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Catalyst

Issue #25

Newspaper of the Solidarity Federation

British section of the International Workers' Association

ACTIONS SPEAK LOUDER

OCTOBER 20TH saw the unveiling of the long-awaited Comprehensive Spending Review (CSR), the coalition government's detailed blueprint for attacking jobs and services. Little within the CSR was a surprise, with cuts roughly at the level that had been predicted in the run up. It is significant that the the scale was below the 40% that had been mooted, this was a blatant attempt to 'soften us up' and feel lucky the cuts were "only" 20%, as if it had been taken straight out of the pages of 'Negotiation for Dummies'.

These attacks are directed across the entire working class, with no section spared. Savage attacks on the unemployed, sick and disabled sit alongside mass public sector redundancies, attacks on parents side by side with increasing prices through the VAT hike. Despite the government's rhetoric, this is a wholesale assault on us all. The basic safety net of the welfare state is being dismantled before our very eyes. This can't be seen as just a slight rejigging of government spending, but an attempt to significantly shift the balance from the majority of us to the richest, and to redefine the support an individual can expect from society.

The government claim the cuts are needed to reduce the deficit and deal with the recession. Most major economists predict they will have the opposite effect. However, it is not just a case of "nasty Tories" - all the political parties would have been

forced to make very similar cuts at this point.

The only way their plans can be derailed is if we simply do not accept their imposition, and make the country ungovernable.

The capitalist system requires constant attacks on the working class to be profitable, and here it continues. During the recession, boardroom pay went up 55%. While some on the left may lie about or whitewash the past to hide Labour's

complicity in the cuts, it is important that the movement to resist them is not tarnished with Labour's discredited legacy.

As this is an attack on us all, it is only on that basis it can be successfully fought – the opposition to the cuts must be on a class-wide basis. It is no good a multitude of separate contesting campaigns resisting the cuts "in their area". This will allow the government to divide and rule, and if we are arguing over where the cuts should fall we are doing their job for them. Nor can we win just by making good arguments and appealing to the rational

judgement of politicians. The only way to stop these cuts is by making their implementation impossible.

Statement of intent: Students occupy the roof of Tory Party HQ. Was it the start

of a militant anti-cuts movement?

In the early 1990s, the anti-Poll Tax movement refused to go along with the tax and in the end the government withdrew it. In France, millions have been refusing to accept changes to pensions. Here, students have been showing a willingness to fight not seen in decades. The coalition imagine they can overcome any resistance to their plans. The only way their plans can be derailed is if we simply do not accept their imposition, and make the country ungovernable.



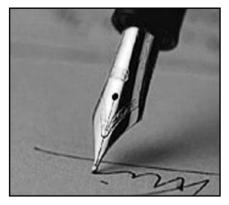
'All joined up'

Page 2: Interview with a striking French teacher about the movement.



Housing benefits slashed

Page 3: Catalyst speaks to a claimant.



Opinion

Page 7: Time to act - why class still matters in Britain.

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always exist. So do contradictions

between what the national

leadership say and what goes on

at a local level. We ask ourselves

sometimes why they don't get

behind the movement more firmly

It was decided to have

actions every day: we

wanted to attack the sites

What have you made of

At the moment I often have an

urge to turn off my television,

because I get so wound up by the

bulletins! What they say about the

lyceéns is unsupportable: always to

hear this talk of 'manipulation', as

if they were incapable of thinking

on their own. When the kids are

told that they become self-managed

the media's treatment of the

show off our badges.

to hit the wallet.

International round-up

Interview with a French striker:

Students, teachers, train drivers, refinery strikers -

"We're all joined up."

France in response to proposed pension reforms which would have upped the retirement age, amongst other cuts. Jean-Marie Cosson, a striking teacher from the town of Saint-Nazaire talks about the revolt at one of the last bastions of the worker's movement, where the entrance of the lyceéns (young students) into the movement was given an ovation by 'their fathers in blue collars.'

What's the situation at Saint-Nazaire?

J-M Cosson: It's still delicate. On the 7th of October, before the lyceéns had even started to consider participating in the movement, some hooded guys went into a lyceé and smashed some windows. Bizarre... The end of a demo in October, which (Saint-Nazaire has a population of 70,000), didn't go well. The gendarmes (paramilitary police) fired tear gas at the lyceéns, even though their representatives had negotiated with the regular police to avoid things turning bad. This

2010 SAW huge social unrest sweep years like it did for (former President) Chirac. Three guys went straight to trial. Two got two-month mandatory sentences.

How does the movement organise itself between public and private sector workers and the lyceens?

The general assemblies are held

per sector, and the co-ordination is done systematically. For example, morning. Then, the guys from the a general assembly. The workers the teachers arrived. Followed by hundreds of lyceéns who were train drivers, refinery strikers, we're

What are the debates in the general assemblies?

