

9 November protests

Workers and students unite!

Wednesday 9 November was quite a day: hundreds of electricians and thousands of students marched in London, the National Association of Head Teachers announced a ballot for strike action, and London taxi drivers drove in circles round Trafalgar Square in an RMT protest!

Electricians march to defend pay and conditions

Kevin Parslow

Unite LE 1228 branch secretary

Construction electricians entered the next phase of their battle to maintain terms and conditions following their national day of action on 9 November.

Unite called a national demonstration in London, attended by 2,000 workers from all over England and Wales, as well as a demo in Edinburgh. At the London demo, Unite general secretary Len McCluskey confirmed that the union would ballot its 1,000 members in Balfour Beatty for strike action.

This company is seen as the ring-leader of the seven building firms threatening to leave the Joint Industry Board scheme (JIB) and force workers to sign new contracts which could cut pay by 35%!

What has been significant about this dispute is that tactics have been determined by the membership, through the branches and the unofficial rank-and-file committee. The national demo was preceded by electricians protesting outside a number of sites in the City of London and urging workers on the sites to join them. They marched from site to site in the City with the acquiescence of the police.

However, this tolerance changed after the end of the official demo at Balfour Beatty's site at Blackfriars station. Although Unite had organised a lobby of MPs at Westminster, many electricians felt this was a waste of time and decided to march up the road to join the student demonstration taking place on the same day.

About 200 electricians and their

supporters were marching up Farringdon Street when they were stopped by a police cordon.

Effectively, these workers were 'kettled' - perhaps the first time a workers' demo has been stopped in this way. Regular police were reinforced by heavily equipped members of the Territorial Support Group, successors to the notorious Special Patrol Group.

After about an hour, the workers were allowed to leave but not before their personal details were demanded. When asked why, a number of excuses were given by police officers: the police commanding officer deemed it likely that a 'breach of the peace' would occur, that the marchers were indulging in 'anti-social behaviour', our (very short) march to join the students was 'illegal', the police feared a repetition of the events on last year's student demos and even that the electricians planned to attack the students!

This campaign has raised awareness among electricians: it has built union membership, found new stewards, forced the union leaders to organise a ballot and show the bosses that their plans are not going unchallenged. The task now is to win the ballot, organise effective action at all sites and force the employers to withdraw their proposals.

Balfour Beatty made £90 million profit in the last nine months and has an order book of over £15 billion! This is a formidable foe but one that can be beaten if the determination of the workers is matched by imaginative tactics that broaden participation in the dispute and are agreed through the branches throughout the country.

The next demo in London was due on 16 November at the Cross-rail development in Farringdon, where employers Crown House are refusing to recognise elected Unite stewards.



photo Paul Mattsson

NSSN condemns 'kettling' of electricians - extract from letter. See www.shopstewards.net

The National Shop Stewards Network (NSSN) condemns the actions of the police in 'kettling' over 200 construction electricians for well over an hour. Workers, including many in their 50s and 60s, were left standing within a ring of riot police with no access to food, drink or toilet facilities.

At the end of this harrowing experience, coming after they had spent most of the day marching, they were subject to a search and, we believe, unlawfully forced to give their names and addresses. No doubt many of these workers will be getting a letter from the Metropolitan Police's new commissioner, warning them off future peaceful protests!

Their crime? They wanted to show solidarity

with the many students who have supported their three-month long campaign by joining their demonstration.

In a magnificent show of solidarity, led by the Jarrow marchers and other student campaigners, the students stopped their march in an attempt to relieve the electricians' siege. However, such was the overwhelming presence of police on the student protest, it was eventually forced to continue.

The police may have achieved their aim of stopping significant numbers of these workers from joining the students but if anything their repressive and undemocratic actions have brought home to both groups how the police are being used to attack the rights of protest

and assembly.

The NSSN has supported the electricians' protests over the last three months, which have grown in support despite the media blackout and we support Unite's strike ballot against Balfour Beatty.

All unions and anyone who still believes in the freedom of protest and assembly must condemn these events. On 30 November, three million workers will be striking against the Con-Dems' attacks on public sector pensions. Many of them will be joining rallies and demonstrations.

It is clear that the best protection for our civil liberties is to ensure that these demonstrations are as big as possible and very well stewarded.

Students: thousands say no to fees, cuts and privatisation

Claire Laker-Mansfield

National organiser, Socialist Students

In the face of breathtaking levels of policing and overt attempts at intimidation, up to 10,000 students took to the streets to protest against the government's plans to snatch away the education rights of young people.

The march helped to send a clear message to the government: the fightback on sky-high university fees, EMA student payments, privatisation and funding cuts is not over. We're continuing the fight for our futures.

The good turnout for the demo came despite the threats and intimidation of the London Met Police. There was enormous anger at the disgusting announcement that the police would have baton rounds (which killed 16 people during the course of their use in Northern Ireland) at the ready.

However some student unions were intimidated by this brutal and disgraceful threat and can-

celled coaches.

Socialist Students and Youth Fight for Jobs stand squarely for the right to protest and demonstrate and will be challenging these attacks on our democratic rights.

Riot police, vans, horses and even dogs were everywhere. The demo was tightly flanked by police in riot gear, and every side street was barricaded with vans and more police.

The students, however, continued with their peaceful demonstration and even made appeals to the police. Whenever horses were lined up one group of young women students chanted: "You don't need to bring your horses, we just want to save our courses".

And the public support was amazing. Building workers were applauding from their scaffolding, office workers were pressed against their windows, and all the foot bridges around London Wall were full of people applauding.

The march also stood in solidarity with the construction workers who were also protesting in London this day.

In solidarity, calls made by



Youth Fight for Jobs on the march photo Paul Mattsson

Jarrow marchers and Socialist Students members to stop the demonstration and demand the release of the kettled workers were taken up.

The whole demonstration stopped and chants of "let them out" rang throughout the march. Soon afterwards they were allowed

to disperse.

The next big date for students who want to organise and fight back is 30 November when millions of public sector workers will be taking strike action against the government.

Students must join their teachers, lecturers and other workers on this day and strike against cuts, joining

the picket lines, rallies and demonstrations.

Only united with workers can we build a movement capable of saving education and securing us a decent future.

www.youthfightforjobs.com
www.jarrowmarch11.com
www.socialiststudents.org.uk