

Expelled from Unison for effective anti-cuts leadership

Onay Kasab

“The appeals committee unanimously rejected your appeal” These were the words in the letter sent to me from Unison on 1 September. The decision finally ends over 20 years of membership of Unison, 13 years of which were as Greenwich Unison branch secretary.

On 23 August a Unison appeals committee heard my appeal against expulsion from Unison. This followed the decision to ban me from holding office for two years. I was one of four Socialist Party members witch-hunted after a leaflet, calling for resolutions on union democracy to be heard, was circulated at the 2007 Unison conference.

An employment tribunal found that the ban was an act of unjustifiable disciplinary action. But then the Unison leadership came forward with new allegations claiming that I had brought the union into disrepute. They alleged that I had encouraged Unison members to leave the union and join Unite. This allegation has led to my expulsion.

I joined Unite once it became clear I was going to be banned from office in Unison. In doing this, I did not end my membership of Unison – I had dual membership, which is not uncommon for trade unionists to have.

Prior to joining Unite I fought to ensure that members did not leave



Kaz (left) on one of the many lobbies of Greenwich council photo Paul Mattsson

Unison. More than five separate letters were sent to over 3,000 home addresses urging people to stay in Unison and fight. A campaign was launched in Greenwich involving large sections of the membership.

The campaign went beyond stewards and activists with members attending lobbies, meetings and rallies as well as writing hundreds of letters of protest, signing petitions and taking part in telephone protests aimed at Unison HQ.

Our campaign in Greenwich gained huge press coverage, most of it supportive. This went alongside the legal campaign. The Unison bureaucracy decided to ignore this and, on the day that the ban on me holding office began, raided the branch office, ejecting branch officers, not just me. Even then, we ran a campaign in Greenwich to remove this occupation.

All the time we were fighting the witch-hunt, council trade union

members were preparing to fight cuts. This was one reason why some of the most active sections, in libraries and grounds maintenance decided that they were going to leave Unison.

They realised very quickly that the union bureaucracy wanted to help out its friends in Labour-controlled Greenwich council, where the Unison branch, under the leadership of the Socialist Party, was more than a constant thorn in their side.

Many workers are leaving Unison and joining Unite in Greenwich. Following my election to the position of Unite branch secretary even more staff have joined.

But more importantly, we have done what Greenwich Unison, under the control of regional officers is refusing to do. Campaigns have been launched against cuts and privatisation. Members have been protected when being reorganised. To put this quite starkly, had the library stewards not joined Unite when they did, there could have been job losses.

Unison members were telling stewards - we are leaving whether or not you agree. This could have led to the loss of the best union-organised areas. Instead, the Socialist Party in Greenwich has helped to ensure that workers have regrouped and are now organised again in a trade union, ready to fight the cuts.

Unison nationally must of course be won for the members and the Socialist Party will be at the forefront of those campaigns. This is not saying that Unison members elsewhere should join other unions. But where we are prevented from even being active, we reserve the right to take measures locally to ensure that we are able to play a role as trade unionists and socialists. Greenwich should serve as a warning to the bureaucracy. We will not go away and, inside or outside of Unison, we will continue to be a thorn in their side. See www.socialistparty.org.uk for a longer version of Kaz's article.

Remploy is not for sale - at any price!

Les Woodward

GMB convenor, Remploy

We will not stand back and watch this government and their lackeys in the leadership of charities such as Radar, Mencap, Mind, RNID, Scope and the Leonard Cheshire foundation wreck the lives of thousands of disabled people. They want to close down Remploy factories, taking away choices for the type of employment open to disabled workers.

The next phase of the battle to save Remploy factories is about to unfold. The Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) have organised so-called roadshows as part of their 'consultation' process on the Sayce report, which recommends the closure of the factories.

You would think that the times and the venues for such events would be published, but you would be wrong. You would think that Remploy workers would have priority in attending the meetings, again you would be wrong.

Trade unions

You would also think that as Remploy is around 95% trade union organised then union officials would be invited to take part in the debates, again you would be wrong.

Remploy invited all employees to attend but then added "if there are too many applicants names will be drawn out of a hat". Remploy Porth in the Rhondda valley is one of the biggest Remploy factories in the UK with around 90 employees working on re-cycling and data cleansing end-of-life computers. Ironically one of its biggest customers is the DWP. But only one of the employees



Protesting outside the launch of the Sayce report photo Alison Hill

had an invitation to the roadshow in Cardiff on 20 March.

The outcome of the consultation process will have a devastating, life changing effect on thousands of disabled workers, not only in Remploy, but in other supported employment sites in the UK. It is a logical progression that if Remploy folds, as the biggest single employer of disabled people in the UK, others will follow.

Up and down the country Remploy workers are considering demonstrations outside the roadshows. The trade union consortium was promised that there would be full consultation with the workers and their representatives. Yet another lie from a government that has an absolute hatred for the working class, trade unions and socialism.

Remploy workers do not work in ghettos, neither are we institutionalised. We are economically active, paying our taxes and national insurance.

The fact that we choose to work with other disabled people is our choice. We were not forced into Remploy and we will not be forced out. We are proud of our skills, our products and our company. Since 1946 it has transformed the lives of many thousands of disabled people, who, without Remploy would have struggled to find employment.

Closing the factories would see 2,800 people added to the benefit claimant list. In 2009 the GMB surveyed those members who had left and the results were not surprising:

735 questionnaires were returned - a response rate of 46%. Nearly all of the people receive state benefits a

year after losing their jobs. Only 190, which is 26% of those who returned the questionnaires, found a job. Only 37 (5%) of them said that their new job was better paid. 44 (6%) had a pension in their new job. 33 (4.5%) had better holidays now than they used to have with Remploy. 62 (8.4%) had a sick pay scheme.

The results vindicate the Remploy trade union position that keeping Remploy factories open and supporting them by providing meaningful work through public procurement is a better solution for disabled people than closing them down and putting people onto benefit.

It also shows that the brave new world extolled by the company and the government, in which disabled people find good quality and sustainable work, is about as mythical and realistic as Peter Pan's Neverland.

Remploy, we believe, is as relevant and as important as it was when the first factory opened in Bridgend in 1946.

We are receiving amazing support from anti-cuts groups and trades councils but there is more you can do. Sign our online petition www.saveremplyfactories.co.uk. Write to your MP, your MSP or AM.

Respond to the consultation document by saying that Remploy factories must stay open and continue to give disabled workers the choice of where and how they are employed.

The consultation document can be accessed online at www.dwp.gov.uk/sayce-consultation. Responses can be emailed to sayce.consultationresponses@dwp.gsi.gov.uk

For further information on how you can help disabled workers in Remploy please contact: Les Wood-

ward, trade union national convenor on les.woodward@ntlworld.com See www.socialistparty.org.uk for a fuller version.

Socialism Today



The Socialist Party's magazine September 2011 issue includes:

- **New phase of the great recession**
Capitalist strategists are filled with gloom at a likely new downturn, Lynn Walsh writes
- **Who broke Britain?**
Sarah Sachs-Eldridge on the most severe social unrest in a generation
- **A world turned upside down**
Peter Taaffe assesses the consequences of 9/11 ten years on

£2.50 including postage from:
Socialism Today PO Box 24697,
London E11 1YD.

socialismtoday.org
socialistparty.org.uk
www.socialismtoday.org
020 8988 8773