

Centrefold feature:  
**Education  
 exploitation**  
 Pages 4-5



Industry focus:  
**Defending  
 healthcare**  
 Page 6

FREE/DONATION

# Catalyst

Issue #28

Newspaper of the Solidarity Federation

British section of the International Workers' Association



TUC BOSS BRENDAN BARBER

## with **FRIENDS** like these, who needs **ENEMIES**



UNISON BOSS DAVE PRENTIS

THE TRADE unions have worked hard over the last twenty years to shed their cloth cap image. Notions of class struggle, with the unions as the means of organising that struggle, have been dropped as unbecoming the modern era. The focal point of today's movement is no longer the workplace but the union head or regional offices. Housed in modern buildings and staffed by professionals, able to offer the best possible service to managers and workers alike, these offices stand as the physical embodiment of all that is 'best' about 21st century trade unions.



UNITE BOSS LEN MCCLUSKEY

Needless to say, in keeping with the stylish fixtures and fittings, all talk of politics and class have been banished from the modern trade union office save for the odd faded photograph of workers taking action, a reminder of the bad old days. The politics of solidarity and class unity that were once at the heart of the workers movement have been replaced by office politics: suits, company cars and expense accounts.

At the head of the modern trade union stands the General Secretary, and as is to be expected they receive a CEO's salary for the onerous task of heading such large

organisations. A good example of a modern trade union leader is the head of UNISON Dave Prentis who, according to the union figures, received a total salary and expenses of £143,887 in 2010. The TUC (Trade Union Congress) response to NHS privatisation? A candle-lit vigil. Without candles.

At the 'militant' end of the spectrum, Unite boss Len McCluskey has been talking all summer about anti-cuts civil disobedience and strike action. For all the talk, he's encouraging a vote for Labour - who are also committed to making widespread cuts. Of course for union tops, talk is action, with occasional one-day strikes thrown in to keep rank-and-file militants happy.

With the union movement now so far removed from the workplace, everyday solidarity, direct action and mutual aid has been replaced with a sense of inevitability. Workers have forgotten how to win. After all, these are terribly old-fashioned ideas. Throwbacks to the 1930s: an era of economic crisis, mass unemployment, obscene inequality and growing poverty - totally unlike the conditions we face today.



### **Ford-Visteon shaft workers**

Page 2: Motor giant to close down plants - again.



### **Cleaners strike for living wage**

Page 3: Anti-strike laws ignored, the fight goes on.



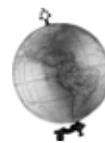
### **Private sector pensions**

Page 8: Profit swindle means poverty for many.

**To beat the cuts, workers need to act independently of the trade union laws... and it's already happening (see p.3)**



# International round-up



## USA

### Thieving bank beaten

CHASE BANK in Seattle has paid out \$1,000 after a direct action campaign by the Seattle Solidarity Network (SeaSol), a local community union. Neftali, a SeaSol member, was shortchanged by the bank after converting currency to Canadian Dollars. Initially the bank denied any wrongdoing, but after a campaign of postering and pickets they paid all money owed, and SeaSol declared victory.

## EGYPT

### Post-Ramadan strikes

HUNDREDS OF thousands of workers including teachers, farmers, textile workers and nurses have launched strikes, sit-ins, and marches to protest their working conditions. These are taking place despite a law introduced in April which criminalizes strikes which harm the national economy, and despite regulations issued by the ruling military government impeding negotiations during the course of strikes.

## SPAIN

### Towards a general strike

ON 29 September the Spanish anarchist union CNT, along with four other radical unions, took the first steps towards a general strike in Spain beyond the control of the mainstream union federations. There were mass assemblies, protest marches and pickets across the country, however this was only the beginning and the unions are still mobilising wider sections of the working class as they build towards a full general strike.

## GREECE

### An ungovernable state

ANTI-AUSTERITY STRIKES and occupations continue to rock Greece, with workers occupying the offices of a power company. The government plans to collect a new property tax by adding it to electricity bills. But the power workers' union has said staff will refuse to disconnect people for non-payment. The Greek working class have been refusing to accept austerity measures with general strikes, demonstrations and mass non-payment, in a country that already has amongst the lowest living standards in Europe.

## NEW ZEALAND

### Vinyard workers wildcat

UNOFFICIAL STRIKE action by 40 vinyard staff ended with victory for the workers. Employees had been paid less than minimum wage, but after the walkout one of the strikers said "our contractor conceded to our demands and, satisfied with the results of our action, work resumed the next day."

## SPAIN

# Ford-Visteon workers face redundancy, pension theft

450 WORKERS at the Visteon Cadiz Electronica factory are facing the scrapheap. The local section of the CNT union is fighting against the closure of the plant. Other reformist unions inside the plant are engaged in a pantomime struggle, focusing not on saving jobs but simply negotiating over redundancy plans with the bosses. The closure of the plant comes as no surprise: already in 2009, there was a temporary forced adjustment plan which affected almost the entire workforce for six months, and skilled workers were moved to other facilities of the multinational, preparing the ground to continue producing the same car components elsewhere. This follows a pattern which is now well known.

