

Saltend lock-out Solidarity strike spreads

Alistair Tice

Since the Socialist goes to press on 6 April, hundreds of engineering construction workers at several sites around the country will be taking strike action in solidarity with the 400 Redhall workers locked out from BP Saltend, Hull.

Into a fourth week of being locked out, after BP/Vivergo ended Redhall's contract at the bio-ethanol plant, a mass meeting at the gates on 4 April voted unanimously to call for a national one-day strike of NAECI (national agreement - Blue Book) sites. Pickets were sent out around the country.

On Monday, Redhall workers from Hull and Teesside were boosted by maintenance workers from Nippon-Gohsei and Interserve who work at BP Saltend refusing to cross 'protest' lines at the gates. Their shop steward, Trevor Grewar, a Socialist Party member, gave a solidarity message

of support to applause.

Last week, Vivergo, 40% owned by BP, sent a letter to 500 workers at Saltend saying that they are not "tearing up the national agreement" and it is not a "lock-out". The letter is dated 1 April but this is no April Fools joke!

They have stated that they intend to split the Redhall contract up between four contracting companies, thus fragmenting the contract and putting TUPE (transfer of employment) rights into doubt, and have given no undertaking to take back the locked out workers.

Redhall has offered £3,300 a worker but only on condition that they stop protesting. The three grand is monies owed, and not even all of that, and the 'offer' has already been rejected at a mass meeting.

The GMB and Unite trade unions have both made the lock-out official. And a hardship fund has been set up.

But rightly the Redhall workers have demanded that industrial ac-

tion be escalated.

By this lock-out, BP/Vivergo/Redhall have torn up the Blue Book. If they get away with it at Saltend, then employers elsewhere will try the same thing. This means that this lock-out is a threat to all construction workers.

As lock-out committee member Keith Gibson said after Monday's vote to spread the strike: "The only way work will restart on that project is if all Redhall workers are taken back. If a one-day strike doesn't shift the bosses, then we will call for the whole industry to shut down."

- Please send donations to the lock-out hardship fund to: Treasurer Mr Steve Cressey, 1 Manby Road, Scunthorpe, DN17 2LA. Please make cheques payable to the: Saltend Hardship Fund.

- Messages of support and requests for speakers to: Keith Gibson: 07743135183 or geminis@geminis.karoo.co.uk



A mass meeting during the Lindsey dispute to defend NAECI agreement photo Sean Figg

Call for strikes to fight Ford attacks on pensions



Ford workers and ex-Ford workers have been treated badly photo M.Gard

Rob Williams

former Swansea Visteon (ex-Ford) Unite convenor, NSSN anti-cuts convenor

Strike action is looming in Ford as the patience of both workers and pensioners runs out. The car giant is intent on pushing ahead with changing the way in which pensions are increased in retirement to take account of inflation (index-linking) so that they will be based on the Consumer Prices Index (CPI) rather than the present Retail Prices Index (RPI).

As RPI is generally around 1% greater, pensioners could see their pensions reduced by up to 15% over their retirement.

The latest meeting between the unions and the company was lobbied by Ford pensioners and supported by ex-Ford Visteon pensioners and NSSN supporters. The ex-Ford Visteon pensioners are involved in a legal battle with Ford about their own pensions.

Two years ago, almost to the day, 600 Visteon workers were sacked with six minutes' notice. They only secured a decent redundancy because of their heroic campaigns of occupations and pickets in Belfast,

Basildon and Enfield. However, the pensions of 3,000 present and future pensioners are in doubt because Visteon UK went into administration.

Ford broke their promises to these ex-Ford workers, now they want to put their hands in the pockets of Ford workers and pensioners.

The unions told the company that a strike ballot will be starting as soon as possible. No doubt many Ford workers will wonder why they should work overtime at the moment for a company that treats them so badly.

This is a battle that can be won. Ford are hiding behind the laws of a government in crisis. Ford workers should invite the pensioners to attend their mass meetings to explain why their pensions are worth fighting for.

They should time action to coincide with action being considered by public sector unions and attend any protests organised by these workers. Whatever happens, the next meeting in the week beginning 18 April should be met with a mass lobby of Ford workers and pensioners.

For more on these reports go to www.socialistparty.org.uk

Prison privatisation Preparing for battle

On 1 and 2 April, members of the POA prison officers' union walked out of prisons across the country, in their lunch breaks, to discuss a response to the Tories' prison privatisation plans. The Con-Dems have handed over Birmingham prison to private security firm G4S. This is the first existing public sector prison to be contracted out.

Below are reports from some of these meetings, and extracts from an interview with POA assistant secretary JOE SIMPSON.

Lenny Shail and Nick Brook
West Midlands Socialist Party

Up to 100 workers temporarily walked out of Birmingham Winson Green prison after the meeting, to stand on the front steps as local branch secretary Brian Clarke addressed the media and held a short protest rally.

Brian made it clear that the union is mandated to take industrial action up to and including strike action if a public prison is privatised.

Workers at the prison were both emotional and militant in their reaction to the plans.

They are proud of the service they provide to the public and the inmates, and warned of the consequences of the present attacks on the rights and conditions of the officers, inmates and public.

The POA members were damning towards the Labour Party: "No one's failed this country more than this government, the previous government and the bankers. It was Jack Straw and Labour that started these attacks in 2009, what a despicable man."

Officers were also determined to not just fight their battle, but to link it to the struggle to defend public services and ordinary working people from attacks by the Tories, Lib Dems and Labour.

As one worker said: "Saturday [26 March] was just the start. We, like every other ordinary working man and woman, will continue the fight against this government."

London

Socialist Party members visited HMP Holloway to offer their support. The POA is organising a strict

work-to-rule in response to this privatisation and although prison officers are legally denied the right to strike, POA members were not ruling out any options.

Swansea

There was an angry mood amongst prison officers and other staff at Swansea prison.

POA members said they are "ready for strike action - if they get away with this then we will be next".

The deputy prison governor told visiting Socialist Party members that it wasn't "helpful" for them to be distributing material outside the prison entrance, as privatisation is a "sensitive issue".

You bet your life it is! That's why POA members will be preparing action to stop the Con-Dem privatisation in its tracks.

Interview with Joe Simpson

On 31 March the Socialist spoke to Joe Simpson, assistant secretary of the POA.

"We are living with threats of injunctions against the union. It's been going on since the start of the week when we put out two circulars to our members reminding them of the policies of the union."

We immediately got a letter from the Ministry of Justice asking us to withdraw the circulars because they believed we were inducing prison officers to take industrial action, which we weren't.

If we try to do anything in the meantime they can just come in

and seize the assets of the union. Phil Wheatley, who was director general of the prison service and is now on the board of directors of G4S, who've just won the bid for Birmingham, did say that if we ever went on strike he would 'own Cronin House', which is our HQ.

We are opposed to privatisation because we believe that the state has a fundamental obligation, that if it's going to sentence its citizens then it should also have the obligation of looking after them and rehabilitating them.

But what they're doing now is actually selling their obligation to the

lowest bidder just to get out of that.

How can readers of the Socialist support your members?

"We will accept any support from anyone in our fight against this."

We're even getting threatening letters about our meetings from the employer, calling it industrial action! Having a meeting in our own time! We believe that government are trying to make law-abiding members of the public, ie the professional men and women who work in our prisons, slaves to the state. And to the private company now."