

Are you a young worker fed up with low pay, bullying bosses, long hours and unsafe working conditions?

Fight for your rights at work



If you want to find out more about your rights at work, what a trade union is, why and how to join, this pack is for you.

Low pay - No way! - campaign pack

produced by



socialist youth organisation

50P

1 Fight for your rights at work

Are you a young worker fed up with low pay, long hours, lack of working rights, bullying bosses and often unsafe workplaces?

Whether you are working full-time, part-time, an agency or casual worker, working one hour a week or 50 hours a week, this pack is for you!

This pack has information on our conditions at work, what some of your rights are and advice on why and how you should join a trade union.

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2 Fight for your rights at work

Young workers – our conditions at work

Health and Safety

-  Every year around 25 people between the ages of 16 and 24 are killed at work with a further 18,000 suffering serious injuries. Many hundreds of thousands more suffer from work related injuries¹.

People like Simon Jones get killed at work all the time and nothing gets done about it. Not this time.


Simon Jones was killed on 24th April 1998, aged 24, on his first day as a casual worker at Shoreham dock - another victim of our growing casual labour economy. He was sent to work unloading cargo inside a ship - one of the most dangerous jobs in the country - with only a few minutes "training". Within hours of starting work his head was almost severed by the grab of a crane. The growth of casualisation, where people are forced into low paid jobs with little or no training, no job security, no sick pay and no holiday pay means bigger profits for companies - and more deaths and injuries for the people working for them. Simon Jones was taking a year out from Sussex University when he was killed. The harassment Simon got from the dole made him take any job on offer for fear of having his benefit stopped.


This information was taken from the Simon Jones memorial campaign;
you can contact this campaign at: <http://www.simonjones.org.uk/> email: action@simonjones.org.uk
Simon Jones Memorial Campaign, PO Box 2600, Brighton BN2 0EF
phone at 01273 685913

Casualisation

Most young workers are concentrated in the service sector (such as leisure, food and catering, retail jobs). According to the TUC (Trades Union Congress), this is the biggest growth area for temporary, agency and casual workers. Employers prefer to employ staff on temporary or casual contracts because these workers are cheaper to employ and much easier to exploit. Temporary workers lack job security and do not have the same rights and conditions as workers on permanent contracts.

For instance; temps face different rates of pay to permanent workers (usually at a much lower rate), temps are often denied access to occupational pension schemes and are frequently denied contractual sick leave and holiday pay². Young people and students are increasingly likely to be on these contracts.

-  The GMB union estimates that there are up to 1.5 million school children aged between 10 to 16 working in Britain, frequently in illegal conditions³.

-  Nearly two-thirds of college and university students work during the academic year. This follows the introduction of tuition fees and the scrapping of the student grant by New Labour in 1997.

Discrimination

Young women expect to have equal earning power as men, yet, on average, women still earn almost £100 a week less than men, 30 years after the first equal pay legislation was passed⁴. Young Women and ethnic minorities are denied promotional opportunities at work.

Many young people still face discrimination and prejudice at work including racism, homophobia, sexism and discrimination against disabled workers. These prejudices only go towards dividing workers against each other, rather than fighting for decent pay and conditions together. Therefore it is vital all workplaces campaign against prejudice together to protect and improve all our working conditions.



3 Fight for your rights at work

Getting organised

Traditionally workers have organised together through trade unions and through the unions have organised collective action together on issues such as health and safety at work. This is because organising together as workers rather than as individuals has a much better chance of improving everyone's conditions in the workplace. Now more than ever young workers need to be organised together, to campaign to force employers to comply with Health and Safety regulations which have been won through collective campaigns of workers not prepared to put up with unsafe working conditions any more. Yet most young workers are currently not members of trade unions.



❗ A recent report announced that only 11% of workers under the age of 24 are union members ⁵.

"While working in a factory through an employment agency on 12-hour shifts, the boss decided without notice to take our chairs away to try and get even more work out of us. This meant we had to bend our backs a lot to reach the tables we were working from and in a short space of time we started to get back aches. We found out this was against the health and safety rules and campaigned together. Within a day our chairs were replaced and although small, was a victory for us and our health and safety conditions. But if we had not stuck together we probably wouldn't have won!", **Helen, young worker from Hertford.**

★ Low pay – No way!



Young =
exempt =
extra exploited!

❗ Did you know?