During the general assembly at Donges refinery, where 350 workers time justice didn't wait for many were present, the indefinite strike

Barcelona general strike



TWO MEMBERS of Liverpool Solidarity Federation were in Barcelona during a general strike. Here they give a brief personal account.

During our stay in Barcelona we visited the Banesto building on Plaça de Catalunya which had been occupied for several days by anticapitalists. They used the derelict space to celebrate resistance, as well as freely exchange information and radical ideas. However the building was later brutally repossessed by

expulsion of Roma and travellers' camps

met with international condemnation and

demonstrations in the streets, but continues

unabated now that the legal threat from the

EU has been lifted.

On the day of the general strike, we joined a lively demonstration of several thousand organized by our sister organisation, the CNT, who put forward a much more militant message of resistance compared to that of the reformist

While a one-day general strike is unlikely to the halt the Zapatero government's attacks on working have been an important staging

on the 13th of October the lyceéns blocked their establishments in the shipyards organised a meet-up for from Airbus, from the refinery at Donges, the train drivers and given an ovation by their fathers in blue collars. These are the intense moments, where solidarity had got 20,000 people together is rediscovered. Lyceéns, teachers,

It's been 40 years that they've been teaching us to be individualists. Where've the blockades

been? How have you been trying to extend the novement? The Donges refinery is blocked. The guys help the twenty employees of the petrol depot nearby to maintain the strike pickets and to prevent the police from occupying In the small businesses it's delicate. The guys daren't ...

was debated, with the understanding

that they weren't going to vote

again to strike every 24 hours. They

decided to blockade the refinery

until the 18th of October. In the

education sector, some voted for

an indefinite strike. Others didn't

support the idea of a strike for its

own sake, to stay at home and be

content to fill up the state's coffers

by allowing it to withhold wages.

So it was decided to have actions

every day: we wanted to attack the

sites of economic production, to hit

the wallet. Above all, we wanted to

avoid finding ourselves opposed to

one another, public against private.

Did this convergence of strikes and sectors start up quickly?

The unions called us into the streets many times in quick succession. We told ourselves that if we didn't take the matter in hand, the movement would croak. Fed up with marching! Especially since some unions stopped saying the words "general strike".

What's the role of the union people, it will hopefully prove to federations in the movement at Saint-Nazaire?

This interview was originally conducted by by Ivan de Roy, for Little wars between branches www.liensjournal.wordpress.com intense physical workloads and

to make anyone happy.

Minorities scapegoated across Europe MINORITIES AND immigrants have been Also in France, the proposed burqa ban, under enough. In Germany, earlier this year, a report involved in a number of cases of poor hit by another wave of European racism and the veil of being an education in republican by the UN Human Rights Council found, but working conditions, including the

discrimination. French President Sarkozy's values is a message to the muslim community failed to name, widespread institutional racism. victimisation of migrant workers at - one that is echoed in Belgium, Holland and It called on a wide set of actions and suggested SOAS university in London in 2009. that the word 'racism' itself (which is only used Their union, the SAC is calling for Recently, Angela Merkel had no qualms in the context of WWII) be given due legal international statements of solidarity about pronouncing that 'multiculturalism has weight, so that institutions can finally name and for letters of protest to be sent to failed' - her problem is that she is not hardline race hate crimes for what they are.

striking workers

A 'MANAGER' at the Combo Allied Nippon Company in Sahibabad, India, shot at striking workers before they overpowered him. Nine workers have now been arrested for

Around 400 workers had been the shooter dead.

claim that many of the so-called 'management' are in fact company goons hired to break the union. and that beatings of workers have become commonplace. Reportedly it was also "quite common for them to roam inside the factory openly carrying the guns in order

SEVERAL HUNDRED households ..) The movement has federated itself between generations and in the Polish capital Warsaw began between the different sectors. We a rent strike in October. The strike don't demand to know each other's was called by the radical ZSP union union affiliation. We don't give whose members have been active a fuck! I'm in SNES (FE teacher's in the tenants' movement and the union): that gives me access to struggle for good public housing, in some information, but we don't the face of increased privatisation and gentrification.

The strike represents an escalation of the struggle which has been developing since spring 2009 when rents were raised from 200-300% in public housing in the city. of economic production But the ZSP says increased rents are just the tip of the iceberg. They cite a litany of complaints including punitive policies, illegal charges and neglectful maintenence of the public housing on which many of



entrepreneurs at 16, that's not going 36 seconds to clean a toilet?

CONTRACT CLEANERS at the prestigious University Hospital of Lund in Sweden are on strike over BASTA! and published in Jusqu'ici excessive workloads. Workers have ('hitherto' or 'til now'), a journal of just 36 seconds to clean a bathroom, the French anti-austerity movement. which their union says puts both It was translated by our friends at them and patients at risk through

> The cleaners are employed by the private company ISS, who have been the employer.

