

Feminists pay a visit to Harriet Harman



On 30th June, a group of feminists assembled outside Southwark Town Hall for the constituency surgery of Harriet Harman, Minister for Women. Harman describes herself a feminist—yet thinks that a 'feminist' response to the recession would be to place more women in top city jobs, putting them 'in charge of the banks'. She supports the Welfare Reform Bill, which proposes to introduce US-style 'workfare' practices, forcing mothers of young children into minimum wage jobs or risk losing their benefits. She recently played a key role in blocking a Bill to legalise abortion in Northern Ireland.

We came with the message that we reject the 'feminism' of the Minister for Women and that there is another type of feminism on offer. We don't want a 'feminism' which is only focused on the interests of rich women.

After the picket lots of us went on to enjoy an evening of films and discussions focusing on the grass roots struggles that women are initiating and engaging in across the country. These included an extract of a longer film documenting the Visteon Occupation that took place earlier this year, the recently victorious Lewisham Bridge School occupation and the impressive challenge a collective of anarcho-fems made to the persistent patriarchy within even anarchist movements. We also heard inspiring stories of ongoing struggles from UCU members currently fighting against massive cuts at Tower Hamlets College, and of one woman's decade long fight to keep open a women- only space in South London.

The evening was a fundraiser for Lambeth Women's Project—www.lambethwomen.wordpress.com

Help Fightback develop feminist resources for young people

We are committed to sharing and discussing feminist history, ideas and perspectives with young people and are developing resources for workshops in schools and youth groups. Our first workshop (an introduction to feminism) has been successfully used in schools and we are now developing other workshops.

Join us on Sunday 6th September to plan another workshop and to discuss ways forward for our work with young people.

Let us know you are interested in using the first pack or having Feminist Fightback deliver a workshop.

Contact us

Email us at feminist.fightback@gmail.com

Our website is www.feministfightback.org.uk

Get involved: Feminist Fightback Calendar

Feminist Fightback is currently a fairly small group of activists involved in a lot of work and we would really welcome new people to come and get involved in discussing and planning with us...

Steering meetings take place on the second Wednesday of the month, from 6-9pm. The meetings will be in three parts - 6-7pm will be a skillshare, 7-8pm will be political discussion and 8-9pm will be for organising/ action planning. Feel free to come to whichever part you are interested in, all self-defining women welcome.

Forthcoming dates

Saturday 29th August, Reclaim the Scene at Manchester Pride—FF will have a stall

Monday 31st August, 10.30-11.30am, feminist workshop at Camp for Climate Action

Sunday 6th September, 11-1, feminist education working group, Bethnal Green (call Alice 07976 274516 for more info/ directions)

Wednesday 16th September, 6-9pm, Transport House, Feminist Fightback London steering meeting (discussion on body image and positive ways forward)

9th-11th October, Fightback planning weekend, Petersfield, Hampshire

Wednesday 14th October, 6-9pm, venue tbc (call Laura 07890 209479 for info) Feminist Fightback London steering meeting (discussion on transnational feminism)

feminist fightback

we're still **here**
we're still **angry**
we're still **fighting**

Fighting racist, sexist education cuts in east London

Staff at Tower Hamlets College returned to work after the summer break to hear that there had been no movement by the management on the drastic cuts being made to jobs and student places from September. On Thursday 27th August they began an indefinite period of strike action, the latest action in an inspiring struggle fought by staff and students at the college since the cuts were announced on 5 June.

Thirteen staff have been given notice of redundancy, and huge cuts are proposed to the English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) department. The ESOL classes most affected by the cuts will be at entry levels, those in the college's community outreach centres, those not expressly for work. They therefore affect the most vulnerable and historically excluded students. The attack is gendered as well as racist— the vast majority of those attending these courses are women. Some are recently arrived in the country, others have been here many years but never had the opportunity to attend a course before. Reasons for this include the incredible lack of ESOL provision in the decades prior to this one, time constraints because of their long hours of labour (particularly unpaid labour in the home), needing to travel outside their local area, and the fear of entering a classroom after a negative experience or no prior experience of formal learning. Community-based provision is essential in helping to break down some of these barriers.



On the picket line, students were asked to support the strike by not enrolling. On a lively picket at the Arbour Square site, staff and supporters had conversations with thoughtful students making the difficult decision about whether to enrol. Many were worried about their course places, but despite this most decided not to cross the picket and to support the strike. Students were under no illusion about what these cuts mean:

ESOL learner Samoneh Mir Jafari explained how important learning English is to her: 'I need to learn English because I am alone in London'

And Pathways to Nursing student Dawn Guilfoyle had a clear message for other students: 'Support the staff, if we work together there is nothing they can do. We need to defend the college for the future.'

The struggle continues. Show solidarity with staff and students at Tower Hamlets College by:

- Coming along to the picket, daily from 7.30am at Arbour Square, E1 or the Bethnal Green Centre, 229 Bethnal Green Road, E2
- Send a message of support via Roberto.foth@tower.ac.uk (UCU rep)

Sign the petition at <http://petitions.number10.gov.uk/THCollegefunding>

- Join the facebook group at <http://tinyurl.com/Facebook-THC> for more information

Why feminist fightback?

We live in a sexist society, fact. 80% of workers in minimum wage jobs are women; 70% of domestic and childcare work is done by women; we are bombarded on a daily basis with images that make us hate our bodies and how we look is always the most interesting thing about us; if a single mother steals from a supermarket to feed her child she is a criminal but the same supermarket can refuse to pay workers a living wage and is committing no crime; one in four women will experience domestic violence in their lifetime, and the state perpetrates and exacerbate violence through its laws, prisons and police. We need a fighting women's movement more than ever. We need a feminism without borders standing for international solidarity with women fighting for their rights throughout the world; that demands the right to choose whether or not to have a child free from economic, legal and social constraints; that works with movements fighting for workers' rights and organises against sweatshops, immigration controls and for the rights of migrants. The world we live in exploits workers for the benefit of the few, and working-class women bear the brunt of poverty, inequality and oppression. Feminist Fightback tries to create a safe space to discuss our ideas and to plan grassroots feminist action, coming together to fight our own oppression and that of our sisters. We seek to involve feminists of different perspectives so please come and discuss with us.