



In this issue:

No to zero-hour contracts – fight for real jobs

Cadogan Street

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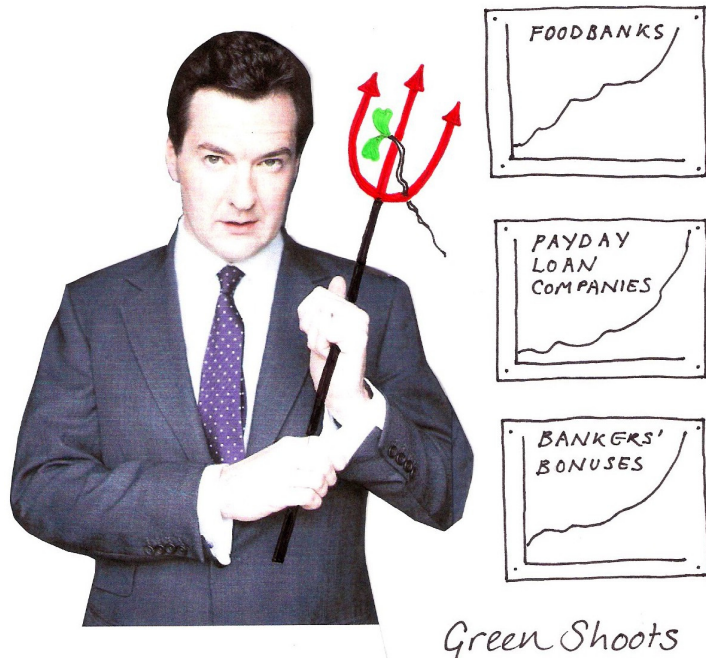
Scottish Unemployed Workers' Network

There's one sort of protest that we could do with less of – that's all those articles from people ensconced in their comfortable studies protesting that people aren't protesting. Out in the real world there's quite a lot happening – it just doesn't get much of a mention in their mainstream media, and so people not already involved may not even hear about it. Well-behaved anti-bedroom-tax camps in city centres don't seem to rate as news, except for some local papers. Without a riot, editors don't see protest as a story. But we can still hope to interact with people on the street, to make them aware of what is happening, and to build our protests up so that they can't be ignored.

In our last newsletter, we reported on the drive to sanction away the benefits of even more jobseekers, and on protests against targets for increasing sanctions in Leith Jobcentre. Edinburgh Coalition Against Poverty is continuing its protests, and the Scottish Unemployed Workers' Network has held anti-sanctions protests in Glasgow and Dundee (see page 3). It was remarkable – and depressing – how many people told us that they had direct experience of sanctions and of trying to survive without any money. We are planning to make our Glasgow protest a monthly event.

That last newsletter also included a long article from Glasgow Against Atos, who hold a monthly picket in Cadogan Street. Our second article in this issue describes how Cadogan Street has become a microcosm of twenty-first century Britain.

We have always emphasised how high unemployment is used to attack the conditions of people in work who are scared of losing their jobs. One of the worst manifestations of this is the growth of zero-hour contracts. In our first article, we look at what these mean – and why there have been yet more protests outside Sports Direct. The SUWN was established for unemployed and underemployed workers. Underemployment is a huge and growing issue, and zero-hour contracts are a major mechanism for perpetuating this.



Please find us on

www.scottishunemployedworkers.net

(where you can also link to our Facebook Page and Group)

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Matt Dobson and Wayne Scott of Youth Fight for Jobs say

NO TO ZERO-HOUR CONTRACTS – FIGHT FOR REAL JOBS

Getting 'a job' can still leave us far from the end of our problems. The work so many of us are forced to do would be soul destroying enough without the tricks and hassle the managers and bosses cause every day of the week. Are we paid enough to put up with being called in at a moment's notice for a shift one week, and then not having enough hours to pay the bills the next? These bosses make millions in profits out of us being flexible while we live at their beck and call and at the mercy of payday loan companies.

The zero-hour contract is a common trick used to exploit at least a million workers in retail and service industries in Britain. Big chains, such as Tesco and B&Q, like to claim they don't engage in this practice, but in reality they offer minimum guarantees of just a few hours work to many employees, who have to hope they are granted enough further hours to make a living.

Sports Direct got themselves in the press as a 'model employer' for paying bonus shares to 'full time staff'. However, the only staff to benefit from this will be those who have worked for the company full time from 2009. Most of these workers are managers. 20,000 shop-floor workers - 90% of Sports Direct staff - are on zero-hour contracts and will receive nothing. Rather than enjoying security and bonuses, they have no rights to holiday and sick pay and do not know how many hours they will work each week. Sports Direct is owned by Newcastle United owner and billionaire tycoon Mike Ashley, who forces the players to advertise payday lender Wonga on their shirts.

