

Direct Action vs Burger Fuel

AFTER PROTESTS in Auckland and Wellington, and further planned protests outside Burger Fuel fast food stores across the North Island and in Sydney, Burger Fuel has recently backed down and agreed not to use the 90 day hire and fire legislation in its franchises.

The protests were against the sacking of Joanne Bartlett from her job in an Auckland Burger Fuel store on the 89th day of her 90 day trial period. She was fired just after asking for more than one 10 minute break during her eight hour shift. No reason was given for her dismissal.

Although it has not been finalised yet, we believe Burger Fuel have agreed to fairly compensate Bartlett, to remove the 90-day no-rights trial period from their individual agreements with workers, and to remove any anti-union conditions from their individual agreements.

This win, while minor, is important. Many capitalists in this day and age of slick marketing and 'public relations' are vulnerable to mobile groups which can turn up unannounced outside their business using lightening pickets, turn away customers, and give them bad publicity. As it looks like the Nats are going to extend the 90 day hire and fire bill to all workplaces, it shows that this direct action can stop these laws being used by bosses. It also shows a way around our vicious anti-strike laws. Workers can use these tactics without the prospect of getting fired or suspended.

There has been a lot of interest recently in these tactics. Solidarity network groups, which aim to give solidarity to workers across workplaces and communities, have formed in Auckland, Wellington (Wellington Workers' Solidarity Network) and Dunedin, with one soon to be formed in Christchurch. Auckland Solidarity quickly organised and co-ordinated the nationwide protests in not only the bigger cities but also in small cities like Napier, Tauranga and Palmerston North that were due to go ahead on 4 September, a major reason why Burger Fuel backed down. Unite Union is also using similar tactics with the formation of its Utu Squad (utu means something like reciprocity, to give back what you receive, although it is often translated as meaning revenge) to 'name and shame bad employers'. Mike Treen, Unite national Director, has said "If the government takes



Unite's utu squad at the Auckland rally against the proposed new employment laws

away workers' rights to use legal means to protect themselves from unjust actions like this then workers have to go back to the tradition of direct action as the only way left to support workers like Joanne".

However, as with any tactic, it ain't perfect. It can be just spectacular outside organising, rather than workers inside a workplace organising themselves. It can be dependent on publicity or image making, rather than strength on the ground. And

it can be used by union bureaucrats like Treen for their own ends – such as increasing their market share. After all, unions negotiate with capitalists the rate of our exploitation, rather than seek to abolish it.

If you'd like to support the actions of these groups, then contact them and they will add you to their contact lists. If you're in Auckland, go to their website solidarity.org.nz; if you're in Wellington, email wellingtonsolidarity@gmail.com

Upcoming public events

NATIONWIDE

SAT OCT 9: Protests against the Search and Surveillance Bill in Auckland and Wellington. The Wellington protest begins at 12pm at the bucket fountain, Cuba Mall.

WED OCT 20: National day of action against the new employment laws. Stopworks and meetings will be held from Kaitia to the Bluff in supposedly the biggest nationwide protest held by unions since the Employment Contracts Act was introduced in 1991. The Auckland stopwork is being held in the Telstra Clear Stadium in Manukau from 1 to 2pm, and in Wellington outside parliament from 12.30pm to 1.30pm. For the locations of mass meetings and stopworks in other towns, see fairness.org.nz

DUNEDIN

The Dunedin Anarchist-Communist Strategy Discussion Group meets every second Monday, 7:30pm @ Black Star Books, at the back of the CORSO building, 111 Moray Place.

WELLINGTON

- EVERY FRIDAY, 1-2pm, Cnr Willis St. and Lambton Quay, support the JB Hi-Fi workers on strike.
- FRI NOV 5, 7pm. Venue TBC. Radical quiz. Hosted by Wellington branch of AWSM. All welcome.

CHRISTCHURCH

Beyond Resistance (<http://beyondresistance.wordpress.com>) hold monthly film or discussion nights on the first Wednesday of every month.

SOLIDARITY

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Newssheet of the Aotearoa Workers Solidarity Movement



AMONGST THE RUBBLE

WHILE THE DUST SETTLES and Christchurch recovers from the 7.1 earthquake, people have begun to pick up the pieces and get on with their lives. But for many working class people this is not so easy. Those most affected by 'natural disasters' – whether by the tsunami in the Pacific, earthquakes in Haiti, Chile and now Christchurch, NZ – are those already on the margins of despair.

As the impact of the quake became known we saw the authorities rush to 'lock down' the CBD, and after a short time brought in the military in a quasi 'martial law' scenario. With the aid of the corporate media and using the odd collapsed and damaged building as a backdrop, a sensational picture was painted of a city in ruins. Their reports were far from helpful – heavily recycling dramatic images while providing little concrete advice and information for those of us on the ground. It was hard to not to get the feeling that it was little more than a ratings seeking adventure at our expense.

