

Workers' Liberty

Teachers

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Call off the hounds! End the reign of Terror!

National action on workload!

When John Illingworth received a standing ovation at this year's conference following his emotional appeal for the Union to take action to relieve workload induced teacher stress you would have thought that even our lethargic, sleep-walking executive would have been stung into action.

Yet just a few months later there is little sign that the executive is about to send a shiver down the spine of any bullying management intent on using every government initiative to pile more crap on teachers. In fact the action being cobbled together in Hamilton House suggests that the Union leadership intends to leave classroom members to carry the burden in this campaign.

Rumours that the forthcoming ballot on workload will be no more than a survey inviting members to express a view on school by school action is just what the government and their NASUWT/ATL lackeys want to hear. The ballot would ask for approval for workload guidelines that might trigger school based action if those guidelines were breached.

This is not the ballot John Illingworth had in mind when he said in Torquay, "don't carry this for me, do it for the others."

On the contrary he had in mind a ballot that would give members the collective backing of the National Union. It would enable them - without further ballot - to refuse to comply with any workload demand outside the actionable guidelines set out in the workload motion passed at Easter.

School based ballots leave members at the mercy of management pleas not to risk the wrath of Ofsted and the possibility of going into a category at the next inspection. If members feel their school is isolated such a plea could prove a powerful impediment to a successful ballot. The parallel with TLR's is not applicable because workload generated by government initiatives is impacting on all schools not just a few. Most school managements feel under pressure to implement government bullshit and this means extra work for all teachers. Only a national ballot setting down strict guidelines is likely to succeed in such circumstances.

Interviewed by John Humphrys for the radio programme "On the Ropes", John said, "when the historians write up this period they will call it the 'reign of terror'". The time to end this reign of terror is now with a national ballot protecting all members. Such a ballot would not only provide desperately needed relief for members it could prove the best recruitment campaign the Union has ever launched.

The Alliance for Workers' Liberty organises as part of the labour movement for a socialist alternative to both capitalism and Stalinism. We stand for consistent democracy, independent working-class politics in domestic and international issues – against predators big and small – and for maximum left unity in action with openness in debate.

**For more information see:
www.workersliberty.org**

Teachers need a voice in politics

NUT policies go well beyond the defence of our members pay and working conditions. In particular the Union has for decades been committed to free state comprehensive schools for all and opposed to selection, privilege and social division in education. Currently we want to see the end of imposed national testing, league tables and targets because of the damage they do to children and young people. As part of the wider trade union movement the NUT supports a Trade Union Freedom Bill in the UK and workers rights to organise freely across the world.

Few of these things will be achieved by the NUT alone no matter how militant, confident or well-organised we become. They require us to campaign much more broadly with the public and with other unions. They demand that we mobilise and help to organise all those forces who want to see public services and workers rights defended and expanded. Above all they cannot be achieved without changes in the law or in government policy. To ignore these facts is to fight with one hand tied behind our backs.

The tradition in the NUT, and the other teacher unions, has been that we should be above politics. In the NUT we don't even have a political fund and therefore cannot support any particular candidates or parties locally or nationally. The Union can only campaign in the vaguest and most indirect way for members to 'consider the stance' of the various parties on some key issues at election time. We can and do lobby MPs of all parties on issues like the Education Bill. But this is merely reacting to events when we should be helping to shape them.

None of the major political parties represent the policies above. All three of them promise to continue the current divisive and market-driven 'reforms' of the public sector and to keep in place the Thatcherite laws which shackle unions from effectively standing up for their members. And yet there is huge support for alternative ideas. Millions of people support state comprehensive education, smaller class sizes and trade union rights but they are simply not represented in politics. We have support for key policies and aims but there is nowhere for it to be expressed. To think that we can address that weakness simply by lobbying the existing set of politicians and refusing to get our hands dirty is an absurd illusion.

At one time Labour would have been seen as the 'party of the trade unions', the voice, or potential voice, of millions of workers. This perception was

about much more than its traditional base of support among working class voters. More significantly it was a party set up by the unions and other workers organisations. Through this vehicle the labour movement had a significant voice in politics. The fundamental change carried out by Blair and New Labour has been to attack that 'umbilical' link between the labour movement and the Labour Party. In practice the most significant legacy left by Tony Blair will be that he drove the working class movement out of politics.

Activists in the trade union movement and Labour Party have organised to overturn this terrible legacy. The Labour Representation Committee (LRC) was set up in 2003 by trade unionists and Labour Party members to restore a voice for organised labour in politics. It is supported by five major national unions at least one of which is not affiliated to Labour (RMT). A leading figure in the LRC, John Mc Donnell, is so far the only person to have launched a campaign to present an alternative to the coronation of Gordon Brown as next Labour leader. McDonnell was decisive in organising the 'Public Services Not Private Profit' campaign which co-ordinated the recent lobby of Parliament against trust schools. His leadership campaign is organised around defending public services and restoring trade union rights and Labour Party democracy. We should, as a union (a collective force representing our members interests) be able to participate in and support the LRC.

Working class political representation is as much needed now as when the unions founded the original labour representation committee to organise working class candidates for Parliament at the beginning of the 20th Century. Political trade unionism should be about putting this idea of working class representation into action. It is not about going back to 'old Labour' with its culture of political conservatism and deference to the leadership. Rather it is about making us as effective as possible as a force for change in society.

As socialists we should not accept the division between the industrial and the political work of the Union. The industrial **is** political and this is most sharply seen when our work is in a key public and social service like education. 'You', as someone once almost said, 'may not be interested in politics but politics is interested in you'. We should be able to sponsor and build initiatives like the LRC, to push the case for working class representation and stop Blair silencing the voice of organised labour in British politics.

