

# Claimants' actively seek change at Dalston Job Centre. Report

ON MONDAY 1 September twenty LCAP members and claimants gathered at the Dalston Jobcentre Plus to raise our voices against the routine incompetence and obstructive behaviour of some of its staff; and the punitive policies in place that make life for claimants difficult and frustrating.

We felt action had to be taken in order to demand that people claiming benefits and using Jobcentre services are treated with respect and dignity.

There are myriad problems at the Jobcentre, and what we have found out is likely to be only the tip of the iceberg. We were told by one claimant that her *Income Support* claim was left untouched for four months, costing her and her son £900 in lost benefits. Another claimant was forced to attend the Jobcentre on five occasions before receiving an explanation for a sudden cut in her benefits. The delay in receiving the information caused her to miss an important deadline for appealing the decision.

As well as seeking to get particular claimants' issues resolved, we centred our protest around four main demands:

- That documents that are needed to assess benefits claims are photocopied by the Jobcentre themselves and for the claimant to be given a receipt.

- That claimants are able to freely use the telephones situated in the Jobcentre to call up the central benefits department in order to enquire about their benefits and to make job enquiries.

- That staff facilitate and be helpful to people with problems with their claim, especially in the circumstances where a

person is having problems communicating. And finally;

- For people to be treated with courtesy and respect at all times.

No other way

We entered the Jobcentre as a group and walked up to the reception desk. We were careful not to prevent anyone coming in to approach the reception and use Jobcentre services. Claimants attempted to explain in a very reasonable manner to reception staff why we were there and how the problems with the Jobcentre had become so severe and persistent that there was no other means of resolving the issues they had. While it was disappointing to find that most of the staff we encountered were rude and dismissive of our problems, and not willing to constructively deal with the issues we presented; it was encouraging to find one staff

member that expressed her agreement with our demands, even in front of her manager!

Whilst there we handed out leaflets and talked to other claimants about why we were taking action, and many claimants expressed their support and about how they had experienced the same problems.

Despite attempting to deal with the issues assertively but peacefully, the numerous security staff spent their time trying to intimidate us, attempting to prevent a photographer taking photos of our action, trying to stop us handing out leaflets outlining our grievances to other claimants, and instantly calling the police. Within ten minutes about five cops had arrived and we took the decision to leave the Jobcentre as a group, which we had decided together earlier. The heavy handedness of the police made matters worse as our dialogue with

staff was cut off, and the police seized the photographers' camera and searched him. We then had to negotiate via the police to get two claimants' meetings with the manager so they could present their problems in full.

One claimant, had a meeting with the manager the next day, and a member of LCAP attended the Jobcentre with her for support and to take notes. When they arrived at the Jobcentre for the appointment security staff and the manager were again rude and obstructive, and would not let the accompanying LCAP advocate in with the claimant to give her the support she needed. The LCAP member was even refused access to wait inside the building whilst the claimant had her meeting.

We are not going to let these issues lie, and we are planning our next steps to see that our demands are met and that dealings with the Jobcentre cease to be unbearable for many.



# against poverty

Irregular bulletin of the London Coalition Against Poverty

www.lcap.org.uk

Issue three ♦ Autumn 2008

## 'Estates Plus' what? Council land sell off mobilises residents into action

*Frampton Park estate dwellers fight council plans to sell off their only green space for development*

FRAMPTON PARK estate in Hackney Central is resisting the Council's attempts to sell land on the estate to a housing association to build on, taking away green space and making profit from overcrowding estates.

On 23 July estate residents demonstrated with supporters at the Town Hall and told Deputy Mayor, Jamie Carswell, where he could shove his *Estates 'Plus'* plans when he came out in an attempt to placate the residents. Two weeks later there was a well attended public meeting, which began with a councillor being thrown out and told he was not welcome to attend a tenants' meeting.

The proposed development will bring more people to live in an already densely populated area. While the Council says that the sale of land will pay for improvements, there is no guarantee that the money will be spent on the estate. While they say that the extra flats will ease overcrowding there is no guarantee that residents will be housed first.



