

Education Worker

Bulletin of the Education Workers Network - 2008 issue 2

Bullying - It's All the Rage

Bullying, whether in the school playground, at work or at home has become the new social malaise. Government departments, agencies, teachers and all kinds of specialists and advisors are now on hand to explain the causes of bullying and what to do about it. Here at EWN we are not decriing the fact that especially workplace bullying has at long last become an issue for the trade unions. Bullying, most often by management against workers, but sometimes from one worker towards another, has been going on for ages.

What all these specialists and the counsellors in trade unions usually refuse to acknowledge, however, are the social and economic causes of this practice. It doesn't just happen because someone is not a nice person. It happens because our workplace and our lives generally are shot through with hierarchies and systems which invite some to have power

over others. A culture of individualism, of climbing the ladder and a lack of workplace solidarity with your workmates all contribute heavily to a culture of bullying.

eliminating bullying

The UCU, for example, has recently had a day against bullying in order to highlight its consequences and what can be done about it. Fair enough, but for how long are we going to have to have managers themselves in our own trade union? The first step towards eliminating bullying is to get rid of the power structures that generate it. The UCU and most other unions probably won't be doing this. It's not even on their agenda. That's why when we rage about bullying we have got to seek out its causes and build horizontal, non-hierarchical organizations that combat it fiercely. The first step is to realise that workers have nothing in common with management. Managers should not be in the same unions as us. We can then start to tackle the issue from a basis of solidarity and mutual care of our workmates.

Management by Bullies at Leeds Met

In June 2007, the UCU at Leeds Metropolitan University released the results of a survey about the effect of management bullying on its members. Some of the figures are startling. For instance two thirds of those surveyed reported stress; while three fifths were affected by anxiety and loss of sleep. Besides these health effects, 96% of staff also felt intimidated into not criticising university policies. Leeds Met is but one example among many, both inside and outside of the education sector, of bullying as an everyday tool of management. More details at: www.ucu.org.uk/index.cfm?articleid=2621.

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by workers - for workers

Education Workers Network - Solidarity Federation - International Workers Association

HERA Lessons

HERA is turning into a shameful farce. Although it has been implemented according to agreed procedures at a handful of universities, EWN has heard many reports of the weird and wonderful ways it has been used by management to cut jobs, raise their own wages, and drive down staff pay. At many universities management have just made it up as they go along, adopting procedures to ensure they get the outcome they want.

sick joke

This is a far cry from the original aims of HERA – ‘equal pay for work of equal value’. Given the upset and anxiety the whole process has already caused to thousands of university workers, talk of greater equality is a sick joke. Instead HERA has been cynically used by management to increase inequality between low paid and high paid; between men and women. That so many universities have used HERA like this is surely no coincidence. Undoubtedly there’s been cooperation and sharing of experiences at national level between university managers.

It is a pity that the unions could not demonstrate the same level of organisation. Having first signed up to a set of HERA procedures which were full of holes, union officials have done nothing to coordinate a national campaign aimed at stopping management abusing the weaknesses of the agreement. This lack of fight by the union has only encouraged management to push the boundaries of exploitation ever further leading to the current mess.

We know of at least one strike against HERA’s implementation; no doubt there have been more. Such disputes could have been focal points for a national campaign to force management to actu-

ally deliver equal pay for work of equal value. As it is, union officials have done little more than make meaningless protests and threaten legal action, empty gestures which management treat with contempt. As a result HERA for the majority of staff has become a horrendous process which most simply want to get through with their existing job and rate of pay still intact.

We should all learn the lessons of HERA. There is plenty of staff anger and discontent at the way HERA has been implemented but without organisation such discontent rarely turns into action. Organising to turn discontent into positive action should have



been the role of the unions but they have been found to be sadly lacking. A reality check is needed, management are slowly leaving behind the traditional paternalistic approach to problems and becoming much more hard line. And the unions cannot come to terms with this new approach.

aggression

What is needed is the kind of workplace organisation capable of challenging management and matching their aggression with our own aggression. This will not come overnight but a starting point is for workplace activists, regardless of union, to come together and exchange ideas and experiences. A small start, but at least a beginning, and far better than pinning our hopes on ineffective union leaders, trapped into industrial relations procedures based on the notion that management care about staff. HERA has shown that the only concerns for the new face of university management are costs, self-promotion and the power to impose their will on staff. This is the new reality that university workers must face and overcome.

Second in our series exploring the basic anarcho-syndicalist politics of EWN.

What we think of... Managers Joining the Same Unions as Workers

The Education Workers Network is a network for education workers. It specifically excludes people with a power to hire and fire, that is the management. In today’s education sector management is frequently devolved to a very low level, often to people with not much more power than bringing in the bad news from more senior management. Where there used to be a manager for every 30 workers, there now seems to be one manager per 3-5 workers these days. This has prompted business unions like Unison and UCU to allow more and more managers to join.

The results of this policy are that sometimes union branches are led by people who are also in management positions in the workplace. This can give rise to situations in which workers may have disputes against a manager who is also a known activist in the union. In one institution where a few EWN members work, a former union president also happens to be a fairly senior manager and, with his management hat on, supported the outsourcing of a core part of the service, acting directly against workers’ interests.

EWN is aiming to create a network among ‘rank and file’ education workers, a network based on such ideas as self-management, self-activity and participation in a democratically run organisation. Having members of management in the network runs against this idea; it is divisive. Therefore no one who is in a position to hire and fire workers can join EWN.

