

Striking for jobs



The funeral for journalism in north London and Herts photo Paul Mattsson

Paul Kershaw

Around 100 people followed a funeral cortege, complete with incense, a coffin and the grim reaper to mark the 'near death' of north London and Hertfordshire newspapers in the Tindle group.

Nine members of the National Union of Journalists (NUJ) began a series of two-day strikes on 19 April, protesting at the failure to replace staff when they leave. "Just three reporters are churning out nine newspapers every week" said the NUJ father of chapel, Jonathan Lovett. "The current Tindle business plan threatens to let once award-winning newspapers dwindle and die."

Michelle Stanistreet, NUJ deputy general secretary, spoke to pickets on the first day of the strike: "I've come here today to show support for our union members bravely standing up to say 'enough is enough' and that the communities they serve deserve better..."

"If Sir Ray [Tindle] has the commitment he says he has to quality

local journalism he should maintain staffing levels that allow journalists to do their job - we need more than lip service."

As solidarity messages highlighted, many other papers face a slide into 'churnalism' with reporters stuck in the office reproducing press handouts rather than going out to investigate. On the eve of their action the Enfield Nine workers were issued letters warning that redundancies could be made in the near future but they say this has only galvanised them into fighting for the future of their papers.

The strikers and supporters marched from the papers' offices to the centre of Enfield on 20 April at lunchtime. Speakers included anti-cuts campaigners and members of the community who spoke of the need to know what is happening in their community.

•More information is available at: <http://strikegazadpres.wordpress.com/>

•Messages of support to: email: strikegazadpres@hotmail.co.uk

Support the Leeds Fed strikers

Iain Dalton

Leeds Hyde Park and Headingley Socialist Party

Wednesday 20 April was the final day of a five-day strike by housing support workers at Leeds Federated Housing who face large pay cuts and the downgrading of some of their jobs. They called for support for their morning picket lines and around 20 or so trade unionists, socialists and anti-cuts campaigners turned up. Added to the Unison placards and flags that have been on the picket lines every day were banners from Unite, Usdaw, Leeds Youth Fight for Jobs and Leeds Socialist Party.

The first reporter for days came down to cover the strike as a result of a press release put out by Trade Unionists and Socialists Against Cuts candidate for nearby

Headingley ward, Ian Pattison.

At the moment there has been a stone wall of silence from Leeds Fed management, but union officials have organised a meeting with the management of all four companies contracted by the city council to provide housing support - Leeds Fed, Touchstone, Community Links and Foundation.

The strikers were able to discuss on the picket line with union members and reps from Touchstone, who were on strike the previous week over similar attacks, and Community Links.

If management still refuses to back down on these attacks then strike action should be coordinated between all affected workers. It is vital that Unison creates a forum whereby stewards at the four workplaces can meet to discuss not just these attacks, but also future issues affecting housing support workers.

Saltend Struggle continues

On Wednesday 20 April, the Redhall construction workers, locked out from BP Saltend, met to decide whether to accept a £1 million financial compensation package from BP/Vivergo.

This offer was the result of four days of talks between the trade unions and Vivergo and Akers, the employers on the bio-ethanol project who cancelled Redhall's contract leading to 400 workers being locked out.

At Wednesday's mass meeting of the locked-out workers, Vivergo's offer of cash was rejected and it was agreed to restart the protest on Thursday morning.

If the deal had been agreed, the two unions GMB and Unite would have signed a collective bargaining agreement preventing any worker from taking further action either legally at a tribunal or taking part in protesting outside the BP/Vivergo site, or anywhere else for that matter.

Workers are adamant that this dispute is about defending the NAECI construction workers' national agreement, fighting to get back their jobs and implementing their TUPE [transfer of employment] rights. Agreeing the deal would have meant that whoever took on the Redhall contract would have been able to cherry pick employees, intimidating these workers further via the selection process in the hope of creating a weakened, subservient workforce.

The hard-won demand of 'first in, last out' on redundancies, secured some weeks ago through strike action, would have been jettisoned.

The mood at the mass meeting was really positive and determination to escalate the dispute resounded around the room. The GMB officer argued against the deal but shamefully Unite advised the men to sign up.

