



## Tower Hamlets

# Class Struggle

A Workers' Liberty education workers' bulletin

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# Support Central Foundation's fight! This affects all of us!

**Staff at Central Foundation Girls' School (CFGS) in Mile End had a Happy New Year welcome back to school after the Christmas holidays; the announcement of a restructure which could lead to redundancies for both teaching and support staff, an increase in teaching time and the reduction of support staff all year round contracts to term time only, resulting in a huge loss of pay.**

The reason being given is that the school's budget is in trouble. One of the reasons for this is the Private Finance Initiative (PFI) project being in deficit due to the collapse of Ballast, one of the companies involved.

### PFI: WHO PAYS?

**This is not just a CFGS issue. There are 26 PFI schools in Tower Hamlets, all affected the same way and all being told that they have to contribute to the cost of the deficit out of the school's budget.**

Staff at CFGS are angry at the idea that they have to pay for this with their wages and jobs. One member of staff told *Class Struggle*: "We didn't sign up for PFI. We did not cause the deficit. We did not cause the general financial crisis. Nor did we have any part in previous mismanagement of the school's budget. We refuse to foot the bill for all this with our livelihoods. Why would we agree to that?"

Another added: "If we let this happen, the other schools will follow CFGS. We are only the first in the line. We are preparing to fight, not just for ourselves, but for the other schools in the borough as well".

### STRIKE BALLOT

**Members of the two biggest trade unions in the school, the National Union of Teachers and Unison (which represents non-teaching staff), have voted almost unanimously in recent meetings affirming that they are prepared to take strike action to defend their jobs and pay.**

Unfortunately, because our unions don't function as democratically as they could, workers at CFGS will need to wait for approval from the national leaderships of their unions before they can launch an official strike ballot. That shows why union members need to fight for democratic reform within their union, so workers can take action when they decide they need to, not when some suits in an office in central London give them the go

ahead.

*Class Struggle* thinks that the unions in the other schools in the borough should prepare to support the CFGS workers and also to prepare to fight themselves.

### OTHER CUTS

**The cuts at CFGS are taking place against the back drop of public sector cuts which are having a devastating effect on local services in Tower Hamlets.**

As a result of last year's council budget cuts, essential services are still being closed down or cut. Journeys, the service which provides bereavement counselling, is threatened with closure. CAMHS, the Children's Mental Health unit, is facing the threat of job losses reducing the service without which many people just cannot cope. In the council chamber last year, Councillor Oli Rahman described the closing of all the After School Clubs in the borough as an opportunity for parents to spend quality time with their kids. What offensive spin will he think of to describe the slashing of CAMHS, a service that young people will mental health issues and their families desperately rely on?

### LINK UP

**This year's budget is soon to be debated in the council chamber. They cannot this time tell us that front line services are safe in their hands.**

We know that they are not. We must fight to defend these essential services and prevent any more cuts. And we must link these fights up with CFGS and the other schools at risk.

### Lobby the Tower Hamlets council cabinet meeting!

Tower Hamlets trade unionists are organising a lobby of the meeting on **WEDNESDAY 8 FEBRUARY**. Come along and let your councillors know what you think!

Meet 4:30pm at Town Hall, Mulberry Place, 5 Clove Crescent, E14 2BG

Workers' Liberty is a revolutionary socialist organisation active in the British labour movement fighting for an alternative to capitalism and Stalinism based on common ownership, democracy and workers' control. *Class Struggle* is produced by our members, supporters and friends who work in education in Tower Hamlets. To get involved with producing the bulletin, or to take copies for your workplace, email [awl@workersliberty.org](mailto:awl@workersliberty.org) with the subject line 'Tower Hamlets Class Struggle'.



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## Learn from young workers!

By a Tower Hamlets academic tutor

**New recruits and trainees are the most vulnerable in any workplace. Being inexperienced and unknown you are anxious to keep your head down and toe the line.**

The one million unemployed youth in Britain create huge competition for few jobs, driving many into precarious, low paid, temp jobs, unpaid internships and work-for-dole initiatives. When young workers do land a proper job, they tend to be willing to settle for longer hours at worse pay, potentially undercutting the older workforce.

On 30 November at my school, tutors and cover supervisors were used to cover the lessons of striking teachers enabling the 6th form to stay partially open. They were the only lessons that ran which was good but, as many of those tutors were new, and as the school was funding their GTP's, they did not have the confidence to refuse. Only one came out on strike with the rest of the staff against an instruction from the head not to.

### STRIKE

**I had arguments in the run-up to the 30 November strike about the need to lose one day's pay striking in order to save jobs and pay generally.**

Some of the responses put short term self-interest before the needs of us all to defend our pay and pensions, despite the fact that the cuts to pensions will hit young workers the hardest. Those under 32 won't be able to retire till they are 68.

Unions have a lot to learn from young workers if they are going to change these attitudes. Solidarity does not come naturally to all but we need to strengthen it to defend the public sector. Our unions nationally are not putting much effort into recruiting young workers and they are very undemocratic. Striking should not be a decision made from above and passed down to the membership like pawns in a game or a tap to turn on and off as the leaders decide.



Withdrawing our labour should be a decision voted and acted on by the workers themselves with the support of our union leaders. When we strike we show that not only do we value our own job, but also the work of others.

**In education our work is valuable to society — the expanding of children's minds. We deserve a future however young and inexperienced we are.**

### Canary Wharf College: the first of many?

By a teacher

**The Docklands Settlement Centre used to be the home of a Tower Hamlets PRU, a place where devoted teachers worked to get vulnerable and excluded year 11 students from Poplar and the Isle of Dogs through their all important GCSEs.**

The council did not have the money to adapt the building to suit the needs of a group of young people and teachers, but Sarah Counter, previously headteacher of a private school, did. Thus at the beginning of this term, the kids from the PRU took a bus to their new premises in Aldgate, while a group of younger and more middle class children walked through the doors of Tower Hamlets' first Free school. Canary Wharf College is run by Counter, her husband and a board of trustees comprising largely of people who work in finance and consultancy. Its ability to have class sizes of no more than 20 can only be possible with private funding, its existence outside of the local education authority gives it freedoms around admissions and curriculum that can both directly and indirectly exclude certain groups of children.

Canary Wharf College was advertised in private nurseries and estates as a Christian school in a largely working-class, socially housed and Bengali area; you need only take one look at its website to know if this school is for your child or not.

This is a school for the children of the bankers, lawyers and accountants of its namesake. Not only does this school represent an introduction of social segregation in an area in which schools pride themselves on being truly comprehensive and inclusive, but it also sets a new standard, an artificial standard that can only be achieved through selection and private funding, against which good local community schools will be judged.

**Canary Wharf College may be the first Academy/Free School to have infiltrated Tower Hamlets, but it will certainly not be the last unless schools and communities stand together to defend comprehensive state education against privatisation, and the exchange of principles of collaboration between schools, for those of competition.**