Established in 1997 as a subsidiary of Ford, Visteon has created a network of 40 legally independent companies through which it can outsource work, transfer funds and avoid tax liabilities and its responsibilities towards workers. Ford has been rewarded for its entrepreneurship with state support. This is forest-fire capitalism under the pretence of creating social wealth. The simple logic of outsourcing is to cut costs by stripping-out functions and hawking these out to other firms. These then compete to offer the lowest cost on the basis of squeezing workers even harder than the core employer. In 2005, Ford launched its "Way Forward"



plan, which pushed outsourcing into overdrive. Since then, Ford has halved its global workforce, getting over 70,000 workers off its books, by either sacking them or outsourcing the work. Companies are declared bankrupt as a means of avoiding paying redundancy payments and pensions.

This huge international scam also hit the UK in 2009 with the closure of Visteon's three remaining factories at Enfield, Basildon and

Belfast. With minutes' notice, the workers were sacked without redundancy or pensions. It later emerged that Ford had moved the pension funds prior to the company being declared bankrupt and secret documents with names like "Project Stone", "Project Protea" and "Project Kennedy" revealed that Visteon UK had detailed long-term plans to close all three factories by reducing the workforce steadily and running them into the ground. In

the aftermath of the high profile occupations and direct action, UK workers are now facing a protracted legalistic battle, courtesy of reformist unions such as UNITE.

In response to the attack at Cadiz the CNT union called for an international day of direct action on 18th August. It included communication blockades and phone-ins from across Europe, and a number of informational pickets were also held.

## CHILE

# The movement for free education

THIS AUTUMN, or spring in the southern hemisphere, Chile has been witnessing a series of student-led protests which have seen tens of thousands of people take to the streets. The movement has also included student occupations, and linked up with striking workers. The movement began by demanding free education up to university level, as much of Chile's education sector is privately run for profit, excluding many. But it has grown to include striking miners and environmental protests, fuelled by the economic crisis and united in anger against the right-wing government.

For the students' part, Chile has amongst the lowest public funding for education in the world, some of the longest degrees, and no system of public grants or loans. Many students have been fuelled by a sense of betrayal by party politics. Former left-wing president Michelle Bachelet had promised to address their concerns following the 'Penguin

Revolution' - a series of student-led protests in 2006. But the promised changes have yet to materialise. One Chilean official, Victor Lobos, has attempted to blame the movement on the number of children born outside of wedlock, which he claims drives people to "anarchism".

Amongst the workers who have joined the movement are the 2,300 miners and 7,000 contractors at the Escondida copper mine, the largest in the world. They have been striking for better bonuses and conditions. Another major Chilean copper mine, Collahuasi, has also seen work stoppages in protest against anti-union measures. Collahuasi workers had previously held a 33-day strike in December 2010. The state-run Coldeco mines have also seen their first walk-outs in over 20 years, prompting the increasingly unpopular President Pinera to meet with union leaders and assure them that Coldeco will not be privatised. Previous strikes at Coldeco saw

sub-contractors demanding improved conditions. Signs outside the Escondida mine are calling for the mining industry to be re-nationalised.



# London cleaners strike - and win

Anti-strike laws ignored, but the battle continues



IN RECENT months cleaners at Guildhall in the city of London, and Senate House, University of London have gone on strike and held protests over unpaid wages, working conditions and victimisation.

At Guildhall the conflict began when cleanerstwicewalked out over unpaid wages. Having received what was owed to them, they began holding regular protests calling for the London Living Wage ('LLW': £8.30) and an end to victimisation. In the middle of the campaign the employer changed from Ocean to Sodexho, a multinational company which runs detention centres and prisons as well as cleaning and catering. As soon as Sodexho took over the cleaning contract they started bullying the cleaners and suspended the union rep, on the grounds of rudeness to a supervisor.

The workers, who have joined the cleaners' branch of the IWW union, have continued their battle. After winning their unpaid wages, they have had the strength and confidence to fight over other issues

important to them. They have demanded an end to corruption and nepotism in the allocation of work, which is widespread in the industry but not usually challenged in public. The workers are well organised and well supported but the company is uncompromising and continues to harass and attempt to intimidate them.

At Senate House, part of the University of London, the cleaners also went on strike over unpaid wages. The strike was unofficial but received support from Unison members at Senate House. After getting their wages and a settlement for a victimised worker, they started holding demonstrations for the London Living Wage and sick pay. They have received support from students in the Bloomsbury Fightback group, as well as from UCU and Unison members from other nearby universities, including SOAS and Birkbeck. At some universities, like London Met, the cleaners have already won the LLW.

