

Bulletin of Socialist Party members in *Usdaw*

A New Year message to John Hannett, Usdaw General Secretary

Dear John,

Tesco is facing a Crisis. Guardian, Tesco suffers falls throughout empire; Mirror, Tesco in crisis as sales fall away - worst sales for 20 years; Telegraph, Tesco under pressure as sales fall around the world - like-for-like sales fall 1.5pc in the UK; Daily Mail, Tesco's profits slide again...

If Tesco is in crisis, which undoubtedly it is, what will be the consequences for our members? But before you listen to Tesco's tales of woe, we want you to listen to the members working in Tesco.

We are suffering from: under staffing, no overtime, delayed overtime payments, essential equipment not being replaced, bullying from managers and not enough money to pay the bills. The staff is demoralised and not only with management's pressure but also with the lack of our union's response.

It is not just Tesco members that are complaining, there are moans from all the companies. Our experiences show that when there are problems in a company, they attempt to solve them at the expense of its workers.

Our rights are being eroded day by day. When the companies are not recruiting and we are doing the work of two, it looks like the union is letting it happen. There is no resistance and that means a complete lack of leadership.

We can remember during our shop steward training exercises dealing with Organising Our Workplace and the benefits of a strong union, we were told that more recruits would make it easier to challenge Tesco and all managements. We now have 70% density in Tesco retail shops.

In the battle for the distribution centres, which were 99% organised and with members willing to fight, you surrendered even before the battle begun. Of course, this defeat was never analysed by the Usdaw bureaucracy. Yet, you could have found it in the writing of the Activist. You sacrificed our strongest section to accommodate Tesco. We can't allow this to happen again in retail.

It is one thing to delay the fight because you don't have the forces but there comes a time when we have to fight. The bosses have already began their attack. Our terms and conditions are under attack. The preparation for the fight back must start now.

In anticipation of you becoming a real general secretary,
Yours, The Activist Editorial Board

P.S. We understand that you are having a little local difficulty at the moment with a blog which has resulted in many of our members wondering what the hell is going on in our Union (see page 5). We are waiting for your response and are wondering why you have not instructed the EC to investigate whether you have abused your powers as general secretary.

TESCO
Bit of your wage
Every Little Helps



US Retail and Fast-food Workers Rise Up

Walmart, McDonalds, Starbucks, Burger King, the list goes on of famous US companies in the fast food and retail industries - all known as successful and profitable companies. But all are also low wage employers both here and abroad.

If retail and fastfood jobs in the UK are seen as only for part-time workers such and young people, parents whose partner has another job or the retired, who don't need to earn a wage to support a family, then that is doubly the case in the United States.

Yet figures there show that 2/3rds of workers on the minimum wage which are overwhelmingly these sorts of jobs are over 20. The majority are also the primary providers for their household.

Most of these jobs are minimum wage, just like in the UK. Just like we have had the rise of foodbanks here, in the US Walmart stores had collections for staff members who were paid to little to afford

Thanksgiving dinners. McDonalds released a sample budget for its staff, which was less than someone working 35 hours a week on a basic wage would be paid!

Yet these companies are amongst the most profitable in the world. There is plenty of money for the pay of executives, YUM! Brands (who own KFC, Pizza Hut and others) made \$20.5m last year alone. Despite its recent financial worries, Tesco still made £1.39bn in the last half-year. Clearly much improved wages and conditions for shop-floor staff are plainly affordable.

Getting Organised

Yet as with any reform in the interests of ordinary working people, they are not won without a fight. The spur for the recent



Strike day rally in New York outside McDonalds

upsurge amongst workers in these industries was a conscious approach by activists who had initially come together in the Occupy movement.

They took forward a combination of acting as 'salts' where activists would go get jobs in low-paid workplaces with a view to recruiting people into a union and winning improved conditions as well as supporting efforts of those already in such jobs.

A number of unions, such as the UFW (a food and retail union) and SEIU (service industries union) have also set up initiatives which are broader campaigns, partially as guard against victimisation of union members but also to draw in a wider coalition of activists prepared to support the campaign and boost the confidence of the workers often in precarious jobs.

From isolated disputes to try and achieve recognition agreements, such as a 45-day dispute at a New York grocery store, these were then linked up first in a city wide strike in New York and then in national strikes. The latest of 5th December 2013 saw strikes and



Striking fast food workers in New York as part of a national day of strikes



Socialist Alternative councillor in Seattle, Kshama Sawant, on a protest during her election campaign supporting the demand for \$15 an hour minimum wage

protests in hundreds of US cities.

When the Activist and its supporters advocate action to improve the conditions of retail and distribution workers we are often told our members are apathetic and will not respond. The same was said about US workers and what a response they have given.

Successes in Seattle

The successful ballot initiative in SeaTac, Washington State has spurred on the battle for a \$15 an hour minimum wage. In neighbouring Seattle, Socialist Alternative candidate Kshama Sawant prominently featured this demand during her election campaign, taking part in rallies and protests over the issue and actively supporting strikes and the sending supporters to help the SeaTac campaign.