Full-time Robbie Coltrane lookalike and part-time Deputy Mayor, Jamie Carswell (right), baracked by residents as he attempts to convince them they're getting a good deal

Why should Hackney tenants trust the Council if it gets what it wants and sells the land? Will they spend money fixing up homes and communal areas on the estate? Or, as in the past, will tenants be stuck waiting for basic repairs? Right now there is a long list, including:

- Broken steps leading up to Exbury House that have caused children to fall from buggies and get hurt and are difficult for old and disabled people to manage

- Persistent mould in some flats

- Malfunctioning security doors, lifts, windows and doors, broken windows, etc.

- Inadequate cleaning of estates because *Hackney Homes* is too tight to pay for more cleaners.

These basic repairs should be done without land being sold to pay for them. Tenants have a right to a decent standard of life, and should not be expected to finance their own repairs.

Recent improvements on council estates including Frampton Park have been paid for with money from mobile phone masts that Hackney Council have

ALSO IN THIS ISSUE:  
Special reports on the Justice for Tube cleaners campaign and Welfare Reform

allowed the phone company Orange to erect on top of blocks of flats. With the money from these mobile phone companies some residents have been given doors that open and lock (most of the time), new lifts, or improvements to estate grounds (better gardens, community halls and play spaces), but the masts may be causing irreparable damage to the people who live beneath them, especially children who will grow up with the masts on top of their house.

Hackney's strategies for improving estates do not include the radical notion of using the rent money paid to them by tenants to pay for maintenance and improvement: estates must pay for themselves with mobile phone masts and land sell offs. But where is the rent and council tax money going? While Frampton Park residents were protesting at the Town Hall at the end of July, the *Hackney Gazette* exposed that one senior council officer was paid £310,000 in 2007.

Like what you've read so far?  
Want to get involved?

**Time for action!**

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[londoncoalitionagainstopoverty@gmail.com](mailto:londoncoalitionagainstopoverty@gmail.com)

visit [www.lcap.org.uk](http://www.lcap.org.uk)

- ♦ Come along to a campaigns or general meetings on alternate Thursdays – All welcome
- ♦ Join the e-list for action callouts: [lcap\\_news-subscribe@lists.riseup.net](mailto:lcap_news-subscribe@lists.riseup.net)  
Give as little (or as much) time as you can manage – just tell us
- ♦ Start an action group against poverty in your area. *We might be able to help*
- ♦ Find out your rights... and tell others. *Get some LCAP information leaflets for your college or workplace*
- ♦ Give a donation – *help us to continue and extend our campaigns*

Name .....	.....
Address .....	Email .....
.....	Telephone .....
Postcode .....	Best time to call .....



## News and Campaigns

Last issue we reported on a campaign by residents of Alexandra Court hostel against the intolerable conditions they were expected to live in. We are now pleased to report on its remarkable success!

ALEXANDRA Court is run by Hackney Council and provides so-called "interim" accommodation to homeless people while they wait for the council to decide whether they have a duty to house them permanently.

The residents, mostly young families, are charged £350 per week to live in pokey rooms, often in a state of disrepair, in a run down block.



security guards, who were later replaced by a brand new gate. This has ended sex work and drug taking in the block, improving safety for the many children forced to live there.

The entire block was cleaned and repairs were hastily made to boilers and kitchen units. At least three families were rehoused in better

accommodation.

The front gate had long since broken and the lifts and communal areas were used for drug taking and sex work. Residents became used to stepping over condoms, needles and even human faeces.

Complaints to the managers were ignored and simple repairs were left undone for months at a time.

Fed up with this state of affairs, residents held a meeting in a nearby church hall and organised a protest march to the town hall which attracted around 100 people.

The council reacted immediately by providing

Residents, more used to dismissal, rudeness and outright contempt, have been surprised and delighted by the council's new attitude of abject grovelling fear.

Although there is still a lot to be changed, the early success of the campaign shows how powerful Hackney residents can be when they work together and how easily the council can be put on the back foot.

Anyone suffering from similar conditions in Hackney's hostels or estates is encouraged to contact LCAP for further information about what they can do to force change.