The two groups of cleaners have supported each other and gone to each other's picket

lines. These workers, who some had written off as "unorganisable", have been militant, brave and prepared to ignore the anti-strike laws. But they need support from other workers, and, most of all, for the struggles to spread. The consistent support they have received from other Senate House, SOAS and Birkbeck staff is important.

An electrician from the dispute in construction (see below) visited a Senate House protest and gave moving messages of solidarity. The employers have shown that they are prepared to be vicious and may get more so; cleaners have been deported following disputes in other workplaces, in raids planned and coordinated with the Home Office. As the austerity attacks get worse, wages in many industries are being pushed down and fighting in the casualised and low paid workplaces becomes the only option. Victories in these disputes give confidence to immigrant and minimum wage workers, and help stop the 'race to the bottom' for all workers.

## Sparks fly: electricians' direct action over pay cuts

EARLIER THIS year the 'Big 8' major construction employers announced plans to tear up an industry agreement on pay, grading and seniority which would result in pay cuts of up to 35%. Workers, not trusting the Unite union to act in their interests, organised themselves into 'Sparks', an independent rank-and-file electricians' group run by a committee elected from their

ranks. Their scepticism towards the trade union structures appeared to be vindicated when Unite official Bernard McAulay described Sparks as "cancerous" in a leaked email.

Sparks have been organising demonstrations across the country, including in Newcastle and London. These have also led to brief site occupations, such as in Farringdon, where over 250 people invaded a building site, while simultaneously Sparks blocked a motorway tunnel in Newcastle. Unite have promised to ballot for strike action, but haven't said when. In the meantime, Sparks continue to take Unite's supposed endorsement of civil disobedience at face value - against the opposition of Unite officials themselves. To keep up to date with Sparks, see [jibelectrician.blogspot.com](http://jibelectrician.blogspot.com) and follow @JIBElectrician on Twitter.



## Time running out for the NHS as privatisation confirmed



TIME IS running out for the NHS, after the government's reform bill passed the House of Lords first reading in October. The plans are strongly opposed by NHS workers, including doctors and nurses. The proposed law will replace Primary Care Trusts with commissioning bodies, opening the way for wholesale privatisation.

The NHS brand will remain, but healthcare will become the preserve of private companies. While the government insist healthcare will remain free at the point of use, GPs in York have already stopped offering minor operations on the NHS but will instead provide them for a fee.

Campaigners have focussed on lobbying politicians to reverse the proposals, with the Trades Union Congress (TUC) spearheading an 'adopt a peer' campaign. Others have taken a more direct route, with the UK Uncut group blocking Westminster Bridge on the day of the vote, and vowing a campaign of direct action.

Prime Minister David Cameron ran for election on a high profile promise to "cut the deficit, not the NHS". The budget deficit has risen since he took office, and is projected to continue to rise, while the NHS is being transformed from a public service into a commercial one.

## Unemployment, poverty, rent all rise

FIGURES RELEASED in October show that official unemployment rose to 2.57 million, a 17-year high. The figures do not include 'underemployment', those working part-time who wish work full-time. The figures came shortly after a report by the Institute for Fiscal Studies (IFS), which predicts that poverty in the UK will continue to rise until at least 2020. By 2020, the IFS estimates there will be 4.7 million working-age adults without children in absolute poverty, up from 3.1 million in 2009.

The housing charity Shelter has also released figures showing that rents have been rising 1.5 times as fast as incomes for the past decade. Financial Times editor Martin Wolf has said the "current UK depression will be the longest since at least the first world war", leading some commentators to suggest we are living through a second Great Depression.

## Anti-fascists acquitted

NINE ANTI-FASCISTS were acquitted in court in October after a fight near a neo-Nazi pub gig. But six more remain in prison after being convicted in an earlier trial relating to the same incident.

After a fight broke out near a neo-Nazi 'Blood and Honour' gig in Welling, police arrested 22 anti-fascists and charged them with conspiracy to commit violent disorder. This meant the prosecutors didn't have to prove the defendants actually took part in the fight at all. No fascists were arrested. For information on supporting the 'Welling 6' see [antifascistprisonersupportuk.wordpress.com](http://antifascistprisonersupportuk.wordpress.com)

## Liverpool airport protest: the photos they don't want you to see

BELOW WE reproduce a photograph of the rooftop protest held by John Foley at Liverpool John Lennon Airport in September. To avoid embarrassment to the airport and Ryanair, the police placed a news blackout on the protest, meaning the local media did not report the story. John and the *Ryanair Don't Care* campaign are fighting for employees at Ryanair to be treated with dignity, respect and fairness. In particular, they are highlighting and fighting against the practise of recruitment-for-termination whereby new cabin crew recruits are charged £3,000 for their training, with many being subsequently sacked at short notice before their probationary period has ended and left saddled with the debt.



