

Fight this bosses' charter!

Dave Gorton

Unite LE/372 branch

As almost three million workers prepared to strike against one onslaught on their future, business secretary Vince Cable was announcing another. Introducing an overhaul of existing employment law, he said he wanted the process for getting rid of staff to be "simpler and quicker".

The British Chambers of Commerce said: "Giving companies greater flexibility to hire and fire will provide them with greater confidence to take people on" - so much for Lib Dem Cable's protestations that he wasn't introducing a hire and fire culture!

Again, the Lib Dems have kowtowed to Tory hawks in the coalition, dropping almost all their supposed opposition to radical changes in employment law. As predicted in the Socialist (issue 692, No return to hire and fire), the 'kite-flying' of venture capitalist Adrian Beecroft's report a few weeks ago has led to all but the most reactionary measures being considered.

Sham consultation

Some proposals include 'consultation' but of course the government will be listening to their big business friends, not trade unions. Among proposals under consultation are:

Beecroft's Compensated No Fault Dismissal, but only for firms with less than ten employees, showing the coalition isn't strong enough to take on the unions over scrapping the concept of unfair dismissal.

The consultation period for collective redundancies to be reduced from 90 days to 60, 45 or even 30. Shop stewards already know the consultation period rarely works in workers' favour with redundancies



Campaigning against the anti-union laws photo Suzanne Beishon

the outcome of most. Reducing time limits will mean workers thrown out of work more quickly with a reduced opportunity to hunt for alternative employment.

"Protected conversations", which will allow employers to discuss issues such as performance or retirement with employees without fear of being taken to a tribunal, amounts to a bully's charter.

Introducing Employment Tribunal fees to lodge a claim with a second fee to proceed to a hearing.

Other measures will be introduced without consultation: doubling the length of service required to bring un-

fair dismissal claims to two years and making it compulsory for claims to be lodged through Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service (ACAS) to encourage mediation before the claim reaches the tribunal.

Of the 34 OECD countries, only the employment legislation in the US and Canada is weighted more firmly in the bosses' favour than Britain. These measures are nothing to do with productivity or job opportunities - there is no evidence that current legislation makes Britain less 'competitive'. They are a bosses' charter being introduced by a right-wing millionaires' government on

behalf of their big business friends.

Trade union leaders reacted with anger at the plans... but they must do more than just respond to the consultation in academic terms. They need to build a campaign of opposition inside the unions, a campaign that could increase union membership and strengthen existing weak shop steward structures, aimed at preparing workers to defend and improve current protection.

The gloves are off - government and workers are on a collision course over pensions, cuts, jobs and rights. There are tumultuous times ahead.

Electricians occupy building company HQ

Rob Williams,

National Shop Stewards Network chair

Construction electricians brought their campaign of defiance to the home of one of the 'Dirty Seven' contractors in London on 23 November. Over 150 sparks marched from their morning protest at Kings Cross to the headquarters of Grate Brothers and occupied the foyer of the office for over an hour.

Grates is one of the companies looking to withdraw from the Joint Industry Board (JIB) national agreement with Unite which will lead to de-skilling. This will cut many electricians' wages by up to 35% by lowering rates to £10 an hour on the new BESNA contracts. This came a day after it was revealed that top ex-

ecutives in Britain have seen their income rise by an incredible 49%.

Grates is the company whose Cannon Street site manager infamously told one of the sparks a few weeks ago: "If it was up to me, I'd pay them £1 an hour"! Angry electricians shouted at managers telling them to explain why they are slashing their wages but they just stood silent on the stairs. In fact one of them asked: "What is the JIB?!"

This is the latest protest in an incredible campaign of rank-and-file construction workers that is now into its fourth month. Over the last few weeks it has escalated into stoppages at sites in London and nationally, including at the West Burton and Ratcliffe power stations in the East Midlands and at Corus on Teesside.

