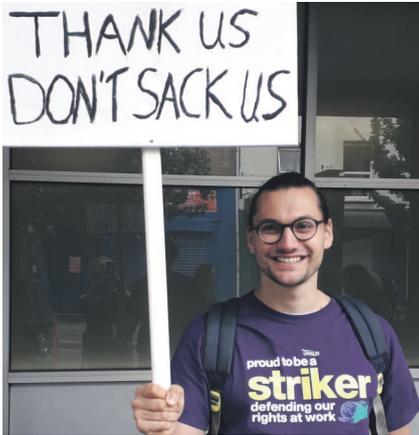


TowerPower

The News Sheet of Tower Hamlets UNISON

Strike special #1 – July 2020



Albert Jacobs House.

You rose magnificently

The long running dispute over Tower Reward entered a new phase in July when the council pushed ahead with its shocking plan to sack and rehire the majority of the workforce in the middle of a pandemic. After a year of trying to bully council staff to sign up to the inferior contract the vast majority had stood firm and refused.

Undeterred and unimpressed by the hyper-aggressive behaviour of council bosses and the misinformation being pumped out by the Mayor and some of his cabinet, UNISON members donned face masks, grabbed their hand sanitiser and headed for socially distanced picket lines for six days of strike action. Those working from home because of Covid 19 'downed tools'.

There is no play book for striking during a loosening pandemic lock down, but UNISON members rose magnificently to the unique challenge and circumstances. The dispute has attracted national and local media attention. Few will forget the sight of Chief Exec Will Tuckey looking unusually agitated on BBC London news as he was grilled about the strike. While Will and Mayor Biggs have predictably tried to downplay the impact of the strike, it has caused real disruption across

#stoptherobbery

various council services as well as heaped negative publicity on both of them.

While the council has imposed the rejected contract this does not mean it cannot be withdrawn and it is still possible for negotiations to continue. The fight and the campaign against Tower Rewards goes on.

Keep checking the Tower Hamlets UNISON branch website for updates:
<https://towerhamlets.unison.site/about/>



John Onslow House.

Mulberry Place Town Hall.



Car pound – Commercial Road.



Our dispute has struck a chord nationally with support flooding in.

People are shocked that workers who have been applauded as essential in supporting the community through the pandemic can be sacked and reengaged to impose detrimental

contracts they have rejected. They are even more shocked that a Labour Mayor is responsible.

Like us they see the cuts to severance as opening the way to redundancies on the cheap. As striker Natasha put it so well on BBC news. 'Step 1: they cut

severance. Step 2: they cut jobs.'

People also understand the damage of increasing inequality by paying for some increases higher up the organisation by cutting down.

continued overleaf >>>

>>> The Council has tried to draw a veil over the equalities impact by refusing to provide data on who loses out grade by grade but that doesn't disguise what we can all see; that the lower down the scales you go the greater the proportion of women and BAME staff. Tower Rewards will increase inequality.



Whitechapel Ideas store.



Transport depot.



Mile End Hospital - Beaumont House.



Crisp Street Ideas store



Mile End Hospital.

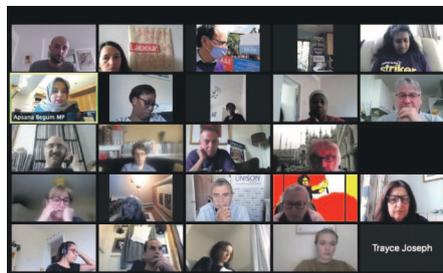
Rallying around to show support

Creative measures were needed so those striking from home and shielding could join in.

Virtual strike 'rallies' were held every day to supplement socially distanced picket lines, and they were a storming success with over 2000 attendees combined. And as news of the strike and the council's shocking use of Thatcherite tactics spread around the country, there was no shortage of high profile speakers lining up to make contributions.

UNISON's General Secretary, Dave Prentis and Assistant General Secretary, Roger McKenzie brought solidarity and committed support right from the top of the union. Strikers were thrilled when Baroness Shami Chakrabarti and John McDonnell MP 'gate crashed' one of the rallies to offer withering rebukes of a Labour council using sacking and re-engagement to change the contracts of key workers without their consent in the middle of a pandemic.

Other speakers included MPs Apsana Begum, Diane Abbott, Richard Burgon and Nadia Whittome. Lord John Hendry QC and Kevin Courtney, General Secretary of the NEU, also made appearances alongside local Labour Councillors who had broken with the Mayor over Tower Rewards to stand by council staff.



What they said about the Council, Mayor Biggs and Tower Rewards:



Dave Prentis, UNISON General Secretary: 'He (Mayor Biggs) is so, so in the wrong... As General Secretary of UNISON we cannot condone such bad

behaviour in our society. For a council to be doing this in the middle of a pandemic crisis is not only wrong but immoral... I believe this strike is so important to Unison and so important to our 1.3 million members'.



Baroness Shami Chakrabarti: 'Labour councils should be leading the way... We're supposed to stand with working people... It's very shaming to be in this

position. I am urging Tower Hamlets to think again... All good employers should be around the table. In the media, they call it a great deal... Perhaps Donald Trump would call it a fantastic deal. If it's so fantastic they should be able to find agreement. No decent

employer should unilaterally impose conditions... It's terrible, it's not what the Labour movement should be about.'



Diane Abbott - MP Hackney: 'How sad that in a part of London with such strong associations with the Labour movement a Labour Council is treating its staff in

this way - using Tory legislations to drive down terms and conditions. I don't want to make it personal but John Biggs should be ashamed. In whose name is he Mayor if not in the name of the ordinary people of Tower Hamlets?'

Contact us

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During the Coronavirus situation the Branch Office continues to be available.

- In the first instance please email jacqueline.durand@towerhamlets.gov.uk or bernadette.hall@towerhamlets.gov.uk with your query.
- To ring please use the Branch Office number **020 7364 5302** or one of these office mobile numbers: **07940 382 299** or **07943 996 646**.

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