

Strike to defend the JIB!

- **Vote YES in Balfour Beatty ballot**
- **Walkout with the public sector workers on N30**

The pressure is building on the 'Big 7' construction companies who want to withdraw from the JIB agreement and impose the new BESNA contracts which will cut pay by up to 35%.

Unite are balloting electricians in Balfour Beatty (BBES) because they've given 1600 sparks notice to put them on the BESNA contract from 7TH DECEMBER. All BBES WORKERS should VOTE YES FOR INDUSTRIAL ACTION to start ON that day.

BBES are starting to panic and have put out a leaflet calling on electricians not to vote to strike. BBES say that your pay would stay the same but even if that happened, what happens after this particular job finishes? You'd have to start on the new BESNA rate and terms & conditions which would be the new benchmark for the trade in the industry. If nothing was changing, why aren't they sticking with the JIB agreement?

Balfour Beatty has an order book of £15billion and made a clear profit of nearly £100million in the last 6 months. They pay their Chief Executive £1million a year but they want to cut the wages of their sparks, who actually help to make the profits by 35%! This is a fight that we can win if we stick together. Vote YES! Vote to STRIKE!

Electricians all over the country are fighting back. It's clear that the national demonstration on November 9th has been a gamechanger by building up confidence amongst sparks. Last week saw walkouts and stoppages at many sites, including Corus on Teesside, Ratcliffe and West Burton power stations, Saltend and Farringdon in London. The week ended with 300 sparks demonstrating in Glasgow on Saturday <http://news.stv.tv/scotland/280537-construction-workers-march-over-changes-to-pay-and-conditions/> Workers at the Lindsey Oil refinery showed 2 years ago that the bosses can be defeated when they walked and sparked a national unofficial stoppage to protect an attack on their NAECI agreement.

3 million public sector workers are striking on November 30th (N30) to defend their pensions. We support the call of rank & file that all workers in the construction industry



should come out on the same day and shut down the building trade nationally. Don't let the government and the greedy employers divide workers in the public and private sectors. The Socialist Party calls on the TUC to invite electricians to speak from the strike rally on N30.

Last Week

Glasgow

"Skilled jobs for skilled workers" was the chant as over 300 construction electricians and supporters marched from the Unite offices in Glasgow to George Square on Saturday 19th November. This impressive and determined mobilisation followed a similar sized march and rally to the Scottish parliament the previous week, demanding an end to the attacks on the electricians' national agreements. The JIB/SJIB national agreements are under imminent threat from the big 7 construction contractors who want to cut wages by up to 35%. Reducing the hourly wage of an electrician from £14.50 to just over £10 an hour.

Speaker after speaker at the rally pointed out the profits being made by the big companies, while workers are being made to pay the price in attacks on wages and through de-skilling. Davie Brockett from Unite summed up the mood when he said "we might be taking on the biggest companies in the country, but we're one of the biggest trade

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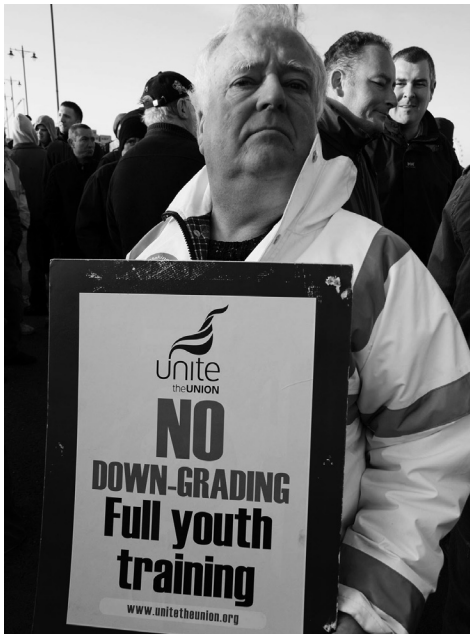


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unions and we're getting in about them until the BESNA terms are torn-up and our fair national agreement is maintained."

Ian Leech, brought solidarity greetings from the 11,500 members of Glasgow City Unison. "Three million of us will be striking on 30th November against attacks on pensions by the Con-Dem government. Our fight is the same as yours. We're fighting to defend decent pay, pensions and working conditions from millionaires who think we should pay the price for an economic crisis created by the rich. They also want to divide



public and private sector workers – and have us fighting each other. The message I want to bring is that will not happen. We'll stand united, hit them where it hurts by striking together until we win."

The ballot currently underway for strike action by BBES electricians is welcome. Organised strike action by electricians is urgently needed, including unofficial but coordinated walkouts to hit the companies hard.

The next action is taking place in Edinburgh on Wednesday 23rd November at 10am on George Street at a major Balfour Beatty construction site.

