

Balfour Beatty re-ballot: **OFFICIAL OR UNOFFICIAL ALL OUT TOGETHER!**

Predictably, Balfour Beatty (BBES) are once again challenging the strike ballot, called by electricians through Unite to oppose them and the other 6 employers trying to walk away from the JIB and impose the BESNA which will lead to pay cuts of up to 35%. In December they were able to force Unite to re-ballot despite the union winning a 82% majority for strike action. This time, Unite has to force Balfours to at least go to court. The last few years have seen companies like BA challenge strike ballots but as the RMT showed on the DLR, they haven't always been successful. In reality, even the pro-business courts have been wary of going too far because continuing to blatantly overrule ballots on flimsy technicalities can legitimise unofficial strikes. The irony of course is that the anti-union laws brought in by Thatcher and maintained by Blair and Brown's Labour governments give the employers a massive advantage as it is.

Its also important to stand up to the legal threat because if BBES are successful in court it allows the union to appeal to sparks and all other construction workers to take unofficial action as the only available means to fight the BESNA. That's why it was correct that the December 7th action at Blackfriars on the day that the official strike would have taken place was so big and effective. No BBES sparks worked on the site that day and many electricians around the country also downed tools or took part in protests. It sent a message to Balfours and the others of the 'Dirty 7' companies that they couldn't stop this incredible five month battle by legal injunctions. This was underlined a week later when over 5,000 construction workers took unofficial action when the NAECI/Blue Book trades joined with the electricians. This time action should be also co-ordinated across the trades and with workers that are related such as the Wincanton oil tanker drivers who've been on strike over the last two weeks.

The national rank and file meeting this



Saturday should agree a strategy over the next few weeks, whether the strike is official or instead has to be unofficial. Unite could call a national mobilisation on the first day of any such action. This could be in London or at one of the power stations or oil refineries around the country. This could be accompanied by a full page advert in the national press explaining why construction workers are taking action to defend the JIB and the NAECI, despite companies like Balfours having an order book of £15 billion. This would really raise the confidence of these workers while telling the bosses that the fight is still very much on. We welcome every positive step by Unite in this dispute while constructively criticising where we think more needs to

be done. It seems that correctly the union wants to target the Dirty 7's clients and suppliers. We welcome this but it should be to supplement rather than instead of a national campaign of strike action - official or unofficial - that we believe will be necessary to force these parasitic bosses to back down. Its now or never!

REPORTS:

RATCLIFFE

Around 40 sparks were protesting outside Ratcliffe-on-Soar power station on Wednesday 1st February to fight the imposition of the BESNA contract. They

have been out each week for the past couple of months, and usually when they hold a protest are able to stop cars going into the site and cause a lot of disruption on the roads tailing back to the M1. However, due to this success and the fact that this weeks protest was more widely publicised in order to break the media blackout on the dispute, two vans of police were present and stopped the sparks from leafleting the cars.

Nonetheless, there was still a determined mood that they will not be stopped that easily and will continue with the weekly protests until they win. There will be discussion on tactics to take the struggle forward amongst the sparks on site, with some planning to attend the rank and file meeting this Saturday.

LEEDS

On Wednesday 1st Feb, around 60 construction workers and their supporters protested against the imposition of the new BESNA contracts outside the Trinity Walk construction site in Leeds City Centre. They included delegations from Saltend and West Burton sites who had been at last weeks protest at the ConocoPhillips site in Immingham.

The imposition of the contract will see a 35% cut in pay compared to the current JIB contract as is being carried out by seven of the largest firms in the industry. The result of a strike ballot at one of them, Balfour Beatty, will be announced tomorrow and UNITE representatives at the protest announced that ballots will soon follow at SPIE Matthew Hall and NG Bailey, to applause from many there keen to see the dispute escalated.

The Trinity Walk site has contractors on it from Crown House Technologies, one of the 'Big 7' companies that are trying to impose the new BESNA terms onto their employees. The presences of police officers and security guards on the gates made it difficult to discuss with workers on the site, which will see increasing numbers of electricians starting their over the next few months. However, many signed a petition organised by UNITE demanding that pay and conditions aren't attacked by these companies.

After a short march up to the Civic Hall, this petition was presented to Peter Gruen, Deputy Leader of Leeds City Council. The council had been responsible for pushing the construction of the project forward and the workers demanding that they put pressure onto its owners to allow the union

onto site to discuss with workers (officials had been blocked going on to site to speak to workers in the canteen). Although many workers were glad that Cllr Gruen offered to do what he could in regards to their case and those of defending jobs for all workers, this should probably be taken with a pinch of salt given the huge cuts to their own workforce that the Labour run council are presiding over, with opposition from the council unions.

Unite reps from the sites present will meet at the weekend to discuss where to hold next weeks protest.

MANCHESTER

Manchester electricians continued their protest at the central library Baileys site, and upped the pressure on the city council, which is the client. Hundreds of copies of a Unite/R&F open letter to the council, demanding Baileys' removal from the site, were distributed to the public and to all councillors attending the full council meeting later the same day. The open letter begins "Work on the £100million Central Library building site is being done by two companies which should not have been given this work. We call on you to take immediate action. We will continue to protest at the site until you act." After explaining Besna and blacklisting, the letter concludes with three demands on the council, to:

- End the operations of NG Baileys and Laing O'Rourke on the site
- Offer, to any site personnel affected by this, their transfer in line with TUPE legal obligations to other companies which are adhering to the Joint Industry Board agreement and not implicated in blacklisting

- Compile a list of all construction companies working on contract to the council and/or on council-funded projects, and publish this publicly at least one week in advance of the next full council meeting.

WALES

Last Wednesday Sparks protested at the NG Baileys office in Cardiff after the protest at Llandough. Yesterday they went up to the Balfour Beatty depot in Rumney, Cardiff.


SCOTLAND

Around one hundred Sparks and supporters from Glasgow City Unison and other unions marched from the rank and file meeting at West Regent Street to demonstrate outside a brand new Morrison's supermarket in Gallowgate where NG Baileys have been a contractor. The police refused permission for a march on the roads but couldn't stop a demonstration through the city centre and Queen Street railway station that attracted the attention and support of Saturday workers and shoppers.

This was day five of an "assault" by rank and file sparks protests of NG Bailey sites across Scotland. The decision to target Morrison's was taken in the meeting after reports that the supermarket chain were complaining to NG Bailey's. With the ballot result coming and the likelihood of another injunction the mood to step up the action and bring the campaign to the attention of customers of the seven companies was evident.

Sparks handed out leaflets to sympathetic Morrison's shoppers explaining the onslaught on the wages and condition's of skilled electricians that the BESNA represents while the seven companies implementing these contracts announce vast profits.

UNITE RANK & FILE MEETING TO DISCUSS WAY FORWARD IN FIGHTING BESNA AND PROTECTING THE JIB AND NAECI AGREEMENTS



Saturday 4th February
1pm to 4pm
Carrs Lane Centre, Carrs Lane,
Birmingham B4 7SX
Only 10 minutes walk from New Street station.



JOIN THE NSSN NATIONAL SHOP STEWARDS NETWORK

6th Annual National Shop Stewards Network conference
11.30am - 4pm,
Saturday 9 June
Friends Meeting House,
Euston Rd, London NW1 2BJ



www.shopstewards.net