the agitator

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Bulletin for trade union and workplace activists - Produced by Workers Power supporters



As right-wing leader stages failed coup...

This is what democracy looks like!

DEFEND MARK SERWOTKA

The Agitator says
o Fight for the annual election of all officers and full-time officials. For the right to instantly recall every official and replace them if they abuse their position.
o All officials to be paid the average wage of those they represent. No careerists!

Earlier this year the press got its collective knickers in a twist over the 'hard left' taking over the unions – as if it wasn't union members voting for candidates who support militant defence of jobs and conditions. Now, when there is a real assault on union democracy, these 'critics' are nowhere to be seen.

First, supporters of Tony Blair's favourite trade unionist, the unelected Amicus general secretary 'Sir' Ken Jackson, were caught out going from branch to branch, voting more than once in union elections. But such lame fraud is nothing compared to what is happening in civil service union, the PCS.

Barry Reamsbottom is the outgoing PCS general secretary. He was not elected by anyone. And when the union decided it wanted an election he tried to stop it taking place.

He failed. In a ballot 96 per cent voted for an election. In the election that followed Reamsbottom failed to even get enough branches to nominate him. The election was won by Mark Serwotka, 7,000 votes ahead of his rival, Hugh Lanning.

Mark stood on a platform of militant trade unionism and was absolutely open about his socialist politics. When it came to Mark taking office at the beginning of June, Reamsbottom, with the backing of an unrepresentative clique on the national executive and most of the full-time officials, sacked him (and left wing president Janice Godrich just for good measure) and tried to bar him from the building.

Reamsbottom's gang is laughably called the 'Moderate Faction' yet there is nothing moderate about their policies – they are extremist supporters of privatisation and low pay. They are extremist opponents of members – like those at the British Museum and before them in the Benefits Agency – who go on strike to defend themselves. He is openly supported by Tony Blair.

Reamsbottom attacks Mark for his politics. At least Mark is honest about his. Reamsbottom is much more shady. He was associated with the CIA-backed Committee for Transatlantic Understanding – which is doubtless where he learnt how to carry out coups against elected representatives like Mark!

But Mark is fighting back. He has had hundreds of messages of support from around the country. A defence campaign has attracted support from across the union, even including defeated candidate Hugh Lanning. A successful lobby of PCS headquarters was held on what should have been Mark's first day at work. The right went into hiding and didn't try to stop the real general secretary from going into the office.

This – and the shenanigans in engineering union Amicus – is an issue that is relevant to every worker in Britain. If the right wing can prevent workers from controlling their unions, the bosses will tear up terms and conditions, safe in the knowledge that the union is in their pocket. And if they get away with it in one union, they'll try it in others.

Every union in Britain is ripe for this kind of takeover. Only an organised and assertive rank and file movement can stop mafias like the Moderates getting away with it. We can start this fight by rallying in defence of Mark and Janice. The courts are set to decide their fate on 15 July. There is no guarantee that the judge will not back Reamsbottom. If he does, rank and file activists must be make it a hollow victory by fighting to expel those like Reamsbottom and the Moderate rump from the union !

What you can do

- **Get your union, from branch to national level to send messages of support to Mark and Janice and of protest to Barry Reamsbottom**
- **Organise meetings and rallies to support Mark and Janice. Come to the mass rally to support Mark and Janice on 19 June, 7.00pm, Friends Meeting House, London (opposite Euston)**
- **Get ready to support/take direct action to ensure elected officers of the PCS have access to union premises**

Send all messages to:

PCS,
160 Falcon Road,
London SW11 2LN
Fax: 020 7924 1847
Email:
Barry.Reamsbottom@pcs.org.uk,
Janice.Godrich@pcs.org.uk,
Mark.Serwotka@pcs.org.uk

More info and to get involved email:
pcsleftunity@tesco.net or visit:
www.pcsleftunity.uk7.net

TRADE UNION ACTIVISTS MEETING

SATURDAY 29th June 12 to 4pm

Conference fee £5

South Camden Community School
Charrington Street
London NW1

Socialist Alliance

LECTURERS TURN ANGER ON NEW LABOUR

In the week before our June national conference NATFHE members held a two day strike against a derisory offer of 1.5 per cent pay offer.

The action across England and Wales was well supported. It was a great start but we now need more action to change the minds of our bosses in the Association of Colleges (AoC), who pulled out of talks that were due to take place on 20 May.

At Conference a motion to escalate the action to indefinite strike action in September was defeated as was another to escalate the action to three days and then indefinite strike action. The leadership went for a vague form of words about preparing for action in September.

The more militant resolutions did have around 40 per cent of the delegates supporting them and a decision to recall a sector conference to discuss the progress of the campaign was agreed for October. Given we know there will be no progress without an all out strike what we need to prepare is winning a commitment to such action in every branch and region between now and next term.