More photos and information are available at: [www.solfed.org.uk/?q=airport-rooftop-protest-the-photos-they-dont-want-you-to-see](http://www.solfed.org.uk/?q=airport-rooftop-protest-the-photos-they-dont-want-you-to-see)

# Dispatches from the education workers underground

**Catalyst** talks to three London education workers about cuts, organising and casualisation in the sector.

## The Education Workers Network (EWN)

*Organising for direct action in education.* The EWN is a revolutionary union initiative for workers in education, for both teaching and support staff. From teachers, lecturers and research staff to porters, admin and security: if you work in education and want to get organised, get in touch via [www.solfed.org.uk/?q=network/ewn](http://www.solfed.org.uk/?q=network/ewn)

## Chris, a library worker at Queen Mary Uni

“ We’ve been meeting all summer and have organised a collective response ”

OVER THE summer Queen Mary University (QMUL) library workers have been organising in defence of jobs and services, in response to restructuring plans that will see a loss of 26 out of 82 jobs.

The majority of the affected workers are part-time and the nature of the workplace means that they are also term-time only workers. Management release the plans in July. This meant the majority of the affected staff were on leave, a clear act of discrimination against part-timers and those

with child care commitments. University bosses clearly designed this to prevent workers from effectively responding, resisting and seeking solidarity from the students, who were also off campus.

In spite of this, library workers have been meeting weekly all summer and have organised a collective response to the proposals. Collective letters have been written and formal grievances have been raised. The workers have pursued all official channels of grievance but have been continuously disregarded and disrespected by university bosses. So on August 25th, Library Staff held an indicative strike ballot over the timing of its consultation period, which was passed.

A significant amount of workers have had no option but to take voluntary redundancy and the loss of the experienced and knowledgeable workers has serious and far-reaching effects on the students and their learning, as well as those workers left at

the library. The library are among 6 departments at the university that are facing serious cuts to jobs. Over 100 redundancies are planned this year across campus.

QMUL is a financially stable University that last year made £10 million in profit and has opted to charge students £9,000 for tuition while at the same time cutting services. Over the last two years, vice-chancellors have awarded themselves average pay rises of 20.6%. This year alone,

QMUL's principal, Simon Gaskell, took a payrise of 18%, including a free flat worth £39,000 a year, bringing his package to £280,000. Furthermore, 95 staff at QMUL are paid over £100,000; this includes 24 over £150,000; and six over £200,000. Low-wage employees who actually keep the university going, are being sacrificed to prop up these salaries.

Library workers are pushing for their union, UNISON, to approve a campus-wide ballot to strike in defense of jobs at Queen Mary as soon as possible. North London Solidarity Federation have been supporting this struggle and spent freshers week leafletting the campus and speaking to students and other workers, raising awareness about the cuts at Queen Mary, the impact they will have and how we can effectively resist.

## Claire, a public sector

“ I’m on a zero hours contract

I’VE BEEN working as an English teacher in Further Education (FE) on an hourly paid contract on and off since 2003. In my workplace, 60 out of 230 of us are hourly paid. Those who are unlucky enough to be hourly paid, including me, are on a zero hours contract with no minimum of guaranteed hours. We get paid about 65% of what we would get if we were permanent staff on the lowest grade, but we don’t move up the pay scale as we get more experience, so we stay on that pay rate indefinitely.

Hourly paid staff (HPLs) are quite a varied group of people. Some of us have a “real” career in the daytime and are only teaching short term or just in the evenings, but many of us stay stuck on that same pay grade for years even if it is our only source of income. Permanent posts are only advertised occasionally and you have to compete against your co-workers. Women and black staff are more concentrated in the hourly paid grade and they tend to teach the most unpopular classes.