- Nearly four million young people between the ages of 16 and 24 are in work ⁶.
- Almost half of all 16 and 17 year olds are in work today. Three quarters of these are juggling jobs with full-time education ⁷.
- Almost half of all school-age workers contribute to family income . This is mainly due to the low pay and poverty many families suffer ⁸.

4 Fight for your rights at work

What is the current minimum wage?

From October 1st 2004:

- If you are 16 or 17, there will be a minimum wage introduced of £3.00 an hour. *
- If you are under 16 there is still no legal minimum wage.
- If you are aged 18-21 (development rate!) then the minimum wage is £4.10 per hour.**
- If you are 22 or over then you are entitled to a minimum wage of £4.85.

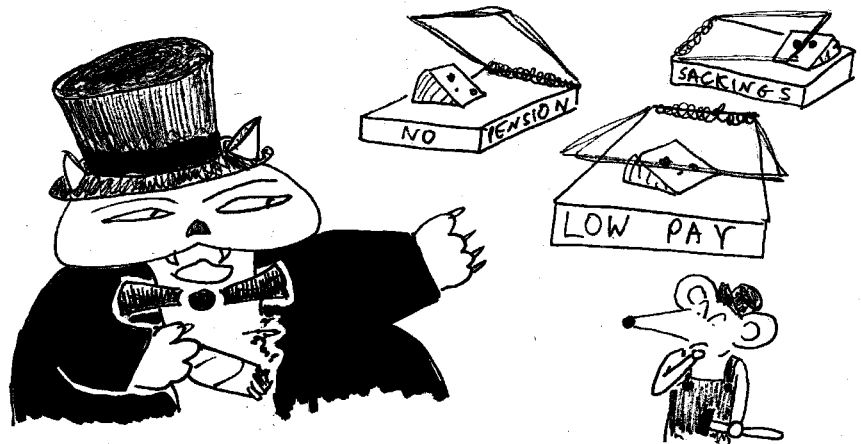
*NB: 16 and 17 year old apprentices will be exempt from the new young workers rate.

**NB: The development rate can also apply to workers aged 22 and above during their first six months in a new job with a new employer and who are receiving accredited training.

How young people are being exploited under the minimum wage exemptions.

Food, bills, clothing, travel and other living costs are no cheaper just because we are young. Yet bosses are getting away with using the minimum wage exemptions and lower rates to exploit young workers. Until October 1st 2004, under-18-year olds were not legally entitled to any minimum wage. Because of the huge anger over this issue from workers, young people and trade unions, the government has been forced to introduce a minimum wage for 16 and 17 year olds, of £3 an hour from October 1st 2004. This is a step forward, but £3 an hour is poverty pay which will still leave many young workers being exploited due to the lower wage levels. Young workers need to campaign with the trade unions and other workers for a living minimum wage for all.

"WORK FOR ME, AND YOU CAN HAVE ALL THE CHEESE THAT YOU WANT!"



Cartoon, Thomas House

Big profits = small wages

"Low pay amongst young people is endemic in Northern Ireland. As a result of the huge tourist industry on the North Coast, young people are forced to work for as much as 12 hours a day without a break, for little more than £1.50 an hour in some cases. University students are also made to suffer due to rising fees, and many are forced to work up to 40 hours a week simply to survive. Northern Ireland is described by businesses as one of the best places to invest, for the reason that we have a skilled workforce which is yet one of the most underpaid in Europe. Put simply, young people are screwed over by bosses in Northern Ireland more than in any other country in the EU."
Chris Henry, Belfast Socialist Youth (ISR in Northern Ireland)

5 Fight for your rights at work

Apprenticeships, modern apprenticeships and national traineeships.

These are all schemes run mainly for young people to offer training in work such as hairdressing, the motor trade etc. If you are working under any of these schemes you have probably already noticed how low your pay is!

There is no legal requirement for companies offering these schemes to pay a legal minimum wage to 16 and 17 year olds (even though all other 16 and 17 year olds will have a minimum wage of £3 an hour from October 1st 2004). Depending on the age you start and the company offering the training, many do not even have to pay the minimum wage over the age of 18 too. Many companies take advantage of this; provide minimal training so they can pay young people poverty pay. There is often no guaranteed job at the end of these schemes.

If you are working in any of these schemes and are not sure if you are being paid what you are entitled to please contact ISR and/or a trade union for advice.