The anger over pay means we can win this. It was evident on the last day of conference when Education Minister, Ivan Lewis, turned up to address us.

An inoffensive stunt by NATFHE members wearing T-shirts which spelled out PARITY WITH SCHOOLTEACHERS greeted the minister, together with a monkey who offered him peanuts (if you pay peanuts you get monkeys).

Ivan Lewis told us it was his twelfth wedding anniversary and that he had been promised we were nice people and he would have a good time. Have you noticed - New Labour politicians have dumped their sense of humour as well as their election promises!

Lewis condemned our strike and berated us for damaging students' education. When the conference erupted he told us to grow up and start talking to the employers. There was a spontaneous walkout. The hall was all but empty, just like Lewis' speech.

When he had finished delegates returned to hear Tina Downes, the union president, reply. She calmly savaged Lewis, pointing out that it was management who had called off the talks. When Lewis asked if he could reply she said no. The general secretary, Paul Mackney, then passionately put our case emphasising that the walkout had been completely spontaneous. For once a union leadership did not criticise the delegates for challenging a government minister but united with us and voiced our anger.

If this pompous politician had addressed the conference prior to the debate on indefinite strike action the vote may have been different. Many delegates suddenly became aware of the government's contempt for lecturers in Further Education. Ivan Lewis made it crystal clear that they had no intention of offering a decent increase.

We have not option but to force his hand. We must return to our branches and build for effective action and force the president and general secretary to turn the anger shown in their conference speeches into a real commitment to an indefinite strike to win the full claim.

London teachers Organise against Mac the Knife!

London teachers are angry about pay. They are fed up at not being able to afford to live in the capital.

Three months ago there was a magnificent strike by thousands of teachers across London and a demonstration that brought the streets of the city centre to a standstill. But now the leadership of the National Union of Teachers (NUT) have hijacked the campaign and are trying to steer it away from the sort of action that will be needed to win a decent increase in the London allowance.

NUT General Secretary, Doug McAvoy, was taken aback by the support for action shown during the strike on 14 March. He seemed genuinely surprised that some of his own union members could not afford to live in London!

But thanks to a lack of initiative on the part of the established left in the union, McAvoy has regained control over the dispute.

A meeting of divisional secretaries from inner and outer London was held at NUT headquarters. In London most secretaries come from the left wing of the union. McAvoy gave this meeting vague assurances of some sort of action, if there was no response from the government on our claim.

This was accepted and a steering committee made up a couple of divisional secretaries and full time officials was established. No attempt was made to organise rank and file teachers or to establish a genuine strike or action committee to build the campaign. No commitment to further action was secured. The result - no action.

The only "event" that has been organised was a "celebration" of London teachers on 22 May complete with balloons and paper hats! We were treated to speeches by John Monks, various politicians from all parties and the secretary of the NASUWT. It was difficult to move without bumping into a "suit".

The Tory politician told us off for going on strike, the secretary of the NASUWT told us off for going on strike and most of the other speakers didn't even mention the London allowance. Finally Doug McAvoy told us that they were putting "a substantial claim" to Education Secretary Estelle Morris but refused to tell us what this claim actually was.

This event was an insult to every class room teacher. It has provoked widespread anger. Some London teachers are now organising to win back control of the dispute from the dead hand of the bureaucrats.

LONDON WIDE REPS/ACTIVISTS MEETING
contact Kate on 07947 115 411

Hackney Teachers Association has taken the initiative of calling a London wide reps/activists meeting on Thursday 27 June. We are tired of waiting for the leadership. The aim of the meeting will be to discuss further action and to set up a rank and file co-ordinating committee. Lewisham and Ealing Associations have agreed to back the meeting and many others are expected to follow suit.

Unfortunately some members of the Socialist Teachers Alliance have not been so positive. They have argued that calling such a meeting is admitting defeat because we are effectively saying that official action is no longer possible. This is a naïve view of how union bureaucrats work. Unless the rank and file organise and putt pressure on them they will not call any action. The meeting called isn't an admission of defeat - it is a practical way of building for victory.

We need to put massive pressure on the union and that can only be done through a lively, active, inclusive campaign. All teachers in London should support the Hackney initiative and come along to the meeting with plenty of ideas for building the campaign for a decent London allowance of at least £6,000.

Public Sector Activists UNITE!

To help co-ordinate resistance to privatisation and low pay members of several unions, along with the recently formed London Public Sector Alliance, are backing a meeting of Public Sector Activists in London. We urge all our readers in public sector unions in London to attend this meeting, and outside London to consider similar initiatives.

Wednesday 26 June
7.00pm
Gustave Tuck Lecture Theatre, UCL Gower Street, London WC1

Unison strike

On 14 May as thousands of Unison members walked out across London. The one-day action was the biggest by local government workers in England and Wales since 1989, and centred on the joint union demand for an increase in London Weighting allowance to £4,000 across the capital.