By linking this and her pledge to take the average wage of those she represents rather than the \$100,000+ salary usually taken by council members she won a stunning victory beating a 16-year Democrat incumbent, Richard Conlin.

Together, these have given an enormous spur to the movement around Seattle, not to just gain isolated victories, but to win widespread gains industry-wide in the city and further afield. During the campaign other candidates were forced to take up the \$15 an hour minimum wage demand.

A glimpse of what this means can be seen with the executive order signed by Seattle's newly elected Mayor, Ed Murray, which has started the process of bringing all workers employed by city council up to \$15 an hour. This falls short of the council's contractors and other workers in the city but is a welcome step forward.

Taking the fight for 15 forward

Already after her election Sawant and her supporters organised a march from SeaTac to Seattle in support of \$15 an hour and have now launched a new website to build further support in Seattle and wider. The site can be viewed at <http://15now.org>

The campaign aims to draw in those radicalised by Kshama's campaign and that in SeaTac to

push for \$15 an hour to become a reality for all workers. To this end they are holding a mass rally in Seattle in early January to draw in supporters.

No doubt the campaign will draw support not just from those in low-paid, precarious jobs but also better paid workers who realise the importance of beating the bosses race to the bottom in terms of pay and conditions as you never know who is next!

The impact Sawant has had stands in huge contrast to that of more numerous Labour politicians in Britain. Several Labour controlled councils have adopted living wage policies, but even in London where this is highest, this is only £8.80 an hour, a full £1.20 from the £10 equivalent of \$15. And this is only after being in control of councils for years, as well as lobbying of them by trade unions.

Sawant shows how elected representatives linked to mass struggle can punch well above their weight. That's why the Activist supports the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition in Britain to promote union backed candidates fighting for the demands we hold dearest. Visit www.tusc.org.uk to find out how you can get involved.



All of Kshama's campaign material featured the \$15 an hour demand

Facial recognition adverts perpetuate crude stereotypes

The Activist has received these comments by a Tesco worker on the face-recognition advertising displays that have recently been installed in petrol filling stations.

In an attempt to increase the available overtime for me and to allow my colleagues to get their breaks on time, I asked and was trained on PFS (petrol filling station) at my store. Since then I've been over on a few occasions but last time there was a white elephant in the room, when I mean white; I mean two foot tall and by elephant, I mean a rather obtrusive advertisement board which no-one pays attention to. Mainly because the typical customer wants to be in and out of the kiosk rather quickly. I was happy to allow this rather ugly monstrosity to adorn the work-surface on which I work, because after all, it's not hurting customers nor judging them.

Until now... Everyone's favourite boss "Lord Allan Sugar" and his underlings have married the two technologies of facial recognition and TV advertisement into one neat package. The aim is simple, scan a customer then judge them according to gender and age, then show the advert which will "target the demographic" by means of slotting the unwitting customer into arbitrary stereotypical categories.

But how long will it be until it recognises your race or your body weight and offers dietary products and other products that the corporate elite believe that you should have should have, based on your perceived stereotype and the sensitive information on which this device captures.

Now let's put this into context if I

were to offer at the checkout, perfume for females and deodorant to males on the basis of sex, or afro-caribbean roast chicken, all because the top brass has a twisted, racist and stereotypical world view, I'd get punched in the face until it resembles a rotten potato (and rightfully so!).

To quote Simon Sugar the chief executive of amscreen and eldest son of Lord Sugar, "...brands deserve to know not just an estimation of how many eyeballs are viewing their adverts, but who they are too". The quote underlines the sheer arrogance of Simon Sugar and his personal view that the working class owes them a favour. Just because he was born with a silver spoon in his mouth as opposed to a pickaxe.

It's clear to anyone with a brain that this device and the underlying concept is Orwellian and can be sexist, racist and damn right offensive. This isn't to mention its potential for abuse. Now the main argument is that this "profiling" is done on social media sites and the internet as a whole.

This isn't to say that this activity isn't abhorrent in itself, but at least on Facebook I can choose the information I share and what it says (according to my facebook I live on the other side of the world) while in this case, the device is taking your personal information without your consent. Either way I shall urge my USDAW rep to fight to remove this from my store and Tesco stores nationwide because this device perpetuates sexism and ageism.



The Tesco face-recognition advertising display

Quick News

First Horse, Now Fox

Last year millions across Europe were disgusted to find out that beef and pork products actually contained some horse meat, with Findus Beef Lasagne being 100% equine.

Walmart Chinese operation has been forced to apologise to customers as its 'Five-spice' Donkey Meat was found to contain fox!

As the Activist commentated at time, in their pursuit of profits companies will try and cut costs by any means possible. The only way we can guarantee decent quality food is to nationalise the industry and subject it to democratic workers control and management.

Low Pay = Huge Profits

This years retail companies celebrated for the biggest increases in profits are Primark and Sports Direct with profits of £514m and £207m respectively, both 40% increases on previous years. Funny how they have both been in the news for how little they pay their staff. Time for a fight back!

Anti-Hannett Blog Launched

Over the past weeks, the *Activist* has received a number of emails commenting on a new blog usdaw.wordpress.com. The blog has detailed some of the undemocratic practices in Usdaw and how John Hannett misuses his position as general secretary.

