

● **LESSONS FROM 2009:** This year saw the biggest crisis since 1929. Everywhere the welfare state, public services and jobs are under attack. We have also seen workers fighting back. The occupations at Visteon, the struggle of Vestas wind turbine workers, Tower Hamlets college lecturers defeating plans for closures and redundancies, Leeds refuse workers winning after 11 weeks strike and in Camden, plans for further NHS privatisation being fought off. The lesson that solidarity and struggle can win needs to be carried through to 2010. Camden Eye wishes all its readers best wishes for the New Year.

Newsletter of the Camden Unison Branch

CAMDEN EYE

Number 16 ● December 2009

PEOPLE POWER WORKS!



Since July Camden Keep Our NHS Public (KONP) has

pushed ahead with a legal challenge to Camden Primary Care Trust's decision to place a privately run GP led health centre in Hampstead Road – and won!

The Primary Care Trust, now calling itself NHS Camden, tendered and awarded the contract for the GP led health centre to a private firm Care UK without consulting local people. The privately run centre posed a real threat to local surgeries run by trusted family doctors and with the company boasting a 59% increase in profit last year, who knows how much of the money would have gone on patient care and how much into the pockets of shareholders.

Local resident Bob Austin (main picture), supported by Camden KONP, put in an application for judicial review on the basis that the PCT had a duty to consult under Section 242 of the Health Act 2006, a fact the PCT repeatedly denied, even in front of Camden Council's Health Overview and Scrutiny committee.

The high court judge ordered that a hearing take place before the end of December, and on this news the PCT backed down and conceded they have at all times been under a legal



duty to consult Camden residents!

At first they said a 'consultation' would begin in December and then a week later on 26 November despite the Chief Executive's personal commitment 'to make the health centre happen' - all plans were postponed until summer 2010!

This is a great victory for Camden KONP and for local democracy and just shows what persistent people power can do! Many thanks are due to Bob Austin for his

courage in making a stand on this issue and to the work of Leigh Day & Co solicitors. We believe the case has important ramifications for other health centres that are planned across the country.

We now need to build a case, in conjunction with local doctors, as to how the £20 million set aside for the GP led health centre should be invested to improve local NHS services. As a start we held a public meeting on the Regents Park Estate on

30th November. Nearly sixty people attended and there was a lively and well-informed discussion on the realities of privatisation, what a genuine consultation would consist of and what local people would want improved.

The PCT still have plans to put the contract for the out-of-hours doctors' service to tender to private bidders, so there is still much work to be done on that over the next few months.

With the predicted slashing of health budgets in North and Northwest London of between £600-£900 million and rumours of mergers and cutbacks at the Royal Free and Whittington hospitals, it is imperative that we fight back against the privatisation of our health service and the new threat of closures.

From everyone at Camden KONP we say 'Keep fighting, you never know when you're going to win!'

Sarah Mills

Our 2010 pay claim

UNISON, Unite and GMB public service unions, have submitted a national pay claim for a £500 flat rate increase or 2.5%, whichever is the greater on behalf of some 1.5 million local government workers in England, Wales and

Northern Ireland.

The claim is for one year only and distinct from any other negotiations over national terms and conditions in the 'Green Book'.

UNISON and the other unions would like negotiations to take place

in an expeditious manner and for settlement to be reached by 1 April 2010.

An additional claim concerning Green Book conditions is to be lodged before Christmas 2009.

The full 21 page claim can be seen at <http://www.unison.co.uk/localgov/>

Some massive international companies are cleaning up from privatisation policies. George Binette reports on three profiting from Camden

Big companies cleaning up from service sell offs



The pace of privatisation has accelerated in Camden and some big private companies and their shareholders are proving the beneficiaries. Corporations like Veolia and MITIE may not be household brand names, but vehicles bearing their corporate logos are becoming common sights on the streets of London and other cities and towns across Britain.

On 22 July Camden Council's Executive rubber-stamped two major out-sourcings: the privatisation of estate cleaning to Veolia Environment Services, an arm of the French-based multinational, which already holds the refuse collection contract, and the transfer of the whole of Camden's recruitment process to Hays Personnel.

From a union perspective there are many obvious arguments against the rampant privatisation we are now seeing, but there is also a fundamental question about subsidising from the public purse the profitability of large companies for prolonged periods with precious little scrutiny.