In May 2004, it was reported that nine apprentices, all aged under 23, died on vocational courses in the preceding 20 months. The number of deaths, all point to a just some of the horrific, unsafe working conditions many young people are being forced into. Many schemes don't provide proper training, don't guarantee a job at the end of the course and the young people on the courses are used as cheap labour.

- We call on the trade unions to launch mass campaigns of recruiting young workers, including apprentices, agency and casual workers, into the trade unions alongside mass campaigns for a living wage, proper training and to force the implementation of decent health and safety in the workplace.

Why should we support a minimum wage?

Because without one employers would be completely free to pay even lower wages than the current paltry minimum wage. The lower rates and exemptions that already exist with young people show that bosses will pay the lowest possible wage they can get away with to make even more money out of us. The government was forced to introduce the minimum wage because of the massive pressure from workers and their trade unions over poverty pay. ISR campaigns for the minimum wage to be much higher so all workers, regardless of age, can have a decent standard of living.

① Most bosses argue they can't afford to pay everyone a living wage and Tony Blair and co argue this too on behalf of their big business friends. Yet in 2001 the average wage for a chief executive in Britain was £960,000 ⁹ (if they worked a 40 hour week all year, this is over £461 an hour!). But we are told it's OK to offer a 16-year-old £3 an hour!

If companies claim not to have the money to pay workers a living wage, the books of the company should be opened for the workforce to see where the money is going. If a company providing a lot of jobs, which are important to a local community doesn't have the money to pay it's workers, facing going bust, the workers and local community should get together to campaign for the company to be saved by taking it into public ownership to save the jobs.



Rover trade union members and their families campaign for Rover to be nationalised when it was facing closure in 2000.

6 Fight for your rights at work

The poverty pay scandal.

How lowpaying bosses force workers into poverty

❶ In 2001 there were 2.5 million workers earning below £72 a week ¹⁰. This is the lower earning limit for National Insurance contributions, which means you are not entitled to statutory sick pay and the basic state (government) retirement pension.

❷ Nearly one-in-five people cannot afford a 'holiday' once a year unless they stay with relatives.

❸ 28% cannot afford two or more of the items generally seen as basic necessities, such as replacing worn-out furniture or having friends or family round for a meal ¹¹.

Millions of workers are being paid poverty wages by scrooge employers who are only interested in one thing – making more profit. Because many people's wages are too low to live on they are forced to claim benefits from the government to help towards rent, child-care etc.

Many New Labour schemes, such as the Job Seekers' Allowance, force many people into low-paid, insecure jobs to keep unemployment figures down and often humiliate unemployed people through continual interviews which rarely help in finding a suitable job. The 'rules' for young people make finding a decent job even harder.

Working-class people, after the Second World War achieved the welfare state (the NHS, unemployment benefit, free education, state pension etc) after generations had struggled for it. In most people's lives there are times when we need benefits to survive. This is mainly when bosses of companies decide they won't keep paying workers and force people into unemployment.

We call for benefits people can live on.

Fat cats getting richer

But who makes the profits?

❶ The wealthiest 1% of individuals own between a fifth of household wealth in the UK. Half the population share between them 6% of the total wealth. ¹²

❷ An average Tesco worker earns £13,598 a year – 181 times less than the chief executive who earns £916,000 a year basic salary ¹⁴. On top of this obscene pay, in 2002 he received 'additional benefits' bringing his total pay package to £2.8million! ¹⁴

❸ In 2003 executive directors of the UK's top 100 companies received an average pay increase of 23% while average earnings rose by a measly 3.2% ¹⁵.

While the majority of chief executives and company directors give themselves fat cat pay packets, the majority of the workers in these companies receive poverty pay.

But who produces all the profits? The chief executives and directors creaming off all the profits certainly don't. Workers produce the profits of the companies.

For example in Tesco it is workers who help produce the food, who then package and deliver it to the different stores, who then stack the shelves and serve the customers, place new orders, who are doing all the work.

The bosses' main objective is to make and keep as much money, in the form of profits, as possible for themselves. The profits they get are produced by the fact that as workers, we get paid as little as the bosses can get away with. The profits they get should be used to pay workers a living wage, go towards education and health – not into the pockets of the rich.

