



WELCOME to the latest edition of *Bits* & PCS. Views herein aren't necessarily those of PCS or the Branch Executive Committee.

INSIDE:

International Women's Day - *page 2*
Where next for the trade union movement? - *centre pages*

E-ACTION

Ask your MPs to support PCS campaigns. Find and contact your MP at writetothem.com

MEET THE BOTTOM 10%



Laughing at us: Francis Maude, the "minister for mayhem" couldn't be clearer in his contempt for civil servants

By Phil Dickens

SENIOR MANAGEMENT IN HMRC have imposed a target that 10% of staff across the department must get a "need improvement" marking on their PDE evaluation. This ties in with government proclamations that the "bottom 10%" of civil servants deserve the sack.

The decision was imposed without union consultation. No trade unionist in their right mind would agree to such a transparent attempt to attack and divide the workforce.

Currently, around 1.4% of staff are marked as needing improvement. "Needs improvement" means no pay rise, which is bad enough even before you consider how few and how stingy pay rises actually are of late. HMRC's own figures show that those on the receiving end of this policy as it stands are disproportionately women, young workers, ethnic minorities, disabled people and lower grades. Already

then, we're talking about a bad policy. Now stretch that figure from 1.4% to 10% - the 10% that the government have openly declared their desire to sack. How much worse does it get? The answer is very.

We already know managers face pressure from above so that "too many" staff don't get top markings - how much of a stretch is it to see similar pressure to make sure "too few" aren't judged as failing? It's not only your performance, but your prospects of a pay rise (however meagre) that become subject to the whim of arbitrary targets now.

This policy not only puts management in an impossible position, and pits workers against one another to avoid being part of that bottom 10%, it comes as trade union facility time is under attack - the very time we use to challenge policies like this.

These performance management targets are just the first changes to

come from Civil Service Employee Policy. CSEP is the Cabinet Office driven process for revising terms and conditions announced as part of the Civil Service Reform Plan. There is more (and perhaps even worse) to come.

The union has already strongly stated its opposition to this policy. **We ask that all members get involved. Discuss it with your colleagues in the workplace and raise objections to it at every opportunity, including team meetings and discussion forums.** This in itself won't stop the policy, but it will give management a sense of how much we disagree with this outrageous attack.

Any of us could find ourselves part of the bottom 10%, but none of us should. Unity is strength, and the higher ups have made it clear that it's all of us - against them.

NB: We will discuss this issue at our AGM - make sure you're there!

INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY AND WOMEN'S HISTORY MONTH

By Helen Sheridan

THE FIRST EVER Women's Day was held on 28th February 1909 in several parts of the United States. Women's Rights were a hot topic at the time with the Suffrage Movement that was ongoing. That sparked an upswing in the number of books and papers being published about the contributions women had made to history.

In 1910, the International Socialist Congress in Copenhagen voted to establish an international women's day in honour of the movement for women's rights and to assist the struggle for universal women's suffrage. The date was then changed in 1911 to 8th March to commemorate the protest by Prussian women against food shortages and war, and the date was when the King of Prussia had promised women's suffrage – in 1848! Needless to say he found compelling reasons not to keep his promise...

International Women's Day was first celebrated in the UK on 8th March 1927. Initially there was great support for the event, with millions world wide in dozens of countries joining in the day. However, political turmoil, war and economic depression caused women's rights to fall out of fashion.

By the late 1950s though, things were starting to turn around and in the 1960s interest in women's issues and women's rights blossomed. By the 1970s it became apparent to many women's rights activists, and academics in general, that history as taught in schools was overwhelmingly about men. This prompted many universities to start running courses in women's history and women's rights in general. In 1975 the United Nations officially designated 8th March to be International Women's Day and held the first World Conference on Women in Mexico City. This led to the years between 1976 and 1985 being



The start of last year's IWD March in Liverpool

declared the UN Decade for Women.

In 2007, the Merseyside Women's Movement was formed to promote gender equality and women's politics in the Merseyside area and began to actively promote and co-ordinate International Women's Day, organising events in and around the Merseyside area, including an event on the closest Saturday to the 8th in the city centre which includes a march through the city centre followed by a public meeting with a variety of speakers and performers and activities for the children.

