

classroomsolidarity

www.workersliberty.org/classroomsolidarity <> classroomsolidarity@workersliberty.org

SCHOOL SUPPORT STAFF: VOTE YES TO STRIKE FOR BETTER PAY

by a Teaching Assistant / Unison activist

Two thirds of Unison members have voted to reject the local government pay offer in a consultative ballot.

We are entitled to be angry about low pay and to demand more. On the morning of the teachers' strike on 24 April, Teaching Assistants in one primary school in Tower Hamlets met to discuss their own pay. They calculated the overall loss of salary — the money taken out of their pay packets — that would result from a below-inflation pay offer, the scrapping of the 10p tax rate, increased pension contributions, the loss of lump-sum payments, higher rent, mortgage and service charges, inflated food and energy bills. It became clear that they were not just talking about making ends meet, but of getting the ends in sight of each other!

The yes vote was helped by the teachers' strike, which gave a public profile and some urgency to the issue of low pay in schools. Unison's action committee met on Thursday 15 May to give the go-ahead for a strike ballot. If members vote to reject the deal, Unison could take action in early July. **Make sure you vote yes to action!**

But the union's leadership seems less than enthusiastic about taking action. There is a direct relationship between the mood of the leadership and the mood of the members. Without a clear campaign, Unison members will be less likely to vote yes or even at all. Unison leaders will then say 'the members don't want to strike', creating a self-fulfilling prophecy. Branch activists must gear themselves up for a battle.

As one Unison member put it: 'we are not being treated like children, but like the family pet — kicked if we bark; patted on the head if we're good'. By the end of the meeting in Tower Hamlets, there was little desire to be the 'good pet' — these members were ready to strike.

www.workersliberty.org/unison

A GREAT DAY'S ACTION, BUT WHAT NEXT?

more action ■ re-ballot this term ■ unite with other public sector workers

On 24 April over 200,000 teachers took national action to defend our pay, joined by around 100,000 civil servants and 25,000 Further Education lecturers.

The government's insistence that public sector workers should pay the price for their failed economic policies and rising inflation was resisted by the biggest day of public service workers' action in decades. When billions are set aside to guarantee failing banks and city bosses pick up £14bn in bonuses alone, this revival in trade union confidence is a long overdue sign of hope.

But it is only a start. Members of the NUT and other unions have to decide: was this a protest or are we serious about winning? If we are serious, we will need more action, and as soon as practically possible.

Members should messages to the National Executive supporting a fresh strike ballot so that further action can be called. Members of other teacher unions, particularly the NASUWT, should put pressure on their leaders to join the NUT campaign.

The presence on 24 April of civil servants and FE lecturers shows that opposition to a public sector pay freeze is spreading across the trade union movement. Support staff in schools have been offered only 2.45%; Unison is consulting them, recommending they reject the offer and strike.

Health workers, fire brigade staff and prison officers are among other groups due to face below-inflation pay awards soon.

It would make no sense for teachers to enter the stage for one

day, only to leave it when thousands more workers join the battle against the pay freeze. A united fight by public sector workers can win inflation-proof increases across the board.

The NUT should re-ballot this term — this time for discontinuous action — and immediately approach the other unions to build a co-ordinated campaign. Discontinuous action would allow us to call further days or half-days of action or to call selective action in particular areas where striking members receive strike pay.

We should start action with whomever will take it — "a coalition of the willing". That will make it easier to bring Unison and NASUWT on board.

All of this can only happen if it is prepared on the ground. In the staffroom it means talking to members of other teacher and support staff unions and sending petitions and messages to NUT headquarters calling for action. In cities and towns, it means building united public sector pay campaigns across the different unions.

www.workersliberty.org/educationunions



Ideas For Freedom

Friday 11 - Sunday 13 July 2008, London

Ideas for Freedom is an annual weekend of socialist debate and discussion. This year's agenda includes:

- Friday evening social and film showing: "I Stand by the River", a film about the Memphis refuse workers' strike, which Martin Luther King was supporting when he was assassinated.
- Where the Chinese regime comes from
- The politics of Simone de Beauvoir
- Is there a feminist revival?
- The state of the unions
- France's working-class uprising in 1968
- Introduction to Marxism
- The Italian elections and the massacre of the left
- The politics of Antonio Gramsci
- World economy in crisis
- After the death of the Labour Party: how can the working-class win a political voice?
- The anti-Vietnam war movement
- Northern Ireland and the civil rights movement in 1968
- LGBT, 'queer' and gender politics
- The Russian revolution
- The way forward for climate change activists

There will be cheap food, a free creche and accommodation available.