Out in the worst affected suburbs people waited for days to receive help from the authorities. While the state hurried to safeguard inner city property, people in the outer limits were left to fend for themselves. Many acts of mutual aid were carried out, with friends and neighbours 'mucking in' – firstly to make sure everyone was safe and then supporting each other with what they could to survive. Some shopkeepers offered free milk, people offered water from private wells, and with the University closed students organised themselves into solidarity teams (numbering over 1000 in total) and went about helping those in an inspiring display of mutual aid.

However reports are coming to light of a number of abusive and oppressive



Christchurch residents cleaning up

scenarios. Workers have been forced to work in unsafe conditions or told to stay home without being paid. First Security, Subway and the Readings Cinema have all put profits before people in a blatant disregard of the interests of their staff. [Update: two of these, and one other, Garden City Bowl AMF, have backed down after a 'tour of shame' by Unite Union]. Equally concerning is the example of a Welfare Centre that in a blatant act of racism evicted a large Maori whanau who were seeking comfort, support and refuge in a facility set up for this purpose ('freeloaders' was the term used). Many people have lost everything and many stories are now being told of residents of rental properties having to stay in dangerous and substandard housing with nowhere to go, as greedy landlords refuse to subsidise rent, make repairs or break fixed-term lease agreements. There was also one case where the City Council evicted residents from council flats without

any notice and refusing to allow occupants to access their belongings, leaving them homeless, penniless and with only the clothes on their backs. All this is ongoing, as are the aftershocks.

Women have once again copped the worst of it. Cases of domestic violence have skyrocketed while earthquake tremours continue, adding to the already heavy trauma.

We should not be so hasty to lump praise on the State just because it showed a helping hand in a time of need, a hand in the service of the biggest disaster of all – capitalism. Nor should we ignore the draconian measures the state has recently passed. The Canterbury Earthquake Response and Recovery Bill gives a single Minister (Brownlee) the power to repeal or modify practically any law on our statute book, without even having to refer to Cabinet, let alone Parliament. This Act was voted in by all Parties in the House, which shows more than ever the true motives

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of our supposedly neutral state: increased power for the few, a privileging of property and an emphasis on order (ie business as usual)...

For those of us in Christchurch who have lived through this experience, who

huddled in doorways, shoveled silt, and witnessed first hand the real beneficiary of the state's response (inner city property), life goes on. For most, it will never be the same again.

– Beyond Resistance.

Since this article appeared on awsms.org.nz Action for East Christchurch held a 100 strong protest in Avonside against delays in receiving assistance, and the lack of power, drainage, water and sewerage.

A mini strike wave?

IF YOU BELIEVE the media, there seems to be heaps of unruly workers going out on strike at the moment. And yes, it appears so – the recent teachers’ strike of up to 16,000 surpasses the total number of workers going out nationwide in 2008 and 2009 put together! (8,950 in 2009 and 4993 in 2008). As well, about a thousand radiographers and hundreds of medical lab and Ministry of Education workers have been on strike, and hundreds of Housing NZ and ACC workers continue with low key industrial action, such as work-to-rules. And there is more ahead – over 4000 junior doctors appear to be set to strike, and if you count the big nationwide stopworks against the new employment laws on Oct. 20 as industrial action, then this year is shaping up as involving more striking workers than for any year in the whole noughties decade of 2000–2010.

Much of this dissent is an expression of anger against the tiny wage increases workers have been offered due to the cost-cutting spree caused by the recession. But there isn't just rage against the wage. Most of these strikes are compelled by exhaustion from overwork – having to work too hard and having to do unpaid



Teachers' on strike in Wellington

overtime (both often due to staffing shortages). It's unsurprising that class struggle is taking this form – central to the neo-liberal deal is the attempt to speed up work to unnatural levels in return for less real pay.

While these struggles by predominantly white-collar workers in majority female workplaces are encouraging, let's not get carried away with them. They haven't blossomed into broader class-wide confrontations, as they are often just narrow attempts by occupational

strata to catch up with, or surpass, other occupational strata in terms of pay (i.e. they are relativity disputes). Strikes have been defensive in nature, such as the Ministry of Justice strikes against the public sector wage freeze. Recent years, including this one, still see us unfortunately experiencing some of the lowest amounts of strike activity in NZ history. The 2000s in general saw a bit less strike action than the 1950s, a decade considered to be characterised by social peace and conformity (that is, after the wharfies and sympathy strikers were crushed in 1951). Even if 25,000 strike this year, it's still only a tiny fraction of the workforce going out on strike (1.2%), when in the 1970s and 1980s generally well over 10% of the workforce were striking. And few workers have gained major pay increases – many, including some who have been on strike, are settling for very small pay increases of 1% to 2% (less than the rate of inflation) and mere assurances high workloads will be examined by joint working parties, rather than reduced. We have a long way to go facing an aggressive, militant and united capitalist class, but these strikes and stopworks are something to build upon.