"Our kids need good homes". Dressed as mice and rats and carrying giant model syringes, hostel residents marched on the Town Hall to issue their demands (left)

### Migrant organisation at work

ON SATURDAY 12 July LCAP and the *Bolivia Solidarity Campaign* hosted a workshop on Organising at Work with a focus on migrant workers and 'illegal' workers.

About 10 people attended mainly from the aforementioned latino groups. Following from initial introductions from Tom (Communications Workers Union & LCAP) and Neil (Solidarity Federation) on organising methods, a lively discussion was held about organising latino workers; positive experiences we

have had or seen; and what tactics are appropriate and when.

This workshop partly came out of the desire expressed by some people at the conference against the TU and Community Conference Against Immigration Controls to move on to more practical activities regarding immigration controls and migrant worker issues. It is hoped that future meetings will determine how LCAP can usefully organise in this area with other groups already active.

### LCAP have an office. Help needed!

LCAP now have an office space at *Freedom Books* in Whitechapel, which we are hoping to open by the beginning of October. But to make it work, we need to have people to staff it!

A good start would be to have it open for a few hours three days a week, with two LCAP volunteers on each shift.

Initially, this is likely to be to give support to people doing LCAP Direct Action Casework, take calls and to

do casework allocations - the tasks of the newly formed casework collective.

Get in touch if you are interested in joining the casework collective - it doesn't matter if you haven't had experience of casework as you can be paired with someone more experienced. If you are interested in staffing the office but not in the casework collective get in touch too.

[londoncoalitionagainstpoverty@gmail.com](mailto:londoncoalitionagainstpoverty@gmail.com)

## News and Campaigns

# Southall Black Sisters saved. For now...

Southall Black Sisters has been at the forefront of challenging violence against women for nearly 30 years. It has a proud tradition of organising assertive, collective action and solidarity, in their own words to "empower [women] to gain more control over their lives; live without fear of violence; and assert their human rights to justice, equality and freedom." Earlier this year they were faced with closure but challenged the Council in the courts. They won.

Now a not-for-profit organisation based in west London, supported in large part by Ealing Council, Southall Black Sisters (SBS) faced the very real threat of closure earlier this year when the Council withdrew its funding. The Council argued that there was no need for specialist services for black and minority ethnic women and that services to abused women in the borough needed to be 'streamlined.'

SBS responded that this view failed "to take account of the unequal social, economic and cultural context which makes it difficult, if not impossible, for black and minority women to access outside help or seek information about their rights"

The case went to the High Court in July and in a dramatic turn of events, Ealing Council withdrew their case after one and a half days of a hearing which saw their defence rapidly unravelling.

From the outset, it became apparent to the presiding judge, Lord Justice Moses and to all those present in the courtroom including the packed public gallery, that Ealing Council was skating on really thin ice in attempting to justify its decision to

cut funding to SBS and to commission instead one generic borough wide service on domestic violence on the grounds of 'equality' and 'cohesion'.

Amongst other things, Ealing Council was charged with the failure to:

- Have proper regard to the race equality legislation and other equalities duties or its own policies when it made its decision to end funding to SBS. It failed to carry out a full and proper equality impact assessment and when it did, it was only to justify its decision;

- Interpret correctly the race equality legislation by deciding that our very name and constitution (to meet the needs of Asian and African-Caribbean women) was in breach of the Race Relations Act because it 'excluded' white women;
- Interpret correctly the cohesion agenda by assuming that it was contrary to the race equality legislation.

As the two days wore on, Ealing Council found it difficult to maintain its defence in the light of extensive evidence which showed that it had committed a series of fundamental errors and was in fact close to being regarded as having



Southall Black Sisters and supporters at the High Court in July

conducted the matter in 'bad faith' – a very serious allegation.

The Council had misinterpreted statistics which showed that black and minority women have rates of reporting domestic violence in Ealing that are disproportionate to their size of population and a crucial letter from the author of a report on gaps in domestic violence services in Ealing was not taken into account by the Council when deciding to provide a generic service, leading her to make a formal complaint.