Today, IWD is observed around the world every year during March in dozens of different countries, some countries even treat it as a public holiday!

It gives us a chance to celebrate our successes of the past, and to inspire us to continue the struggle for full equality for all women. This year around the world there will be thousands of people taking part in events large and small. In Liverpool there are a number of events being held including an exhibition of work by Clare Campbell in Baltic Creative, Jamaica Street and the annual parade through the city centre.

More details of the events in Liverpool will be available closer to the time from the Branch Women's Advisory Committee.

Footage from last year's parade is available here:

<http://goo.gl/cFKIQ>

(the eagle eyed amongst you may even spot one or two of your reps in the clip!)

Remember the dignity of your womanhood. Do not appeal, do not beg, do not grovel. Take courage, join hands, stand beside us, fight with us.

- Christabel Pankhurst

The theme of this year's IWD is "A promise is a promise: Time for action to end violence against women."

The purpose of the theme is to promote ongoing efforts at the national level and globally to end violence against women, share experiences and innovations in delivering on commitments to women and girls, and support efforts and strategies, particularly at the national level to increase investments focused on gender equality and women's empowerment.

WORKING OVERTIME?

By Phil Dickens & Nikki Burns

THE DELAYED START to overtime at the beginning of January and the new restriction on when it can be worked both speak to an enormous take up. Management have confirmed that far more people are doing it than they expected.

This offers us the first truly clear impression of how well supported the overtime ban was when it was on. Every member who refused overtime during the successive disputes in which the ban was enforced deserve thanks and praise. Those who ignored the ban were in an extreme minority.

Overtime is still a big issue in the PCS Tax Justice For All campaign. Instead of having to work extra hours, we should be getting decent pay rises for the job we do. If there's work to do and money to do it, why not make FTA staff, extensions of hours and temporary promotions permanent?

Overtime won't always be there, but we will. As will our need to pay the bills, buy food and generally live. With no ban on, it may be a useful way to supplement an income which is fast falling behind the cost of living.

But at what cost? Overtime is tiring. It reduces your ability to enjoy a Work/Life Balance. It affects your health. Further strain to joints can lead to RSI, tiredness can affect your immune system, juggling to manage family commitments around long working hours can lead to stress. If you are unfortunate enough to fall victim to any of these things, you'll get little compassion from a "Well-being" Team eager to meet HMRC targets on sickness absence.

If and when we do ask staff to refuse overtime again, it's worth remembering just how effective a ban can be, and stand together so we can win an actual, decent living that (unlike overtime) won't disappear when HMRC isn't rushing to meet deadlines.

TRADE UNION HISTORY: THE SHREWSBURY 24



By Sarah Broad

MOST OF YOU will know Ricky Tomlinson from the TV but before he was a star he was a plasterer by trade and a prominent trade unionist.

In 1972 there was a national building strike, the first of its kind. Ricky joined the flying pickets who went round different building sites around Shrewsbury supporting the picket lines. He and 23 others were prosecuted because of this, he even spent 16 months in prison for his role as a flying picket.

Their only crime was just to seek better pay and safer conditions for their fellow workers. Many people believe their treatment and prosecution was grossly unfair and are campaigning for their prosecution to be overturned.

In addition the government are keeping the documents relating to the arrest, prosecution and imprisonment of these workers a secret as, apparently, releasing them would be a threat to national security. As Frances O'Grady says: "So Ricky Tomlinson, one of Britain's best known and best loved actors, in his spare time is public enemy number one? Frankly if Ricky is a threat then every decent working man and woman in this country is a threat too."

There is a petition to get the files disclosed, before it is too late for all of the '24'. Please sign it if you believe in the truth.

<http://epetitions.direct.gov.uk/petitions/35394>

NEWS IN BRIEF

Bootle Town Committee launched

Recently, reps from Bootle Taxes Branch convened a meeting with reps from other PCS offices in Bootle in order to launch the town committee.

The Bootle Town Committee is a platform for PCS branches and offices in the Bootle area to coordinate activity and offer each other support. The first meeting took place on the evening of 30 Jan and a regular schedule for subsequent meetings will soon be available.