TEACHERS' STRIKE



ON SEPTEMBER 15TH over 1,000 teachers and supporters (pictured above) from Wellington, Hutt Valley and Kapiti Coast marched from Wellington High School to Parliament as part of a national one day strike action. The strike was called in support of teachers’ claims for a 4% wage increase an improvement in working conditions and opposition to such measures as the 90 Day Act.

The marchers were in good spirits, with a sense of purpose for their action. There was some chanting and attempts to interact with lunchtime passersby in the CBD, who were either subdued or supportive in attitude. One amusing example came when some teenagers on the pavement called out “Good one, but make sure its a Friday next time!”.

Upon reaching Parliament grounds, numbers swelled and a series of scheduled speakers addressed the crowd followed by an open mike. Although each speaker stressed slightly different aspects of the teachers’ situation, a common theme was the warped sense of priorities exhibited by the Government in terms of its allocation of money. This was a point made for example by Labour MP Trevor Mallard who put the lack of funding for teachers in the context of the recent bailing out of South Canterbury Finance investors “If they can find money for that, they can find money for education”. A valid point but it is doubtful a Labour led government would have contemplated anything radically different to the action National took, given its own previous track record and shared

role as a prop for the capitalist economic order.

Following the speeches, remaining marchers moved up the road to the Ministry of Education building. A short but noisy expression of dissatisfaction occurred as the teachers formed a semi-circle in the courtyard immediately in front of the Ministry entrance, before dispersing.

In other centres, similar marches were held. The Auckland march of about 2,500 ground Queen St to a halt. The one-day strike was the first in eight years for the Post Primary Teachers Association (PPTA) and it affected about 280,000 students from more than 450 secondary and intermediate schools. Peter Beyer, an English teacher at Otahuhu College, said students were being disadvantaged because of teachers’ huge work loads. “The Government will say we’re greedy, we’re after money, but we asked for very little money – we asked for a realistic settlement – and we’re marching mainly for the students and for the conditions we work in,” he said.

In summary, the turnout on the day was good given the current low level of strike action nationally across both public and private sectors. However, more concerted action is required if teachers and other workers are to make real progress. With the PPTA leadership pushing a line in its literature of wanting “cooperation from government – not conflict” and the ultimately puny nature of a one day strike, teachers at the chalkface and their allies will need to take more direct action themselves. The PPTA has already pulled

back from one-day strikes, and instead said they will go out on eight partial strikes each week from October 14. During each partial strike, teachers will refuse to teach students from a particular year (say year 11) but still continue to teach all other students. There is also a need to link the conditions of workers in one sector or form of employment with others and to include the unemployed and non-unionised, to avoid the government isolating and picking off weak targets. Such a goal will not be easy to achieve in reality, but it is one worth working towards if any substantial improvements are to be won.

That’s capitalism!

- Amount given by the government to South Canterbury finance to bail their investors out: **\$1.6 billion**
- Amount pledged so far by the government to the people of Canterbury affected by the quake: **a mere \$135 million**. Yet the quake has caused an estimated **\$4 billion in damage**, made almost 3,000 homes uninhabitable and damaged at least 76,000 homes (that is the current amount of claims received by the Earthquake commission). Of the \$135 million pledged, most of it (\$94 million) is to rebuild roads, and \$10 million is to repair historic buildings. Only \$15 million has been given as relief to unpaid workers (the wage subsidy fund), \$7.5m for the ‘community response fund’, \$5m for the mayoral fund and \$2.5m for counselling.

It’s obvious that the government cares more for capital, roads & historic buildings than it does for working class people.

Protests across Europe

ON SEP. 29, protests erupted across Europe against government cost cutting measures, including massive wage cuts, job losses and cuts to benefits and social services. There was a general strike in Spain involving millions of workers, a 100,000 strong protest in Brussels marching on the European Union HQ, a public sector strike in Slovenia, strikes in Greece by bus drivers and doctors, and protests in Ireland, Italy, France, Portugal, Britain and Poland, as well as an illegal protest in Lithuania.

What is AWSM?

The Aotearoa Workers Solidarity Movement (AWSM) is an organisation working towards a classless, stateless society: anarchist-communism. We are a small national organisation with members in Wellington and Christchurch and in a few smaller centres.

As class-struggle anarchists our priority is active involvement in workplace struggles and industrial action as well as community based campaigns in our neighbourhoods. We are currently involved in a variety of struggles, including protests against National's proposed industrial legislation and more. We encourage working class people to organise themselves against capital and the state. We do not seek to paternalistically organise people from the top down.

To become a member of AWSM, you must agree with our Aims & Principles (available at <http://www.awsms.org.nz>), and be involved in the life & activity of the group. If you're interested in joining or just finding out a bit more about us, e-mail or write to us – see our contact details in the next column.

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