



The

**Daily Strike Bulletin No.1**

# Open Book

A bulletin by and for University of London workers  
[openbookbulletin@gmail.com](mailto:openbookbulletin@gmail.com)

## Cofely GDF Suez Workers' 3-Day Strike!



We, the outsourced workers responsible for the cleaning, security, and maintenance at the central University of London, are on strike today as part of a three-day industrial action over union recognition, job losses, and equal conditions of employment.

In November, we took strike action for two days. Following the strike, our employer (then Balfour Beatty Workplace, now Cofely GDF-Suez) issued new contracts which offer improved holiday and sick pay conditions. However, they have still refused to talk to us directly about any of the issues raised, or take on board any of our other grievances.

The last strike showed the effectiveness of our action, and has made us determined to continue until we have achieved all our demands, which remain:

1) That our employer, Cofely GDF-Suez, recognise our union (the IWGB) so that we can set up proper formal negotiations. Despite the fact that we are the biggest union among outsourced workers on campus, and we are a legally registered union, Cofely GDF-Suez and the University of London refuse to recognise us.

2) That we be entitled to the same sick pay, holidays, and pensions as our colleagues who work directly for the University. Despite the improvements offered, we are still a long way from full equality, especially regarding pensions.

3) The University of London has plans to close the Garden Halls (of residence) this summer. We want workers in these halls to be given priority when vacancies arise elsewhere in the University, and for longer-serving staff to be considered first. This is a logical, common-sense, fair, and relatively cost-free approach to dealing with the upcoming redundancies. However, once again, Cofely GDF-Suez has refused to engage.

## Report from the first morning of the strike

In advance, the University of London management have been seeking to downplay the potential impact of the 3-day strike against Cofely GDF Suez.

A few days before the strike, UoL issued a statement on its website saying: "Next Monday (27th January), members of the IWGB are due to start three days of industrial action. The University is not expecting any disruption to day to day operations at Senate house"

Let us just survey the disruption on the *first morning* of the *first day* of the strike:

- Dozens of Cofely GDF Suez employees on the picket lines, with many more at home or expected on pickets later in the day.
- Construction workers turned away from the building site at Senate House, and expressing solidarity with the strike.

- An agreement from the piano company not to deliver or carry out repairs for the duration of the strike
- Linen company vans turned away
- Workers arriving to install blinds at Stewart House turned away
- Reports of directly-employed staff taking leave, working from home, or working from other sites today.

Don't let the bosses fool you! This strike is causing disruption to Senate House, it will cause further disruption as the week goes on, and it will continue to damage the reputation of the University of London and Cofely GDF Suez until they negotiate seriously with the IWGB.

### **UNISON rep: "I don't believe in strikes."**

Sharon Bracey, a member of the Senate House Unison Branch Committee and a Cofely GDF Suez rep, continues to be an embarrassment to the countless Unison members at Senate House who support the outsourced workers' dispute and deserve a union that will fight effectively for them.

Crossing the picket line this morning, Sharon told the striking workers: "I don't believe in strikes."

Well, seeing is believing, Sharon! You may not believe in strikes but we can assure you that this one exists.

When it comes to Unison members taking national strike action during the HE pay dispute on 6 February, I wonder if our esteemed branch committee member will believe in them then?

Unison members might want to bear that in mind come the next Senate House branch AGM.

### **Why recognition is important**

One of the major reasons why we are going on strike again on 27-29 July is that the last strike, while winning major concessions, did not settle the question of union recognition.

Why is this important? Firstly, union recognition will allow the IWGB, which represents the vast majority of the Cofely GDF-Suez workers and is a legally-established trade union, to negotiate seriously with management. In the past, our calls for dialogue and negotiation were rejected by the bosses because they preferred to hide behind the fiction that the recognised union at Senate House, UNISON, represented the workers in this dispute. Secondly, if the IWGB is involved in the

negotiations then any discussions with management can be democratically accountable to workers on the ground through our regular branch meetings. As it stands currently, UNISON has been conducting negotiations over the heads of workers who it does not represent and who in most cases are not even UNISON members! Recognition would bring negotiations under workers' own supervision and could pave the way for a genuine resolution to this dispute

### **Lessons from History: 1934 Minneapolis Teamsters' Strike**

In 1934, truck drivers ("teamsters") in Minneapolis, Minnesota USA, struck for shorter hours, pay increases, union recognition, and other demands. The mass strike was the result of a sustained unionisation drive, led by revolutionary socialists. The 1934 strike brought rank-and-file teamsters into direct confrontation with the bosses, the state, and the union officials, with parts of Minneapolis effectively brought under workers' control.

The Teamsters Local 574 union branch started off small and under the control of bureaucrats. With the help of socialist activists, it was totally transformed and helped to organise thousands of workers in the city. It produced a daily newspaper called *The Organizer*, which became the tribune of the Minneapolis labour movement, carrying reports from the workers themselves and countering the lies of the bosses and the union bureaucrats. We hope to achieve something similar with our daily *Open Book* strike bulletins!

The 1934 strike, though different in many ways, contains lessons for today. Now, as then, we faced an employer refusing to recognise and negotiate with the union, and bureaucratic interference from a distant and unelected union leadership in Unison.

**Join us to read a first-hand account of the strike in the book *Teamster Rebellion* by Farrell Dobbs. We are meeting on Wednesday 12 February at 6pm in the University of London Union (ULU). The first session will be a general introduction.**

*The Open Book is a bulletin written by and for UoL workers, and published by Workers' Liberty, an organisation fighting as part of the labour movement for a socialist alternative to both capitalism and Stalinism, based on common ownership and democracy.*

[www.workersliberty.org](http://www.workersliberty.org)