India: boss shoots at

his murder.

striking over the issues of contracts, bonuses and a pay rise. Company officials went to confront strikers and opened fire with 4-5 shots, wounding a worker. Workers then fought with officials leaving several injured on both sides and

Sources close to the workers

Warsaw rent strike

compromised hygiene standards.

Housing benefit cuts spark poverty fears

Catalyst speaks to a 'benefit scrounger' Milton Keynes free

way for drastic changes to the benefits system. Brighton SolFed spoke to one of the supposed benefit scroungers to find out what it's really like to live on benefits.

Since finishing a postgraduate course, Teresa has been looking for a job in Brighton. "I have been applying for at least 4 to 5 jobs a week for the past 4 months but did not get any job. Often I have been told I am overqualified for the positions and even though I tried to impress on them that I get someone less qualified to do the work on minimum wages.

"When renting any place I have to keep in

THE MEDIA keep running stories about has to cover heating and water bills together month. You can find a bedsit (one room benefit fraudsters living it up, paving the with food, travel expenses or any other bills that I may have to pay."

"I am in deeper debt now than before I friends to pay for any extra cost that I incur. For example, I needed to move out of my a studio apartment away from the city center them. which is relatively cheaper." "It is very difficult to find something that

is suitable. Ideally I would have liked to rent a one bedroom flat, but that is out of would like to work – I was told that they can question if you are living in Brighton as the maximum we can claim on housing benefit (HB) is £600/month. And remember there is no extra money for gas/electricity/water mind that I will not get any help towards any bills. A decent sized studio with a separate heating or water rents etc. I only get £62 a but very small kitchen in Brighton/Hove week for unemployment benefit, which also and surrounding area will cost approx £575/

less, but they are extremely small and badly kept, often sharing bathrooms with several was on benefit. I had to borrow money off other tenants - they are utterly depressing. People on benefit are forced to choose from the bottom of the pile as most of the place and had to find £1420 to secure myself time these are the only properties rented to

> know a few people that have ended up in hostels, an environment that is extremely depressing and self destructive as it is very difficult to keep up hope.

Given their precarious money situation, people on HB face additional hurdles. "Most places are reluctant to rent out to people on benefits and sometimes say so openly. "No DSS needs to reply" and such. Also, even if they do not say this openly, often they will require you to to pay a minimum 6 weeks rent as a deposit and a month's rent in advance on top of minimum £270 for agency fees. This is almost impossible to pay for someone who is in receipt of benefit and so in all probability does not have any savings."

"I know a few people that have ended up in hostels, an environment that is extremely depressing and self destructive as it is very difficult to keep up hope without help and understanding. The system does not cater for this reality but is geared to make one feel unworthy and a failure instead of pointing out that this is a failure of the society as a

How can we fight back? By making sure we spread the truth: anyone can end up in this situation. Unemployment is the product of a warped capitalist society that we live in today which is only interested in making the maximum profit with giving very little back to the society. A decent standard of living by unemployed people is not a privilege but is the right for everyone including employees who work in an environment which provides no job security or guarantee. And remember, todays employed are tomorrows 'dole

containing sleeping and cooking area) for

town centre. After only a few minutes they were stopped and questioned by Community Support Officers and private security staff, asked for their names and addresses, and told that they The group, Northampton Solidarity Federation, who have members in Milton Keynes, say that the ban on any political activity in the area by CMK Shopping Centre shows that Milton Keynes city centre is not public space. In

a statement, they said: "It seems that if you're not a consumer you're not wanted. Big business has effectively privatised our areas that should be public. If one worker can't give another worker a leaflet about their rights, especially at this time of massive attacks on workers, without being moved on, it's a worrying situation in terms of free speech."

housing benefits slashed, anti-fascism, news in brief 3

Deportee deaths

of the 2008 EU Return Directive

speech fight

JIMMY MUBENGA has become the 14th person to die during forced deportation from the UK. Meanwhile the government has jut off until 2011 the end to the holding of children in asylum detention centres like Campsfield and Yarl's Wood, which have seen repeated hunger strikes. Both the introduction of fast-track

deportation and detention centres are a result

WORKERS RIGHTS activists have been

prevented from leafletting in Milton Keynes

Northampton Solidarity



Workfare: quick interview

ONE OF the new ideas from the government has been to suggest that the unemployed be made to do community work for their benefits, effectively £1 an hour. Aside from the obvious question about what happens to the people who already do those jobs, Catalyst spoke to a road-sweeper about other problems this crackpot scheme faces.

Catalyst: What's your view on this idea? RS: It's insulting and degrading. It means the job is considered to be a punishment.

C: How well thought out is it as an idea? RS: Well, anyone can push a broom, but can

you do it all day? Can you sweep 65 roads a day? I worked with a guy who swept for 25 years, this job cannot be done by anybody, or

C: How will this affect the existing workforce?