Youth Fight for Jobs has organised protests at branches of Sports Direct, including in Glasgow and Dundee, talking to workers about the issues they face and putting pressure on management.



Protesting outside Sports Direct, Dundee (the manager in the doorway is complaining to the police)

One Sports Direct worker told us, 'Had it been merely the wage and the zero-hour contract I would not have labelled them the worst company I have ever worked for. What tips the balance was the shockingly indignant way they treated me and the rest of the workforce. As an employee you were not considered to be worthy of entering the shop via the front entrance, you had to go in via the back door. There was also a big sign on the back door that if you opened it without a supervisor present you would face immediate dismissal for the crime of opening a door! Worst of all, you were basically treated as a criminal and subject to a body and bag search at the end of every shift. It is about time the shockingly bad way Mr Ashley treats his employees is brought into the public spotlight.'

Under these contracts, bosses and managers have a workforce at their mercy who they can hire and drop at will at minimum cost. Politicians get to claim lower unemployment figures when in reality millions are underemployed. And the use of workers on "flexible contracts" can easily be used to undermine terms and conditions of permanent staff.

The Youth Fight for Jobs Campaign says, No to zero-hour, low hour or flexible contracts that leave us at the mercy of our bosses. We want real secure contracts with fixed minimum hours suitable to those who need to work full and part time, paid at a living wage. (see www.youthfightforjobs.com)



*Protesting against
jobseeker sanctions in
Partick and Dundee*

*(top photo by Mihall
O'Cuinn)*

Sean Cudden, who blogs at <http://skintandangry.wordpress.com>, takes a look at

CADOGAN STREET

The first thing you notice when you walk into Cadogan Street are the groups of people milling around and gathering at certain doors. Different groups at different doors at different times – none look particularly happy.



Cadogan Street is home to the offices of Atos in Glasgow. About its door you see dejected, fearful and downtrodden people, some having a cigarette to calm their nerves before going in, some lighting up with shaking hands on the way out. Some are worried that a person with no medical experience, or perhaps a nurse under pressure to meet quotas, is about to tell

them that their ailment is imaginary or even a lie, and that either way it shouldn't stop them working so their benefits are being taken away from them. *What's that you say Mr Smith? Oh I see. Yes that's a shame, but many, many people in wheelchairs who suffer from severe depression, insomnia and terminal cancer work. So don't worry about losing your benefits, you don't really need them. Have you ever thought of being a taxi driver? They work sitting down, and a night shift would fit in well with your insomnia. Besides, even if you can't find work you won't have to worry about it for long thanks to the cancer.*

A connected group, including some of the same people, can be seen in Cadogan Street in the early afternoon of the last Friday of every month. Glasgow Against Atos protests against cuts to benefits for disabled people and against an assessment system that has been designed to take money away from people – and that neither properly assesses their ability to work or truly helps them identify the support they need to get back into work.

Across the road from Atos, you might see groups of predominantly young people milling about. These are door to

door charity collectors preparing for a shift where they will hear the word “no” repeatedly, have doors slammed in their faces, and generally have their youthful perkiness knocked out of them. The charities they collect for include some who have had government grants cut just when individuals are less able to give.

Around 9pm, just next door to Atos, another group gathers – homeless people in grateful receipt of food from a soup kitchen. The dozens of desperate, hungry people who meet there receive food parcels, compassion and a true taste of the Big Society – no home, no income, no hope, but a hand out of food.

Sometimes, a bus is parked in Cadogan Street late at night. It's a drop-in clinic for prostitutes who work in the surrounding streets. Some of the women in the area are young, like the singing prostitute who sings “looking for business?” to passing men in whatever tune pops into her head. She seems surprisingly happy for someone in her line of work, but the bleary eyes and faltering unsteady steps tell a different story. Others look like they might be in their fifties or even sixties, but their true age is probably much less; their appearance afflicted by their occupation, addictions and god knows what other horrors.

All of this goes on in a street full of the offices of a variety of companies that service the very same financial sector that caused the economic crisis: a crisis that has given the preachers of austerity the opportunity they were praying for. Perpetrators and victims share this street. When government ministers and other apologists for the cuts want to defend their position on the need for austerity, they might want to take a walk down Cadogan Street first and see what it looks like in the flesh.