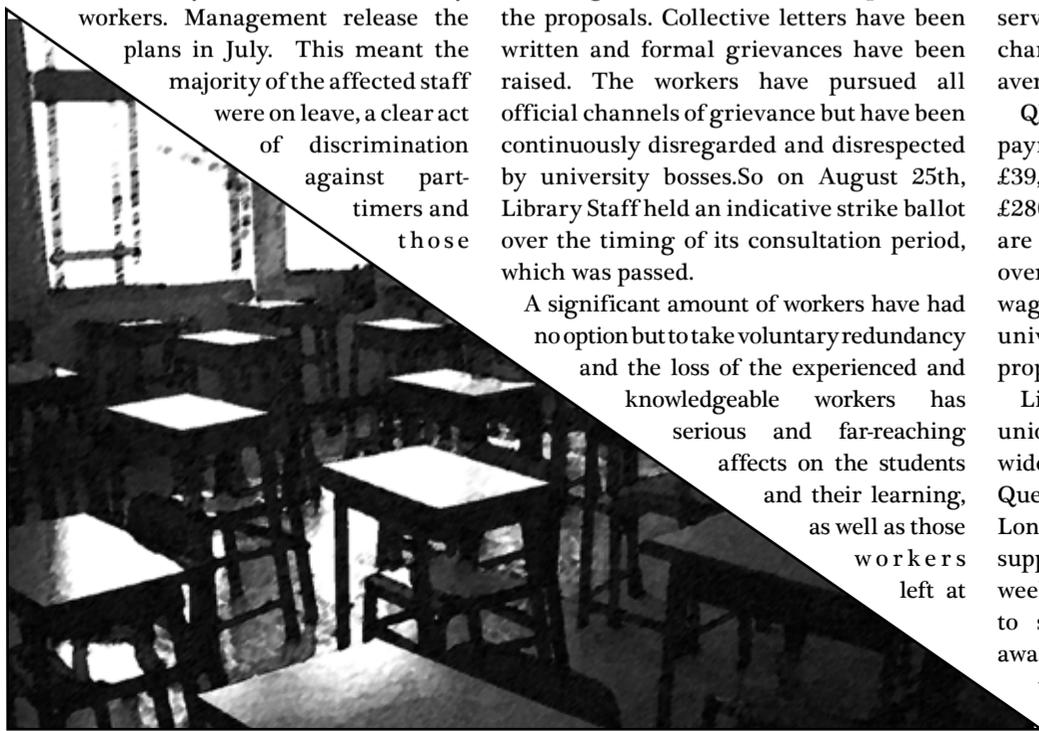
Apart from pay, the biggest problem is insecurity. We get timetabled after the permanent staff—which in the past was predominantly a problem of receiving annoying timetables. We also get more part-time classes, which are a lot more hassle. The risk of our hours being cut without notice always hangs over our head. There used to be plenty of work, if you were prepared to do lots of cover and work any hour.

## Adam, a casual TEFL

“ We all see TEFL as a ‘stopgap’

2011 HAS seen the popularisation of the NEET (Not in Education, Employment or Training) term as a social category for young people. Perhaps 2012 will see a new term join it, that of the PEP (Professional, Educated and Precarious). For the last year or so, I’ve been trying my luck as an English as a Foreign Language teacher (or TEFL) in London. I’m a young, precarious university graduate, lost in a generation-wide swamp of casualisation; flitting between one McJob and another (often simultaneously), absent-mindedly muttering about going abroad or changing career. We all see TEFL as a ‘stopgap’, a means of paying the rent while you prepare for your dream job of acting, writing, academia, etc. ‘Who cares? I’m outta here soon,’ can constantly be heard echoing around my school’s narrow corridors.

Like many one college calculation. Journey Plan this class in one in Wimbledon of marking. Tube, since hours that the student Director of line management will tend to employed sick leave - only guaranteed (a maximum classes I suffer the line are as ‘overtime’ However myself I have some



# On the frontlines: The impact of austerity

## Contract English teacher in Deptford

Contract with no minimum of guaranteed hours, and get paid by the hour ”

at short notice. However, with the cuts in FE some of us are losing up to 90-100% of our hours.

Normally when HPLs lose their hours or even their jobs it doesn't become a union issue. Management don't consult with the union or follow the redundancy procedures. Most HPLs don't join the union (there are ten union members out of sixty HPLs in my workplace) and a lot of them cross picket lines in strikes (although a lot also refuse to cross). Partly because of this, there is a tendency in the union to see the hourly paid staff as disposable.

However, it looks like this might be changing. For the last year or so some of the union reps have been pushing the issue of hourly paid contracts in negotiations. A lot of the permanent staff spent years in the same boat before they got a permanent job and are sympathetic. Recently we had a big struggle against redundancies amongst the permanent staff. Some of the hourly paid staff were active in the struggle and took part in direct action with everyone else. Currently the union and the organised permanent staff do look like they are prepared to take the issues of the hourly paid staff seriously and they might be prepared to take solidarity action.

Organising around the hourly paid staff presents lots of difficulties. People are scattered around the college and are more likely to work evenings and off-

site. If they have other jobs somewhere else they don't hang around the college so it is a lot more difficult to speak to them. People are afraid of victimisation.

More fundamentally, a lot of people do not feel engaged in the struggles over pay, pensions or redundancies that go on in the college. There is a degree of separation from the struggles of the permanent staff, but at the same time the HPLs don't work together as a block and usually don't know any other hourly paid staff except in their own department. This dispersal makes it more difficult to come together and talk about our needs and demands.

If we don't learn to organise with casualised workers we don't stand a chance of resisting austerity, never mind changing the world. Outside FE colleges there is a submerged world of training providers, jobcentre courses and private sector language schools where my union doesn't even try to organise. If the permanent staff are prepared to accept bad treatment for casualised staff as a buffer for their own jobs and conditions, and casualised staff don't take responsibility for coming together and fighting for their conditions, and then demanding solidarity on that basis, then our management can basically do what they want. So both sides of the divide have to see beyond their own narrow interests and be prepared to stand up for each other.

