

# Britain: rally for sacked Gate Gourmet workers addressed by Socialist Equality Party

Our reporter  
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Socialist Equality Party member Daniel O'Rourke addressed a rally of sacked Gate Gourmet workers and their supporters on September 7. More than 600 employees of the catering company that sub-contracts in-flight meals for British Airways were locked out on August 10 and replaced by scabs, as a means of imposing mass redundancies.

Workers at Heathrow came out in solidarity and paralysed the airport, until the Transport and General Workers Union (TGWU) instructed its members to get back to work. Having isolated the sacked workers, on August 25 the union signed up to a joint proposal with the company urging the workforce to accept the 670 redundancies in return for a financial settlement that is less than the company initially offered. Although portrayed as voluntary, there is no agreement that those identified by the company as "militants" will have any option but to accept.

The union agreed that a letter be sent out by the company asking individuals to make up their minds, in an attempt to break the solidarity of the strikers and impose the union's final betrayal.

The September 7 rally attracted an audience of around 300 and was advertised by the TGWU as a "visit by local Labour MPs—all Labour Party members urged to come along." It is a measure of the isolation of the strikers by the TGWU and the entire trade union and Labour Party bureaucracy that only John McDonnell, MP for the local London constituency of Hayes and Harlington, and a Labour Party photographer turned up. McDonnell spoke before O'Rourke.

O'Rourke drew attention to the article published on the *World Socialist Web Site* on August 30, entitled "Britain: union agrees to hundreds of redundancies to sell out Gate Gourmet strike". The statement drew the

connection between the Gate Gourmet dispute and the experience of striking mechanics at Northwest Airlines in the United States, where the union bureaucracy were similarly sabotaging any struggle. It stressed that, faced with global capital, the working class must respond as an international class, unifying its struggles through the building of a new socialist party.

O'Rourke warned the sacked workers that the Labour Party had been in office for two terms and had not repealed any anti-trade union laws. In fact, it had strengthened them. Labour's attacks did not stop there. It had carried out a war in Iraq and implemented a shoot-to-kill policy.

"This is not a party which represents the working class. It defends the rich and it defends the Gate Gourmet bosses. There has to be a rebellion against the Labour Party," O'Rourke insisted.

"But that is not all," he continued. "A rebellion is also needed against the trade union bureaucracy. These leaders are doing a deal with Gate Gourmet and are selling you out. They are more interested in maintaining relations with the company than with you who are left standing out here.

"The union will allow the company to cherry pick those who are allowed back and then it will allow the conditions that you came out against to be implemented. The TGWU bureaucracy will defend the bosses at all costs and only in an independent political struggle against them will the strike take a step forward."

O'Rourke's comments were met with a warm round of applause. Afterwards, he was surrounded by dozens of sacked workers wanting a copy of the SEP leaflet.

One man told O'Rourke, "I was one of the workers that turned up for work on the late shift and was told by loud hailer in the car park that unless I signed the new

contracts I would be sacked. I had planned a holiday in India leaving on the following day.

“When I went I did not enjoy it at all as I was worrying all the time. I only came back yesterday and went straight down to the picket line here, just to find out what was going on. But everyone says that the union officials have not been here for ages and that they do not know what is happening.

“I am not interested in those taking photos to prove that someone has come down here from the Labour Party. That man [McDonnell] says we need to get rid of [Prime Minister Tony] Blair, but who do we put in his place in the Labour Party that’s any different?

“This man said that he will organise us to go down to Number 10 Downing Street to see Blair, but he will not see us. I know Blair has no interest in us. The trade union leaders are nowhere to be seen. I have no trust in these people. You are right in what you said. They will sell us out.

“How can this all be changed and stopped? The law is on the side of the bosses. The union is talking to the bosses and not us. You said we need a rebellion. Yes, but who do we replace them with? It was good what you said and I will read this leaflet properly later.”

Earlier, McDonnell told the rally that he was pursuing a Trade Union Freedom Bill in Parliament to scrap the anti-trade union legislation brought in by the Thatcher government. On the Labour Party, he only said that the government must be pressured to “act in solidarity” and be forced to outlaw the behaviour of bosses such as Gate Gourmet.

He was questioned by several strikers. One asked, “Hasn’t the Labour Party just become a Tory party?” Another asked, “Why hasn’t Tony Blair been to our picket?” A third wondered what was going to happen to the 11 workers who have had court injunctions issued against them, since it appears nothing is being done.

McDonnell replied by saying that after eight years of a Labour Party government there was no excuse for it keeping anti-union legislation. He had tried to get an amendment to the Employment Relations Bill last year demanding that the right to strike be included, but the government refused. He was now hoping that the Trades Union Congress would support such legislation at its conference next week, although he admitted that it had not done so last time.



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