## Motion 4 submitted by KCL

Solidarity with cleaners’ struggle

1. At King’s College London in November 2016, the cleaners’ private employer Servest suddenly served all cleaners with a notice that they would either be made redundant or have their hours significantly reduced, alongside more long-standing problems of excessive workloads, no provision of cover staff, and issues with taking breaks and holidays. KCL Unison organised two very successful, loud, angry protests to demonstrate the grievances of the workers, and as an opportunity for students and other staff to show solidarity with the cleaners. In January 2017, a ballot for industrial action came back with an overwhelming 98% in favour of striking.
2. The striking workers at KCL are part of a wave of cleaners at elite London universities fighting for stable contracts, to be brought in house (employed by the university rather than by private contractors) and for better pay. LSE (London School of Economics) had large protests in October and November 2016 led by cleaners in United Voices of the World, and SOAS (School of Oriental and African Studies) has had a campaign led by cleaners running since 2006! They’ve won many key demands – such as the London living wage – but the cleaners have not yet been brought in house, so the campaign continues. Cleaners at the University of South Wales, organised in UNISON, have also recently started a campaign for a pay rise as they currently earn the minimum wage.
3. Migrant workers often form the most oppressed layers of working class people – employers use them as a source of cheap and casual labour, which for the workers means instability, poverty pay, and terrible conditions at work. Especially in London, they’ve become increasingly radicalised and organised. Migrant workers are joining and building grassroots unions like United Voices of the World, who have led numerous strikes in defence of pay, tips, and victimisation.
4. The issue of pay in particular has attracted attention – students are funnelling more money now than ever into UK universities through their tuition fees, and yet rather than the poverty pay of support staff (including cleaners) being raised to a living wage, the pay of vice-chancellors is increasing. A 2016 Times Higher Education survey found that, whilst universities were offering staff a 1.1.% pay rise, they were offering their vice-chancellors a pay rise averaging 6% nationally – although some individual vice-chancellors had a pay rise as generous as 25%!
5. KCL Socialist Students has attended all the protests, and we will be visiting any picket lines, to show solidarity with the cleaning staff. This is turning out to be a very explosive issue on university campuses – the campaigns against it have been much more visible in London, but this is an issue everywhere. Socialist Students has a strong track record of showing solidarity with workers, and actively building links with the trade union movement. There will be opportunities to build on this in 2017 with university support staff, especially cleaners and especially those employed by private contractors. All Socialist Students societies should investigate if this is an issue on their campus, if there is a mood to organise and/or if workers are already organising against it, so we can be at the fore of organising student solidarity.