

Saltend lock-out

National strike needed to defend rights

Alistair Tice

The Socialist has previously reported on the over 400 engineering construction workers who have been locked out from a site at BP Saltend, near Hull. The weeks-long lock-out results from a dispute over company attacks on the construction workers' national agreement (NAECI). On 10 April, at arbitration service ACAS talks, main contractor Vivergo refused to talk to union officials representing the locked out Redhall workers, unless they called off the daily protests at the plant.

The next day, Monday 11 April, Vivergo got their answer when Redhall workers blockaded the gates, then invaded and closed the site, and later blocked the roundabout causing traffic to tail-back miles to the city centre.

Whilst the call for solidarity strike action at other construction sites on 6 April did not come off, delegations joined the protest at the gates from West Burton, Conoco, LOR and Drax, and the Teesside lads picketed ICI Wilton causing three to four mile



Rallying to defend the NAECI agreement photos Yorkshire SP

tailbacks.

And in a show of solidarity, the Interserve and Doosan repair and maintenance workers at BP Saltend refused to cross dispute lines and stayed out all week. Also the electricians and scaffolders who had been put on "gardening leave" for four weeks refused to cross on Thursday

and Friday when called back to work. Employers are now threatening sackings of those standing in solidarity with Redhall workers.

BP, who have a 40% stake in Vivergo, have their company AGM in London on 14 April. Coachloads of locked out workers are going to protest. As one Redhall worker put it:



At the gates of the Saltend site

"The 'little men' are going down to London to show them who's boss".

The trade unions must make it clear that if any other worker is sacked as a result of this action, then the whole industry will be brought to a halt. We cannot allow victimisation of workers taking basic trade union solidarity action.

Pressure from below has finally forced an emergency (after six weeks!) National Engineering Construction Committee (NECC) stewards' meeting to be called for Monday 18 April in Leeds specifically to discuss the Vivergo/Redhall

lock-out.

This meeting must take the bull by the horns. The lock-out is a blatant attack on the NAECI agreement and TUPE [transfer of employment] rights. If Redhall workers are not re-employed, then this will give the green light to all employers to attack and sack other construction workers.

The NECC must name the day for a national stoppage of all NAECI sites. Stewards at all sites should invite Redhall workers to mass meetings to explain what's really happened and dispel the myths and rumours that have been circulating. This will prepare the way for a successful national strike which should be extended if the employers don't back off and re-employ the Redhall workers.

- Please send donations to the lock-out hardship fund to: Treasurer Mr Steve Cressey, 1 Manby Road, Scunthorpe, DN17 2LA. Please make cheques payable to the: Saltend Hardship Fund.

- Messages of support and requests for speakers to: Keith Gibson: 07743135183 or geminis@geminis.karoo.co.uk

Unison health conference

Delegates disappointed

Roger Davey

Unison health service group executive, personal capacity

This year's Unison health conference, held in Liverpool, was the first major union gathering since the magnificent demonstration on 26 March. It also came at a time when both the NHS and the pay and conditions of health workers are coming under ruthless attack from the coalition government.

These two huge factors should have made this an historical conference, one that established a clear strategy, programme, and commitment to defeat the government. Instead the conference illustrated the unwillingness of the union bureaucracy to build upon the momentum of the 26th and delegates returned to their branches disappointed.

The whole conference was tightly controlled, which ensured that any resolution that called for industrial action over pensions or privatisation was ruled out of order. It meant that the service group executive did not oppose any of the motions, none of which, of course, committed the

union to do anything.

However, there is huge pressure building up from health workers for the union to take action over pensions, the pay freeze, and the destruction of the NHS. Delegate after delegate told of the reality of working in the NHS today as it is being prepared for privatisation.

They spoke movingly about the likely impact of marketisation, and the effect that the unprecedented financial cuts will have on patient care. They also repeatedly expressed anger that health workers and patients are expected to bail out this rotten capitalist system.

In fact when delegates, in the main Socialist Party members, called for a one-day public sector strike to defend the NHS and our living standards they received an enthusiastic response from the conference. Not even the bureaucracy could completely smother this overwhelming desire for action, emanating from the rank and file.

In one of the conference workshops, delegates were asked to decide how to react if management proposed cuts in order to save jobs and services. There was uproar when those participating in the

workshop unanimously refused to accept any cuts either in the service or in pay and conditions.

