

## Update on the Tube Cleaners' Struggle

### RMT Cleaners Secretary avoids the sack. Fight for Mary's reinstatement continues

ISS, one of the largest cleaning contractors on the Underground, attempted to break the strength of the cleaners on the Underground by picking off two reps. Clara Osagiede, the RMT Cleaners Grade Secretary for the underground was called into a disciplinary on trumped up charges of "gross misconduct". Mary, another cleaners' rep fought for reinstatement after bosses got rid of her. Both of these women have been courageous in their efforts to organise some of the most poorly paid, overworked, and exploited workers in this city, a group that even some in the RMT considered 'too difficult to organise.'

On Thursday 8 January, 40 solidarity and RMT activists including members of Feminist Fightback picketed the ISS offices while the hearings took place. Chants were kept up for the two and a half hours that the women were in their hearings. Shouts of "Reinstate Mary! Don't sack Clara!" brought some life to the cold January morning in one of the smartest areas in Greenwich.



In a clear sign of the level of support the cleaners' struggle commands, this picket was mobilised in just three days by the RMT, Feminist Fightback, Campaign Against Immigration Controls, SolFed, London Coalition Against Poverty, and others. It followed an earlier presence at 8am at the Hainault depot where Clara and Mary work. Ten activists went into the depot and spoke to other workers there. The morning managers' meeting was interrupted as they stared out of the window at activists holding messages of solidarity for Clara and Mary. Activists were finally escorted off the depot by the site manager.

This mobilisation partially met its aim, and in a result few expected given management's determination to crush the union, all charges against Clara were dropped. However Mary's sacking has been upheld.

Activists also picketed the ISS offices again on the 26th of January, in support of Phillip, another RMT Rep threatened with dismissal. While Phillip had been working on the Underground for 7 years, it was only after he became an active union member that ISS questioned his immigration status. We demonstrated again, in front of Metronet, on 28th January to demand Clara's reinstatement.

Cleaners, who spend nine hours a day cleaning broken glass, vomit, etc. often have no mess room and are forced to change and keep their stuff in the same cupboards in which the chemicals are kept. When a cleaner died this year after using unsafe chemicals in an unventilated space, the conditions remained the same for the worker who took over the shift. One cleaner was found the morning after she had died in a cupboard.

These are the sort of conditions that, as a result of the history of trade unionism and working class resistance in this country, are rarely imposed on any other group of workers other than immigrants, which tube cleaners are almost entirely. The private cleaning companies ISS, ITS, ICS and GBM have used the immigration status of organisers as a weapon against them, colluding with immigration controls to arrange the deportation of key activists. To resist effectively we must reject immigration status as a way of dividing us. There are no workers more or less entitled to be here.

Feminist Fightback will continue to offer their solidarity to Mary, Phillip, and this important struggle.

# Calendar

## January

**8th:** 7-9pm **Fightback Steering Meeting**, the Angel pub, near Old Street tube, London

## February

**14th:** 10.30 - 6.30 **Gender, Race & Class: an Anti-capitalist Feminist Event**, SOAS

**21st:** 7.30 pm **Reclaim the Night, Manchester**, University of Manchester Student Union.

## March

**5th:** 7-9 pm **Fightback Steering Meeting**, the Angel pub, near Old Street tube, London

**7th:** 12 pm **Million Women Rise**, Portman Square. Feminist Fightback will be part of an anti-capitalist contingent

7 pm: **International solidarity for women's liberation:** A public meeting to celebrate International Women's Day. SOAS.

**10th:** 5pm Picket outside Harriet Harman's Surgery in protest of her actions during the HFE bill vote.

**28th:** 11.30 - 4 pm **Feminist Fightback Campaigns Planning Day**, The Arbour Community Centre, 100 Shandy St, E1 4ST

**Trade Unionists for Choice** is a Feminist Fightback campaign which aims to actively involve trade unions and working class women in the fight for abortion rights and reproductive freedoms.

Abortion rights won in 1967 gave women control over a big part of their lives - the decision whether or when to have children. They freed women unable to afford private clinics from the risks of backstreet abortions. Working class women need to actively defend and build on this legal right to choose. We want 'reproductive freedom' - real freedom to choose whether to have or not to have a child. Without economic and social pressures. Where sex education and contraception empowers women to make choices about reproduction. Where abortion is free and gaps in NHS provision are never a barrier. Where women are treated as responsible and their decisions are respected. We campaign for the extension of abortion rights to Northern Ireland, an end to the two doctor's signature rule, a publicly owned NHS, a real living wage for all workers, better sex education and free childcare.

Feminist Fightback is currently speaking at trade union branch meetings about the fight for reproductive freedoms and how trade unionists can get involved. If you would like a speaker for your trade union meeting contact us at [feminist.fightback@gmail.com](mailto:feminist.fightback@gmail.com)

## Taking feminism into schools and youth groups

Feminist Fightback members have produced a lesson plan and resource pack for two workshops. The first provides an introduction to sexism and feminist responses to it, and enable young people to reflect on their personal experiences of sexism. The second workshop discusses feminist history, and the various strands of feminism (liberal, radical, socialist, etc.). We hope to raise consciousness of varied experiences of sexism within classes/ youth groups and beyond, and start a dialogue about feminism today.

The 50-minute lessons can be used with upper Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4 students in subjects including politics, citizenship, sociology and PSHE, or in youth groups. It can be used by teachers or youth workers, or we can come and deliver it.

Get in touch with us for more information.

## Upcoming Campaigns

Feminist Fightback has several campaigns planned for the upcoming year:

- Working in solidarity with **LCAP** opposing the government's plans to cut benefits.
- Opposing migration controls and to work in solidarity with migrants' rights groups and No Borders groups.
- Fighting for Reproductive Freedoms, for a *real* choice for all women
- Fighting for sex workers' rights, and against the upcoming Crime and Policing Bill.

If you have any ideas for other campaigns, or would like to be involved, come to a

**Feminist Fightback** is a feminist activist network. We're inspired by the politics of socialist feminism - the idea that women's liberation and the establishment of a democratic, classless society are interlinked - but we seek to involve socialist and feminists of different viewpoints in discussing ideas and building a movement.

We hold regular steering committees in London and the north of England, open to all selfdefining women, to decide activity.

Get involved - email [feminist.fightback@gmail.com](mailto:feminist.fightback@gmail.com) or see [www.feministfightback.org.uk](http://www.feministfightback.org.uk)