## Cover teacher in New Cross

'Gap', a means of paying the rent while you prepare for your dream job ”

any of my colleagues, I dart from college to another, doing complex tasks on Transport for London in a manner as to whether I can cover a class in Stratford before going to that in Wimbledon. I've got into the habit of leaving and preparing classes on the way. We only get paid for the literal hours we spend in the classroom with students. I usually try to insist that my employer (Studies (kind of like the teachers' union)) gives me a contract (he or she usually 'suggests' that I register as self-employed - denying me paid holiday and 'for tax purposes') but even that doesn't guarantee me work until term's end (a maximum of 12 weeks), and any extra hours suddenly get offered further down the line - not included; rather, they're seen as a 'perk'.

Perhaps I should consider myself lucky, because at least I have something. New Home Office

legislation came into force in April 2011, essentially prohibiting non-EU nationals from coming to the UK on a student visa without already possessing an intermediate (i.e. passable) level of English, and even then they have to pass an examination proving that their English has progressed in order to get a visa renewal. On top of that, non-EU students are, in theory, barred from working more than 10 hours/week in the UK (although in practice this forces many students to find unofficial work - I had one Thai student who was earning £3.80/hour in a restaurant with three Michelin stars!).

In response to the government legislation and the global recession, my college projected a 50% drop in student intake, and started relieving teachers accordingly. I spent two months as a highly precarious cover teacher, pondering whether it would be worth

my while to 'try something else' or sign on, all the while nervously checking my phone, on which I depended on for early morning round robin texts offering work. I missed out on hours due to being in the shower, in another room to my phone, or even asleep (leading to me adopting the habit of setting a 7am alarm to check my phone).

One day, I finally managed to be the first to whirr my fingers across my keypad and thereby pick myself up three days of work. On my first day back, I overheard my boss commenting that he was going to open another class, and I interrupted him to volunteer my services, landing myself three more weeks in the process - but no contract or guarantee of further work. 'The only thing worse than working,' I mutter to myself on the tedious daily Tube journeys across London which cost me the equivalent of an hour-long class, 'is not working.'



# Industry focus:

## NHS privatisation in the West Country

A nurse and member of the Bristol Local of the Solidarity Federation, a small union initiative, writes about their experiences organising - unsuccessfully - through the trade unions against NHS privatisation.

IN 2009, the Labour Government launched its 'Transforming Community Services' policy for public healthcare. PCT boards were instructed to evaluate their provider services and consider a variety of models for future service delivery. One model much favoured by the current coalition Government is social enterprise, defined as 'businesses established to address a social or environmental need'.

**we formed a small group with health workers sympathetic to what we were doing and started campaigning**

The key word in the term 'social enterprise' is the latter. No matter how much spin it is given, this 'transformation' is the privatisation of health services. It is well known that when services are taken out of public ownership, workers' wages are cut and terms and conditions are attacked as organisations scramble to win contracts. What is more, privatised public services hardly have a great record of delivering good quality comprehensive care.

around 1,200 NHS staff working in over 40 different community services. If approved this would mean that community health services in these areas would be run by the private sector from 1 October 2011, but all seven applications were yet to go before the SHA board - not the fait accompli people seemed to think.

We spoke to our union branches to find out about the campaign against these privatisations. We got blank expressions and shrugged shoulders. One branch secretary even thought that the deal had already been sealed for the service which she not only represented but worked in herself!

Aware that our Local was nowhere near influential enough to make any significant impact, and wary of being viewed by health workers as outsiders agitating for political ends, we formed a small group with health workers sympathetic to what we were doing and started campaigning against social enterprises. We leafleted staff meetings organised by management and spoke to as many affected workers as we could. We arranged a meeting for workers with speakers



primarily the lack of strategy and leadership from the social democratic trade unions. Many branch officers and regional officials appeared like rabbits caught in the headlights. After years of compliance and social partnership under a Labour government they seemed utterly unable (and in some cases unwilling) to do anything to resist a full-on attack on public services. In the final theatre of conflict their strategy was to make pleading representations to the South West SHA Board. Unsurprisingly the board ruled in the interests of the privateers despite being presented with evidence that demonstrated very little staff support for social enterprises.

Branch officers and regional officials told us that there simply wasn't any appetite amongst the membership for resistance to these plans. However, very few NHS workplaces have active stewards or safety reps, and rank and file meetings are exceptionally rare. Consequently the gap between union member and branch officer can be, and often is, gaping. When we leafleted staff members attending management propaganda meetings we were told by the workers that this was the first time they had had any information opposing social enterprises. With so little action by the unions and such slick marketing from management, it was no surprise that many workers thought that the deal was sealed months before it actually was.

The lack of union activity also appeared to have bred a mentality of compliance and a sense of fatalism amongst the workforce. For example, we called a meeting of all the workers affected in Bristol and leafleted

almost every single community health workplace in the city and only three people attended. For most workers, nothing was going to change because nothing had been successfully challenged before.