The pressure and mood even forced general secretary Dave Prentis to talk of strike action over pensions. He made the startling claim that he had fought all his life for the downfall of capitalism! But the stark fact is that we've heard all this before, without national action following. Unison needs a new leadership to ensure that it becomes a fighting democratic union.

During the next period, tens of thousands of health workers will be demanding action from the union. This would be a step towards transforming Unison into a fighting organisation, one that will join with other unions in national strike action to defend living standards and to campaign against all cuts.

The Socialist Party made a significant impact on the conference, with a record number of delegates, and an inspiring fringe meeting addressed by Tony Mulhearn, one of the heroic Liverpool councillors who fought the Tories in the 1980s. Socialist paper sales were encouraging and over £300 was collected for the fighting fund.

Striking against an academy

Sunara Begum

Strike action at Tile Hill Woods school (THW) in Coventry has been stepped up against plans to turn the school into an academy. 20 teachers' union NUT members were on strike a few weeks ago and on 5 April, 70 out of a total of 80 school staff were on strike.

There was also talk of coordinated strike action with other schools facing the threat of academies, and with other unions who represent education staff, such as Unison.

There was a swarm of NASUWT

blue caps, tabards, whistles and hand clackers, helping to create a great atmosphere of solidarity between the strikers from NUT and NASUWT unions.

Coventry Socialist Party councillor Dave Nellist gave his support at the picket line. He informed the teachers of how he was fighting for the council to fund a ballot for parents and teachers to have their say on academies.

Many of the teachers were disgusted at the lack of consultation they have had. The decision was taken by an unrepresentative vote of 13 out of 16 governors, with no con-

sultation from staff or parents.

Teachers see the decision to push through academies as a threat to comprehensive education, and the democratic and public accountability of schools to the community and staff.

The arguments used to defend the plans for the academies, such as the need for local authorities to save money and there being no alternative, were ridiculed.

As the recent u-turns taken by the Con-Dems indicate, there is always an alternative. Collective industrial action and community campaigns can force the hands of those in power.

NUJ conference calls for general strike

A conference delegate

The National Union of Journalists (NUJ) has become the first trade union to call for a 24 hour general strike. The NUJ gave overwhelming backing at its delegate meeting (national conference) to calling on the TUC to coordinate a general strike against the cuts and attacks on wages and pensions.

The union agreed to look at ways journalists could become involved in coordinated industrial action and to support the National Shop Stewards Network anti-cuts campaign and other bodies opposing the cuts.

The delegate meeting also offered its support for the Egyptian, Tunisian and other Middle East and North African revolutions, and to back the formation of democratic independent trade unions, workplace committees and neighbourhood committees.

Delegates urged the union's national executive committee to follow the examples set by the Arab masses

and redouble the efforts to mobilise against the Con-Dem cuts.

The news of the climbdown by News International over phone tapping, which came during the conference, vindicated the position of the NUJ, and a number of delegates made the point that whilst the excesses of the News of the World were among the worst examples, there was widespread unjustified use of illicit methods.

The conference saw the end of general secretary Jeremy Dear's ten years at the helm and deputy general secretary Michelle Stanistreet take his position unopposed. The lack of an election caused concern as it was a missed opportunity for Michelle to explain her policies and plans for the union.

In many ways the delegate meeting was a success for the left in the NUJ.

However, faced with the biggest attack on working people for 90 years, the test for the left will be to ensure that positive resolutions are carried out. Actions speak louder than words!

In brief

NSSN conference

The National Shop Stewards Network (NSSN) steering committee has agreed to bring the fifth annual NSSN conference forward to Saturday 11 June. This is to avoid a clash with the Durham Miners' Gala and other labour movement events around the same time.

The conference will be taking place in the run-up to potential strike action by five or more unions against the Con-Dems' attacks on public sector pensions. The other main themes of the conference will be fighting the anti-union laws and defending the NHS. The conference will be at the South Camden Community School from 11.30am to 4pm. Registration will begin at 10.30am.

• For more information see: www.shopstewards.net and www.stopcuts.net

Unison elections

The elections for Unison's national executive council run from 11 April to 13 May, when members have a chance to elect the fighting leadership needed to counter the massive attacks on jobs and services being waged by the Con-Dem government and by councils.

Readers of the Socialist in Unison are encouraged to vote for candidates on the left slate. For more information see: www.socialistparty.org.uk/articles/11571/30-03-2011/vote-for-a-fighting-democratic-unison-leadership.