VEOLIA

Veolia's roots stem from the mid-19th century, when the current corporation's precursor began supplying water to the French city of Lyon. By 2008 it employed more than 335,000 employees across four main divisions (water, environmental services, energy services and passenger transport). Its annual turnover in 2007 amounted to more than 35 billion Euros – some £31.5

billion at current exchange rates.

The drive to privatise public services has been crucial to its global expansion and profitability. In 2008 more than 70% of its revenues came from contracts with local authorities around the globe. It has been a key player in water privatisation in South Africa and Latin America, not to mention its role in the construction of a light rail line between Jerusalem and illegally occupied territories in the West Bank.

MITIE

In 2006 MITIE Cleaning Services took over the contract for cleaning Camden's workplaces including virtually all schools. Founded in 1987 and based in Bristol it now boasts of more than 42,000 employees and an annual turnover of more than £1.5 billion last year. Despite the recession its profits rose by 12.5% year on year for the period between April and October 2009, with revenue for those six months exceeding £801.1 million. Meanwhile, shareholders' dividends rose from 3.3 to 3.7 pence per share.

So how did MITIE achieve such impressive results in the teeth of the downturn? According to a May 2009 article in *The Independent*, the key element has been the out-

sourcing of ancillary services from the public sector. On the Camden contract, for example, UNISON believes that the vast majority of the workforce is on substantially less than the London Living wage of £7.60 an hour, with most on the national minimum wage, which rose to just £5.80 on 1 October. And according to MITIE's own figures for 2008 96% of those working on the Camden contract for the minimum wage are from Black and Minority Ethnic backgrounds.

HAYS PERSONNEL

Finally, Hays Personnel has been the 'master vendor' to Camden for agency workers since 2004 during which time the number of agency staff has, on average, grown despite the Council's stated commitment to cutting reliance on agency employees. Despite this and well documented concerns about inadequate equalities

monitoring, the Council has awarded a contract worth an estimated £30 million a year to Hays for at least three years, with the possibility of a two-year extension, to run the whole of the recruitment function. As a result 10 posts look likely to leave Camden under TUPE, while local managers may lose control over the shortlisting of applicants.

Few London authorities have gone down this route, but Camden follows Buckinghamshire County Council in the wholesale outsourcing of recruitment. Hays is becoming increasingly involved with public sector outsourcing as part of its growth into the single biggest recruitment agency in Britain and Australia. All told this multinational operates in 27 countries with a workforce of more than 8,500. Though the recession had some impact last year, pre-tax profits in 2007 approached £212 million.



Maddy Cooper and Liz Wheatley, UNISON stewards in HASC, took a giant postcard to their local postal workers' picket line at Hampstead Sorting Office. It was signed by UNISON stewards and members, and after 13 days of strike action pickets were very pleased to hear that Camden UNISON had made a £1000.00 donation to their hardship fund.

Inflation is higher for lower-paid

The Retail Price Index or RPI has been less than 1% since December 2008 and negative since March 2009. So some employers say workers are having no problem meeting living costs.

But the low rates of RPI do not seem to match the experience of workers trying to cope with rising food, fuel and transport costs.

It does not really measure the impact of inflation equally for all income groups, but is based on the average price of a basket of goods, some of which rise in price over the year while others fall.

For instance: prices of basics go up, while prices of restaurant meals, hotels and culture and recreation go down: low-paid workers will have no choice but to pay more for necessities, but are unlikely to benefit from lower prices for other goods.

In fact, low-paid workers are facing much higher prices for basic goods and services.

Figures released by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development show that food price inflation in the UK was 8.6% last year, four times higher than any other country in Europe.

According to the Minimum Income Standard project, the cost of a minimum household budget rose by about 5% for most families in the year to July 2009.

This is well above the general inflation rate, because someone on a minimum income spends more of their budget on food, domestic fuel and public transport, whose prices have risen by 7% to 12%.

The minimum budget does not include a mortgage or running a car, whose falling costs have pulled down the general inflation rate.

● From the UNISON website: www.unison.co.uk

● See also: <http://www.minimumincomestandard.org/>

Growing your library and mangling the language

On the 28th October the Libraries Organisation Change Report (Growing Your Library) was passed by Councillor Flick Rea.