Cheap rates for advance bookings:
£22 waged, £15 students/low-waged, £10 unwaged.

www.workersliberty.org/ideas
phone 020-7207-3997

ClassroomSolidarity is produced by teachers, teaching assistants and other education workers in the Alliance for Workers' Liberty, an organisation fighting as part of the labour movement for a socialist alternative to both capitalism and Stalinism, based on common ownership and democracy.

In contrast to New Labour and the Tories we believe that education should challenge, inspire and liberate minds young and old. This means scrapping intensive testing and monitoring, narrow curricula and selection.

We want one democratic, fighting union for all education workers. We oppose racism, sexism, homophobia and all prejudice that divides us. Only our bosses benefit from a divided workforce.

ACADEMY STRIKE

NUT members at the Withins School in Bolton took strike action in opposition to plans to turn the school into an academy.

The strike - the first of its kind - shows that teachers understand the importance of strike action and are willing to use their collective power to protect all aspects of education work.

More action and a rolling programme of protests and lobbies are planned.

www.savewithins.exofire.net



SCHOOL CAMPAIGNERS' ELECTION VICTORY

On May 1st, anti-academy candidates swept to victory in Barrow-in-Furness, unseating sitting pro-academy Labour Councillors including the Council leader!

Three members of the 'Our Schools are Not For Sale' were elected with a fourth narrowly missing out on a Council seat.

www.osanfs.co.uk
www.antiacademies.org.uk

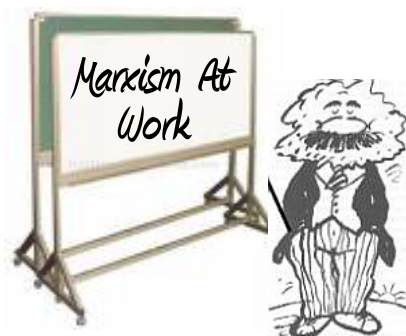
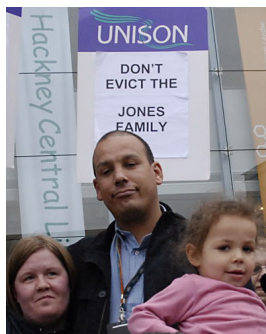
DEFEND RICKY JONES

Ricky Jones has been Residential Caretaker at William Patten Primary School in Hackney for ten years. He is also Hackney Unison's Education Convenor.

In February, the school management told Ricky that they planned to make him redundant, which would also mean evicting him, his wife and three kids, two of whom attend the school.

Hackney Unison believes that Ricky is being victimised for his effective trade unionism, and is campaigning hard to save Ricky's job and home.

E-mail messages of support to
matthew.waterfall@hackney.gov.uk



WHAT IS 'FAIR PAY'?

NUT and other unions raise a slogan for 'Fair Pay'. But what does this actually mean? For the unions it means a pay rise in proportion to the Retail Price Index (RPI) - a broad measure of the rate of price increase that factors in housing as well as consumer goods. So at the very least, 'fair pay' means a rise that would prevent an effective cut in wages. If pay rises by 2% when RPI is 5%, a teacher earning £25,000 will be £750 worse off per year in real terms. So the fight for 'fair pay' by this measure is important. 'Fair pay' would mean a 5% increase.

But let's take a broader view of 'pay' and see if we are really getting a 'fair' deal. Under capitalism, the basic measure of the quantity of work done by any one individual is time: hours, days, etc. We are expected to complete a certain amount of work in a certain unit of time. Teachers are expected to work 1,265 hours per year: the time the government (a) thinks we need to finish all our work (b) is prepared to pay us for. So a teacher on £25,000 gets paid about £19 per hour. Recent surveys of teacher working hours show that we actually work an average of 1,915 hours. So 'fair pay' for our teacher on £25,000 would actually be £36,383!

But there is more to work than the number of hours you spend in school, marking books or preparing. Teaching Assistants in particular have experienced an 'intensification' of their work. Many are expected to work with larger groups of students, carry out tasks like marking and preparation etc. Without a related pay rise, TAs are doing more work for the same money. This 'intensification' with no reward is in effect a pay cut.

There is more to the slogan 'Fair Pay' than meets the eye. That's why bringing issues like workload into future action and formulating a strategy that places demands on working time and the tasks we carry out is vital to this dispute.

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Send us a fiver (cheques payable to N London Workers' Liberty) and your address!

Got a story for *ClassroomSolidarity*?

We welcome reports & comments from all schools workers.

Contact Workers' Liberty, PO Box 823, London SE15 4NA. 020-7207-3997