The Council eventually decided to withdraw its case thereby denying SBS the opportunity of having a full judgement setting out the facts of the case and the litany of failures on the part of the Council – which would have been devastating for the Council and in particular for its leader. But we were able to secure a shorter judgement (pending) – which will take the form of guidance to Ealing and hopefully to all other local authorities so that in future they comply properly with the racial and

other equalities legislation.

This result of all this is that Ealing Council must now go back to the drawing board and although the outcome could be the same again, hopefully, our victory will make it more difficult for it to ignore the guidance and therefore SBS. The Council has agreed to continue to fund SBS at the previous level until it completes the process of commissioning based on any new decision on domestic violence services.

While it would be a complete travesty if Southall Black Sisters were forced to close due to what amounts to a political decision taken by the Council, it demonstrates all too clearly the dangers inherent in a once radical community organisation finding itself seduced into being largely funded and resourced by the local authority, only to find itself then at the mercy of that very same local government funding in order for its continued survival.

For more information on the Southall Black Sisters and their history of campaigning visit: [www.southallblacksisters.org.uk](http://www.southallblacksisters.org.uk)



## ISS hits migrant tube strikers; protesters hit ISS

Thirty protesters turned up at the Greenwich offices of multinational cleaning company ISS on 13 August to protest against the letter sent out by the company to dozens of tube cleaners requesting they come in for a 'document check' that day.

It is clear to the cleaners' union RMT that this is part of the reprisals against the tube cleaners for the 3-day strike in support of the

London Living Wage which they held in late July. Activists and reps among the cleaners have been targeted, with a view to break union organisation.

A lively picket of the office at 15 Park Vista was held with people from a variety of groups and unions brought together under the the banner of the *Campaign against Immigration Controls*. At the same time a number of supporters entered the foyer

of the premises in case the ISS managers were unable to hear the message properly.

However the managers lost their cool and called the police, while refusing to allow in union reps, who had arrived separately. They argued that the picket was upsetting the neighbourhood peace and quiet, while demonstrators argued back that the detentions and deportations

and union busting their paper checks cause is a bit more upsetting. One protester was arrested and is currently out on bail.

Undeterred, the cleaners vowed to go back out on a 48 hour stoppage, due the following week; however this proved unnecessary as the bosses conceded defeat and granted them the pay rise they had been fighting for (see main report).

## News and Campaigns

### LCAP to hold 'crap' walking tour. All Welcome

JULES PIPE (Mayor of Hackney) said that if you opposed developments like the Dalston Square then you were part of a 'keep hackney crap mentality'. But Hackney isn't crap. Not even close. It doesn't need property speculators to 'make it a nice place'. Don't take our word for it - come and see for yourself.

On Sunday 28 September we will host a walking tour of Gentrification in Dalston and Hackney central, culminating in a picnic in London Fields.

While Hackney Council celebrate the Olympics with the 'Carnival of the Cultural Olympiad' we will have a look at the gentrification of Hackney

that the Olympics will cause. From Dalston Lane to Broadway market we will take people on a guided tour of dispossession and hear from shopkeepers, residents and the homeless who are fighting to keep their area a place they can live and work in and struggling to survive in this

Olympic borough.

So on Saturday 28 September meet at 1pm at the Dalston Peace Mural on Dalston Lane, (just after corner with Kingsland rd, near Dalston Kingsland Station).

If you would like to get involved, or know more please contact: londoncoalitionagainstopoverty@gmail.com or call 07932 241737

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--- WHEN: 1PM // WHERE: DALSTON PEACE MURAL, DALSTON LANE // CONTACT: 07932 241737 ---

Flyer for tour



The government has stated that it aims to reduce those claiming Incapacity Benefit by one million over the next 10 years and increase the number of people with disabilities in employment. The impact will be to hit those worse off financially and physically even harder; in order to drive down overall spending on the benefits system. A member of the *Edinburgh Coalition Against Poverty* looks at the latest attack in the form of the Welfare Reform Act.