Deputations were heard from UNISON, Holborn Library Users Group and from the Camden Historical Society. Some arguments had already been won, such as the retaining of an Archivist in Local Studies, but many other concerns were raised, one of which was the continued criticism of the language employed in the report to communicate these ideas. (See below).

UNISON raised concerns about reductions to staffing levels, the threat of compulsory redundancies and the continued 'dumbing down' of the library service.

Councillor Flick Rea did offer some form of scrutiny, perhaps mindful of the constant critical coverage in the local press on this issue and the many angry letters published from the library public. She expressed concern about the span of management responsibility in the new structure and stated that no redundancies should be made until RFID machines are installed and their impact measured.

UNISON will now engage with management in the ER/VR and ring fencing process in order to secure the best results for its members in libraries.

Library Stewards

● *Your council tax at work. Reader John Richardson sends in a magnificent example of jargon, from a report by Camden council, north London, called 'Growing Your Library' [sic]. This turns out to mean sacking lots of staff and replacing them with barcode scanners. It includes phrases such as 'information plinths' and reads in part: 'The People work stream sits alongside service visioning, ICT procurement, spatial strategy, pilot RFID (radio frequency identification), enabled library and communications work streams.'*

Why is it, when local councils are having more and more of their power taken by central government, they respond by distancing themselves so thoroughly from their voters? — Guardian columnist Simon Hoggart

EYE VIEW

Cuts madness

The council says it has to cut £59 million over the next few years. It is stated as if it was a law of nature. However, it is anything but: it is a political choice.

The public sector did not create the financial crisis. The private sector did. If it had not been for government intervention we would be facing a Great Depression and not just a recession. Why should the public sector pay now?

We need more council housing not less. We need apprenticeships for the young people who are swelling the dole queues. We need social justice. All those opposed to the forthcoming cuts need to unite.

A million climate jobs now

We have 2 to 3 million people unemployed and at the same time we have to avert potentially catastrophic climate change. A logical solution would be to employ people in 'climate jobs' – jobs which reduce the amount of green house gases we put in the air. The Campaign Against Climate Change trade union group has been working with academics and environmentalists to produce an evidence-based report on what these jobs would be, sector by sector.

They have produced a short £2 pamphlet 'One million climate jobs now!' and are planning a campaign to make it a reality. It's a call that should be taken up. If we just wait for action from the politicians going to Copenhagen we will find that they will only be taking action when it is too late.

More at: <http://www.campaigncc.org/greenjobs>

Camden Council is proposing to cut the budget for UK Online Centres in Camden by £170,000 from April 2010. The budget for the current tax year is £206,000 so this represents a massive 82.5% cut. **John Boyle**, SHELL Centre UNISON, outlines the campaign opposing the cuts

Camden Off-Line

There are 16 UK Online Centres in Camden based in local communities and offering free Use of the Internet, Computer Skills Training, Help back into Employment, English Classes, Help with Words and Numbers and much, much more. In today's economic climate these centres represent a vital support network for the most vulnerable and needy

in Camden and a bridge to those left behind by modern technological developments. They also enable all to access the increasing number of on-line services which are important for both Council and residents' needs.

The cuts proposed by the council will lead to some of these centres being closed and others having services cut. Jobs will be lost. Everyone who uses or

works with Camden UK Online Centres will be affected.

A campaign to oppose these cuts has started and both paper and online petitions have been signed by hundreds of Camden residents who value these services. Users of the centres are lobbying local councillors by email from all over Camden. Please support us by:

1) Signing the petition at

<http://www.ipetitions.com/petition/supportcamdenonline-stop-the-c/index.html>

2) Emailing the leader of the council keith.moffitt@camden.gov.uk and other representatives.

● If you would like to help with the campaign or receive regular updates email me at the address below. supportcamdenonline@googlemail.com

Union suspends four union activists



Three UNISON London branch secretaries and one London

branch chair have been suspended from holding UNISON office – Onay Kasab, Greenwich; Glenn Kelly, Bromley; Suz Muna, Housing Corporation; Brian Debus, Hackney. Glenn was this year re-elected onto the UNISON National Executive Committee (NEC) with a higher vote than before.

The case against the four was that they produced a leaflet at UNISON conference, using the three wise

monkeys' image, which it was claimed caused racist offence. However, the person making this claim accepts there was no intention to do this and that she was awaiting an apology. The four gave immediate apologies for any unintentional offence they may have caused even though there has never been any racist use of this ancient image (popularised by Ghandi).