ISR campaigns for:

- ✳ A living wage for all workers.
- ✳ For the immediate introduction of the trade unions' minimum wage demands (EG: the UNISON call for £6 an hour), as a step towards a living minimum wage of £8 an hour.
- ✳ For an end to all lower rates and exemptions.
- ✳ The right to quality training with a guaranteed job and free quality education for all.

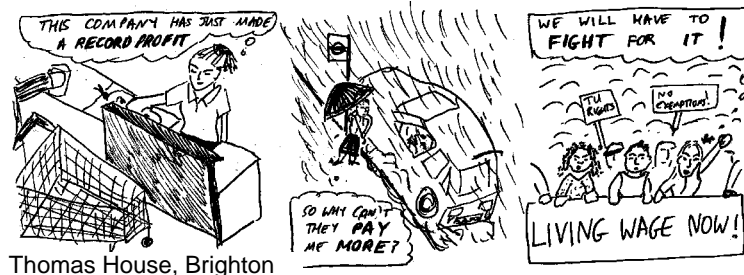


7 Fight for your rights at work

★ Fight for your rights

Not only are we told we have to accept low pay, we are also regularly denied our rights at work. All rights are better protected if you are in a trade union and better still in a workplace with a recognised trade union.

Here are just some of the rights you have:



Thomas House, Brighton

Trade unions:

- All workers, including agency, casual and part-time workers have the right to join a trade union, even if a trade union is not officially recognised in your workplace.
- You do not have to tell your employer that you or any other worker is thinking of joining or has joined a union.
- You have the right not to be discriminated against for being a member of a trade union, or for the reasons of sex, race or any disability.

Take a break

- Everyone is entitled to a 20-minute break, away from where you normally work, if your working day is more than six hours.
- If you are above school leaving age but under 18 you are entitled to a minimum rest break of half an hour if you work more than four and a half hours in a row.

NB: There are different regulations for different sections of workers, such as for the transport sector. Get advice if you think this may affect you or if you are not getting your breaks.

Health and Safety

- You have the right to work in a place which is safe, and you have the right to refuse to do something dangerous if you feel you are in 'imminent and serious danger.'

The minimum wage

- See beginning of pack with the current minimum wage rates.

Agency work

Your agency must give you 'written' terms just like any other employer, which tell you:

- How much and when you will be paid
- Your working hours
- Other terms and conditions such as maternity leave
- Pay on the agreed day even if the agency have not been paid

There are other rights you have, including what an agency must not do. This Information is from the TUC (Trade Union Congress) 'Respect at work' campaign, http://www.tuc.org.uk/tuc/rights_main.cfm and the UNISON 'Trouble at work' campaign, www.troubleatwork.org.uk. There are other rights you have, such as holiday pay which often depends on certain agreements in your workplace. Please make sure to always seek detailed advice before taking any action against your employer. If you are unsure of how to go about this you can also contact ISR for help and advice.

Many employers try to get away with not giving workers their rights. We can't rely on the employer or governments to implement them. The only way we can try to get them is that workers in every workplace fight together for the rights that do exist to be put into practice. Doing this as part of a trade union, which can offer advice and ensure everyone is organised together makes it much harder for employers to pick on individuals and means workers are organised together. We need to fight for more rights, such as better pay and more of a say in the shifts we work and how the workplace is run.

8 Fight for your rights at work

★ What is a trade union?

A trade union is an organisation formed by workers, for workers, to fight for our rights together. By yourself, the boss can ignore you, pick on you and fire you – and who will support you?

The idea of a trade union is 'strength in numbers'. A trade union unites all workers doing a certain job, or working at a certain place or in a particular industry. For example, many workers in the public sector are organised in UNISON.

Unions in Britain were originally formed by workers over 100 years ago when there was next to no protection or rights for workers. Workers were at the mercy of their employers whose main aim was (and still is) to squeeze as much profit as possible out of their employees, making them work as many hours as they could get away with.

Workers joined together to fight the employers. In many cases they refused to work until their demands for better pay or shorter working hours were met. Many of these strikes were illegal, but faced with empty factories producing nothing and cutting their profits, protests and demonstrations employers and the government were often forced to improve wages and conditions. These early unions succeeded in winning rights like:

- The right to strike
- The right to join a union
- A reduction in the working day

In the early days, unions were just in one workplace, or one area. This wasn't enough, so local unions came together to create national unions that would be stronger. With this development there were debates of how best the unions should be organised such as; who leads the union, and how? How are the leadership elected? How are the leadership accountable to the members? How do members decide what the union does? From the start, there was a struggle by union members to try to make sure that their unions were fighting and democratic, for example where the membership elect their leaders and holds them accountable, making sure the union fights for their members rights at all times. These debates and struggles are still going on today.