AS OF FEBRUARY 2008, there were 2,389,720 people claiming Incapacity Benefit in Britain. At December 2007 the employment rate of people with disabilities was 49.9%, compared to 74.4% for the overall population.

The *Welfare Reform Act* was given Royal Ascent in May 2007. A major component of the *Welfare Reform Act* is the replacement of *Incapacity Benefit* and *Income Support* based on the grounds of incapacity with a new benefit called *Employment Support Allowance* (ESA), which will apply to all new and repeat claimants from October 2008. The number of people claiming *Incapacity Benefit* rose steeply during the Tory government years as a deliberate political measure to keep the figures claiming unemployment benefit low.

The government has announced that from October all new and repeat claimants will undergo the *Work Capability Assessment* (WCA), a new medical test designed to look at what people can do rather than what they can't. Depending on the result of this medical test, claimants will fall into one of two categories:

**The 'Work-related activity group'**  
Those claimants who pass the WCA assessment and are identified as capable of taking part in some form of

work-related activity will be entitled to claim ESA at a rate of £84.50 a week. They will be required to attend work-focused interviews through the *Pathways to Work* scheme, to help them overcome their barriers to work and support them into long-term sustainable employment. Those who don't fulfil these conditions without a good reason could have their ESA cut.

**The 'Support group'**  
Those claimants who are identified as not able to take part in any work-related activity will not be expected to take part in work-focused activities unless they want to, but will not face any sanctions. Everyone in this category will receive a minimum of £89.50 a week.

All people claiming ESA may also continue to be eligible for other benefits, such as *Disability Living Allowance*, *Housing and Council Tax Benefit*. Those who do not qualify for ESA can apply for *Jobseeker's Allowance* (JSA) and will be expected to take part in the work-focused interviews and programmes to help them get back to work.

The *Pathways to Work* scheme was introduced as a pilot in 3 Jobcentre Plus districts in October 2003 and four further districts in April 2004, before going nationwide in April 2008. The scheme requires most new claimants to attend a series of *Work Focused Interviews* (WFIs).

Failure to comply can result in benefit sanctions. *Pathways to Work* contracts are awarded at an individual Jobcentre Plus district level. The significant majority of these contracts have been awarded to private sector companies - this continues the neo-liberal agenda of privatisation into the welfare to work field.

The Disability Alliance has raised a number of concerns over the assessment in relation to whether a claimant can work or not; particularly around the time constraints given to medical practitioners in assessing claimants to make an accurate assessment of the different descriptors which make up the assessment. Furthermore, the Disability Alliance has expressed concern over the lack of consistency in the language used in the descriptors.

There are real issues in attempting to assess whether a person is able to work or not. A person may have a fluctuating condition; there may be issues in getting to a workplace. Different work situations require different capabilities. A more appropriate focus would be whether a person would like to work and why work appears to be an unattractive option for a significant number of people in our society.

Research commissioned by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), illustrated that reducing benefit levels by sanctions

had a detrimental impact in terms of paying for necessities and added to relationship difficulties. Sanctions particularly hit the more socially deprived harder.

The *Welfare Reform Act* is designed to push people with disabilities into the labour market, whilst handing over large amounts of public money to large private sector companies. The government has of course, far less to say about employers who discriminate against people with disabilities.

There doesn't yet appear to be any co-ordinated campaign against these changes at a nationwide level. However a group have set up a *Welfare Reform website* at [www.welfare-reform.org.uk](http://www.welfare-reform.org.uk) to campaign against these changes. In addition there are small groups around the country who have campaigned against these welfare reform changes.

Ultimately, there is need for welfare reform. However, not a cruel welfare reform programme which potentially leaves disadvantaged people worse off, whilst making huge profits for private sector companies at the expense of the public purse.



