

# Occupy Bristol supporters attend Capita strike picket

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Workers employed at Capita, the UK's leading outsourcing company operating the BBC TV licensing contract, held their third one-day strike on November 18. They are protesting against a 2.7 percent pay rise—the first for two years and well below the current five percent inflation rate.

Three-quarters of the workforce voted for industrial action at offices in Bristol, Darwen and Glasgow. Many are low paid, earning just above the minimum wage. In 2010 Capita profits increased by 12 percent to £364.2 million and shareholders reaped the benefits with a 19 percent increase in dividends. Some £600 million has been paid out to shareholders over the last five years. The total remuneration for Capita's directors in 2010 was up by 11 percent and £1.65 million was paid out in bonuses to the Capita board, an increase of 23 percent.

Reporters from the *World Socialist Web Site* seeking to interview pickets outside the Bristol office were informed that the company had warned that any communication with the media would result in disciplinary action. Capita management were stood observing the picket. Strikers did explain how one of their colleagues had placed an “anti-Capita” picture on Facebook and was now being “taken down the disciplinary procedure route”.

People from Occupy Bristol were at the picket. Mark addressed the strikers saying, “What you're fighting for is what we are fighting for. We are sick and tired of being pushed around, belittled, being screwed over by politicians and big business. What we are doing on College Green (Occupy Bristol's base) is exactly what you are doing here.”

He continued, “We have seen over the last twenty years poverty increase and a certain section grow extremely well off, while the rest of us work harder and are up to our eyeballs in debt. Wages just haven't gone

up. We have had to take out credit cards just to keep going. The rich win when things are going good and they win when things are going bad.”

Mark announced that Occupy Bristol would set up a second camp outside Capita.

“People say we need to send a message to this government. Well, we have sent enough, we need to bring it down... if the trade union leaders won't give what you want, get rid of them.”

“We are going to push for a general strike throughout Bristol. If we in Britain got together for two weeks we would bring it all down.”

Communication Workers Union (CWU) Bristol Branch Secretary Dave Wilshire put a left face forward on behalf of the union bureaucracy, claiming that “Occupy Bristol and our Bristol Capita members are fighting the same battle. So far as the CWU is concerned, ‘Occupy Bristol’ can camp out at Capita for as long as they like. We salute their idealism and determination.”

The CWU would naturally support people camping out at Capita because it takes the onus off the union for organising opposition to the company. Behind all the talk of “battle” and “determination”, CWU National Officer/Assistant Secretary Andy Furey appealed to Managing Director Terry Boynes to get “into talks with the union with the aim of resolving the dispute.” He hoped that “Terry takes the sensible option and wants to resolve this dispute.”

Workers at Capita should have no illusions in the CWU. Throughout the decade since the nominal “left” Billy Hayes was elected general secretary in 2001, scores of Post Office and Royal Mail offices and depots have closed—leading to the loss of tens of thousands of jobs. Postal workers remain among the poorest paid in the country. In 2009, postal strikes with mass support

were called off with the CWU declaring its commitment to “modernisation”—the euphemism employed by Royal Mail and the Labour government for the sweeping programme of cuts and speed-ups designed to prepare for privatisation.

Unresolved was the issue of Royal Mail’s £10 billion pension fund deficit—the product of repeated “pension holidays” taken by the company with the support of the Labour government.

The CWU and its counterparts no longer function as trade unions as they have been historically understood, i.e., as organisations for the collective defence of the jobs and working conditions of their members. They function as a second arm of management to discipline and control their members and sabotage any and all struggles that they cannot suppress.

The trade union bureaucracy, like its political allies in government, is charged by the financial oligarchy with extracting the hundreds of billions in bailout funds given to banks and major corporations from the workers—through a devastating programme of cuts in jobs, wages, and conditions, as well as the elimination of vital social services.

No struggle can be waged successfully against any of the attacks now being waged against working people under the leadership and through the structures of the trade unions. New organisations of the rank-and-file must be built now in order to pursue the class struggle, in a rebellion against the trade unions. The progressive answer to the rule of the “one percent” and the failure of capitalism is the transformation of the major financial institutions and corporations into publicly owned and democratically controlled institutions, and the planning of world economy to meet social need, not private profit.

Above all, a new and genuinely socialist party is required.

Outside of this, protest actions such as the Occupy movement will be harmlessly channelled back behind the parties and institutions of the political establishment.

Meanwhile, pressure has been building up for police action against Occupy Bristol. The *Evening Post* declared, “We all respect their right to protest but respect has to work both ways and the Occupy Bristol have gone too far. They now need to pack up their things and give College Green back to the people of

Bristol.”

The camp outside Capita was trashed over the weekend by unknown assailants.



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