★ Why should you join a union?

- Average earnings in unionised workplaces are around 8% higher than in non-unionised workplaces.
- The average trade union member in the UK gets 29-paid days annual leave a year, compared to 23 days for non-unionised workplaces.
- Black and Asian trade unionists earn 32% more than their non-unionised colleagues.
- You're less likely to be injured at work as unionised workplaces have health and safety officers to make sure the employers are sticking to their legal obligations ¹⁶.

If you haven't yet had problems with your employer over pay, health and safety, breaks etc then it is probably only a matter of time before you do! So your best bet is to join a union. The employers are happiest when people are quiet and scared of raising issues. When workers are organised together this is much stronger than workers individually trying to fight – 'a fist is stronger than five fingers!' The union is your strength, but to get support from the unions you have to be a member.

We can't rely on the government or our employers to fight for our rights at work. We can't always rely on the trade unions, unless we are actively involved in them and fighting for better conditions in the workplace as well as for more democracy inside the unions.



9 Fight for your rights at work

★ How can I join?

You don't have to tell your employer you are joining a union. The way you join will depend on whether there is a recognised union in your workplace. If there is you should talk to your workplace union representative and get a membership form to fill out and they should help to sign you up. If you are not in a unionised workplace or not sure who your union representative is you need to work out which union you should join (see some in the list below), and/or look in the phone book, internet for contact details and ask for a membership form, or contact ISR for advice. Once you have applied to join, if after a few weeks you haven't heard anything, ring their head-office to speed your application up or contact ISR for advice. When you've joined you'll receive a membership card and information. All unions ask for membership fees. If you are part-time or a student you will pay less than a full-time worker. But by joining and paying your membership fees you'll be entitled to full rights in your union.

Below are just some of the unions there are to join. If there isn't one listed here which is relevant to you, or you're not sure which one you should join, please contact ISR for advice.

T&G: (Transport and General Workers): General union that organises many workers including some stores of Sainsburys, transport workers, office workers etc. 020 7611 2500 / www.tgwu.org.uk

USDAW: (Shop workers union): Organised in Tesco, some stores of Sainsburys and many other shops throughout the country. 0161 244 2804 / www.usdaw.org.uk

UNISON: (public-sector union): Council workers, privatised public services, and companies with public-sector contracts). 0845 355 0845 / www.unison.org.uk

PCS: Civil service workers, job centres, benefits agencies, etc. 020 7924 2727 / www.pcs.org.uk

GMB: General union organises many workers including public sector. 020 8947 3131 / www.gmb.org.uk

CWU: (Communication Workers Union), post offices, call centres, BT etc. 020 8971 7200 / www.cwu.org

RMT: National Union of Rail, Maritime and Transport Workers: 020 7387 4771 / www.rmt.org.uk

ASLEF: Train workers: 020 7317 8600 / www.aslef.org.uk

AUT: Association of University Teachers: 020 7670 9700 / www.aut.org.uk

NUJ: (National Union of Journalists). 020 7278 7916 / www.nuj.org.uk

FBU: Fire Brigades Union: 020 8641 1765 / www.fbu.org.uk

GPMU: (Graphical, paper and media union): 01234 351521 / www.gpmu.org.uk

UCATT: Construction workers. 020 7622 2442 / www.ucatt.org.uk

AMICUS: electricians, engineers, manufacturing, clerical workers in industry. 02078363070 / www.aeeu.org.uk

UNIFI: Finance, banks etc. 0208 946 9151 / www.unifi.org.uk

NUT: (National Union of Teachers). 0207 3886191 / www.teachers.org.uk

NATFHE: The University and College lecturers' union. 0207 837 3636 / www.natfhe.org.uk

TUC: The majority of the above unions are part of a trade union federation called the Trades Union Congress: www.tuc.org.uk



10 Fight for your rights at work

★ What if I'm the only union member in my workplace?