Pensions Sell Out: no retirement before 65

The fight to protect the local government pension schemes (LGPS) to which many education workers belong was hailed as having “paid dividends” by the Spring 2007 issue of *U*, the Unison magazine. More than a million public sector workers came out on strike on “Red Tuesday” 28 March 2006 to defend the 85 Year Rule, which allowed LGPS members with 25 years of pension scheme membership to retire at 60 without any reduction in pension. Initially, Unison appeared strong on this, but ultimately agreed to a pensions deal which abolishes the 85 Year Rule after April 2020, effectively forcing the rest of us to work until we are at least 65.

Unison democracy

Unison members were urged to vote “yes” to the new LGPS scheme by their union, which announced a 97.1% vote in favour of acceptance. However, the consultative ballot saw only 166,283 (17%) out of around 1 million public sector members cast votes - and there is also strong emerging anecdotal evidence that many eligible Unison members didn't receive ballot papers at all.

But this is not surprising in a union where a tiny handful of un-mandated stewards constitutes a Regional HE Service Group which feels confident of expressing the supposed views of members, without bothering to meet or ballot them beforehand.

This endemic lack of involvement of the membership (internal democracy), combined with a parliamentary rather than industrial action focus of the pensions campaign, and of course the endorsement of the new package by Unison officials, effectively quashed the combative spirit shown by the strikers in March

2006, by the time of the ballot result of July this year.

class war

The union side also allowed its position to be undermined by inaccurate media coverage of allegedly over-generous public sector pension schemes, and the existence of new EU age discrimination legislation. The capitalist media reflects capitalist interests and is antagonistic to the unions and working class generally; we should not allow ourselves to be deflected from defending our own interests by the voice of capitalist self-interest. And any legislation which forces us to work until at least 65, and in the name of *preventing age discrimination*, is perverse and ridiculous, and should be made unworkable.

Pensions are deferred wages. A reduction in pension conditions such as the scrapping of the 85



Year Rule is equivalent to a wage cut. Despite making a show of opposition to government attacks, union bosses generally collaborate with the government to impose reforms (albeit with some minor changes, such as delaying the abolition of the 85 Year Rule from 2016 to 2020!). Because they affect us at the end of our working lives, attacks on our pensions are not merely attacks on workers, they are attacks on the working class. Instead of selling us holidays and insurance, a union worthy of the name would fight tooth and nail to resist any such attack.

Universities to Adopt Works Councils?

It would seem that an increasing number of universities are employing the union busting firm of lawyers, Pinsent Mason, to advise them on how to undermine campus unions. An article in the Pinsent Mason bulletin argues that university management are becoming increasingly fed up with the unions which they see as unrepresentative due to low union density or militancy. The article argues that universities should adopt works councils or staff forums in order to undermine the unions and demonstrate to them “that they were not the only show in town”.



Pinsent Masons

That some universities are looking to undermine the unions should come as no surprise. More worrying would be if management attempts to introduce works councils or staff forums ended up with the unions participating in them. Such bodies merely act as rubber stamps for management decisions and as such are no place for union members. The true way to fight works councils and staff forums is not by seeking to influence them through participation but instead to boycott them. Boycotting these management controlled bodies is the best way to isolate them and expose them for what they are, a means by which management impose their agenda on the workforce.

Resist Academy Schools

There is growing resistance to academies which has included direct action such as occupations. This is encouraging but some concerns must be borne in mind. Not least is that union leaders will accept academies in return for recognition and vague promises about nationally agreed terms and conditions.

Campaigns should involve parents as well as education workers and should be run democratically with decisions taken by mass meeting. Importantly, the aim should not be limited to protecting terms and conditions but should include total opposition to academies. Academies must be resisted because they will further debase an already appallingly class ridden and unequal system. Education is a means of liberation, of teaching children to

think for themselves, enabling them to develop to their full potential. Academies are the total negation of this, a means of handing over teaching to capitalists and religious zealots who will stunt children's individuality rather than develop it.

One great failing of the union movement is to limit itself to workplace militancy excluding wider social/political issues. In the fight against academies education workers can avoid this by involving parents and the wider community. In this way not only can they defeat Labour's attempts to privatise secondary education, but also begin to organise a movement capable of challenging an education system geared more to preserving the dominance of the ruling elite than to liberating our children's minds.

Education Workers Network

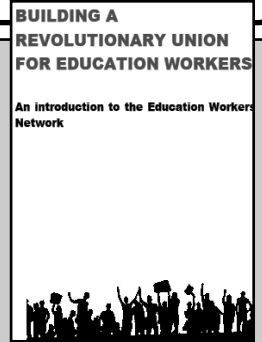
EWN is made up of Solidarity Federation members who work in the education sector.

Joining EWN also means joining your nearest SF local group (see below for contact details).

Even if you do not wish to join us, we welcome requests for bundles of *Education Worker* and/or to join our email discussion list (see below).

SelfEd Collective

'A History of Anarcho-syndicalism' is a series of 24 pamphlets covering the role of anarcho-syndicalists and anarcho-syndicalist organisations within the international workers' movement. All of them downloadable for free from www.selfed.org.uk.



EWN Introductory Pamphlet

Building a Revolutionary Union for Education Workers

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- I would like additional copies of *Education Worker* - please circle preferred amount: 5 copies; 10 copies; 20 copies; other (___ copies);
- I would like to join EWN (or contact your nearest SF group - see opposite)
- I would like a copy of *Catalyst*, the Solidarity Federation free sheet
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