



Blackadder: Banned from Facebook

By Eric Lee, Labourstart.org – 24.01.2008

Facebook, the social networking website, is getting a lot of attention these days. In the trade union movement, there are differences of opinion about how useful Facebook actually is. Some of us are making a real effort to find out by using Facebook as an organizing tool.

One of them is senior LabourStart correspondent Derek Blackadder, from Canada. Derek's day job is as a staffer for the country's largest union, the Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE). He's one of the people who thinks Facebook is potentially quite useful for trade unionists.

Well, maybe not so much anymore.

You see, a few days ago, Derek was banned from Facebook.

I'll let John Wood from the U.K. tell the story in his own words:

Derek got a note from the good book, telling him he was trying to add too many friends, and should calm down a bit, or else. Now as a union organiser, he's quite likely to want to add lots of friends - it's kind of what he does. So he waits a bit and tries again, and is told he can't add any more at the moment and to wait and try later. Fair enough. He waits a bit more and tries again, same message. By now, he's probably frothing at the mouth and muttering "must organise, must organise", so he has another go to see if the coast is clear, and promptly gets himself a ban. That being a ban from Facebook itself - no more profile, no access to the stuff he's built up, no appeal.

John has launched a Facebook group to sign people up to protest the ban on Derek. I am writing to ask each and every one of you to take a moment and [sign up to join the group](#). If you are not yet signed up on Facebook, join the 60,000,000 others who have done so and [sign up](#).

We know that this isn't nearly as important as most of the other campaigns we do on LabourStart -- and if you read all of [John's article](#) you'll detect a somewhat light-hearted tone.

Still, as social networks become more and more important, our access to them as trade unionists must be protected. These are early days yet -- I know that most of you are not yet signed up to Facebook. This is good time to see whether we can mobilize the kind of support -- the thousands of names -- that will force the owners of Facebook to reverse course and allow Derek to do what he does so well: organize.

Thanks for your help on this. And spread the word!

Eric Lee

John Wood's Facebook application for Unions

It's very simple and lets members show a union badge on their Facebook profiles (along with a link to that union's website and official Facebook group if there is one) and see which of their friends are in unions.

The idea is twofold -

- to help grow our unions' own Facebook groups a bit. Many in the UK are starting official groups (or endorsing unofficial ones), and this might hopefully alert more members to the existence of a group for their union.
- also to just generally increase visibility of unions, in a popular forum where people are conducting other personal business. In the UK, 80% of the private sector are not union members, and these people probably think they don't know any union members, as people don't tend to have reason to talk about it much. We hope it will be one more small contribution to help non-members see that lots of their friends are actually members of a union, so it might not be such a strange thing to do to join one!

I'd like to get more countries using it too, as Facebook is popular all over the world, and there will be a lot of personal friendship links between people in different countries that would be fun to bring out. Currently exploring with a few other national federations to use it - the more that join, the better it will be for everyone.

You can install it to your own Facebook profile at <http://www.my-union.org> - though it will only show you UK unions at the moment. If I created another country, it would appear in the drop-down list next to "UK" when people first install the application. It's very easy to just click a button to add another country, with its own admin panel to let you add/delete unions if needed, or add official Facebook groups if they start them. There's also the option of advertising a central national "My Union user group" Facebook group, which could let the national centre build their own Facebook channel, as a communications resource for all unions online in that country.