The blog has raised Hannett's: first class train travel; the provision of a Jaguar car for free; his £120,000 plus wage and benefits package; giving £1.3m to the Labour party without reference to the EC; taking payment for attending meetings while being paid by Usdaw and yet other trade unionist attendees don't claim; plans to change the ADM; and the use of a Union credit card. There has been no criticism of Hannett's policies.

Some of the points illustrated on the blog have been raised by the *Activist*. However, there are a number of new points that need answering:

1. Has Hannett received any monies for serving on the Low Pay Commission or Acas while still drawing his Usdaw salary?
2. Has Hannett used £1.3m of Usdaw's political fund without reference to the EC?
3. Has a union provided credit card been used inappropriately?

There has yet been no response from John Hannett to these serious charges made by the blog. However, since these accusations are now in the public arena the EC needs to fully debate these issues and ensure the truth is presented to the members. The EC's findings must be reported and debated at the ADM.

The *Activist* applauds all attempts by members to debate the failings of the present leadership of our Union. However our approach is different, the *Activist* and Socialist Party primarily raises opposition to the partnership and pro-Labour party approach of Hannett. This was shown by Robbie Segal's pamphlet explaining her challenge to replace Hannett as general secretary.

The first part of the pamphlet challenged the direction John Hannett was taking the union and explained her political views. In the second part,

Robbie deals with organisational questions and some of the issues regarding the lack of democratic processes raised during the election campaign.

Robbie won 40% of the vote and if the election had been democratically organised and the issues openly debated undoubtedly her vote would have been even higher and maybe Hannett could have been replaced. As Robbie demanded, It is now time for the EC to take back control of the Union.

Below the *Activist* republishes Robbie's programme and we believe it still offers a fighting alternative to the policies pursued by Hannett and the leaders of Usdaw. (Robbie's pamphlet can still be bought from Socialist Books)



Robbie Segal's General Secretary election address

Vote Robina (Robbie) Segal:
www.robbiesegal.com A trade unionist since the age of 19; Tesco union rep for 21 years; member of Usdaw Executive Council for 9 years.

A General Secretary on a worker's wage: I reject the wage and benefits totalling over £100,000 and the jaguar car the General Secretary receives. I'll continue to take the wage of a Tesco worker. You can check my expenses.

A Living Wage: Let's launch a campaign to fight for a living minimum wage of £8 per hour for all workers, from 16 years to retirement age and for a decent pension. To win you have to play a part.

NO TO PARTNERSHIP: Let's establish Usdaw as a free, democratic independent trade union and restore our vote on pay in Tesco retail. Partnership means Usdaw accepts the dictates of the bosses without consultation.

For the rest of Robbie's election programme please see this article on the blog or the pamphlet

Letters to the editors

Time companies started respecting shopworkers

Dear Activist,

Every year before Xmas Usdaw rightly raises the issues of staff harassment and abuse in the busy Xmas period. We've all been there, people getting impatient when they can't find the one or two missing items from Xmas dinner, or losing their cool as they navigate the packed queues at the checkouts.

However, John Hannett's Open Letter this Xmas published on the Usdaw website on 19th December directs this solely at one target. He says, "I want to gently remind shoppers to remember that retail staff are people as well."

However, whilst Hannett targets customers, why is he so silent on the companies that leave us so short staffed, even when we max-out extra shifts on part-time staff? Surely they have a responsible not only to ask customers to behave or support criminal legislation against harassment but to invest money into providing decent staffing levels. Extra staff mean we could have more checkouts open, replace stock in counters and shelves quicker and guarantee a better shopping experience at busy times of the year like we've just experienced.

Usdaw should be demanding minimum staffing levels in shops. However, the supermarkets main concern isn't our welfare, its their profits. That's why they continually drive down staffing levels, and why we will have to bring them into public ownership if we want decent working



Is asking customers to 'keep their cool' enough to protect retail staff from physical and verbal abuse?

conditions and a retail service that meets customers needs.

Yours, Dave Ingham

Dear Activist,

I, like many of our members, participated in our union's Respect campaign and many of the companies we work for provided facilities for us to promote the issue.

I wished that these same companies showed us some respect by paying its employees a living wage.

A North West Usdaw member

Making Tesco and Usdaw listen

Dear Activist,

Does anyone listen these days? Certainly Tesco has stopped listening to our grievances. Usdaw seems no better. So I thought I would write to the Activist and see if i can get the attention of our so-called leaders. I know one official who regularly checks on the contents of your blog and let's hope he passes it on to Central Office

I work in an Express and things are getting unbearable. No extra staff have been employed for the christmas period and not just in the small stores. They want us we work 11.30 on Christmas Eve and New Year's Eve. No chance! There has been no overtime for months. Yet, we have been asked to go and work in the Super and Extra stores over christmas because they too don't have enough staff.

I am not the only rep feeling depressed about the lack of action by our union. We use to be the listening and campaigning union but now all they want us to do is recruit. It is great having over 100,000 more members but they are useless unless these new members are used to campaign to better our members' term and conditions.

Yours in hope
A Tesco rep