Unison's industrial action committee gave the green light for a further two-day strike on 12 and 13 June. As we go to press that strike is taking place - and from reports coming in is hugely successful.

The local authority bosses have finally offered talks with union negotiators.

A strike ballot on the national pay claim for local authorities gets under way from 10 June in the GMB and T&G, as well as Unison.

Spreading the word around the union about the impact of the London strikes, about the new members recruited by showing them the union means business, and about the confidence it has given to militants throughout the union, will all help ensure that we win the vote on national action.

WORLD CUP WINNERS AND LOSERS

The World Cup is one of the most open and entertaining in decades. All the favourites have had their off days and even Senegal and the USA have had results. But while the winners and losers on the field are still to be decided, those in the multi-billion pound industry that surrounds the competition have already been decided.

o Adidas is sponsoring the World Cup to the tune of £24m, backing ten teams, as well as top players like David Beckham (someone should tell them you're only meant to support one team). But Adidas is confident that it will make back the money and then some – sales are already up 7 per cent.

o Nike has refused to become an "official" sponsor, preferring to spend all its £90m World Cup budget on advertising its own products while putting nothing back into the game. The message is that Nike is about being the best and doing it in style – and you can be part of it, just buy the gear.

o Manchester United, JJB Sports and Umbro are among those found by the Office of Fair Trading to be operating a price-rigging scam to swindle millions of pounds out of youth and parents for their shirts, flags and boots.

o FIFA has also had its fingers in the till. Its website sells "official" FIFA footballs at £64 a throw-in. Yet, they are sewn together by kids who receive just 18p per ball. Geeta, a 12-year-old from Punjab, says, "I have been stitching footballs for as long as I can remember. My hands are in constant pain. I feel like they are burning."

Much of Nike and Adidas' production has been relocated to China in recent years because the government gives the multinationals big tax breaks, waives minimum wage and health and safety legislation and even offers to imprison workers who start up independent unions.

This may be the first World Cup to be staged in Asia, but its paraphernalia has been made in Asia for some time. Typical conditions include:

o Pay rates as low as a dollar a day

o Forced overtime: 18 hour days with only one day off a month

o Child labour with workers as young as 12

o Living quarters in locked dormitories above the factories. A recent fire in India killed 40 trapped and sleeping workers

In some circumstances, things are even worse. Saipan – the Pacific island where Roy Keane staged his tantrum – is renowned for trapping young women workers in contracts that tie them to the company for years: i.e. literally slave labour. In China the phenomenon of workers dropping dead from exhaustion is so common they've come up with a new word for it: guolasi, literally "death from overwork".

Kick the sweatshops out of football!

NO SWEAT! is a campaign against the way giant corporations like Nike, Adidas, and Reebok exploit young workers around the world.

It aims to even up the score by campaigning for:

o a living wage for all workers
o no forced overtime: for the 8 hour day
o at least 1 day off in 7
o equal pay & maternity rights for women
o the right to an independent trade union
o no child labour: pay for their education

BLOOD ON THE TRACKS

"The money he was getting was danger money. As far as I am concerned my son was murdered." - Mrs Mungovan.

Michael Mungovan had only been working on the railways for three days when he was sent to work unsupervised near Vauxhall station in south London. He was securing a section of track when he stepped into the path of a 50 mph train. The 22-year-old student died instantly.

Michael had been in a classroom for only one and a half days training and given just half a day on a rural single line before being sent to work on one of the busiest junctions in the country. He did not have a valid track safety card, his colleague did not have the relevant supervision skills, and the experienced worker Michael had been assigned to work with was suspended at the time. The jury at Michael's inquest decided he was "unlawfully killed" and the police will now be reopening a criminal investigation.

The RMT rail union says the number of permanent staff employed on the tracks has fallen from 31,000 before privatisation to between 15,000 and 19,000. Casual labour and 20-hour shifts have replaced a highly skilled railway union workforce.

Michael was employed by temp agency McGinley Recruitment Services, who in turn were subcontractors for Balfour Beatty, contractors for Railtrack - an illustration of the long chain of command now operating on the railways. The devastated family said that privatisation of the railways had led to a "low regard for human life".

The Waterloo branch of the RMT has taken up Michael's case and is fighting for justice. The struggle should also be linked to the upcoming health and safety strike on the London tube.

RMT meeting: 5-7p.m. Tuesday 16th July, The Coffee House, Chalton St, London NW1
More info @ www.simonjones.org.uk

The Agitator says

Bring Michael's corporate killers to justice!
For union control over hiring and training of new workers, ban overtime with no loss of pay!
Renationalise the rail!