RS: We already have a problem with agency workers who have less motivation because they get less pay. How much worse will it be if you're paid £1 an hour? There is no idea of taking the job seriously, it's never going to be a career.

C: What do you have to say to people who think this is a good idea and anyone can do it?

RS: I thought it was a piece of piss and didn't listen to start with. And if you don't learn, you can't finish the day. Aside from techniques and equipment there are all sorts of health continued outside where several Lewisham and the willingness it, "the cuts must be unworkable, and safety concerns. If they do this there will

Cuts spark town hall riot in Lewisham

THE LIVING Wage Campaign at University College London (UCL) has claimed victory after the university agreed to pay cleaners the London Living Wage. The living wage is meant to be introduced over the next two years. The UCL Living Wage Campaign was formed two years ago and is an alliance of cleaners, students, academics, and staff

Cleaners win

have been paying low wages to their police brutality in the lobby, cleaners. To date, thanks to pressure from various groups and campaigns, all London universities except an hour, the protestors were University College London have been minimum wage and raise pay to at in private where the first wave of south circular road outside the least the London Living Wage. The cuts were passed by the Labour- town hall was closed due to the Campaign at UCL has vowed not run council. Wage is fully implemented and all low-paid staff are well organised.

proposed local cuts, people in Lewisham stormed the town hall where a vote on the cuts was taking place. Around 100 people tried to force their way into the building in an attempt to stop the vote going ahead. Some protestors got to the council where batons and fists rained down on the protest. After half ejected from the building. The police, horses and dogs. There indication of things to come. As meeting was subsequently held

INSPIRED BY the recent student

protests and angry about

to disband until the London Living The lobby at the town hall hundred people faced riot to take direct action may be an we must be ungovernable."

were so many officers that the number of police cars and vans.

cuts are passed and implemented Across the country, it looks increasingly likely that they will The anger displayed at As a participant at Lewisham put 4 direct action pull-out poster Catalyst #25 www.solfed.org.uk direct action pull-out poster 5

Student riots: the angry, not the anarchists

ON NOVEMBER 10th, the National Union of Students (NUS) and Universities and Colleges Union (UCU) organised a demonstration against cuts in education, which ended in an occupation of Tory offices at Millbank, with smashed windows and arrests. Two weeks later, tens of thousands of students marched in towns across the country, taking over roads and buildings and scuffling with police. The Solidarity Federation, which puts out Catalyst, has been one of the groups suggested in the press as the ringleaders of the trouble. Not only do we refute this, we call for more direct action against the cuts.

Of course some of our members – those studying or working in higher education – were at the demonstrations, but we cannot take credit for the storming of 30 Millbank or the events two weeks later when even a brief look at the video and photo evidence available shows that a wide cross-section of the national student community took part.

It is absurd and grossly patronising to attempt to pin such a widespread outpouring of anger on the heads of an apparent "hardcore of troublemakers" or "protest junkies," in articles that sit alongside footage of student participants confirming that this was their first ever demonstration. Even if we were inclined to manipulate and control crowds, the chances of us successfully doing so as

a small minority in the midst of irate thousands are surely minimal. What must really terrify the politicians is to see how red and black flags and masks have been hugely outnumbered by the hyped-up faces of students rejecting cuts to their education - cuts which now bear the fingerprints of all three major political parties.

Against this backdrop then, the treachery of NUS President Aaron Porter, who called the Millbank occupation "despicable" and accused genuinely angry students of "hijacking" his march, looks worse and worse. We can only assume that Porter is concerned about the effect that this will have on his credentials as a future Labour Party high-flyer, following in the footsteps of Jack Straw, Phil Woolas, and the like in using the NUS as a stepping stone into professional politics. The NUS is out of touch with ordinary students and we recommend they continue to organise themselves, rather than rely on the careerists the rest.

– something which happened in places on the 24th.

Following the demonstrations, students occupied universities across the country. Students are already making links with university staff and future students in further education and schools, who are hit particularly hard by the fees as well as the removal of the Education Maintenance Allowance. This can be a truly effective movement if these encouraging developments continue

developments continue. We hope students will be the first of many to directly reject the cuts which affect us all and we will continue to organise against this scorched-earth austerity plan in our workplaces and neighbourhoods, democratically and independently of union leaders and politicians bleating the mantra "business as usual." Only through struggle - direct action and solidarity between workers, students, the unemployed and the retired - can we fight back in this class war of the rich against



The Paris Commune: Insurrectionary workers seize the city and create a radically democratic commune run by the workers themselves.



The Russian Revolution: Workers form free councils and overthrow the government The Bolshevik party disbands the councils and drowns the revolution in blood.



The Spanish Revolution: The Spanish working class responds to a fascist coup by launching the most far-reaching social revolution yet.



Hungary '56: Workers rebel against the so-called 'workers state' and again form free councils, until Stalin's tanks roll in.