As an SF Local we were totally overwhelmed by this campaign. Despite our concerns for other localities in our region, we very quickly realised that we could only hope to influence events in our local area. We made the strategic decision early on to work within the trade union movement as they held the power and influence to halt the process of privatisation. We considered the alternative of campaigning and organizing from the outside, possibly with the local anti-cuts movement, but felt that the campaign would be limited without organising industrial muscle.

Although the battle for community services in many areas of the South West appears to be lost we have learnt a lot from the struggle. When they come for the acute and secondary services, we'll be here with a more determined and better organised response.



**UK Uncut's protest tactics outside the workplace have yet to be any more effective than the trade unions in halting NHS privatisation**

The first our Local was aware of what was happening was in conversations with health workers, who told us that 'community services here are already a social enterprise'. After some research we discovered that this was not the case at all. Across the West Country, provider services in seven different PCT areas had applied to the Strategic Health Authority (SHA) to leave the NHS and become social enterprises. In Bristol alone, this affects

from a successful campaign against social enterprise and we pressed for action within our union at branch and regional level.

Despite our best efforts and the efforts of others within and outside the unions, all seven applications were approved by the SHA and it looks like community health services in much of the West Country will be lost to privatisation.

We feel that the anti-privatisation campaign failed for a number of reasons,



# Opinion & Letters

## From #J30 to #N30: Public sector strikes

The much vaunted follow-up to the June 30th pensions strike, it has now emerged, will be on November 30th. Subject to ballots, the number of unions on strike will more than double from J30 and around 3 million people will be taking part in walkouts. As we face that prospect, the emphasis must now be on effective mobilisation and building.

We know the limitations. In announcing the decision, Brendan Barber fell far short of declaring a public sector general strike, instead opting for "day of action." Whilst "some unions will be asking members to take industrial action, others might want to show support in other ways, through lunchtime meetings, rallies and events." Then there is the fact that it is only 24 hours, reducing it once again to a protest strike rather than one that can cause significant economic damage.

Nonetheless, what we do have is a chance to build so that rank-and-file militants can push beyond these limitations. At the top of the unions, leaders are considering tactics not to defeat the government's programme but to force it to include them. All have been quite clear that engaging in "meaningful negotiation" will end the strikes, and we know that this means an orderly retreat as the unions get to keep a hand in managing the decline of our terms and conditions. In order to prevent them getting that chance, and to have an effective answer to the attacks on our class, workers need to organise on the ground.

This means the building of local strike committees, to coordinate action within any

given locale. It means public meetings where workers and communities are given the chance to have their say in how the action progresses. It means mass picket lines and strike meetings where the workers taking action can make demands about what happens next. It means generalising the strike where circumstances allow, and bringing those outside the public sector into the dispute.

We have initiated such a strategy in Bootle, near to Liverpool, where there is a heavy concentration of public sector workplaces. The purpose of the Bootle Strike Committee is to act as a coordinating body, with at least one delegate from each striking workplace and

community campaign, so that propaganda and picket lines can achieve maximum impact. At the time of writing the initiative is just getting off the ground, but with luck it will provide a springboard for continued militancy.

We are not on the brink of revolution, or even of the kind of general strike that could collapse the government. But events are moving, and it is no good to bemoan their limitations from the sidelines. For militant workers and libertarian communists, the task is to address the contradictions through action and by waging class war from below.

Phil, Liverpool



## Letters catalyst@solfed.org.uk

### Some thoughts on Occupy Wall Street

What interests me in Occupy Wall Street is the minimal programme of 99%ism: that it is so attractive and so immediate a rallying cry. No doubt some of this is to do with the liberating sensation that one doesn't need a fully fledged

theory of political economy to take part in action. It's diffuse groups with similarly minimal programmes that have been peculiarly successful here, too – especially UK Uncut. Like many, I share a disquiet that hesitancy to voice radical critiques of wage

labour and capitalist culture (because we're scared of spooking the horses) means that these minimal programmes will find themselves as acting, essentially, as parliamentary pressure groups, articulating essentially cosmetic and reformist demands.

But there are other ways to branch out from 99%ism, to

extend its logic more rigorously, to use it as a basis to insert other conversations – just as here, too, we might suggest that the actions of UK Uncut don't so much demand a return to the old status quo but demonstrate that even that is no longer recoverable. From there, we might talk about the brief interlude of a postwar

social democratic settlement, the incoming realities of resource scarcity, the way that demands from and action by workers won what little we have – and how, in a period of increased precarity and diminished militancy, it's all vanishing from under our feet.

James, Oxford

# Know your rights: *at work*

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

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

The Minimum Wage for those over 21 years of age is set at £6.08. For 18-20 year olds it is £4.98 and for 16-17 year olds it is £3.68. Apprentices under 19: £2.60. For agency workers, wages must be paid on the agreed day, even if the hiring company has not paid the agency.

