

THERE ARE UNIONS...AND UNIONS

A number of strikes have materialised recently in the education sector across the country, action at Southwark College in South London and Sheffield College being but two examples. The Education Workers' Network supports these actions. So why are we in a network to form a revolutionary union when the existing unions are capable of calling strikes to defend our rights?

A number of features distinguish revolutionary unionism from the practice of the existing unions in this country. It involves a political commitment to Direct Action and Direct Democracy - collective decision making and full control of our organisation without professional officials.

Day to day issues like pay and conditions are crucial.

But revolutionary unions have an additional ultimate goal, that of Workers' Self-management. This means all workers own and

manage the enterprise in which they work. Only workers, who do the jobs, know how to do them most efficiently and safely.

REVOLUTIONARY UNIONS HAVE AN ADDITIONAL ULTIMATE GOAL, THAT OF WORKERS' SELF-MANAGEMENT.

Technical knowledge is part of the collective knowledge of the working class, not a meal ticket for "professionals" or "experts". Separate management will always manage in the interests of outsiders, themselves, or politicians who claim to represent the interests of the working class better than we do ourselves.

Not only is there a need to bring the political agenda into the workplace, the way today's unions

never will, but also outside the workplace. Those who are unemployed, do not do conventional 'work' or who's work is not recognised with wages contribute to the political agenda. Also, many social problems affecting the working class have their root outside the workplace and these issues need to be tackled head on in our own interests.

What makes revolutionary unionism different from both simple trades unionism and left-wing politics is an organisation and a set of ideas in which there is no distinction between self-appointed "leaders" and "followers", but which can be a vehicle for working people to achieve our aspirations for ourselves. Anyone attracted to either the revolutionary goals and ideas or to the organisational principles should recognise that the two are inseparable, and take up both. It is up to all of us to ensure that our organisation is the vehicle we need.

CONTACTS

SOLIDARITY FEDERATION, PO Box 384, Preston, Lancs. PR1 5PQ.

PUBLIC SERVICE WORKER NETWORK (PSWN), PO Box 29, SW PDO, Manchester M15 5HW.

TRANSPORT WORKER NETWORK (TWN), PO Box 73, Norwich NR3 1QD.

INTERNATIONAL NEWS: NICARAGUA

Recently, we have received calls for solidarity from a teachers' union, ANDEN, in Nicaragua, against government repression of striking teachers. Such action stems from strikes which commenced in March involving 15,000 school teachers. For more information contact: ANDEN, Costado Oeste, Parque Las Madres, Managua.

DONATIONS

This bulletin relies on donations to keep it going. Please send any donations to EWN. Many thanks to all those who made this issue possible. Your continued support is vital.



If you want to know more about the Education Workers' Network write to:

**Education Workers' Network
PO Box 29 SW PDO, Manchester M15 5HW**

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FREE/DONATION

ON TQA

An EWN member from Bradford comments on the latest checking and testing craze and its effect on workers in higher education.

Currently all Universities around Britain will have to undergo a Teaching Quality Assessment which is supposed to assess the quality of teaching provision on undergraduate courses. Some institutions have already gone through the experience. Mine has not but the reality of what TQA means is all too clear.

With increased pressure on staff to produce more publications, modularise and semesterise TQA is hardly welcome. It will involve vast numbers of meetings resulting in interference with normal tasks, boredom and exhaustion. The divisiveness it will produce between colleagues and institutions, as league tables are no doubt compiled, is beyond contemplation. The negative impact on research and time available to inform and develop ideas - what universities should be about - will be significant. The bureaucracy and paper demands will be tremendous. Is the whole process conceived to stop us getting on with our jobs or force us to work longer hours for no benefit to anyone?

Meanwhile, funding is cut, students have increasing difficulties paying for courses and the whole ethics of what universities should be but are drifting ever further away from is undermined. Many universities are becoming factories of highly trained, brain-dead, unquestioning sheep.

MANY UNIVERSITIES ARE BECOMING FACTORIES OF HIGHLY TRAINED, BRAIN-DEAD, UNQUESTIONING SHEEP

We must use what little influence we have to undermine this process individually. But how are we to restore the proper values of true, free and critical education for all, and effectively oppose and overturn the prevailing market-led consumerist views currently in power? Organising ourselves in an effective network of like-minded individuals is a start..

IN THIS ISSUE:

We take a look at the future fully Thatcherised and Majorised education system..



PLUS:

- Teachers and Caretakers
- Local and Industrial Strategy
- Merger by Rumour
- All the usual news and views

DIVIDED SCHOOLS

WHO REALLY LOSES OUT?

The traditional trade union boundaries only serve to strengthen barriers education workers must be breaking down in the fight for better conditions for all, writes an EWN member from Norwich.

Teachers are always keen to joke about the most important person in their school, the caretaker. Very often they will feel intimidated by the secretary. It is very rare to find the teachers genuinely chummy and egalitarian with the others.

Is this due to helplessness, (inverted) snobbery or otherwise? Pondering on it might fill a few minutes. One thing is clear; no caretaker is in a teacher's union and no teacher is in union let alone T&G. It was thirty years ago I heard my biology teacher refer to his colleagues "graduate arrogance". They would regard just about any work

without chalk or red pen beneath them. This attitude is still firmly entrenched.

According to a recent card printed by a teaching union, Point 0 on the basic wages scale for teachers is over £11K. By serving time or by promotion teachers can climb this scale to £20K or more. Nevertheless, on a starting salary of £11K a new teacher gets £211 per week gross. Bearing in mind at least three years in further education or teacher training this seems a poor return for those years of student poverty. But, looking at wage levels of non-teaching education workers in any local rag gives a picture of part-time work on pathetic wages.