Mai '68: French students riot and 10 million workers join an unofficial general strike. Similar struggles ripple around the world.



The Poll Tax: London burns from heavy rioting, but it was the direct action of 17 million people refusing to pay that finished the tax - and Thatcher - off.

DIRECT ACTION

growing student movement not content to simply march, direct action is the word on everybody's lips...

With the

Direct Action is a notion of such clarity, of such self-evident transparency, that merely to speak the words defines and explains them. It means that the working class, in constant rebellion against the existing state of affairs, expects nothing from outside people, powers or forces, but rather creates its own conditions of struggle and looks to itself for its means of action.

What is it?

DIRECT ACTION is, as the name may imply, action taken without any mediator between those taking it and the desired aim. Rather than pleading with our 'betters' to make changes for us, direct action is the practice of simply doing it for ourselves. Recognising that in a society defined by rule of the capitalist class - bosses, politicians, bankers - over the rest of us, all that we can acheive is what we can force from the capitalists with our collective strength. The practice of direct action is therefore about imposing our collective power, and leaving those who run society no choice but to accede to what we demand. Directly in opposition to party politics, direct action sees that only when we act for ourselves - without being represented by politicians, unions or any other would be representative - do we have the ability to change the world, and begin to shape it in our interests.

"100,000 proletarians armed to the teeth are nothing if they place their trust in anything beside their own power to change the world."

Some direct action methods

Verbal protest // walkout // partial strike // go slow // work-to-rule // limited strike // checkerboard strike // indefinite strike // picket line // occupation // demonstrations // economic blockade // rumours // discrediting // sabotage // reappropriation // (unauthorised) sale of stock // autonomous production // unauthorised work // 'good work strike' // boycott // civil disobedience // generalised strike // general strike // insurrectionary general strike // expropriatory general strike... and many many more.

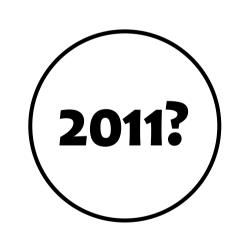


- Émile Pouget

What is it not?

DIRECT ACTION has nothing to do with voting or party politics. It has nothing to do with publicity stunts like dressing up in a superhero costume and climbing a landmark. Direct action is not violence, nor is it necessarily non-violent. Direct action is not necessarily illegal, although effective methods are often criminalised (such as the flying pickets used successfully to spread strikes in the 1970s). Direct action is not a form of protest: protest complains about a problem, direct action does something about it.

These are all however popular misconceptions, spread by both the media and many activists alike. But in divorcing the practice of direct action from the class struggle, by associating it with individual stunts or creative forms of protest, such misconceptions help deprive workers of the most powerful weapon we have: ourselves, and our collective power to change the world.



This is just the beginning: To beat the cuts we must make history!



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Know your rights Redundancy



NOT TAKING IT LYING DOWN: In 2009 Ford-Visteon workers occupied their factory and won improved

THE CHARTERED Institute of Personnel clause in a fixed term contract waiving the right and Development have predicted that 725,000 public sector jobs and up to 900,000 private sector jobs will go in the next five years, as a result of spending cuts and the VAT increase. While some will go through workers will be facing redundancy. Here is a brief guide to the law around it.

Redundancy happens when an employer ceases to carry on its business, or stops or diminishes some part of its business. The law covers England, Scotland and Wales, with different legislation in Northern Ireland, though its provisions are similar.

For a worker to be made redundant, their dismissal has to be attributable to the be motivated by a company in difficulties, any reorganisation that results in fewer staff will be a redundancy

Replacing a worker with a cheaper one is not redundancy and the worker has a case membership or activity; non-membership for unfair dismissal. In cases where this is done, the employer will often redefine work that was previously done by those workers as a "special project" to try to get round this regulation. When Parker Pens made people redundant in 2008, they got experienced workers to train agency staff to replace them by threatening that enhanced redundancy pay would be lost. This was effectively an unfair dismissal, though lack of organisation on the part of the workers concerned and the meagre prospects of compensation from a tribunal meant the firm got away with it.

outlined above and an employee is advance if there are 100 or more. dismissed this is a redundancy Notice is required to be given, which is one week for dismissal but the employer must act those with less than 2 years service rising reasonably. Criteria used to select to a maximum of 12 weeks for those who have 12 years or more, these provisions discriminatory - a number of things are may be more if it says so in your contract. 'automatically unfair', such as singling out Redundancy pay is only payable after 2 union members or activists. Temps directly

redundancy providing they qualify under the 2 workers unless they can prove that they year rule. The Fixed term Employees (Prevention are deemed to be an employee. of Less Favourable Treatment) Regulations The selection is still a dismissal, as 2002 make it unlawful for an employer to put a well, and the employer has to go through

to a redundancy payment.