Contact Margi Henderson for more information or to get involved.

Long Service Award

The National Executive Committee has decided to introduce a special award for members in recognition of their length of service as a union member, in the form of a PCS gold badge.

To qualify, individuals must have been in membership of PCS or its predecessor unions for 25 years. The period of membership takes into account periods of maternity leave and career breaks, whether paid or unpaid. Contact a rep for more information.

Jobs saved for low-paid jobcentre and benefits workers

The threat of compulsory redundancy for 43 low-paid jobcentre and benefits staff has been lifted after PCS members in DWP had voted for industrial action, prompting the DWP to withdraw the compulsory redundancy notices. All 43, who are admin grade staff in various locations and types of work, have been offered alternative work for at least a year.

ICE (In Case of Emergency)

No one likes to think about what would happen if you were taken ill or involved in an accident but taking a few simple steps now may mean that the emergency services can contact your next of kin. All you need to do is save the number of the person(s) who should be contacted under **ICE1, ICE2** etc in your mobile phone.

WHERE TO NEXT FOR THE

AGM & CONFERENCE

The cornerstone of democracy within PCS is our Annual Delegate Conference. There, delegates from every branch across the country vote on motions put forward by members in order to decide union policy for the coming year.

The first step in this process is the Annual General Meeting, where members can ask their branch to endorse motions on all aspects of union activity - from pay and terms and conditions, to health and safety, to political campaigning. If you've ever thought "why isn't the union doing this" then putting a motion to the AGM is your best bet to change that and influence union policy. Ask one of your reps for advice if you're unsure of how to write a motion.

This truly is the most member-led aspect of PCS, and all members are encouraged to take part in the AGM and the later mandating meeting. **Our branch AGM is in Ash Street Church on 28 February, where PCS General Secretary Mark Serwotka is one of the guest speakers.**



GEC & NEC ELECTIONS

Ahead of conference, members will also get the chance to vote for members of the Group and National Executive Committees.

Who runs the union within HMRC? Who runs the union overall at a national level? Well, that's entirely up to you. More information on these important elections will come from the branch closer to the time.



SOCIAL PARTNERSHIP...

By Tony Robertson

RECESSIONS ALWAYS LEAVE the economy in a different, sometimes very different place than before the financial crisis hit. Trade unions are as much a part of the economy as the City of London as it is our members who create the wealth we all depend on in our capitalist economy.

Traditionally, British Trade Unions have been all about the struggle between wealth and capital on one side and those who are being employed or indeed exploited on the other. But the world is moving on and so must the focus of trade unions if they are to be relevant in the coming decades.

Mass membership of trade unions via heavy industry such as coal, steel and the railways has been in decline for generations as those industries have also declined, although railways seem to be enjoying a welcome revival. Now many trade union members are public sector and white collar but their jobs are also in decline because of Government cut-backs caused by the

economic collapse.

I am not trying to argue the economics and politics of why we are where we are, although I do have strong views about that, but what trade unions need to consider so that they remain sustainable and have a clear purpose for the future.

The big issues as I see them are the divide between capital and employment, the small number of cooperative type companies in our economy, tired industrial relations practices that hark back to very different times and the lack of workers on the boards of companies.

In other words I see trade unions and their members needing to influence from within rather than being apart from the economics and management of running companies/organisations etc. This approach will be new to the 'us and them' relationship that still defines British industrial relations and it is far nearer to the German model.

There is an opportunity to grasp here but are we trade unionists brave enough to move with the times?

TRADE UNION MOVEMENT?

WHICH UNIONISM?

The current economic crisis has brought to the fore the debate over strategy within the trade union movement. On this page, Tony Robertson and Phil Dickens outline arguments for the two poles of this debate - social partnership and class struggle. Within this spectrum there are three broad trends: the right-wing, the "broad left" and the recently resurgent "rank-and-file" movement.