London

Over 100 electricians and supporters gathered at Farringdon station in London this morning as the struggle to defend the Joint Industry Board (JIB) agreement continued. The protests have been running for over three months ever since eight electrical contractor firms decided to tear up the JIB and impose, among other things, 35% wage cuts.

The weekly 6.30am starts on Wednesdays have got colder and darker as winter draws in but the determination of sparks to resist the attacks of the employers remains undiminished.

Although the turnout was smaller than last week's national day of action, sparks had received some good news from across the country. Workers at Ratcliffe and Corus had downed tools earlier in the week, marking an upturn in the action taken so far.

A small victory was achieved even before the demonstration started. During the night management had locked the main entrance into the Farringdon site, meaning heavy vehicles could not get in or out. Fearing a repeat of the occupation of the site a month ago management had ended up doing some of the job of disrupting the site for the sparks!

As the protest went on it was clear that a

number of electricians on the Farringdon site had refused to go into work, including a group of Polish workers. They were given a huge cheer when this was announced on the microphone.

Several speakers addressed the rally. There were solidarity greetings from Prospect union and from students. Rob Williams, chair of the National Shop Stewards Network condemned the police kettling last week of sparks attempting to join the student march on 9 November. He asked why the police were not showing the same zeal in arresting the bosses of the rogue electrical contracting companies that were breaking legal agreements. Pointing to the walkouts in Ratcliffe and Corus as showing the way forward he also urged electricians to join up with the public sector action on 30th November.

Paul Callanan from the Jarrow March for Jobs said that kettling was used because the bosses feared workers joining up with students and young people in opposition to cuts.

Mick Dooley, 'disqualified' Ucat general secretary candidate, put forward the idea of direct action against the offices of the electrical contracting firms.

Unite will begin balloting Balfour Beatty sites today, for official industrial action. The hard work of publicising this dispute by sparks up and down the country over the last three months can bear fruit in a big vote in favour of strike action.

Liverpool

Around thirty electricians demonstrated outside one of Spie Matthew Hall's sites in Liverpool this week over their attack on the JIB agreement.

The protest began at 6.30am and protesters were joined by around twenty electricians working on the site who are outraged at the actions of the companies involved in the attack on their national agreement.

The electricians on this site were adamant that the employers must not be allowed to get away with their plans to de-skill and cut the rate for the job and were fully behind the official action being called for 7 December. The Unite officer for construction told me that there is a meeting with the employers early next week but one of the workers said to me that officials should not meet the employers until they lift their threat to the JIB.

West Burton, Nottinghamshire

All 1,000 contractors at West Burton power station in North Notts struck on Wednesday 16th November. They were supporting action that hit sites across the country. GMB pickets spoke to Jon Dale:

The employers have said there will be no pay talks until 2013, which would mean no pay rise until 2014. With rising prices, that's equivalent to a 20% pay cut.

There's no recession in this industry. In fact,

there's a massive amount of work, mostly on power stations.

After privatisation of the electricity industry in the 1980s, the new owners took huge profits and did not carry out necessary planned maintenance on power stations. Now the plants are aging. West Burton and others were built about 40 years ago. Like old cars, they need lots of work just to keep going.

Half the power stations need replacing. There has to be ten times as much work in the next twenty years as in the last twenty. Otherwise the lights will go out!

The private owners have also stopped training, so there's a shortage of skilled workers, who are getting older.

They did away with apprentices for a long time. They used to pinch skilled workers from steel, mining, railways and other industries, but these sources have dried up. They've tried to bring in foreign workers but that's also caused them problems.

We've no problem with foreign workers so long as they get the same pay as us.

The contracting companies say they can't pay a rise because EDF, who own West Burton, and the other corporations owning the power stations, won't pay more.

This strike will be followed by another one-day strike in a month. After that, there will have to be more action if the bosses expect workers to join the 'race to the bottom'.

The need for renationalisation, with democratic workers' control and management, could not be clearer.

Redcar

The excellent protest on Monday was followed on Wednesday by around 300 workers turning up at dawn to again protest outside Corus Steel in Redcar.

On the Monday the police were taken by surprise and both the gates were obstructed, with traffic tailing back a couple of miles.

It was reported that this protest led to 18 Spie and 50 Balfour workers voting to withdraw their labour in support of the sparks at the gates.

Scaffolders were refused the right to hold a union meeting - so they downed tools and walked out.

By Wednesday the police presence had mushroomed. A reporter from BBC Tees said they had heard that the riot police were out. Initially the protesting workers stood on the side of the entrance, but it became clear that many wanted to do more.

The decision was made to block the entrance. The police issued warnings that this was illegal, a police van with recording equipment raced towards the blocked entrance, however no arrests were made.

There has been an invitation to all involved in the protests to attend Unite's Newcastle Central branch to discuss the demonstrations and the lessons that have been learned.