What you can do:

✂ **Raise awareness in your workplace and union. NO SWEAT! can supply speakers, videos and information packs (ring 07951 493 232)**

✂ **ACTION! (a little less conversation and a lot more...)**

SHUT DOWN NIKETOWN!
Saturday June 15th @ 3pm
NikeTown, Oxford Circus, London.
Come along and bring a couple of mates to form your own 3-a-side anti-sweatshop team.

Join the Agitator network!

We want you to join our network of trade union and workplace activists and help rebuild working class organisation and militancy.
email us today:
agitator@workerspower.com

AZNAR

CHIRAC

BERLUSCONI

BLAIR

... right wing attack WE FIGHT BACK!

The racists, the war mongers, the free-market globalisers know how to organise. Between the G8 meeting in Genoa last year and its next in Seville this month, they have been planning and co-ordinating their vision for Europe. A Europe where refugees are deported, where public services are sold off to multi-nationals, where workers and youth are expected to work longer hours for less pay without security or a future.

But now the victims of globalisation are beginning to plan and co-ordinate resistance to their rotten system. In January over 60, 000 people met up in Porto Alegre, Brazil to discuss how to fight globalisation, debt and war. Peasant farmers and left academics, trade unionists and unemployed shanty town dwellers ate, talked and partied politics for a week at what they dubbed the World Social Forum, to show their contempt for the bosses' so-called World Economic Forum.



By Kirstie Paton, Greenwich NUT

Now the call has gone out for a European Social Forum to meet in Florence, Italy 7-10 November 2002.

Initiated by anti-capitalist organisations like Attac and supported by unions across Europe, the ESF plans to be the biggest gathering of trade unionists, NGOs, socialists, community activists, anti-racist campaigners and every anti-capitalist who has been waging war against the globalisers over the last few years.

The aim of the forum is this - to discuss what our movement must say and do in response to the effects of globalisation across Europe. There will be three key themes to the ESF: Neo-liberalism and globalisation; war and disarmament; democracy and citizenship.

Alongside conferences in the morning (2-3000 people) there will be seminars (over 100 venues across Florence) on a range of issues such as fighting racism and the far right in Europe, privatisation of public services, the European Union, the crisis in Argentina, war in the Middle East. The ESF has organised over 10,000 places for accommodation including hotels, hostels, schools and community centres, but over 30,000 are expected. This one's gonna be big!



So it is vitally important that we reach out to those communities so often ignored by the official trade unions - black and Asian communities, refugee and asylum organisations, youth and women. If you have ideas about how to do this then contact Agitator.

In building for the ESF we can also learn from the Italian Social Forums. They began as mobilising groups for the mass demonstrations against the G8 in Genoa last summer. Drawing in trade unionists, anti-racists, peace activists, human rights campaigners and anti-capitalists they ensured the enormous success of that mobilisation. But after the reign of terror and the murder of Carlo Giuliano by the Italian police, the social forums became beacons of resistance. The Italian social forums are now dynamic organising centres supporting the struggles of schools students and the rights of refugees. Most recently, the Social Forums played a key role in building for and extending the general strike against Berlusconi's attack on workers rights.

In November we will have the luxury of four days of uninterrupted debate and discussion (something normally reserved for the bosses). The more people who come the more we will all benefit. Today, the idea of taking time off work to go to Italy in November will not excite many, so we've got six months to make the prospect of going one that no one will want to miss out on.

Let's go for it!

Register Now - esf@workerspower.com
For more info visit www.mobilise.org.uk
To subscribe to info list: esf-uk-info@lists.southspace.net

WHAT WE FIGHT FOR

The possibilities that this forum opens up are enormous – simply bringing together activists from across Europe is an exciting prospect in itself. But our aim must be to go further:

o We must discuss ways of co-ordinating strikes and occupations across the continent every time multi-nationals threaten to make us pay for their crisis through lay offs and pay cuts and 'flexible' working practices.

o The threat of privatisation championed by Blair is not just a British disease – it is spreading across Europe from France to the Ukraine. Imagine what could be achieved if we could bring together a European public sector and community alliance to co-ordinate strikes, occupations and direct action.

o Against the racist anti-immigrant policies called for by leaders such as Blair and Jose-Maria Aznar. the ESF must take up the fight against racism and tear down this 'Fortress Europe'.

o The answer to the warmongering of the European leaders when they backed the bombing of Afghan civilians was tremendous – but it remained at the level of demos. We should build on the experience of the International Solidarity Movement which has sent activists to Palestine to lend real support to those at the sharp end of the so-called 'war against terrorism'.

o Finally, we need to work out a solution to the problem of capitalism, and a plan of how to implement it. This must involve taking the vast machinery of production and distribution out of the hands of the tiny group of bosses and bankers. It must involve real democracy – of the millions, not the millionaires. And it must involve mass direct action to break up the capitalists police forces and armies which – as has happened time and again – will be used against us. In short we need a revolutionary international party.