The first thing to do is to try to check out the workplace. What does it do? How many workers are there? What do they do? What are management like? For example you may work in a small café or pub run by one boss who owns it with only a handful of other workers. Or it might be a call centre with 100 or more workers, on different shifts, owned by a big company. Or it may be a job with an agency, in a public-sector workplace, with other agency workers and workers directly employed by the council or government with thousands of other workers in many different departments.

The key is to organise as many workers as possible into the union - and, if you haven't already got it, to demand union recognition from the management. This may take time and the main thing is at first, to only speak to people you can trust.

If you are worried about how to approach this contact your trade union and/or ISR for advice.

Try to find out about as many workers as possible without tipping off the boss. Draw up a list, and put workers into categories. There are usually four types. Those who want to join a union, those who want to be actively involved, those who are recruitable, and those who won't join a union and may be very hostile. The first thing to do is talk to the ones who want to join a union and build the union, fix up a time to meet (doesn't have to be in the workplace) and talk it over. You could invite a sympathetic trade unionist or organiser to come and speak. If you would like advice about how to invite contact your trade union and/or ISR. Get leaflets and other resources



from the union and ISR and talk individually to the workers you think are recruitable. When you've got a bit of interest, hold another meeting, discuss how to recruit others, what you want to fight for and how. There will be issues of workers doing different jobs, on different contracts and shifts, sometimes issues of different backgrounds, age, race, sex, etc. A trade union brings workers together on issues faced by all workers, as well as any discrimination or prejudice that can help divide workers.

★ What if there's already a union in my workplace?

Talk to the union shop steward. Explain you want to get involved in the union. Ask about what the union does, about meetings, the details of anything, which might be useful (campaigns etc). Some union shop stewards are more experienced or more enthusiastic than others. If your union rep doesn't seem to offer the help and advice you need, then talk to the workers and union members - the rep should be accountable to and elected by the members in the workplace. What are other workers and union members in the workplace concerned about? What do they want the union to do?

Every union has branch meetings, which cover different workers in each area. Sometimes this covers a lot of workers, hundreds or thousands working in local government, or a few dozen working in call centres. There will be a secretary (organiser) for the local union branch. You could contact your union branch secretary for branch meeting details where you and other workers could attend to put forward ideas on what you think needs doing, such as campaigns etc. If there are no meetings in your area and you would like to get some started so other workers in your area can get organised together, please contact your union and/or ISR for advice.

★ What is a strike?

As workers we sell our ability to work in return for wages. This work produces the wealth and profits of the world. A strike is when workers refuse to work for the boss and therefore stop making money for them as well! When workers in the public sector strike (such as local council workers, teachers, fire-fighters), this is a powerful tool which puts a lot of pressure on public sector employers trying to force through attacks such as cuts and low pay.

Workers don't take the decision to take strike action lightly. There are a number of reasons why workers are forced into taking strike action. For example, fighting for better pay and conditions against job losses, defending another worker who may be getting victimised.

There are different types of action such as:

- Stage a one-day strike.
- Work to rule eg: refusing to work overtime or at weekends or evenings.
- Repeated one-hour actions over several days or weeks.
- Withdraw co-operation with management on certain issues.
- Indefinite strike (going all out until demands are met).

The decision to take strike action is often the last resort for workers and often comes after workers and their unions have tried to negotiate a better deal with the employer. Workers don't get paid for going on strike, unless there is a union strike fund, which is offered differently and at different amounts depending on the union. But if the bosses won't listen to anything else strike action can be the only way to try to fight for better working conditions, against job losses etc.



National Union of Teachers strike 2002



It is important that all workers stick together during a strike and try and get as much support from other workers in your workplace as possible. If the strike is against job losses, but your job seems 'safe', how do you know you won't be next? If it's over getting better pay but you feel your pay is OK, how do you know your pay won't be cut next?

The employers will do everything in their power to try and break the strike to make it less effective. They know that if they are forced to pay more wages, back down on sacking workers, etc it will effect their profits and future plans for more cut backs. They try to divide workers by trying to get people to work during the strike and often try to use young agency workers to cover the work of the workers on strike. This is why it is vital all agency workers should join a union to make sure workers stick together.

★ What is a picket line?



Fire service workers strike, 2002

Picket lines are where workers who are on strike, such as the fire fighters in their dispute in 2002, stand outside their workplace to stop people going in. Also by all the strikers being together on a picket line means no one is alone or isolated during the strike. It also means there is the possibility of building support with other workers and the public.