Caretakers can expect somewhat less than £200 per week, and without the points scale to climb up, that leaves you going nowhere fast. And there's no higher rate for part-time posts as with supply teaching.

A lot of non-teaching staff have considerable industrial muscle. Combined with that of teachers, the result could be a formidable problem for bosses and policy makers. It is time to forge the links right across the education workplace. The caste system in education will not disappear overnight but there is a burning need to expose the ridiculous wage structures, organise and get all education workers off the bread line.

NUS: FOR OR AGAINST?

The National Union of Students has been facing a battle. Some have likened the split between 'left wingers' and 'reformists' as similar to that over Clause 4 in the Labour Party. Whether tenable or not, the Blairites on the NUS Executive Committee won their battle within the exec, leaving just the small matter of convincing the rank and file. And the battle? All about the leadership's idea that free education is no longer viable and that students really should not expect to avoid graduate taxes and student loans.

Fortunately for students everywhere, the Derby meeting of the NUS turned against the exec decision so it will not now have a graduate tax as its policy. However, we shouldn't underestimate the significance of the exec move. After so many years of rank and file demands for free education, it was a real kick in the face.

The NUS is supposed to protect students' interests. We must decide whether a union exec which does this to us really deserves our support.

At **EDUCATION WORKER**, we stand for real free education for all. Not education to fit neatly into the industrial machine but learning which empowers, spreads awareness, and lays the building blocks for better living.

ANOTHER OPT-OUT GET-OUT

Dirty tricks tactics aimed at saving the disastrous opt-out legislation include offering public cash to anyone willing to say 'Grant Maintained Status is good', reports an EWN member from Sheffield.

A recent Government-funded meeting in Sheffield aimed at promoting Grant Maintained Status attracted a small handful of teachers. It is interesting to postulate how many of the measly few were in fact drawn solely by the £20 bribe offered in exchange for turning up. Or maybe it was the gripping meeting (which, of course, included free drinks) at the Victoria Hotel, or the free Department for Education video and accompanying DfE letter asking for ideas on how to promote GMS policy which made it irresistible?

Since the new laws were introduced two years ago forcing school governors to debate GMS every year, none of Sheffield's 187 state schools have made the switch. Even in the initial wave only 11 Sheffield schools succumbed - seven were Roman Catholic and the remaining four were facing closure by the council.

The considerable sums of money being spent to promote GMS are not matched by opposite propaganda - the amount spent on discouraging schools from leaving the LEA is subject to severe legal restrictions.

Apparently, similar 'research' aimed at assessing the impact of the various government smear and publicity campaigns around promoting GMS policy is going on in London, Northampton, Warrington and Sutton in Surrey.. that's 20, 40, 60, 80, 100 quid including Sheffield, and loads of free drinks..

A LOCAL & INDUSTRIAL STRATEGY

Why do we need to organise locally as well as in industrial networks?

The Education Workers' Network consists of groups of people involved in the education industry, who are committed to developing a revolutionary union based on anarcho-syndicalist principles.

EWN is affiliated to the national anarcho-syndicalist organisation, the Solidarity Federation. Besides the industrial networks, SF has a geographical structure based on Locals, or Solidarity Centres. Locals are places where like-minded workers can gather both politically and socially, providing a space for debate and a springboard for action. Several locals already exist and more are currently being developed in towns and cities across Britain.



Locals can achieve essential objectives which cannot be fully addressed by industrial networks alone. Apart from industrial issues, SF groups and members are involved in issues which affect working class people beyond the workplace. This is because we believe that the class war also takes place on working class streets and housing estates.

A local SF group organises members of the industrial networks together with SF members who are not in a network into one local unit. This type of broader local organisation complements the industrial

networks, especially with increasing 'flexibilisation' of the workforce, with a decreasing number of workers being tied to a single industry or employer.

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By fighting around issues of interest to all working class people, strong local organisation will prevent any tendency to concentrate on the 'parochial' concerns of a single industry.

We don't need single issue groups, however broad and participative, however radical and militant, but groups which will actually tackle all issues from a working class perspective. By occupying this space, Anarcho-syndicalism gives a class character to struggles which affect working class people.

WE NEED GROUPS WHICH WILL ACTUALLY TACKLE ALL ISSUES FROM A WORKING CLASS PERSPECTIVE

By focusing on Solidarity we effectively combine support for industrial disputes with agitation on local issues.

If class conflict on the shop floor is to become a real revolutionary challenge to capitalism it needs an organisational base to develop and spread it. Industrial networks are our answer to the inadequacy of trade unionism but without a wider solidarity movement they can only organise around specific industrial issues. This risks isolation from the wider class struggle.

We can link industrial issues and the networks with local issues and at the same time make solidarity a function of groups with a far broader class perspective and range of activities than a single issue group. The result is a broader base for Anarcho-syndicalism through acceptance that it is the best way for people to organise. Not only can we make our own contribution to disputes but we can also make sure that, whatever the outcome, the lessons and experience get put to

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good use. Locals or Solidarity Centres are the places which provide greatest impetus and focus for our work towards this end.

EWN members contribute to and benefit from the Solidarity Federation by having an industrial focus combined with access to Locals. Action can be channelled in the right direction and support can be gained from other like-minded individuals outside our industry. While we can call on and depend on SF for this support, we are an entirely autonomous decision-making body when it comes to how we organise and agitate within our industry.

