IN EVERY FACTORY AND OFFICE
FIGHT FOR THE UNIONS!

by New Worker correspondent

ON TUESDAY, the Financial Times, the newspaper which does for class-conscious bosses what the New Worker does for class-conscious workers, carried an article titled Trade Unions are Back After a Long Absence.

It opened with the story of a 21-year-old worker in a coffee-shop chain who recently joined a union for the first time, in his case the Bakers, Food and Allied Workers Union (BFAWU). He was recruited via social media after becoming concerned at the start of the pandemic about his café’s infection control and furlough and other issues. The “Pink ‘Un” reports him as saying: “Thanks to the pandemic I think there’s going to be a massive resurgence in the idea of unions because so many people, especially young people, have realised how vulnerable they are to the whim of their employer.” Let’s hope so – and about time too!

At the last count in May 2020, members of TUC-affiliated unions amounted to 6.44 million or 23.5 percent of the workforce. At the dawn of the Thatcher era, in 1979, the TUC represented 13 million workers.

At present, 3.69 million are women, 3.7 million trade unionists work in the public sector and 2.67 million in the private sector. About half of union members have been with the same employer for 10 years or more and over three-quarters are aged over-35 compared with 63 percent of the workforce as a whole. The announcement of a 21-year-old recruit is therefore more news-worthy than it was in the days when the shop steward came around and signed up apprentices on the day they arrived at the factory.

one in ten

At present, only one in ten 20–25 year-olds are union members. This is a serious problem that unions need to address. Jesuit leader Ignatius Loyola had a genuine point when he said: “Give me a child till he is seven years old, and I will show you the man.”

Young workers need to become trade unionists at an early age, not put off joining until the boss threatens them with the sack for some wearing the wrong colour of socks. Too many activist young people confine themselves to single-issue matters such as environmental issues, which occupy them for a while before they take off for a long summer break on the other side of the globe. The anarchist tendencies they pick up in such movements sometimes put them off what they see as oppressive trade union bureaucracy. In many cases that only means they don’t like it when a vote goes the wrong way.

The TUC does not seem to be very active in this matter. Whilst it encourages young people to join unions, the figures mentioned above suggest that lots more work needs to be done. The TUC’s Twitter feed aimed at young trade unionists seems to consist of simply passing on ‘worthy’ messages about every subject under the sun.

The old ‘last in, first out’ policy enforced by trade unions whenever jobs were being cut in a factory, designed to benefit older workers with family commitments, fortunately is now a thing of the past.

If unions focused on fighting for higher wages, job security and the nationalisation of essential industries, all members would benefit.

Unions benefit all workers. Social media also has an important role to play – but whilst it is useful for advertising the simple fact of trade unionism, it is no substitute for plenty of young and active shop stewards in every factory and office. That’s where the battle for trade unionism will be won or lost.

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FUND

This week’s fighting fund tally came to £897 pushing the running total for the March appeal to £1,425 thanks to supporters in England, Scotland and Wales who rallied to the cause to keep our presses rolling for another week. Two comrades, one from Southall and another from Eastbourne sent in £100 cheques. A regular supporter of the fund from Carlisle sent in £40. A Welsh reader posted £20. Two Dagenham comrades gave £22 and we got donations from two supporters in Leicester and Sutton-in-Ashfield. PayPal donations included £50 from a Hexford comrade that was matched by another in Bristol. A Southampton supporter gave £40 and a Midlands hacker made a £25 contribution. We now need £2075 to hit our monthly target of £3,500.

We rely entirely on our readers to help keep our communist presses going. Help us by sending donations to: New Worker Fund, PO Box 73, London SW11 2PQ. Cheques and postal orders should be made payable to the ‘New Worker’.

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