
THE SUPERMARKET WORKER

Organising across the supermarket sector

What is The Supermarket Worker?

This is a monthly bulletin, produced by a cross section of people working in different supermarkets. We are sick of our low wages, and the insecure and hyper-exploitative nature of work in our sector. We've seen from the experiences of other workers that when people get organised management can no longer ignore our concerns. The only way out of this situation is to learn to support each other, trust one another and to stand up and get organised. Breaking the silence about the conditions of our work is the first step toward that. You are not alone.

Co to jest 'The Supermarket Worker'?

'The Supermarket Worker' to miesięczny biuletyn wydawany przez grupę pracowników, którzy mają dość niskich wynagrodzeń, niepewnego zatrudnienia i wycisku w naszym sektorze. Wiemy, że gdy zorganizujemy się, menadżerowie nie będą mogli nas ignorować. Jedynym rozwiązaniem naszych problemów jest wzajemne wsparcie, opór i walka o swoje.

Too Lidl, Too Late

As of March the 1st this year Lidl will be rolling out a payrise for 16,000 of its employees. The UK's 'low-cost' supermarket said that it would be increasing entry-level wages from a measly £8.45 to an equally paltry £8.75 per hour outside of London and £9.75 to £10.20 within the M25, in-line with the increase in living wage announced last year. Despite the obvious 'piss taking' nature of a 40p per hour pay hike- it does beg the question what are USDAW - the union allegedly representing the interests of all workers in our sector - doing? Why for example haven't they sort to extend these pay rises across the entire sector- for the millions of us struggling to make ends meet in the UK's food supply chain?

The simple answer is USDAW are a 'partnership union' - in plain speak- they're 'a bosses' union'- and while they are there to represent you on some level, they actively seek to mediate any struggle between workers and their employers-- usually in the interests of the company's productivity. We've all seen the USDAW training videos for example- were a worker makes a complaint about the inefficiency of some aspect of their job, they talk to their USDAW rep and 'hey presto' the problem gets resolved and the now job gets done quicker! This obviously isn't in our interests - we don't need quicker tasks!! Far from it- we need work to slow down- we need a fighting union that's going to slow the pace of work, increase our wages and make our working conditions better not actively worse. If USDAW can't do this, we are going to have to do this ourselves. If you work in a supermarket outside of the Lidl chain, why not raise the news of the Lidl pay increase with your fellow workers and your USDAW rep? When are Tesco, Sainsbury, Morrison, ASDA, Safeway, Iceland and all the others going to step up to the plate and pay us what we all know we deserve? If USDAW won't negotiate for us, then we are going to have to take matters into our own hands. *Time to get organised.*

Are there any unions that actually win?

So USDAW are useless. Some supermarket workers are members of GMB, and they don't seem to be doing much better. What can we do about it? We've got three options:

1. Give up.
2. Change the unions from the inside.
3. Join another union - one that actually wins.

We reckon option 3 is the best.

There are a couple of unions in London that have been organising workers in similar precarious conditions. The United Voices of the World and the Independent Workers of Great Britain have both had big successes winning wage increases and better conditions for cleaners. They're unions that aren't afraid to take the fight to the bosses. If we could start to organise like they do, we're more likely to be able to develop our own power.

<https://www.uvwunion.org.uk>

<https://iwgb.org.uk>

Help Out & Contact Us

Print and distributing the Supermarket worker! Hand it out around your workplace, give it to mates in other shops. We can send you paper copies if you get in touch.

Contact us at:
organiseoursector@gmail.com

Supported by the Class Inquiry Group.

XMAS at Tesco

I was recently employed to work at Tesco by an agency over the Christmas period. I was employed as part of the night team at a superstore, restocking 'ambient goods' from 10pm until 6am in the morning. My job involved dragging cages of stock from the warehouse to the appropriate aisle (often using cages that were broken and dangerous); laying out the goods near their designated shelves; rotating the stock so the new stuff was at the back of the display; putting the new stock onto the shelves and finally 'fronting up' the products so they looked neat and tidy for the customers.

Work was totally relentless there- and while I was told I would only have to work 3 nights a week- the evenings I was 'required to work' (re: told I had to) escalated the closer we got to Christmas. No one felt they could refuse the 'extra hours', as all the agency staff were made to feel we would not be asked back if we didn't comply with these demands, also many believed there was the possibility for our contracts to be extended if we showed willing (something management told us themselves). None of us were ever given an extended contract. We would often work through our 'lunch' breaks in order to get the shop ready in the morning- and while promises to leave early- or have the time made up to us, were made- none of these were met. We were totally run down- there seemed to be no distinction between the agency staff or the permanent team in this regard.

Most of the team directly employed by Tesco also looked bullied and harassed by management and the pace of their jobs. Many 'long term' workers complained of health issues, directly related to their job (lots of bad backs, necks, knee problems, poor sleep patterns and chronic cases of fatigue) and about bullying from the management team and poor wages. The night team also felt segregated from the wider 'Tesco' family and were not invited to x-mas outings or staff parties- leaving morale very low. One agency worker was also driving lorries during the day as his wages were so low (something management knew). How he didn't kill himself or someone else is beyond me. There was no regard for his welfare at all. I didn't have a lot of interaction with the 'day staff', but those I did speak to complained of 'shortening hours' and a lack of job security and unfair and disciplinary 'sickness procedures'. I lasted a month and a half before I was finally let go. In that time, I had met lots of people disgruntled with their wages, hours and conditions but no one felt powerful enough to challenge this. What was needed was more communication between the workers and a belief that we would support each other with our concerns or demands - USDAW were obviously not doing this- no one I spoke to thought they were even worth paying a subscription to. It was clear that Tesco workers need to come together and discuss their shared problems- in honesty they need a new union and they need it fast.