Redundancy can be 'unfair' and this can be taken to a tribunal within 3 months with a claim for unfair dismissal. It is automatically 'unfair' if the selection for retirement and natural wastage, a lot more redundancy was because the employee exercised any of the following rights: jury service; leave for family reasons; refusal of Sunday working by a shop or betting worker; working time; being a trustee of an occupational pension scheme; acting as or being elected as an employee representative collective redundancy or TUPE purposes; protected disclosure; asserting a relevant statutory right; National Minimum Wage; tax credits; flexible working; reduction in employees. It doesn't need to participating in official industrial action; consultation of employees regulations; part time workers regulations; fixed term employees regulations; European public limited company regulations; trade union

> of a trade union; pregnancy. The selection can also be 'unfair' if there was no genuine redundancy, there was a lack of consultation, an 'unfair' selection procedure or a failure to offer alternative

Those affected have a right to consultation if more than 20 workers are affected. The consultation must be timely and meaningful. Failure to consult is a reason to go to an Employment Tribunal (ET) which can make a protective award. Consultation has to begin at least 30 days in advance if more than 20 workers are to If a redundancy situation occurs as be made redundant, and at least 90 days in

employees for redundancy must not be employed are covered by the Fixed Term Temporary workers are also eligible for Employees Regulations but not agency

procedure. This must state in writing the selection criteria for those workers to be made redundant, arrange a meeting for the employee to discuss the application of the criteria to them before making a final decision and allowing an appeal against the decision. Failure to adopt this procedure (provided you have 12 months continuous service) is an unfair dismissal (in procedure) and allows you 4 weeks basic pay compensation (at a maximum of £310 a week). This is useful for those workers who haven't qualified for the 2 years redundancy payment.

Ill health and maternity do not preclude redundancy, but an employer has to act fairly. You can be offered alternative work but can turn it down if it is of lower pay or status. You have a right to time off during the redundancy notice period to look for work.

Entitlement to redundancy pay depends on whether the statutory scheme is used or the employer has a different one. If different groups of workers in a firm have significantly different terms and conditions (for example after a transfer from a different employer), it may be that some will get significantly better redundancy pay than others. If this is the case, it's worth checking because it could potentially be 'unfair'. There is a ready reckoner for the statutory scheme at http://www.direct.gov. uk/redundancy.dsb.

for redundancy pay which is currently £380 per week since October 2009. Anyone earning more than this will only get £380 per year of service. If the employer is insolvent, the redundancy pay (and any other pay owing) must be claimed from the Department for Business Innovation and Skills (BIS), and the statutory redundancy pay is subject to tax and national insurance deductions, making The maximum payable is for 20 years it even less. Other than that, if redundancy

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 ertain basic rights. These include:

1. The right to be told in writing how much and whenwe are to be paid.

The Minimum Wage for those over 22 years of age is set at £5.80,. For 18-21 year olds it is £4.83 and for 16-17 year olds it is £3.57. For according workers, we give the paid on the agency workers, wages must be paid on the agreed day, even if the hiring company has ot paid the agency.

. The right to at least 28 days paid

Any employment contract should set out leave entitlements. If it doesn't, then 28 days nust be given (which can include public nolidays). 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 o months, we get 14 days (for part time workers it is less, and it applies to jobs arted since October 2001).

. 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

4 hours and a minimum of a day a week off. Rest breaks for under 18s are minimum 30 ninutes every 4 1/2 hours.

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

We cannot be forced to work over 48 hours per week unless we have agreed to it in vriting (note that this is averaged over any 17 week period, so we can be forced to do more

5. The right to sick pay when we are ill. We are entitled to statutory sick pay if we training is provided.

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 whenwe 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

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 ne rights as full-time workers.

8. The right to defend ourselves.

We all have the right to protection from dismissal for asserting 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 orwhere 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

Comment & Opinion

Time to act by Svartfrosk

LASS MATTERS in Britain today. business and international investors start to are on benefits. I disagree and instead don't come into it. hold that the real differences are between those who own and control the economy tax; Boots calls for cuts while running its and those of us who don't. Put it like this: the country is run in the interests of that tiny elite. The public face of that elite are often politicians, whose parties claim to be different but actually share more way as to avoid paying tax in the UK on than they differ. We had thirteen years of money made from manufacturing Scotch Labour government, acting in the interests whiskey, among other things. of that elite, despite their rhetoric. Who did well? Bankers and financiers, property developers, management consultants, PFI owners. Who didn't? Almost everyone else, particularly if they didn't benefit from rising house prices.

If rather than listening to what politicians say we look at what they do, the message is clear. We are not in this together!

At the grass-roots level, most people who go into politics do it because they want to inflation figures say. Fuel, food help. They are not all bad people, but the and transport are all going up, political system only allows for a neo- and VAT rises in January to 20%. liberal reality. Even where politicians make
The coalition plan to raise council promises that might benefit ordinary voters, rents to 80% of market rates, then cut such as the Liberal Democrats promising housing benefit as well. For those of us no increase in tuition fees, they drop them with a mortgage, rates are flat, but for how once in power as the pressures from big long?

