

Balfour Beatty re-ballot

Vote to strike again

Rob Williams

National Shop Stewards Network chair

The next two weeks are absolutely vital in the construction electricians' struggle against the employers' imposition of the Besna contract. Unite are re-balloting in Balfour Beatty (BBES), the leader of the 'Dirty 7' construction companies who want to withdraw from the JIB agreement and open the door to 35% pay cuts on the back of de-skilling the trade.

In December, the strike ballot in BBES was won with a whopping 82% majority yet Unite have re-balloted because BBES challenged it on a technicality. Yet again, the class nature of the law has been clearly revealed. The employers can run to the courts, even though they have the protection of Thatcher's anti-union laws - the most undemocratic in Western Europe, and scandalously maintained by Blair and Brown's New Labour.

It is vital that the ballot is won again with the biggest possible margin. The scale of the Yes vote in December undoubtedly legitimised the dispute and was a major factor in the successful unofficial action that took place on the intended strike date of 7 December, when thousands of electricians took action. No Balfours' sparks worked on their site in Blackfriars train station in London.

A week later, the electricians linked up with the other construction trades under the NAECI/Blue Book who are facing a pay freeze, in a day of action which saw over 5,000

workers take part in an unofficial walkout.

This has to be the model for this re-ballot. We look to take the official route but if blocked, the dispute can't be constrained by the Tory courts. However, it seems that the union stepped back in December under only the threat of legal action. This time Unite should not back down to threats.

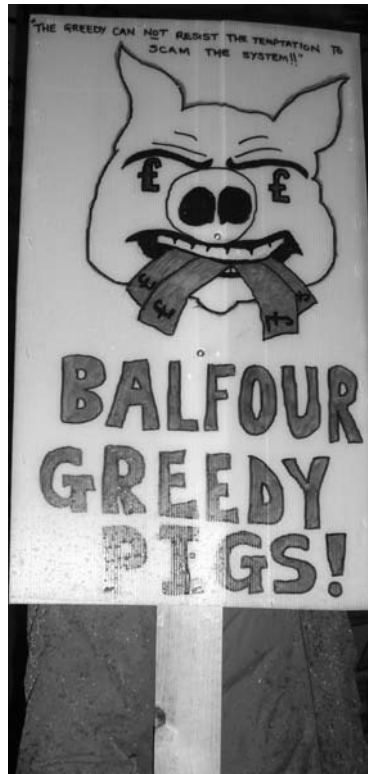
And if BBES get a verdict in court this would clearly show to all of the electricians that unofficial action has been forced on them and would then be the only effective way to continue the battle.

Demonstrate

Whether official or unofficial, Unite should call a national demonstration on the first strike day at one of the sites. When this was done in November, over 2,000 electricians were mobilised. This would really raise the sights of sparks that the dispute is far from over. It could be accompanied by a full page advert in the national press to overcome the media blackout of this dispute.

However, it must also be linked up with the other disputes that are currently unfolding in the construction industry or closely linked to it. We support coordinating any further strike action with the NAECI pay dispute, as well as the Unite oil tanker drivers working for Wincanton, who could shut down some of the refineries that are maintained and renovated by the construction workers.

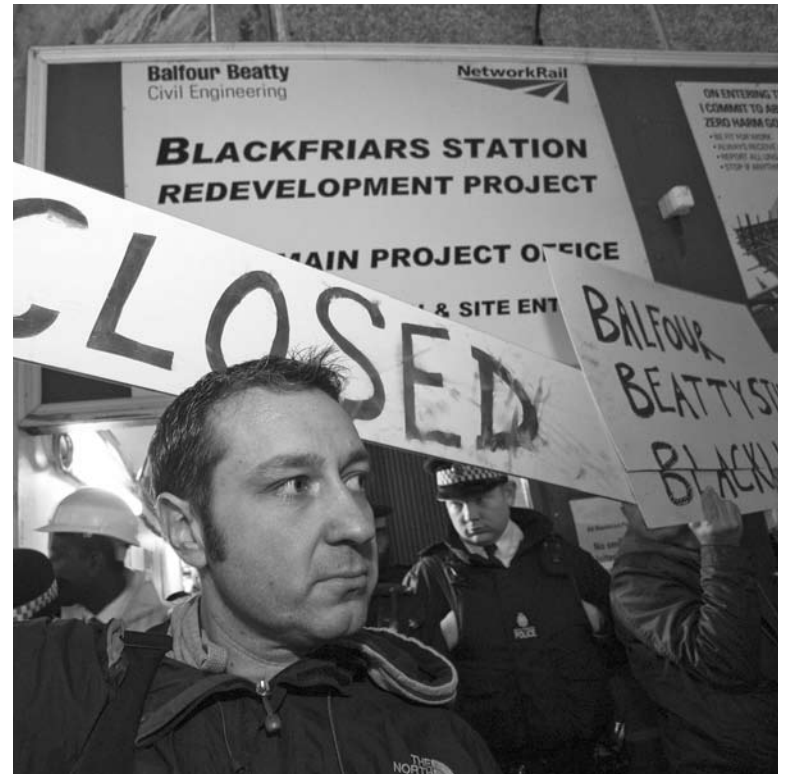
This would bring home the message to the employers and their cus-



tomers that these disputes will seriously damage their profits. Balfour Beatty alone made almost £100 million in profits in the last six months and has an order book of over £15 billion!

