

Plymouth Unison

The battle against de-recognition

Rob Rooney,
Plymouth Unison shop steward,
personal capacity

Bosses at Plymouth city council (PCC) have de-recognised Unison. But Unison and the other council trade unions have struck back.

A 70-strong Unison members' meeting, with one abstention, unanimously backed the call for a strike ballot should the council stick to its position. De-recognition is the culmination of a six month-long negotiation process caused by the government's cuts agenda.

PCC said it needs to save £18 million over three years. This meant cuts in holiday entitlement, other payments slashed, redundancy payments halved and mileage rates reduced.

Management has ruthlessly



Unison members on the 26 March demo photo Paul Mattsson

sought to divide and rule, using the council's internal internet to spread fear and insecurity and issue dire

threats if members voted 'no' to the proposed changes.

In these circumstances Unison,

which represents 1,600 council workers and is the largest union at the council, voted by 299-244 - 17% of the membership - to accept, while GMB and Unite members voted 'no'.

When the council gave back the two days holiday entitlement, GMB and Unite members re-balloted and accepted the cuts but Unison refused to sign this rotten deal.

Management said 300 redundancy notices would be issued but then decided to de-recognise Unison and impose the deal. Now GMB and Unite have withdrawn from the deal.

In de-recognising Unison, this vicious management has thrown down the gauntlet to the whole trade union movement. But the campaign to force the Tory-led council to back down has already drawn support from New York trade unionists and

from Europe. Now the unions need urgently to begin building for an industrial action ballot of all council workers.

All that has happened demonstrates the correctness of the call for no cuts to any public services or to the terms and conditions and pensions and pay of those who provide them.

The call for industrial action in defence of our right to be in a trade union is vital, but should be linked to:

- A policy of no cuts
- A joint shop stewards committee drawn from all three unions, elected by their respective branches.
- Looking forward to the next financial year, a call for a needs budget.
- A demand for equal access to council communication channels.
- 'No cuts' candidates in city council elections.

Construction workers fight to defend national agreements

Hundreds of electricians protested outside the Balfour Beatty site at Blackfriars train station in London on 24 August. Workers also protested in Manchester.

This is the latest stage in a growing campaign to fight the intention of the 'Big 8' construction companies to pull out of the nationally negotiated industry agreement.

The companies see this as an opportunity to introduce three new grades for electricians - so rather than the current Joint Industry Board (JIB) rate of £16.25 an hour, by de-skilling they can get away with paying between £10.50 and £14 an hour. For the worst hit, this would mean a pay cut of 35%!

As well as this, they want a whole raft of attacks on these workers' terms and conditions such as doing away with travel time and making it far easier for the employer to get rid of workers and pick and choose who stays on sites.

This is a mirror of the attempts of

construction companies to get out of the NAECI agreement which caused the disputes in Lindsey Oil Refinery in 2009 and the lock-outs in Saltend and Fawley this year.

The Saltend dispute, which Socialist Party member and NSSN supporter Keith Gibson played a leading role in, showed that, as in Lindsey two years ago, construction workers have the power to take on the employers if they are prepared to use it.

The electricians will be determined to prevent the union full-time officials doing what they did in Saltend and cut across the moves for a national strike to defend the national agreement and defend these workers.

Unite officials attended a rank and file meeting on 13 August which saw up to 500 electricians elect a national committee and pledge a recruitment campaign on the sites. Workers are determined that the union must be serious about waging



At the Blackfriars protest photo Chris Newby

a real fighting struggle which backs up campaigning and negotiations with the threat of strike action if the

employers don't back down.

Unfortunately, no Unite officers were on the London protest. But the

workers are determined to build the campaign, in spite of site managers threatening workers with the sack if they joined the protest.

Rob Williams of the National Shop Stewards Network (NSSN) pledged the support of the network when he addressed the London rally: "When you go to the shops, the prices haven't gone down by 35% so why should workers' wages? This is just the start. I appeal to all those workers on this site to join this campaign as these attacks will affect you as well."

There was a very good reaction to the leaflet for the NSSN lobby of the TUC as the workers understood the need to put the union leaders under pressure to defend their members, in the private and public sectors.

The campaign will continue with another London protest on 31 August at 6.30am at the Westfield Shopping Centre in Stratford, east London, and at other sites around the country.

