

# BRIEFING ON CHARTWELLS IN READING

<http://rscw.weebly.com>

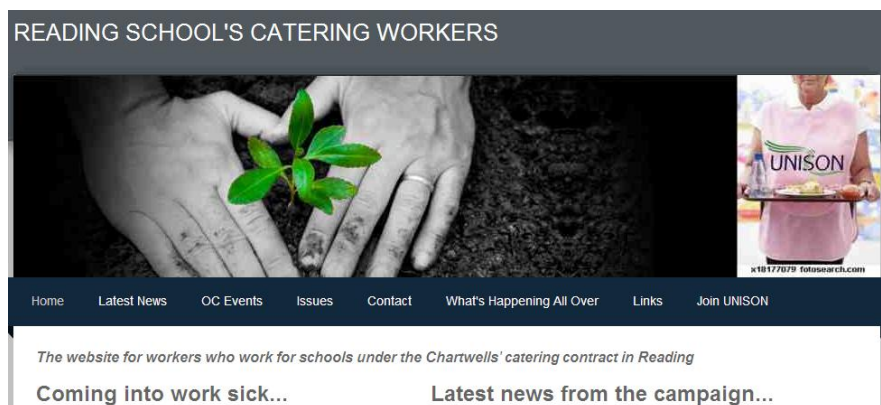
## Overview

UNISON is working to organise workers in three private sector contractors. These contractors compete for catering and cleaning contracts in the public sector. These workers have for years not been unionised and are some of the most exploited workers working in our schools, hospitals and public buildings around the country.

In **Reading**, the catering contract is currently awarded to a company called Chartwells, which is part of the multinational company Compass. This contract is up for renewal in 2011 and the workers are building a movement with parents and politicians in Reading, to campaign for changes in the way the company treats its employees.

## Our website

The workers have setup a website which has details of what we are doing in Reading and how the project has developed in Sheffield. We will update this with more information over the course of the campaign and would like people to share their support for the workers online. Why not take a look at <http://rscw.weebly.com>.



## Company structure

There are around 120 workers in schools across the Borough and they provide meals to children from a wide range of backgrounds. The workers are low paid and have in the main no sick pay and have to choose to come to work sick or lose pay, which they cannot afford to do.

The workers are forced to make some difficult decisions. On the next page they explain in their own words.



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## Workers speak in their own words...



# Sick Pay

***“Not everyone gets sick pay and this is unfair.”***

*“We do not want to make a choice between losing money and coming into work sick. We love our jobs and just want to do them properly. We just want what every other school employee has in the same school, nothing more, and nothing less. It is hard to imagine that despite the millions of pounds of profits made by the multi-national company, Chartwells, they continue to cream off the profits, while their workers, low paid school meal worker like us, that bring in the money and make them the profits, are working until they drop.*

*We cannot afford to take time off; low paid work does not have the luxury to choose between work and sickness. It makes it all the more challenging for us. When the workloads are high, losing a day’s pay could mean a choice between buying a day’s shopping to feed our families or not.”*

***“It cannot be right and fair that in a civilised society, a company can expect there to be no provision for sick pay. We feel we should all be paid sick pay and not just for those of us Tupe’d over. Why can't we all get the same?”***

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## Pay

***“We are not asking for massive pay rises, just to be paid the same rate for the same job.”***

*“Recently, cooks have been offered different overtime rates for the computer Health & Safety training. We should be able to do the training during work time, but because it is so busy, we cannot. If it is work we should be paid for the time no matter how long it takes. It is not fair that across the Borough we are offered different amounts, different rates and non payment for additional hours and overtime.*

*Inequality and a two tier workforce are only a trickle of issues on pay that we want resolved. We should all be paid the same fair rate for the same work. Equal pay, right? We do not think it is fair that one temporary worker, on a contract, can be paid more than the supervisor.”*

***“It can be quite demeaning for one school meal worker to be paid a higher rate of pay, when their junior, with less responsibility, less workload, is paid more. We want justice!”***

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# Recognition & Reward

***“No matter how hard we work, we are an invisible workforce.”***

*“A workforce that can work hard without pay to make sure the floors are cleaned, the tables put away and the children fed. A simple thank you and encouragement is not hard. If we work longer hours we should be paid for them. The service we provide is enjoyed and supported by the schools we work in, where their pay and conditions are recognised.*

*A lot of the teachers, head teachers and teaching assistant and supporting staff receive the benefits of sick pay, holiday and fair treatment at work. A lot of them support our stand to have the right pay and conditions. A lot of us want to be treated in the same way as the schools by having the respect and recognition for our work, feeding our next generation.”*

***“At meetings organised by Chartwells, we are not allowed to ask questions or speak. We just want to be respected and treated fairly.”***

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# Equipment

***“Sometimes we have to go out and buy cutlery for our kids as Chartwells ignore our requests for replacement forks and knives.”***

*“Often, we have to wash cutlery during the lunchtime period as there is not enough. Why is it so hard to replace lost cutlery? The cost in washing up, preparing the same cutlery twice, adds to our workloads, increases the pressure on us to deliver a healthy school meal. They would save far more time and money by investing in the appropriate amount of equipment. So we do not have to get the head teacher, through sheer disgust of our treatment, driving in her own time to buy cutlery for the kitchen staff, working in her schools.*

*The schools are provided with the latest laptops, computers and equipment for the teaching staff to provide a professional service. It only seems fair and good practice that Chartwells provides the appropriate level of cutlery, clothing and equipment. Chartwells has to maintain a standard of health & Safety in order to avoid putting at risk its workers from injury, good hygiene practice and duty of care. We want to make a stand so that we have the right tools to do our job.”*

***“Chartwells, when did you audit your kitchen for the right levels of equipment? When did you last ask your kitchen school meal workers about the replenishment of cutlery?”***



# Family Friendly?

***“Our children are not allowed to study at the same school.***

*“It might not be the case for all of the workers and schools. It can make the working day all the more demanding and interfere with our own childcare issues. We cannot understand what difficulties it would present, when it would make our childcare provision easier.”*

***“Where is the caring and investment in us as workers?”***

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## There is a better way...

Around the country, workers are coming together to campaign for better treatment. We piloted this methodology in Sheffield and we have been working in Reading since February. We have achieved some early successes such as 'Snow Pay', when Chartwells were refusing to pay workers for the days when the school was closed due to the snow. The workers joined UNISON and said no, this is unfair especially when other workers in the school were being paid while the school was closed. The company had to back down.

## How does it work...?

We have an organising committee of workers from Reading schools working to bring together a conference of like minded people in September. We need community leaders, politicians and party workers to join us by pledging the following:

I recognise that across Reading schools, workers in Chartwells cook and provide high quality service for thousands of children every day. The high quality food and service help children focus on learning in the best possible environment, irrespective of their cultural background.

I am proud of the work they do, but worsening conditions and no sick pay are making it harder for the workers to do their best for the children and the Reading community.

**Count Me In!** I am joining with the workers from my community to improve the terms and conditions for Chartwells workers on the school's catering contract.

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Email \_\_\_\_\_

Mobile Number \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_ Postcode \_\_\_\_\_

There is more everyone can do, but together we can change the lives of many workers in Reading, the UK and the world. Be part of the change you would like to see in the world and join us.

Written by Paul Bell and workers from the kitchens in Reading Schools  
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