Often, as with the fire-fighters strike, the government seeks to put obstacles in the way of workers trying to defend themselves. They saw the massive support the fire fighters received and realised that if they won many other workers would be inspired to take action too. ISR supported the call for other workers to take strike action as well as helping to build local solidarity support groups. The anti-union laws make it illegal for you to strike in support of other workers (secondary action); some workers refused to work on days the fire-fighters were striking, on the grounds of health

and safety. This was done by RMT (National Union of Rail, Maritime and Transport Workers) members who correctly saw it as a risk to their and the public's health and safety if there was a fire and no fire service to deal with it. More recently in 2004, unofficial strike action quickly spread among post office workers. Due to the large number of postal workers who took this action they were able to defy the anti-union laws.



Fire service workers strike, 2002

★ What are Employment tribunals?

These are often put forward as a way of getting justice for discrimination, unfair dismissal and other abuses of worker's rights. A worker is often represented by their union in an employment tribunal. While these can be useful, they are also difficult: often cases at employment tribunals take several years to be decided on and place an enormous strain on the worker involved. Where there is a strong trade union organisation, the aim should always be to sort out a problem before it gets to the stage of an employment tribunal.

13 Fight for your rights at work

★ The trade unions today

Unions in Britain today organise every kind of worker, in all sorts of jobs. There are about ten major trade unions in Britain; most are affiliated to the TUC (Trades Union Congress), which has an affiliated union membership of over 7 million workers. Millions of union members pay membership fees, which means the unions can afford resources such as magazines, newsletters, people who work for the union, offices and so on. However the real strength of every union is the potential power of its members and workers in general to organise and take action. No members = no union!

Fighting for the right to strike and organise.

Over the past 25 years the unions have suffered vicious attacks by parties which represent the interests of the bosses instead of the interests of working class people. The Tory government of Thatcher and then John Major passed a lot of laws making it harder for workers to organise and take strike action; and even took the unions to court threatening to freeze their funds if they continued to organise strike action. New Labour has kept most of these laws. They continue to refuse to sign up to European Union laws, which would give British workers more rights. New Labour are well and truly attached to the bosses and have proved this through their attacks on the fire-service strike and more recently against civil servants in the PCS union fighting for a living wage. Just as the early trade unionists had to fight for the right to organise, workers today need to step up the fight for our right to organise and strike when we decide we need to.

Campaigning for fighting, democratic union **S**

All unions want more members. Some unions have young members' sections. Young workers face some of the worst pay and conditions, and we have the most to gain from joining and building the unions.

All unions need a structure such as having paid officials, head-quarters, elected representatives etc, to make sure the unions are as efficient as possible. However, unless there are proper democratic structures, with an active membership prepared to campaign for the union to represent their interests then the structures of the union can often become out of touch with the real needs of their members. In many unions there is a conflict between the members and the union structures. This can be made worse if, for example, paid officials and union leaders are paid wages much higher than their ordinary members, or if the structures of the union makes it harder for members to vote leaders who represent their interests and to remove leaders who are not doing their jobs.

Jack Jones, an active trade union leader from the 1960s and 1970s, was recently quoted as saying; *"If we (the trade union movement) are to have a real revival, the major thing that is essential is an effective shop stewards movement. The trade union movement at base is not sufficiently strong and militant... get the unions back to the factories and rebuild the shop stewards movement."*¹⁷

We support all campaigns to ensure the unions are democratic, fighting unions, which make sure the leaders are accountable to their members, ensure members are fully involved and the unions fight properly for member's interests. There are an increasing number of trade union leaders and local shop stewards (workplace representatives) who are already campaigning for this and showing that it is possible to have democratic, fighting unions. ISR calls for all trade union officials to receive the average workers' wage.



14 Fight for your rights at work

Trade unions are an expression of the fact that the system is unjust and based on exploitation. By organising in a union, workers challenge the bosses' view of us as just a mere source of profit for them. The experience of low paid workers at Whipps Cross Hospital east London during their strike last summer, shows clearly that when you organise and fight you win.

