

# workers power

weekly

11 September 2010 • Issue 4 • workerspower.com

## France: millions take to streets in general strike



Jo Cassidy speaks to a French anticapitalist about the protests

FRENCH WORKERS and students have returned from summer holidays to an explosion of class struggle against the raising of the retirement age, with a mass general strike taking place on 7 September.

Workers Power spoke to Martin, a student from the Nouveau Parti Anticapitaliste (NPA) in Toulouse, about the movement.

"The strike took place against the government project to raise the legal retirement age from 60 to 62. 2.5 million people took to the streets in protest against the reform all over the country, with 110,000 here in Toulouse. There were big strikes in many sectors, public and private; it is the biggest day of strike action we've had here in quite some years. All the big unions participated as well as the left-wing parties"

"The mood on the demonstration was very positive – workers and youth are determined to fight. The NPA is now pushing for general assemblies of rank and file workers in every sector who can go further than

the trade union leadership and their strategy of isolated days of action – we believe more is needed. The NPA is arguing for an ongoing general strike, where the strikers take a vote each day about whether to continue the action. This is the best way to step up the pressure on the government."

"I hope that this strike will lead to a movement of all the workers and youth and shift the balance of forces in our favour in order to challenge the government and the capitalist system as a whole."

The movement has enormous potential with 75 per cent of the general public supporting the unions' action and right-wing President Sarkozy's popularity rating is at 30 per cent, the lowest since his election.

Another strike date has already been called for 23 September, with a day of action on the 15th, when the law will be voted on.

A victory for the French workers would be a victory for all movements fighting the austerity plans across Europe.

## ConDems move to sell our post

THE CON-DEMS have upped the stakes by bringing the privatisation of Royal Mail back on the agenda.

It is estimated that half of all mail centres are to be shut while delivery staff will suffer an ever-increasing workload. This is bad for workers, and bad for the postal service that so many of us rely on.

Worse still, they are attempting to divide the workforce by offering postal workers a stake in the sell-off, with shares in the new company, whilst casualising many jobs with temporary, zero-hours and part-time contracts.

Billy Hayes, leader of the Communication Workers Union said: "we fear the government may also be plotting to seize the pension assets."

Now is the time to defend our postal services with a mass campaign of protest from the whole working class movement: trade unions, the Labour Party and communities that rely on their post offices.

With impending action from tube workers and firefighters, workers in the CWU can take courage from knowing that this time they are not alone - we need to fight the Tories together.

As more brutal cuts are announced, it is time for local anti-cuts committees to get down to delivery offices and offer the posties the solidarity they need.



# Martin Smith: fight to drop the conviction

By John Bowman

THE COURTS struck a blow against the right to protest this week when anti-fascist leader Martin Smith was wrongly convicted of assaulting a police officer.

Martin was arrested at a demonstration outside the BBC building in Shepherd's Bush London, where BNP leader Nick Griffin had been invited to speak on Question Time in October last year.

The magistrates believed the words of a single police officer above hours of video footage by major news corporations who filmed the protest extensively. Workers Power members on the day who saw Martin's arrest were also convinced of his innocence.

The courts sentenced him to 80 hours community service, a £100 payout to the police officer and £350 in costs.

Martin told a crowd of 200 supporters



at the court "My only crime is that I refuse to bow to fascism and the BNP and the EDL...It's no crime to fight fascism." He denied the accusation by the police officer that he had kicked him in the groin. He is now planning to launch an appeal.

Among his supporters were many trade union banners and the leaders of the CWU, RMT, NUJ and PCS unions.

For our part, Workers Power gives our unconditional support to Martin Smith against charges by the police and courts.

Mark Serwotka, leader of the PCS union was right when he told Martin's supporters at the court that this was a systematic attempt by the courts to disrupt antifascist protests. He called the conviction a "travesty of justice."

UAF secretary Weyman Bennett was also charged recently for the very serious offence of "conspiracy to commit violent disorder." He is yet to go on trial.

The whole trade union, left and antifascist movement must fight to drop the charges and quash the convictions.

**Send messages of support to:**  
[supportmartin@uaf.org.uk](mailto:supportmartin@uaf.org.uk)

## FBU set to fight mass sackings

By Dan Edwards

LONDON FIREFIGHTERS are balloting for industrial action as the London Fire Authority threatens to tear up the contracts of over 5,500 people.

After frequent attempts by the bosses to force the FBU to accept a new shift structure, the London Chief Fire Officer Ron Dobson announced on his blog (!) that firemen and women would have to accept the offer or be fired without pay. All fire fighters in the capital are now on a 90-day redundancy notice.

The LFA has been demanding that fire-fighters' conditions be altered so that they work twelve hour shifts instead of the current 9-hour-days and 15-hour-nights pattern.

This attack on working conditions in the fire service would lead to huge disruption in the domestic lives of FBU members, with one recently complaining that under the new scheme he would have to go three days in a row, every eight days, without being able to see his children. The cutting of night-time working-

hours also marks the beginning of cuts to the service itself; so much for the Con-Dem rhetoric of "protecting front line services".

London FBU activists will be working all out to get a massive 'Yes' vote - and judging by recent mass meetings, they will get it.

Many of them will also know that he Tories are unlikely to be fazed by one, two or even eight day protest strikes, especially considering the six months spent by the LFA training up an army of scab fire-fighters.

FBU members and leaders should seek solidarity and support from other sections of the workers' movement, and coordinate with other unions - like the RMT and TSSA - taking action against cuts in the public sector to strengthen their struggle.

An indefinite, co-ordinated public sector strike could stop the Tory cuts and protect not just one service or one region, but all our services in the face of this onslaught.

## Support the tube workers

LONDON UNDERGROUND workers from both the RMT and TSSA unions are currently involved in a series of four one-day strikes to save 800 jobs from the tube bosses' axe.

Admin workers, ticket sellers and station staff are at risk but all sections of tube workers, including the drivers, have come out to defend their colleagues.

Bob Crow, leader of the RMT said London Underground were "burning up safety agreements almost by the day in the dash for cuts."

Make no mistake, Boris Johnson wants a war on the RMT to break the union's "control" of the underground and stop one of the most militant British trade unions from being able to resist his government's public sector cuts.

This is why tube workers need to increase the power of their strikes, coordinating with the FBU. If Boris Johnson wants a war with London's workers, then we should give him one.