Youth workers on strike

Youth workers across Oxfordshire, including prime minister David Cameron's Witney constituency, took strike action on 23 August in response to the Tory-led county council plans to slash youth service funding from £3.7 million to £1.4 million.

These cuts threaten 26 youth centres and two youth teams, as well as the removal of the nationally-negotiated JNC terms and conditions.

This spells the end of professional youth work in Oxfordshire, replacing qualified youth workers with non-professional managers and volunteers.

Doug Nicholls, national officer of Community and Youth Workers in Unite, along with local reps, made it clear that the staff and users of the service will "take further strike action and occupy if it's needed".

Lenny Shail

Newcastle Metro fightback

Churchill Contract Services are contracted by DB Regio Tyne and Wear to clean Metro trains and stations. Churchill has reneged on a TUPE transfer agreement, which should have guaranteed working conditions.

The RMT has released figures showing that Churchill had an 81% surge in pre-tax profits between

2009/10 when the average pay for cleaning staff on the Metro is just £5.93 an hour.

RMT relief regional organiser Craig Johnston said: "This is the sharp end of privatisation. Bosses attacking people on the minimum wage, attempting to get every last drop of blood."

Elaine Brunskill

Part time workers and the great job con

The Activist is produced by Socialist Party members in the retail and distribution union, Usdaw.

A worker recently sent in the following letter:

Just over a year ago, I took a job with one of the giants in retail. I was offered a seven-hour contract. But I regularly worked over 30 hours a week - not a great wage but at least I got by.

I was annoyed when full-time workers left and they were replaced by other workers on similar contracts to me.

However there was a catch. When I took my holiday, I was paid for only seven hours rather than an average of the hours I worked each week.

Now I have been informed that the store's budget has been cut and the hours I worked are no longer available - now I can't get by.

Surely what is happening to us part-time workers is wrong. But when I ask at work what the union is doing about it - no one knows.

As a union we should be opposing this new exploitation and there are thousands who would join the union

if there was a real fight.

Greetings

A retail worker

With very few full-time jobs available, more and more workers are being forced to take part-time work.

The latest employment figures show 1.26 million people work part-time - the highest number since records began.

The bosses are using part-time jobs to control the workforce and reduce wage bills.

If you would like a copy of the Activist send your email address to: shopworker@socialistparty.org.uk

South Yorkshire Newspapers strike

The indefinite strike by two dozen South Yorkshire Newspapers (SYN) journalists is now in its seventh week. The strike began on 15 July to protest against 18 compulsory job losses, office closures, job mergers and in defence of quality local journalism.

The National Union of Journalists (NUJ) members have conducted a high profile and energetic campaign to get their grievances addressed, but the management of the SYN and parent company Johnston Press (JP) have refused to negotiate at all, repeatedly making "No Comment"!

So a delegation of strikers travelled to London on 25 August to get

face-to-face with John Fry, JP chief executive. They presented him with a 3,000-signature petition at a JP financial meeting called to present the company's interim results for the six months to last July. Johnston Press is the UK's third biggest local newspaper company but is in huge debt from empire building gone wrong, and are now cutting jobs and quality journalism to pay for their corporate greed.

JP management's refusal even to talk is a clear sign that they want to try to break the union's resolve. The NUJ must back the strikers with a strike fund, rather than one-off

donations, and support the South Yorkshire branch's call for a strike ballot across all the JP group.

A NUJ national demonstration must be organised in Doncaster as soon as possible to show support for the strikers and show management that they are taking on the whole union.

Messages of support and donations are very much needed. Please send messages of support to darenburke@gmail.com and donations to account name DFP NUJ Chapel, no: 35630388, sort code: 60-06-39.

Alistair Tice

Transport to the NSSN lobby of the TUC on 11 September

From the **North East**: Newcastle Central Station, 7am picking up in Durham 7:30am and Teesside, Middlesbrough 8am. Cost £10 unwaged or low waged, £20 waged. To book email paul.phillips1988@btinternet.com or call Paul on 07989806104 **West Midlands** - phone Lenny 07530429441 **Southern** - phone Keiran 07814184624 **Wales** - phone Rob 07541145108 **South West** - phone Dominico 07786926585 **Yorkshire** - phone 07706710041 All other regions email info@shopstewards.net