The Right

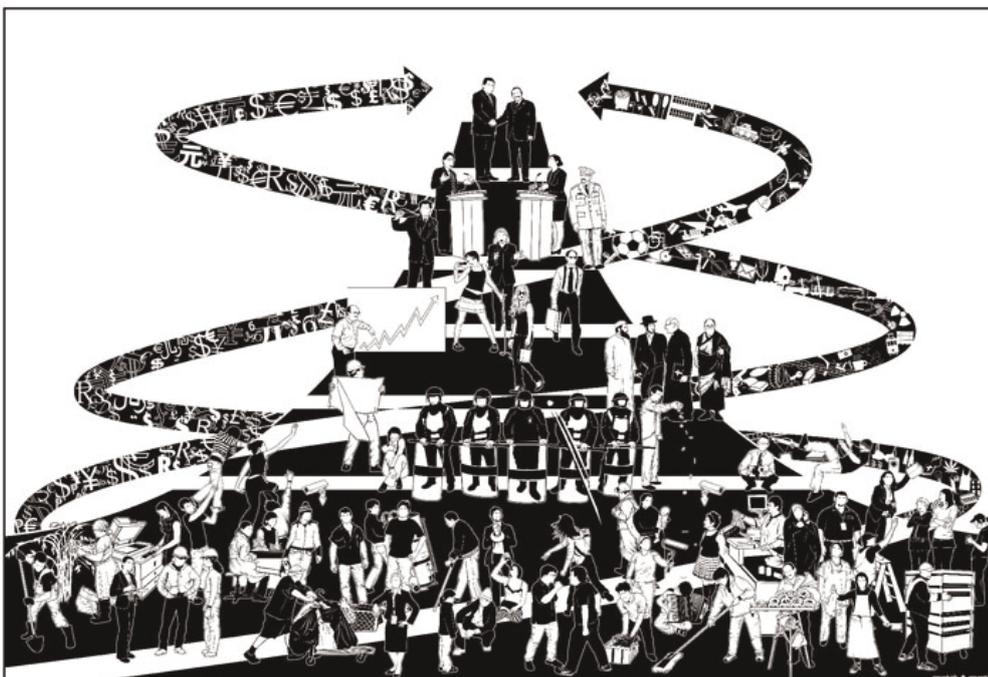
When we talk about right-wing in union terms, we don't mean Tories or fascists. We mean those who favour a more moderate approach, based on working alongside management and avoiding industrial action. Historically, the right has been overwhelmingly higher paid and higher ranking staff, and within the civil service it has an ignominious history of subverting democracy to get its way.

Broad Left

The idea of a "broad left" is about building a coalition of all those with left-leaning and socialist views in order to take power from the right. If the left controls the structure, they reason, the union better represents its members and can negotiate or where necessary take action to win meaningful gains. In the form of Left Unity, the left is currently in control of PCS.

Rank & File

Rank-and-file movements generally place less stock in taking control of the union hierarchy, seeing it as structurally flawed and creating a division from those on the shop floor. They seek to pressure union leaders where they can, but also argue for workers to act independently. Ultimately, they want workers organised without hierarchy and taking direct action to advance their interests.



...OR CLASS STRUGGLE?

By Phil Dickens

"THE WORKING CLASS and the employing class have nothing in common. There can be no peace so long as hunger and want are found among millions of the working people and the few, who make up the employing class, have all the good things of life."

Those words are from the preamble to the constitution of the Industrial Workers of the World, a syndicalist union originating in the USA. They represent, as the right wing of the trade union movement and the Tories alike would argue, an "outdated" way of doing things. "The class war is over" as Tony Blair put it - we are all middle class now.

But are we? The idea that "us and them" is an outdated mentality is predicated on the idea that bosses and workers have shared interests. If the business benefits, we all benefit, etc.

This illusion may have been easy to keep up in the 1990s and pre-crisis 2000s - but now? It's not an illusion but a delusion.

Huge cuts are made to public services whilst big business gets tax breaks. Companies make layoffs not to stop themselves going under but to boost profit margins. Those on the dole are forced to work for free, struggling to survive whilst shops save on their wage bill.

A tax on second homes is laughed at, but if your flat has one room too many you'll lose part of your housing benefit. Civil service jobs are fast being replaced with a temporary and casual workforce and all the rights we've ever won are being steadily eroded and undermined.