## Focus on... the london underground cleaners



Justice for Cleaners at a previous picket

*Cleaners in London have been getting organised for the last 3 years and getting significant improvements in pay and conditions as a result. Among them are the hundreds of cleaners on the Tube. But the bosses are responding, using the threat of immigration checks on their staff as one of a number of tactics to deter further action. Could it be that they fear these successes will inspire and inform the actions of other tube workers? LCAP joined some of the cleaners and activists recently who are fighting back. Here's our report...*



**IN THE END** the strike by the 700 cleaners on the London Underground due towards the end of August was not necessary.

The bosses caved in and cleaners' demands for the London Living Wage of £7.45 per hour (an increase of £2 per hour!) was accepted. But rather than being an end to the matter the struggle being fought out is very far from over: demands for sick pay; holiday pay; an end to third party sackings; free travel and other demands have yet to be met. And while the headlines mentioned that the majority of cleaners would be getting their wage demand in full, cleaners working for *Tubelines* will only receive a measly 60p per hour increase.

In addition there is a constant and ongoing series of attacks from the four companies employing the bulk of the cleaners (ISS, ITS, ICS and GBM) as well as *London Underground* itself. In particular there has been a worrying escalation use of immigration controls to threaten and to remove workers from the scene.

One day after the cancellation of the strike friends of some workers in the company Initial reported to the union that paper checks are happening, beginning with the "Mobile Cleaning Team" group of workers who do the deep cleaning of stations in the middle of the night.

At the same time, there is increasingly a sense that tube cleaners in the RMT are

forcing retreats and making ground. These companies, who profit from trying to impose non-stop, intensifying exploitation on hundreds of thousands of cleaners throughout the world, are facing new levels of fight back in London.

Over the last months, more and more workers have entered into the struggle actively, and all the grades of workers in the RMT union have, to some degree, found ways of aligning their struggles, coordinating action, and proving some of the potential strengths of industrial unionism.

Other cleaners have advanced their own disputes: *Eurostar* cleaners voted unanimously on a 100% turnout and took action on the August Bank Holiday Monday in possibly an unprecedented ballot result. Low-paid workers who put up the posters on the Underground have just won a pay rise through strike action.

Cleaners have been joined in their struggle by a broad range of activists under the *Justice for Tube Cleaners* banner - *Feminist Fightback*, keen to highlight the way in which sexist and racist oppression

are at play in the exploitation which low-paid workers face, co-ordinated actions at the *London Underground* head office, littering tube stations during strikes, and disrupting Boris Johnson's Mayoral Question Time in City Hall. A meeting called by Brent Trades Council went on to use direct action to ensure that a cleaner facing a disciplinary was able to have union representation with him.

One direct action tried to occupy the offices of cleaning contractor ISS on the day they had told their cleaners to present their

National Insurance numbers, a clear attempt to intimidate the workforce which was preparing for a strike (see report overleaf).

This fight has been led and will be won mainly through the actions of cleaners themselves. But for the over-

whelmingly young solidarity activists who have got involved so far, this struggle represents some real hope for change in general, and has been an opportunity to advance the collective struggle for freedom, justice and equality, alongside a group of workers with vast experience who have shared this through inspiring analysis in speeches and exemplary bravery in action.

### Activists picket cleaning company GBM in protest at deportation of tube cleaners

OVER 30 ACTIVISTS chanting "*GBM, hear us say! No deporting from today!*" protested outside the offices of GBM cleaning company in London Bridge 21 August. GBM have been implicated in the deportation of two of the tube cleaners who have been involved in the recent campaign of strike action for a living wage.

Three cleaners employed by GBM were met by immigration officers when they turned up for work last month. Two have already been deported back to Nigeria and the Congo, another is in detention awaiting deportation to Sierra Leone

A delegation occupied the offices, demanding to speak to the managers. GBM insisted that they were only cooperating with the Home Office who had contacted them. But questions have to be asked such as why this happened leading up to the planned strike action against companies like GBM. Activists also demanded why GBM has refused to meet with RMT reps to discuss their dispute.

As one of the strikers put it at a recent meeting: "We clean the capital, we are treated like rubbish ourselves, we demand that every cleaner on the tube get papers so that we can end the abuse of these companies. They are all corrupt.. they have the money, they could afford to treat us with dignity and respect...".