### 2. The right to at least 28 days paid leave per year.

Any employment contract should set out leave entitlements. If it doesn't, then 28 days must be given (which can include

public holidays). All workers, agency workers, homeworkers, trainees, so-called casuals and most freelancers are included in this. Holiday entitlement starts immediately, e.g. on day 1, we get 2 days leave, and, after 6 months, we get 14 days (for part time workers it is less, and it applies to jobs started since October 2001).

### 3. The right to breaks of at least 20 minutes after each 6 hours of work.

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

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

We cannot be forced to work over 48 hours per week unless we have agreed to it in writing (note that

this is averaged over any 17 week period, so we can be forced to do more in any one week).

### 5. The right to sick pay when we are ill.

We are entitled to statutory sick pay if we normally earn over £77 per week and we have been working for over 3 months (or are deemed to have been in continuous employment for 13 weeks).

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

From April 2003, most mothers are entitled to 26 weeks' paid maternity leave and an additional 26 weeks' unpaid leave. To get maternity pay, we must earn over £77 per week and have been working for over 6 months by the time the baby is 15 weeks from being due. For

the first 6 weeks, this should be 90% of average earnings, then a flat rate of £100 for 20 weeks. If pay can't be claimed, Maternity Allowance may be claimed from the DSS. Fathers/male partners get 2 weeks' paid paternity leave (subject to the same qualifying conditions as for maternity).

### 7. The right to be free from harassment.

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

### 8. The right to defend ourselves.

We all have the right to protection from dismissal for asserting our statutory employment rights. We also have the right to join with our fellow workers and organise

ourselves collectively, and to join a trade union.

### 9. The right to refuse work that is unsafe or where training is not provided.

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



\*  
SOLIDARITY FEDERATION  
WORKPLACE ORGANISER  
TRAINING PROGRAMME

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

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

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

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

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

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

# Private sector pensions: profits cause poverty

THROUGHOUT THE current pensions dispute, the government has attempted to divide workers by claiming that public sector workers receive far better pensions when compared to those working in the private sector. This is certainly true. But what is never explained is just why private sector pensions are so much worse. This is not surprising given that the vast majority of private sector pension schemes amount to little more than a license for the financial sector to make shed loads of money.

British private pension schemes charge on average 2-3% a year. This may seem modest, but what has to be taken into account is the fact that most private pension funds have only managed growth of around 4% a year over the last 30 years. As such, most workers in private schemes have seen between 50% and 75% of all growth in their pension savings go to the companies that manage them.

Somewhere in the region of £20bn is charged by pension companies in fees and expenses each year. This legalised theft of workers' money means that it is almost

impossible for private sector workers to build up sufficient money to retire with a reasonable pension income. Currently, 8 out of 10 private sector workers will receive a private pension of £1,000 or less each year, while a further 1 in 10 will receive around £1,750 a year. In reality this means that 90% of those currently in private schemes will be losing more in pension credits and other benefits than they would get from their pension savings.

In this light, the argument put by the government that public sector pensions are unaffordable and have to be brought in line with the private sector should be seen for what it is: a 'race to the bottom' that will end in ever rising numbers of workers living in abject poverty in old age. The place for private sector workers is to stand with public sector workers in their fight against the government cuts. Given the massive scale of the attacks on the working class, the need for solidarity and unity has never been more important. Through unity of action, the government can be defeated to the benefit of the working class as a whole.

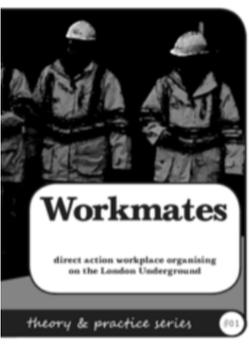


## Sudoku

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

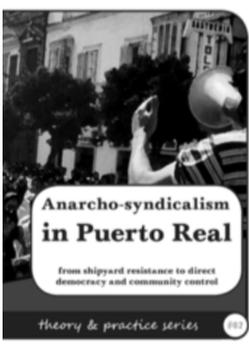
1		4	7	5				9
				6				
5		6	8			3	4	
	3		5					
	1	2				7	6	
					1		2	
	8	3			6	5		2
				9				
9				3	8	4		6

## New: Theory & Practice series pamphlets



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

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



### #2 Anarcho-syndicalism in Puerto Real

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

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

# About the Solidarity Federation

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

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

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

wish to create; that is, organisation based on mutual aid, voluntary cooperation, direct democracy, and opposed to domination, hierarchy and exploitation in all forms. We are committed to building a new society within the shell of the old in both our workplaces and the wider community. Unless we organise in this way, politicians - some claiming to be revolutionary - will be able to exploit us for their own ends.

The Solidarity Federation consists of Locals and Industrial Networks which seek to take on the functions of revolutionary unions - supporting our organising efforts where we live and work. Our activities are

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