It always has, but for a long time tell. We could, of course, ask those piling on the media and politicians have the pressure to make cuts to behave more pretended that the real divisions in this reasonably. But it is not in their interest. All country are among those who work or they care about is profit – ethics or morals

own headquarters affairs through a Swiss Another firm pushing for more austerity, Diageo, structures its business in such a millionaires.

If rather than listening to what politicians and big businessmen say, we look at what they do, the message is clear. We are not in this together!

Most of us face a situation where pay is stagnant or falling; the government want to use the unemployed to work for less than the minimum wage thus keeping wages low. The minimum wage itself is so low that it regularly gets topped up by benefits, which are in effect a subsidy to skinflint employers. The cost of living is rising, despite what the official

If you aspire to improve your lot through Europe, complete with ridiculous amounts education, you'll be punished financially. The Education Maintenance Allowance, we're doing all this just to stand still, let paid to students aged 16-19, is to be scrapped alone make things better for ourselves. by Michael Gove, who specifically stated he wouldn't scrap it during the election are already planned in those frontline So, Vodaphone is let off £6 billion in campaign. Fees for attending university are services the Coalition pledged to protect, set to rise. It's all very well saying that they

> For most workers today, retirement workmates. The elite tells us we must be is a receding prospect. Those of us who do have jobs work the longest hours in

will be paid off once someone starts to earn

of unpaid overtime. And most of the time

Cuts in services will hit everyone, and such as schools and health.

Can you rely on anyone else sorting out Post Office Box, solely to avoid tax here. enough, but a future debt of £40-£50,000 is the problems you face? Probably not – the a deterrent to anyone who doesn't mix with best you can hope for is to get support from those around you - friends, family, reasonable and accept austerity. While we get nothing or pay cuts, boardroom pay for top UK companies soared by 55% in the last year. When it is suggested that top people in business or finance pay a bit more tax as they can afford it, or are

> regulated better to stop them bringing banks to their knees, they threaten to go elsewhere. If we threaten to withdraw our labour, we are subject to media ridicule and restrictive laws.

We need to stand up for ourselves and organise around the things that will improve our standards of living. Pay, conditions, work culture, where we live, where we study. If you are interested in fighting back, the Solidarity Federation is running training sessions for people interested in organising where they work (see below for more details).

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.

include: building a 'shop committee', crossunion activity, collectivising grievances, and building for direct action. What our attendees

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

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

"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

Education workers: just say NO

WORK in an FE college which has a very autocratic management which operates bullying, intimidation and isolation. No unions are recognised and new members of staff are given the impression that they may not join a union. But... There is a rising level of dissatisfaction and discontent, connected to the idea that people may like to talk and do something about it. (Mainstream union membership is actually on the rise)

Recently a 'request' came down from senior management to a certain group of staff that they must consider themselves to be on call on demand. This was justified as coming under that lovely catch all contractual onrase "any other duty necessary to the fulfilment of your role."

Needless to say, those involved were not happy about this (me being one of them). After some co-ordinated discussions with those involved, it was quickly agreed that we would not comply with the request. The first to refuse received a response which threatened their

simply a comment regarding the to management if you wish to

proportion had refused it became is that it is impossible to say NO defying the management's

'co-ordinated response' (some staff keep your job. This case proves sent identically worded replies.) otherwise. Also, the management Finally, all had replied negatively. thrives on the fact that the staff Nothing has happened, the request are fragmented – it is difficult appears to have been dropped. to communicate between This may seem to be a minor departments, and fearful. But in event, but within the culture of this case, people from different position and wage (the typical the college it is hugely significant. departments came together response). By the time a higher The general feeling amongst staff and acted together, successfully

overbearing demand. As news of this spreads, so does the realisation that it may after all be possible to fight against some of the appalling ways in which the management treats the staff.

Watch this space, as they say. The authoris a member of the **Education Workers Network,** part of the Solidarity Federation: www.ewn.org.uk

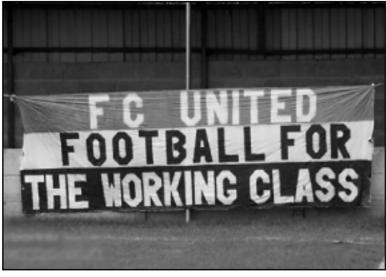
8 pensions, fc united Catalyst #25

"Making friends not millionaires"

ONE EVENING in May 2005 at a curry house in Manchester a group of disillusioned Manchester United fans decide they'd had enough. Billionaire Malcolm Glazer's takeover of the club was the final straw in a long line of events, including changing kick off times for the benefit of television and ridiculously priced tickets. They decided to do the unthinkable; form their own football club.