These workers including cleaners and porters, mainly women and many from Africa overcame huge obstacles through a unionisation campaign that went on to win pay increases forcing the private contractor and trust to end the two tier workforce. (Inequality of treatment between workers doing the same jobs)

From 60 members at the start out of 360, union membership rose to just under 300. Their struggle forced up the hourly rate from £4.30 to a new minimum of £5.00 per hour plus lump sum payments, increases in holidays and unsocial hours payments. **Len Hockey – UNISON rep, Whipps Cross hospital, London.**

Unions fight about issues in the workplace, but struggles shouldn't end there. For the unions to really represent their members' interests, they need to take part in political campaigns such as against privatisation of services. But at the moment all the main political parties represent the bosses and therefore while the unions are campaigning for their members in the workplace, there is no political party which weakens the struggle in the workplaces.

★ The need for a political alternative to New Labour

As well as supporting anti-trade unions laws, New Labour have also sold off many of our public services to private profit making firms, made massive cut backs to schools, health care and local services. They have also introduced university tuition fees and are now planning to introduce top-up fees of up to £3,000 a year in 2006. They went to war on Afghanistan and spent £billions on the war in Iraq.

These are just some of the attacks and big business policies New Labour, often with the support of the Tories and Liberals, have carried out. Most trade unions remain affiliated and pay money to New Labour.

The unions and socialists set up the Labour Party as a political voice for working class people over a century ago. But as it clearly doesn't speak for us any more; many trade union members and activists think its ridiculous continuing to fund what is now a big business party. More workers are calling for the unions to break with New Labour. The RMT (Rail workers union) has voted to start supporting candidates in elections who will represent their members' interests better in Scotland. For this decision they have been expelled from the Labour Party which shows that New Labour doesn't support working class people fighting for an alternative to their big business policies.

We call for:

- **A fighting, democratic trade union movement, which represents all workers.**
- **Full-time officials should be regularly elected and receive the wage of an average worker**
- **Democratic fighting youth sections in all unions to help organise all young workers.**
- **No to the parties of big business - for a new political party which represents workers and young people.**



15 Fight for your rights at work

★ For a socialist alternative

Britain is the fourth richest country in the world. The gap between the rich and poor has never been greater. This is because we live under capitalism which always puts private profit before the needs of people. This system is run for greed, power and wealth by and for the few while the majority of people are forced to live in poverty.

If this system can't afford to pay us a living wages, provide us with a decent education, affordable homes or give young people a decent future we can't afford this system. We are fighting for a socialist society based on need and not profit which can abolish poverty pay and meet the needs of everyone.

★ Who are International Socialist Resistance?

International Socialist Resistance (ISR) is an international socialist youth organisation run by and for young people. As well as in England, Wales and Scotland, we have groups in Northern and Southern Ireland, Belgium, Germany, Sweden, France, South Africa, Kashmir, Brazil, Australia, USA and more. ISR is campaigning in Britain and internationally against employers that are exploiting young workers in sweatshops, paying poverty wages and providing unsafe working conditions. We initiated the idea of school and college strikes against the war on Iraq and helped to organise many of them. We also campaign against the destruction of the environment, the commercialisation and privatisation of our education, racism and on many other issues. If you would like to join or get more info on ISR and link up with other young people internationally please get in touch.



Day X (first day of war on Iraq),
2003 school strike in
Huddersfield

We demand:

- The immediate introduction of the current trade unions minimum wage demands (Such as UNISON's £6 an hour), as a step towards £8.00 an hour.
- An end to exemptions and lower rates of pay for young people.
- The right to quality training with a decent job at the end.
- No to racism, sexism, homophobia and other forms of prejudice in the workplace.
- Scrap tuition fees. For free quality education for all. For a living grant for all.
- No to employment agencies that cream off huge percentages of workers' wages.
- For the right of agency workers to have permanent contracts, living pay and safe working conditions.
- Scrap the New Deal for young people, job-seekers-allowance and welfare to work. For full benefits without compulsion.
- For the provision of free quality childcare.
- For a maximum 35-hour week for all workers without a loss of pay.
- For a fighting and democratic trade union movement which involves agency workers and to launch a campaign to recruit the hundreds of thousands of unorganised workers.
- For fighting and democratic youth sections in all unions run by and for young people.

Background information:

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8. UNISON and YMCA research, from UNISON website 2004.
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11. Social Trends, 2001, ONS.
12. Social Trends, 2001, ONS.
13. Observer study, Oct 2003
14. Tesco annual report and financial statement, 2003.
15. Guardian survey, 2003.
16. Figures from the UNISON website, 2004.



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