Unison strike at Central Foundation Girls' School, London

From Central Foundation Girls' School Unison: At a branch meeting [on 27 September] our members voted unanimously to ballot for industrial action over the threat of redundancies among admin staff in the school.

The NASUWT and the NUT [teachers' unions] have pledged support, which means that potentially the school could shut during the action.

The Unison Tower Hamlets Branch has also backed our decision and is contacting the regional office to ask them to endorse our dispute.

This is a fantastic response to the proposed restructure of the admin section.

The proposed plan

The proposal is to get rid of thirteen posts in the admin department. In their place will be eleven new posts (actually 19 but some have already been taken).

There is to be no direct assimilation of current staff into the new posts. All those whose jobs are being cut will have to apply for a new post. They will be competing against applicants from outside the school.

Reason for dispute

This is why the Unison members have taken the step we have. We consider the decision to put our members through this process to be grossly unfair.

If the school wishes to reorganise the way admin is carried out, they should do so without the drastic effect of redundancy on our staff.

The last restructure

The last time admin was restructured (only just over one year ago) it was done in a hurry by the old head who wanted it out of the way before she retired.

We argued at the time that she was going too fast, it was unnecessary and anyway the new head wouldn't like it.

Were we right? Or were we right?

The job descriptions were badly written, and indeed were still being written when the deadline passed. The head pressed on anyway.

The interviews were an insult to anyone who had to go through them. Staff were receiving their invitation to interview after they had actually gone in to the interview room. This resulted in such anger that the admin staff marched into the Bursar's office and said they would not leave until the process was stopped and done properly.

The lines of management were confused so that it was unclear who could tell who what to do or even what they were supposed to do.

The result was a mess and nobody knows that more than the staff who were put in the position of trying to make the new jobs work.

Review

When the new head came, we asked for a period of review so that the inaccuracies could be ironed out. She asked EPM to carry out the review and this restructure is the result.

We don't blame her for wanting to sort out a mess. The problem is how it is being done. The staff in admin are being punished for a situation they did not create.

They are being punished after trying to make this mess work for over a year. This is wrong

***Send messages of support through
thomas.unterrainer@talk21.com***

FEMINIST FIGHTBACK CONFERENCE

21 October, 11.30am – 7pm
School of Oriental and African
Studies, University of London,
Malet Street, London

*Speakers: Iranian and Iraqi
activists, International Union of
Sexworkers, Amrit Wilson and
others...*

www.fightback.org.uk

For Secular Education!

Faith schools featured as a controversial aspect of debate at conference 2006 and despite a lengthy discussion – on the web, in conference hall and at fringe meetings – no real progress was made. The union had not considered its position for some time and many asked 'why raise the issue now?' This strain of thought was given weight by the wording of the initial motion which allowed sections of the union to cloak discussion in terms of Islamophobia. Amendments did little to help with some giving implicit support for the expansion of faith schools and others failing to deal with issues of parity between different denominations.

This meant that the fundamentals of secularism, the role laid out for faith schools in new education policy and the reality of these schools as they operate now were sidelined. The real debate for the NUT should not be about how many of which type of faith school there should be, but how best to explain our opposition to the state funding of religious education – of whatever sort – and how to return VA/VC schools to local, secular and democratic control.

The Faith Schools Working Party gives an opportunity for the debate to continue and time to reflect on the substantive issues. However, there are signs that the functioning of the group will be hindered by a stream of representations from various religious groups. It would be rank hypocrisy – or worse - to support the continued funding of existing faith schools whilst denying expansion for under-represented groups. But to support continued funding is to support the notion that faith schools deserve public money.

Rather than this evidence the group should hear from those with direct experience of faith schools – students and teachers – and educationalists with evidence of the impact of faith schools on their neighbouring schools and local communities.

Any motions from the Left for Conference 2007 should take into account the experience of this year's debate and reflect the implications of allowing a renewed expansion of religious control on the lives of young people.

Support Robin Sivapalan - defend workers' right to protest

A campaign has been launched to defend Robin Sivapalan, a London classroom assistant suspended for organising an anti-Blair protest at his school. Please sign the following statement of support for Robin.

On 7 September, Tony Blair and Education Secretary Alan Johnson visited Quintin Kynaston school in north London to announce the first wave of 28 "trust schools" run by business, charitable and religious organisations - of which QK will be one of two in London. They were met by a demonstration, supported by Unison and NUT locally and School Students Against the War, and composed mainly of students from the school, expressing opposition to government policy on trust schools, privatisation and the wars in Iraq and Lebanon.

The initiator of this demonstration, QK classroom assistant Robin Sivapalan, has now been suspended from his job for "insubordination" and "breaching confidentiality" by informing people of Blair's visit.

The attempt to victimise Robin is an attack on freedom of speech and the right to protest. We are not prepared to see public service trade unionists silenced when they dare to express opposition to government policy. We the undersigned call on the management of Quintin Kynaston to immediately reinstate Robin Sivapalan and drop all disciplinary charges against him.

Westminster Unison, John McDonnell MP (Chair, Labour Representation Committee), Billy Hayes (Communication Workers' Union General Secretary), Rahul Patel (Secretary, Westminster Unison), Bernard Regan (former QK teacher and NUT NEC member), Jon Rogers (Unison NEC), Pat Murphy (National Union of Teachers NEC), Kevin Courtney (NUT NEC), Marsha-Jane Thompson (Unison London Region Young Members' Convenor), Pdraic Finn (Secretary, Westminster NUT), Nick Grant (Secretary, Ealing NUT), Dennis Charman (Secretary, Hammersmith & Fulham NUT), Mary Compton (former president, NUT), Liam Conway (Joint Division Secretary, Notts NUT), Sofie Buckland (NUS NEC) and many others

See www.workersliberty.org/node/6909 for a full list of signatories