt by London Met management to get him out of the way, either permanently, or at least for the time being while they push through their plans for privatisation.

A few days later, Steve Jeffreys, head of WLRI was also suspended. The next day, the Head of (continue on p. 3)

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 on left)