One of the four had complained to the London region that an active member of the BNP – in breach of

the union's rules - was in membership in his branch and he wanted this dealt with. To date no action has been taken.

The four will not have this penalty imposed on them immediately as they all submitted appeals against the decision. The appeals are being heard and a decision is expected in January.

They have also made a claim to an Employment Tribunal (ET) under the new legislation protecting against discrimination for Religious and Philosophical beliefs. All four provided

evidence in their hearing of being treated differently from others in the union who had acted in the same way as them but not been subject to any disciplinary action.

At the ET documents and evidence were produced showing there has been a campaign in the London region to remove certain left-wing activists from their positions. One email to a Regional Officer informed him he was being removed because he 'failed to deal with Glenn Kelly'.

All four, who are members of the Socialist Party, have a proud campaign record of defending members' jobs, pay and conditions. They also provided evidence to the hearing of their excellent record fighting against racism in their workplaces. The ET is due to continue in mid-December.

Camden UNISON has supported their fight against suspension. Now John McDonnell MP is organising a meeting in the Houses of Parliament on December 8 to promote further investigation of officials' actions.



Hugo Pierre
Co-convenor CSF

UNISON carried out a safety inspection of the Crowndale Centre in October as part of European Health and Safety week. **Sarah Friday**, Branch Health and Safety Officer, writes on what shocked the other health and safety reps and herself

Inspecting the Crowndale Centre



Crowndale is a maze. Part of it is a former post sorting office and so some areas are not suitable as office accommodation, but this has not deterred Camden.

Basement: all the basement offices are horrible, but we were particularly shocked to find one group of staff – who are entirely office based – working in a room that does not have a window. Safety law recognise the importance of natural light and research shows those who work in natural light are healthier than those that do not. They should be moved out of this room immediately.

Mezzanine: a low ceiling,

poor lighting, lack of space, along with hot and stuffy conditions mean staff suffer work related sickness.

Display Screen Equipment (DSE) self risk assessments: There is a very low level of take up of DSE self risk assessments. Safety law made it a managerial duty to do these assessments 17 years ago – yet still Camden have not come up with a system to ensure this gets done.

Hot desking: There was a general hatred of hot desking – it is a nuisance, time waster, etc.... Camden needs to look again at this issue.

Heating and air conditioning: Many complaints of it being too hot or too cold! After much pressure from

UNISON Camden have agreed to upgrade air conditioning in some parts of the building. Because this is not comprehensive many of the problems will continue.

Cleaning: Cleaning standards are not up to scratch - cleaning cover has not kept up with the numbers using the building.

Many of the above issues are compounded by Camden's accommodation strategy that crams ever more office workers into a smaller space. Many of the Crowndale staff work with some of the most vulnerable people in the borough. They should given a standard of accommodation that reflects their responsibilities.

By-election win for John McLoughlin

The branch secretary of Tower Hamlets UNISON, John McLoughlin, has scored a clear-cut victory in a by-election to replace the retiring David Eggmore in the Greater London seat on the Service Group Executive (SGE) for local government. The SGE is the union's democratically elected policy-making body for more than 700,000 UNISON members across local authorities in Britain.

John, who gained Camden UNISON's nomination in the summer, secured 60% of the poll in a contest with Peter Daley of the Wandsworth branch. While he gained some 4,200 votes the election turn-out remained low, reflecting a relative dearth of publicity about the election and a lack of awareness among members about the SGE's significance as a decision-making body within the union.

George Binette
Branch Secretary



Victory for Leeds refuse dispute

Refuse department workers in Leeds have won their 11 week all out dispute.

The joint action by UNISON and the GMB was forced by Leeds council's threat to slash workers' wages and privatise the service.

The workers, who stayed solid during 11 weeks, have voted overwhelmingly in favour of a new deal securing their wages. They

returned on 25 November.

Under the guise of implementing equal pay legislation the Tory/Lib Dem council planned to cut 500 employees wages by up to a third, from £18,000 to £13,000. Now only 20 are set to lose much smaller amounts and the agreement with the council states that it will seek to ensure that those employees do not lose out.