Fast forward to Bonfire Night 2010 and that club, FC United of Manchester (FCUM) beat Rochdale in the first round of the FA Cup. Over 3,500 FC fans celebrated this achievement of a club that set out to do things in a radically different way.

Owned by its fans, FCUM is based on seven core principles including the board being democratically elected members, decisions taken on a one member, one vote basis, a commitment to avoid outright commercialism and remaining a non-profit organisation. Two slogans of the club are "Making friends not millionaires" and "punk football": its radical outlook has secured links with others including the infamous Hamburg club FC St Pauli.



Last year FCUM and the Working Class Movement Library commissioned the Outcasts exhibition to commemorate the centenary of the 1909 strike by players from Manchester United who refused to relinquish their membership of the players union and were called "Outcasts FC". For a club so aware of its roots and history, it was no surprise to find that the day after the biggest night in their short history the club declined to appear on the BBC's Football Focus in solidarity with a strike by the National Union of Journalists members at the BBC. Although strike-breaking BBC staff told FCUM officials that the dispute only involved newsroom journalists and didn't cover sport, this subterfuge was quickly discovered by the club. Subsequently, Football Focus carried a brief report from Old Trafford about FCUM's victory without interviews from players, board and supporters, but the location of the programme, provided a stark, and ironic, contrast to the principles of FCUM.

Sudoku

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

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

Pensions under threat

Divide and rule game looks to undermine private and public sector workers' retirements

THE NUMBER of people with final salary pensions in the private sector has declined dramatically in recent years. There are now only 3.6 million private sector employees in company pensions and many of those are in middle and upper management. The savaging of private company pensions has left millions more dependent on the meagre basic state pension in old age, a state pension that an OECD report published in June 2009, found to be one of the worst in the developed world with income on average just 31% of preretirement earnings.

To add insult to injury the government now intends to force people to work even longer to earn the poverty level state pension. The coalition government has brought forward Labour plans to increase the pension age starting in 2020 when the retirement age will rise to 66 years old. The justification for this rise in the pension age is that we are all living longer. What the government fails to mention is that some are living longer than others. For example a manual worker in Glasgow retired at 66 would have

13 years (on average) of retirement left. A man in Kensington & Chelsea would have 22 years to enjoy.

Furthermore the government claims about living longer fail to take into account health inequalities that exist prior to the death. Study after study have shown that manual and low paid workers begin to suffer with serious health problems far earlier than the middle classes. This means that not only do the low paid workers die younger their quality of life in retirement due to poor health is much worse than the better off. Increasing the retirement age can only increase these health inequalities. Forcing people already in poor health to work longer can but lead to a further deterioration in their health and increase the likelihood that they will die even sooner.

With increasing number of private sector workers dependent state pension the government has now set about destroying public sector pensions provision. In order to justify their attacks they have filled the newspapers with stories of public sector workers receiving massive pensions. These stories



are largely nonsense, for example the average pension in local government is just £4,000 a year, dropping to £2,800 for women.

The value of these already paltry pensions is set to fall under government plans, in the future they intend to link public sector pension increases to the Consumer Price Index (CPI). Currently pensions are linked to the Retail Prices Index (RPI) which typically measures

inflation much higher. The switch to the CPI will mean that the true value of pensions will be continuously eroded by inflation. This will mean that as the real value of public sector pensions declines, state workers, like private sector workers, will be increasingly dependent on the state pension in old age.

The defence of public sector pensions should be central to the campaign against cuts - but the

fight must not end there. The government hopes to divide public and private sector in order to weaken opposition to the cuts. This can be countered by linking the fight to defend public sector pensions to a demand for a massive increase in the state pension and opposition to the increase in the retirement age. The government hopes to divide workers; the pension issue is the means to unite them.

Catalyst

Catalyst is the free newspaper of the Solidarity Federation (SolFed). SolFed is an organisation of workers who believe in taking control of our lives where we live or work, rather than leaving things to the dictates of politicians, managers and so called 'experts'.

Our members are workers across all industries, students, pensioners and unemployed. Through solidarity and acting together, we can deal both with our local problems and at the same time work to change the bigger picture, and change

the system that means power and profit for the few.

We believe we should apply the same principles to actions we take around local issues to those we take at work. Across industries, we organise in Networks; geographically we organise in Locals, to support each other in our struggles and to fight for our interests, both in and out of the workplace. We are part of the International Workers Association, organising with like minded people across the world.

To comment on Catalyst, get copies to

distribute or if you are interested in getting involved, contact us at:

catalyst@solfed.org.uk

If you are interested in the Solidarity Federation, we can be contacted at:

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DA-SF PO Box 29, SW PDO Manchester M15 5HW www.direct-action.org.uk

Subscriptions (4 issues) cost £5 per year basic, £10 supporters rate.