



## **Burston School Strike**

The longest strike in history was staged by the children of a small village in Norfolk, in 1914. In 1902 a Bill was introduced offering education to working-class children, but the conditions they were taught in were squalid. Teachers Tom and Kitty Higdon wanted these children to be treated with equal respect and objected to them being pulled out of school to be used as cheap labour. But Tom and Kitty found themselves at odds with the farm-owning managers of the school, and were dismissed, despite requests to the council from the NUT.

The new teacher was greeted with the message on the blackboard “We are going on strike tomorrow”. A group of children led by Violet Potter and assisted by parents marched with placards saying, ‘we want our teachers back’. Tom and Kitty set up an alternative Strike School, which had 66 of the 77 children from the council school. Parents supporting the strike were summoned to court for not sending their children to the council school and land owners sacked participating workers. However, with donations from the miners, railway workers unions and others, a new school was built and opened on 13 May 1917.

## **Playfair 2012: campaigning for a sweat-free Olympics**

The Playfair 2012 campaign calls on the sportswear industry and Olympic movement to ensure that the rights of workers making their products in global supply chains are respected, in line with internationally recognised standards and the UN Universal Declaration on Human Rights. Playfair 2012 is coordinated by the British Trades Union Congress (TUC) and Labour Behind the Label, and is supported by more than 20 trade unions and non-governmental organisations.

As a result of the campaign, the organisers of the London Games wrote into contracts with their suppliers that they must meet the labour standards in the Ethical Trading Initiative base code. This means that workers supplying goods/services should have their rights respected and be paid a

living wage. The campaign also persuaded the organisers to develop a system so that workers in these supply chains can make a formal complaint if their rights are not respected and for these to be investigated and resolved. These are big steps forward and the first time this has happened for any world sporting event. But there is still more that needs to be done.

Pressure from the international Play Fair campaign (of which Playfair 2012 is part) resulted in a groundbreaking agreement between sportswear brands, trade unions and suppliers being signed in Indonesia, in June 2011. The agreement on respecting the right of workers to join/form a trade union will help ensure that workers will not be victimised for carrying out trade union activities and is an important step towards negotiating with employers for better pay and working conditions. Playfair 2012 is also working with trade unionists in Brazil to support their work to raise standards for workers delivering the Brazil World Cup in 2014 and Rio Olympics in 2016.

## **Sri Lanka**

In Sri Lanka, trade unions, garment workers and labour rights organisations ran a campaign to increase the national minimum wage in 2010. The Free Trade Zones and General Services Employees Trade Union in Sri Lanka educated workers about their rights and collected more than 20,000 signatures in support of the campaign, which they handed to their government. Following negotiations with the government, they successfully gained a 30 per cent (around £15) increase in their monthly minimum wage. They are now campaigning for a living wage of around £130 a month. The union also organised the first-ever meeting in Sri Lanka bringing together major players in the garment industry like Adidas, Nike, Next and Colombia Sports to agree to work together to address poor working conditions like low wages, long hours, unrealistic production targets and workers’ right to join a trade union not being respected. The British TUC supported this work through a joint project with the union.