Not only is class war a reality, it's one that is escalating by the day. The very economy is built on a divide between "us and them." Class war isn't something we started and can stop, as social partnership advocates insist. It's something we meet head on and resist, or get overrun by.

Do we really want to extend the hand of friendship to the bosses, as they meet it with a boot and make all our lives worse?

MY FIRST YEAR AS A REP



By Michelle Lewis

SHOULD I OR SHOULDN'T I? That was the question!

I argued with myself for weeks, debating whether or not I should stand as office rep. Then two quotes that one great man used to say popped in my head... "If there is something worth fighting for, then fight!" and "If you want a job done properly, do it yourself don't wait around for others to do it half heartedly!"

He was once a shop steward for the crane driver's branch on the docks. He was one of the original Registered Dock Workers that started working down the hold of the ships and had a registration book without which they couldn't get work. All his mates were the sacked Dockers and he only escaped that fate because he was diagnosed with a heart complaint 12 months earlier and finished up. He never got over the guilt of that, which is why he spent so much time joining the picket and fundraising for 'the Lads' and supporting them right until his dying day... This great man was my Granddad! So I decided to do it; for me, for you and to make him proud.

I was amazed by the amount of votes that I received and promised that I would strive to be a great union rep for all those who voted. I was so eager in the first few months, and attended the Stage 1 personal reps course, learning so much about trade union history and policies, learning how different government offices run, how to make

things right and better for everyone and met some great people along the way. I had my first complaint and personal case whilst still in training, which considering how daunting this was, was the best thing that could have happened as I got stuck right in.

The months went on and became more and more involved in activities and organising meetings and handing out leaflets. I was becoming a 'real rep'! This continued for the majority of the year and I continued to meet great new people, join marches in London, experience new situations and fight for what I believe to be right!

The last few months of the last 12, have been quiet on the union front for me, solely because my career has taken me a different direction and I haven't been able to dedicate as much time to it. However, I have always shown 100% commitment and support and done as much as I could.

I had a dream.... but sometimes other factors stand in your way of achieving it! So, next year I won't be standing for office rep. This doesn't mean I have lost my dream or the will to fight; I just don't want to do a half hearted job and only give 50% commitment.

However, I urge you to become active. We're all guilty of sitting back and complaining about things we don't like when we could make a difference. Fight for things that are worth fighting for and do it yourself! Being a rep, however difficult it is, is also rewarding, fulfilling and an invaluable experience!

DEFEND KEVIN SMITH



HOME OFFICE MERSEYSIDE Branch recently took part in an industrial action ballot over the unfair treatment of Kevin Smith, who was sacked for raising a grievance about being bullied by his managers. Yes, you read that right.

Kevin's plight is appalling in and of itself. But it is all the more shocking because it happened in a workplace with a strong, well organised and recognised trade union. If it could happen there, then it could as easily happen in any workplace – including our own.

Indeed, it has happened elsewhere. For example, at Halesowen College, 4 staff in the maths department were sacked after raising the issue of cuts. Their union, UCU, recently took strike action on Valentine's Day following a 200-strong march demanding the workers' reinstatement.

There were over 40 cases of the victimisation of union activists in 2012 alone and two high profile cases so far in the first month of 2013. More worryingly, less than 10% of such cases occur in workplaces where management doesn't recognise a union. Most cases happen in unionised environments such as our own – or that of our fellow PCS members at the Home Office in town.

An attack on the right to organise, or even to voice complaints, is an attack on our right to have decent working conditions. Especially in the current climate of a hostile government and hostile employers, an injury to one is an injury to all.

Bootle Taxes Branch offers its full support to Home Office Merseyside Branch. Sign the petition at: <http://www.thepetitionsite.com/686/00/863/reinststate-kevin-smith/>

STRIKES ACCOMPLISH NOTHING?



The historic "Black Friday" strikes at Walmart in late 2012: employees struck nationally, despite not actually having a union

By Phil Dickens

IT IS WORTH REMINDING ourselves, every so often, of the power we hold as workers. The media and government will go out of their way to play this down. Strikes don't work is the common refrain – they accomplish nothing except to cause a lot of disruption and inconvenience. As if that isn't the point!