The men rebuked the Unite officer and ordered him to approach the electricians and scaffolders, other workers on the site. He was told to ask these workers to re-join the protest outside the site as had originally been agreed if talks with the employers came to nothing.

The meeting also agreed that the national NAECI stewards' committee, that was unilaterally cancelled by Unite, be convened to discuss how to win this dispute.

Socialist Party and lock-out committee member Keith Gibson

had argued against ending the protests and the supportive strike action.

However, urged to by the Unite full-time official, a majority of the workers had at that stage agreed to stop the protests under the guise of trying to prove that the locked out workers were not disruptive and that a chance should be given for negotiations to proceed with the employers; and with the promise of an imminent national shop stewards' meeting.

There was concern at the threats of dismissal being made to the repair and maintenance workers who had taken solidarity action.

Vivergo (40% owned by BP) has always maintained that the locked-out workers are not its responsibility. But five weeks of militant protests and solidarity action forced the bosses to come up with their offer of £1 million to get the workers off the gates.

If the deal had been accepted, it would have set a very dangerous precedent in the industry, undermining the NAECI national agreement and TUPE rights.

Unite official Bernard McAulay has pursued a strategy of de-escalating the action and getting the workers to sell their jobs. Many Unite members are also asking where their general secretary, Len McCluskey, has been and how he can allow McAulay to try to sell them down the river.

Despite the trade union bureaucracy running scared of the anti-union laws, workers have conducted 'illegal' secondary picketing and unofficial walkouts. This will now resume.

Following Wednesday's rejection of the offer, an urgent campaign of explanatory leafleting and meetings at other NAECI sites is now needed to win support for solidarity action across the industry.

This can force the employers to back down and guarantee jobs for all the locked-out workers.

• On 26 April the scaffolders and electricians at Saltend voted to re-join the protest. And sites in Portsmouth and the east midlands are being picketed.

• At the National Union of Teachers annual conference this easter, Keith Gibson spoke at a meeting organised by the left group Campaign Teacher. £400 was raised in solidarity with the Saltend workers at that meeting and a further £7,000 at the conference itself.

In brief

London Midland

Train drivers working for London Midland are to vote on a package to end a long dispute over harmonisation of pay and leave entitlement. Their union Aslef will ballot members after a strike vote was first challenged in the high court, where an injunction stopped strike action. An appeal overturned the injunction, a new strike ballot was held because the earlier vote was out of time and the new vote saw a bigger vote for action. This seemed to concentrate management minds, along with the lack of volunteers to work Sundays and no rest-day working agreement.

The offer is for pay to be harmonised with a 5% pay rise from April 2011. Leave will be harmonised at 30 days a year from April 2011. There will be pay rises in 2012 of 3% or February Retail Prices Index (RPI) plus a quarter per cent, and in 2013 3% or RPI plus half a per cent, whichever is greater in both cases.

Harmonisation of leave for 2011 is complicated by shortage of staff so drivers whose leave is increasing will be paid four days extra pay this year. Talks are to take place with Aslef to reduce the reliance on overtime working. So the union will play a constructive part in more jobs being created.

National action ballot across civil service



Workers at the Driving Standards Agency were balloted for strike action when a programme of office closures and job cuts was announced. 2,000 civil service union PCS members were balloted and 62% voted for strike action on a 43% turnout.

When the strike dates were announced by the union, involving admin and driving test staff, management offered concessions on the office closures and agreed to suspend compulsory redundancy notices until March 2012. This was enough for the union to suspend the strikes. Battles against cuts and closures are also going on in the Department for Work and Pensions, the Home Office, the Equality and Human Rights Commission and other sections of the civil service. Therefore the PCS national executive is putting a resolution to the union's conference in May, calling for a national ballot in defence of jobs, pensions and pay and for the union to continue to work with other trade unions to coordinate the action for maximum impact. The resolution urges all members and activists to prioritise mobilising for a 'yes, yes' vote.



The 2011 NSSN conference will be held on 11 June at the South Camden Community School, London NW1 1RG.

The themes are:

- Strike to defend jobs and pensions
- Fight the anti-trade union laws
- Save our NHS

Registration begins at 10.30am.

Email info@shopstewards.net to register.

See also www.stopcuts.net and www.shopstewards.net