You could see from their faces that these managers aren't used to having to explain themselves and justify their outrageous treatment of the cleaners they employ. Well now their shady operations are out in the open and we intend to keep the pressure up. We ended our picket shouting: "Its a fact, we'll be back!".

### Bakerloo line blocked in action to demand the reinstatement of sacked union rep at Stonebridge Park

LATER, IN THE evening, another group of activists met to protest the sacking of one of the RMT reps at Stonebridge Park depot. With impressive solidarity from RMT members in the area we made a plan to stop the Bakerloo line temporarily to demand our brother's reinstatement and to shame ISS for their conduct, which has also involved suspending activists without pay and threatening hundreds with letters about their immigration status. We boarded the train that was due to terminate at Stonebridge before going to be cleaned overnight.

The cleaners at Stonebridge have been one of the strongest groups in the strike so far, with well-attended upbeat pickets and a history of fighting some of the most brutal employment practices and conditions on the underground, through unofficial walk-outs that have previously caused management to back-down. Now, despite their rep continuing to organise and encourage workers, they feel prey to an increased rate of victimisation and harassment; practices that the union has prevented management introducing so far, may come in with force. Meanwhile, the rep, a man of rare selflessness, dignity and fight has been without pay since early July and black-listed among the cleaning

companies.

A public meeting of the Brent Trades Council a few weeks ago heard of the noxious cocktail of chemicals that cleaners are forced to use in deep-cleaning work which, before privatisation, was only given to well-paid and highly trained engineering workers. Management are trying to increase from four hours to seven hours an unbearable stint under a train, wearing a gas mask, which already debilitates cleaners forcing them to stay-off work sick and unpaid.

ISS managers think they are working with slaves or beasts of burden. They have been shown time and again by the workers that this will not be tolerated, but immigration controls have given them a new and lethal weapon to attack this group of organised workers.

Our aim in stopping the Bakerloo line was also to highlight these practices and to help force an end to them. We spoke through a megaphone as the train pulled up to the platform at Stonebridge. Passengers were mostly receptive, encouraging - and above all listening. It must be remembered that as the Bakerloo line proceeds westbound from Maida Vale to Wembley Central, the life expectancy of residents

plummets by over 20 years. Stonebridge is a working class area, where most people understand poverty and would be inspired by attempts to fight the companies, the government and the police who make daily life a struggle. Indeed the local MP failed to turn out to the Brent Trades Council meeting, because she couldn't be in the room with "illegal workers". Such an erstwhile Black trade unionist has no place representing people in Brent, the most diverse borough in London, where new generations of migrants have fought year after year in unity with previous generations of migrants.

While activists spoke to passengers along the platform, one man dominated the scene, talking about his personal suffering as a self-employed manual worker and his inability to cope under the strain of the current economic hardship. The train driver was the only really hostile presence, fifteen minutes of his well-paid time being the only thing on his mind; he tore up the leaflet and made clear he couldn't give a damn.

Everyone else accepted leaflets, read them and one passenger came up to shake our hands and express that it was important that we were doing what we were doing. This was the overwhelming sentiment, where people understood that the only proportionate response to the casual upending of workers' lives is to hit these inhuman companies and their ability to

function as normal. While making it clear to passengers that we weren't wanting to hold them up, we did want the message to go to the line operator that the stoppage was due to ISS.

We left as the British Transport Police were called, according to our plan, but two activists were unaccounted for. In the delay the BTP arrived as we were rounding the corner and one further activist stopped when the police called, meaning the rest felt compelled to hang back in solidarity. Under the threat of arrest, names and addresses were given and the BTP may choose to issue a caution for breaking rail bye-laws in obstructing the rail and for disorderly conduct. Whether the BTP choose to proceed will be a political decision to go on the offensive or to avoid the publicity of dragging activists through the courts, with the Drax protesters' case just having been referred to the CPS.

Activists met with the sacked rep at the Stonebridge Hotel later, where workers already knew from the publicity of the Brent Trades Council meeting what the issue was. Some stayed late into the night at the invitation of the pub workers to discuss the potential ways of dealing with this victimisation, through individual options to collective political action on immigration.