The reason why employers recognise unions and bargain with them is because they recognise the power unions harness. That is, the collective power of their workforce to down tools and cease production. They're the boss because they own the means of production, but without the producers (us) that means very little. So where they cannot prevent us exercising that power, they must offer concessions in order to maintain their right to manage. A few recent examples underline this point. In January PCS members saw the threat of compulsory redundancies in the DWP averted on the threat of strike action. There was no walkout, but the YES vote in itself brought the employer to the table.

Beyond our own union, cleaners at John Lewis who are in the IWW union won a 9% pay rise, again on just the threat of a strike. Where action has actually been taken, the IWW cleaners'

branch in London has lifted its members in several companies from poverty wages to the London Living Wage. In Somerset postal workers got a suspended colleague reinstated by launching a wildcat walkout. Similar unofficial action saw a sacked bus driver in Belfast get his job back.

In the construction industry, electrical and mechanical workers defeated de-skilling and 35% pay cuts through a sustained campaign of unofficial strikes and protests, punctuated with official action. Their militant campaign, which even saw them join picket lines around the country when the threat of court action led to their union calling off a strike, was so successful that it defeated employers notorious for blacklisting trade union activists.

All of the above examples underline the power of disruptive action when workers stand together. There is a debate to be had over tactics and members need to be involved in those discussions to ensure your voice is heard and we take the most effective action possible.

But there is no question that strike action and action short of strike works. The question we should always ask is whether it is employed to best effect. But there is no question that, when we're willing to do nothing, we will inevitably get nothing.

THE UNION MAKES US STRONG: SMALL ACTS OF SOLIDARITY

TECH & DIGITAL WORKERS

Read how one tech worker took his colleagues from a culture of individualism to collectively winning a pay rise:

<http://goo.gl/eCtdN>

HAPPY BIRTHDAY

Read how a birthday card played a part in saving the job of a workplace organiser: <http://goo.gl/U8JUF>



We'll hold this line
until Hell freezes
over -- Then we'll
hold it on ice skates.

— Anonymous picket sign

Better to starve
fighting than to
starve working.

— A slogan of the Lawrence,
Massachusetts "Bread and
Roses" strike of 1912



CAPTION COMPETITION



THIS IS SIR BOB KERSLAKE, the head of the civil service who earns £200K a year and has a final salary pension, but thinks it fair our pay and pensions get attacked. Sir Bob is visiting workers in Essex, but what's being said? The funniest entry (*civil service code permitting!*) will be published in the next issue. Entries to pcsbootletaxes@gmail.com.



FOLLOW US ON
 **twitter**
twitter.com/pcsbootletaxes

Find us on
 **Facebook**
fb.com/pcsbootletaxes

1 MARCH 2013 is the TUC's "Work Your Proper Hours Day." This event is designed to highlight that, every year, workers doing unpaid overtime give their employers £29.2 billion of free work.

HARDSHIP FUND WORKING GROUP

THE BOOTLE TAXES BRANCH hardship fund is now starting to look healthy, thanks to a number of generous donations and fundraising activities organised by reps.

Now, a number of branch reps have formed a working group to keep the revenue coming in. As a support mechanism for those who suffer hardship due to industrial action, it is vital that the fund always has money to enable it to fulfil its function.

The working group is tasked with coming up with and organising fundraising activities for this purpose. If you want to get involved, or have a fundraising idea that you think is worth pursuing, get in touch.

The hardship fund working group are: Adam Lloyd, Nikki Burns, Sarah Broad, Dave Lindsay and Paul Jamieson.

Join us now 

Join PCS online at pcs.org.uk/join

SUDOKU - DIFFICULTY: MEDIUM

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

CONTACTS

Editorial Board

Sarah Broad

Nikki Burns

Phil Dickens

Frank Doran

Charlie Wilson

Toni Wright

Branch Officers

Chair: Frank Doran

Vice Chair: Bernadette Parkes

Secretary: John Smith

Organiser: Charlie Wilson

Treasurer: Suzanne Donaldson

External email

pcsbootletaxes@gmail.com

Branch Website: pcsbootletaxes.wordpress.com