Attack on trade union time off

The *Sunday Telegraph* has sent a Freedom of Information request to every local authority asking them to provide the number of union representatives employed by the council who, for all or part of their week, work on trade union activities, rather than council duties. It also asks for the total cost of their salaries, as well as a breakdown of the unions concerned and a 'banding' for the salary of each representative.

This clearly presages a press attack on union organisation in councils. UNISON has sent advice on this to all branches.

There's strength in numbers:

JOIN CAMDEN UNISON

With over 3,500 members Camden UNISON is the largest union in the council. If you are worried about your job in a re-structure, stressed by your workload, having trouble with your manager, worried about outsourcing, have health and safety concerns or are anxious that there is a decent pay settlement this year then you are better off in the union than without. Fight together with others – don't struggle alone. Phone the branch office on 020 7974 1633 or email: paul.england@camden.gov.uk More information at: www.unison.org.uk

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The views expressed in
this newsletter are not
necessarily the views of
Camden UNISON, but
the branch will defend
the right of members to
express those views.

UNISON
the public service union

Augustine (Charlie) Dubuisson: End of an era

Charlie Dubuisson retired in October having clocked up 40 years service as a laundry attendant at the Oasis Sports Centre, Endell Street, Holborn. He started there shortly after coming to London from St Lucia in 1963 and has been a union member (in UNISON and before that NUPE) till the present day. Charlie says he will miss all his colleagues and friends from the Oasis. Within today's privatised leisure industry – that is known for its rapid turnover of staff - Charlie's length of service is quite extraordinary.

In recent years the Oasis laundry service has been scaled down and Charlie's role has been reduced to washing bathing towels for centre users only and clothes of local OAP's. This summer GLL (Greenwich Leisure Limited, the company running most of Camden's leisure centres) closed the laundry, having contracted out the service.

GLL were less than ceremonious in the way they dealt with Charlie's retirement. Already having allowed him to work beyond 65, GLL then changed its mind and decided to set a



default retirement age of 65. UNISON represented Charlie at his retirement hearings and argued that as his job no longer exists he was entitled to redundancy pay (the Employment Equality Regulations 2006 removed the upper age limit on redundancy). There are also possible claims for age discrimination and unfair dismissal. However the recent High Court decision - that it is not unlawful age discrimination for an employer to dismiss an employee on the grounds of retirement at age 65 or over - may impact on Charlie's claim.

The closure of the laundrette brings to an end over 150 years history of public facilities for washing laundry on the Endell Street site. The front page article

of 'The Lady's Newspaper' of 16 July 1853 reports that the new baths and wash-houses were needed as 'a vast amount of loathsome and incipient disease has been allowed to accumulate in London' and would 'by improving the conditions of the poor, increase the comforts of the rich'. For about 100 years prior to the opening of the wash-houses Londoners travelled to Endell Street to a Turkish Bath, originally known as the Bagnio and then Queen Anne's Bath, to enjoy the therapeutic effects of the waters from a natural spring. This was cut off in 1840 shortly before the baths and washhouses were built.

So Charlie's retirement is the end of an era in many ways. We wish him a long, happy and prosperous retirement.

Sarah Friday, Camden UNISON Branch Officer
Fred Folkes and Krzysztof Czarnas, Oasis Camden UNISON representatives

(research on history of the Endell Street site was done with the help of the wonderful librarians at Camden's Local Studies and Archive Centre)

NSL surveillance victory

This victory follows shortly after another for UNISON at NSL Shop steward Richards Zhungu's workplace, Bedford House.

Five of his colleagues whose duty it is to monitor CCTV cameras for parking infringements were charged with gross misconduct for sleeping on duty.

While they monitor for parking infringements, they in turn are monitored by Camden employees by way of CCTV footage from office

cameras. 'Big Brother' eat your heart out! On this occasion Camden alleged that the footage showed that the NSL staff were sleeping on duty. At the hearing (only one of the five was a UNISON member) we argued that the footage was inconclusive - and that the cameras should not be used to monitor staff.

As a result all the charges were withdrawn and our member was the only one of the five to keep her job on

the Camden contract. This showed to workers at Bedford House the importance of being in UNISON and many joined as a result.

Because both cases raise issues around the inappropriate use of CCTV footage we are to meet with NSL to see if this can be stopped.

● If you are facing problems with monitoring and surveillance at your workplace contact Sarah Friday, Phone: 020 7974 1635 or mobile: 07776 37 43 45.