See also back page



On a previous London protest photo Chris Newby

Usdaw: Fighting against the policies of 'social partnership'

Activist is the paper of Socialist Party members in the shop workers' union Usdaw. Recently it carried an article explaining how, after 12 years, Robbie Segal has decided not to stand for re-election to the Usdaw executive (EC). Robbie has been

Robbie explains how the failure of Usdaw's leaders to challenge the exploitation of unpaid unemployed youth working for free in big retail companies is connected to their slavish support for the now discredited 'social partnership' policy.

Tesco, Poundland, Argos, Sainsbury are just a few companies Usdaw has agreements with and all have embraced the Con-Dems' 'job

experience programme' for young unemployed. This latest scheme forces young people - 16 to 21 year olds - to spend eight weeks working a 30 hour week as slaves. They receive no payment for their work and if they refuse to participate they lose their Jobseeker's Allowance. For trade unionists, this is a form of slavery - working for nothing.

Usdaw should be fighting to ensure these modern-day slaves are

struggling for the last year against a neurological disorder and now feels it is impossible to play the role of an active EC member. Often Robbie has been the lone voice on the EC against Usdaw leaders' collaborationist policies with the bosses.

paid the same wages as our members which, unfortunately, is little more than the minimum wage. Such a campaign would act as an example of how trade unions are relevant to young people today.

Youth unemployment has climbed to over one million which means a staggering 22% of 16-26 year-olds and in some areas over one in three are on the dole. Rather than implement genuine training programmes to develop real

skills, the response of both the major political parties - Con-Dems and Labour - is to establish this cheap labour work experience scheme.

It is the responsibility of the trade unions to join these young people in the fight for a future.

For a full version of this article and if you would like to receive a regular copy of the Activist send your email address to: shopworker@socialistparty.org.uk

In brief

Supporting N30

Steve Hedley, London regional organiser, RMT explained how the RMT is supporting N30: "We're organising a march from the RMT HQ to support everyone who's on strike. Except for the Tyne and Wear Metro and ferry services and of course the Royal Fleet Auxiliary, who are striking, the bosses are not coming for our pensions just yet, but they will do if they get this through - so maximum solidarity is required to support this action. We support coordinating action. When everyone's under attack we can't allow sectors to be picked off. We've got to coordinate action for everybody's good and we will support not only our union members but everyone fighting on 30 November."

Joining N30

TV licensing workers, employed by Capita, are joining in the strike on 30 November. That will be the fourth day of strike action that CWU members has taken in their pay dispute. Capita has only offered a 2.6% pay rise, in spite of the fact that the company makes over £1 million in profit every day. Workers will be mounting picket lines in Bristol and Darwen and joining in local public sector union demos.

Victory at Honda

Paddy Brennan, Unite convenor at the Swindon Honda factory, has had his suspension lifted by management.

Paddy was suspended by Honda on 28 July. The suspension came at a time when Honda management was attempting to have Unite derecognised in the workplace. Paddy was one of the keynote speakers at the National Shop Stewards Network rally on the 11 September lobby of the TUC calling for coordinated strike action in the public sector.

Victory for union organisation

Facing a united and determined campaign from Transport for London (TfL) and cabbies' unions, management have dramatically withdrawn their outsourcing proposals for London Taxi and Private Hire (Compliance and Licensing). We now have 18 months to prepare to block the likely attempt to outsource TfL call centres.

More immediately we need to stop the threatened introduction of a new low-pay "Band 0.5" assistant grade at the London Transport Museum.

TfL reps are currently meeting weekly as a 40-strong joint shop stewards committee and are naturally feeling buoyed and empowered by this victory, which means keeping 94 colleagues in-house and saving 68 of those from a probable move to private firms in Coventry or Northampton to keep their jobs.

Paul Stevens
TfL RMT

Wightlink

Transport union RMT members working for Wightlink on the Portsmouth routes are balloting for industrial action in support of their rep, Paul Kelly. Paul has been victimised on trumped-up charges after organising opposition to the imposition of new rosters. The ballot started on 30 November.