Rank and file

This has been an incredible struggle in that for almost half a year, rank and file electricians have built and maintained a dispute that has forced Unite to take it seriously. We welcome the union's involvement and recognise the advantages that it brings. But the battle has exposed the role of the full-time officials and



the necessity of the rank and file in democratically controlling the dispute and keeping the officials accountable.

The letter from the national officer Bernard McCauley advising workers to sign the Besna contracts has created unnecessary confusion and even potential demoralisation. If the union thought it was necessary for tactical reasons because the vast majority of sparks had signed, it should have been explained clearly at meetings on the sites and at the national rank and file meeting and put to the vote.

This would then be accompanied by an absolute assurance from the

union of the dispute continuing with a viable strategy of action outlined.

Many struggles have shown, including industrial disputes and even the poll tax that just because an attack gets onto the statute book or into a contract of employment doesn't mean that the battle's over.

Sometimes workers have to see the reality of a change before they are stung into responding. But that still not need happen in this dispute, which if the work is done now can lead to renewed strike action that can defeat the employers and their Besna contract.

See page 11 for a history of the JIB and more construction news

Victory against Dorries' abstinence education bill

Campaigners move onto the next fight

Beth Granter

On Friday 20 January a demonstration against Tory MP Nadine Dorries' Sex Education (required content) Bill 185 was interrupted mid way through when a victory was announced.

To cheers from the crowd I reported that the Bill had suddenly been withdrawn, effectively killing it dead.

Around 250 people turned up to protest against the Bill, which would have required girls aged 13-16 to be given compulsory abstinence lessons as part of their sex education. Over 2,000 people joined a campaign against the Bill on Facebook at facebook.com/stopdorries.

As well as the Socialist Party and Youth Fight for Jobs and Education, the opposition was supported by the British Humanist Association, Abortion Rights UK, Education for Choice, the National Secular Society, Feminist Fightback, Queers Against the Cuts, Slut Means Speak Up, and others.

The Bill had many problems - it was sexist by being just for girls, and abstinence-only education has been proven not to work in reducing unplanned pregnancies or sexually transmitted infections.

As the majority of sex and relationships education (SRE) is



On the protest photo Suzanne Beishon

not currently compulsory, many schools, particularly academies and religious schools, don't teach comprehensive SRE, meaning that the Bill effectively could have meant abstinence-only education for many.

Although the Bill had little chance of passing its second reading due to scheduling, opposition was rallied in order to raise awareness of the need for statutory, evidence based,

comprehensive SRE.

However, Dorries is threatening her intentions might become part of another bill she puts through, so while celebrating the success in defeating this Bill, campaigners are keeping an eye on Dorries and her government, as we know we haven't heard the last of their attacks on women's' rights, education and sexual liberation.

Keep the racist EDL out of Leicester

Steve Score

East Midlands Socialist Party

The 'English Defence League' (EDL) is threatening to visit Leicester on Saturday 4 February. The last time they came, in October 2010, they attacked shoppers and smashed city centre shops. They also broke away from police control and attempted to march on Highfields, an area with a large Muslim population.

The only thing that stopped them was a mass mobilisation of local people including up to 2,000 Asian young people. Socialist Party members and other anti-racists stood side by side with the local youth defending their area. At the same time anti-racist protesters who joined the Unite Against Fascism (UAF) rally against the EDL were kettled in by police.

The EDL is a racist organisation that claims to only oppose "Muslim extremism". In reality their actions on such demonstrations as this prove otherwise. They use Muslims as a scapegoat, but try to win support among people who are looking for someone to blame for the problems they face - unemployment, poor services and attacks on living standards.

They aim to divide working class people and must be opposed with a political answer. However because they bring their racist thugs on these 'protests' - the issue of physical de-

fence is necessarily raised.

A counter demonstration has been called by trade unions and UAF, which will be well supported. However, there is concern that people do not want a repeat of last time when the UAF was kettled but the EDL was allowed to attack people. There is also a desire in the local communities for self defence.

Self defence

The Socialist Party supports the right of self defence of communities, and believes that a mobilisation will be needed in Highfields and St Matthew's on the day. Ideally we need enough people mobilised to defend these areas and to prevent the EDL rampaging through the city centre on the day.

At the time of writing, the exact details are unclear. Last time there was a ban on marches, with the EDL and UAF being allowed 'static rallies'. In addition there was a massive campaign by the police, the council and religious leaders and others to persuade people not to join the counter protests. It is not yet certain whether the same will happen again.

The Socialist Party will be doing our best to get a turnout on the 4th, at the same time we will be raising socialist answers to the problems people face to cut across the EDL's attempt to divide Leicester. For jobs, homes and services not racism!