
Sparks say:

THE FIGHT IS ON UNTIL WE WIN!

The 'Sparks' construction electricians have well and truly launched a nationwide struggle against de-skilling. Last week, there were protests in London, Manchester, Swansea and outside Grangemouth.

The message to electrical contractors such as NG Baileys and Balfour Beatty is simple: take the Electrical Service Operator de-skilling grade off the table or expect more protests, walkouts and strikes.

All construction workers need to put 7am Wednesday in their diary for every week, for the increasing protests that send the message that the fight is on until we win!



Grangemouth

'Say no to the ESO', was the chant that rang out on Wednesday morning outside the HQ of the hated Ineos corporation at Grangemouth.

45 construction electricians, organised as part of the Scottish Rank and File group of Unite, gathered to protest the de-skilling onslaught by construction companies including NG Bailey's and Balfour Beatty.

Many were working on a Balfour Beatty site at Grangemouth and were walking out for the day, pointing to the potential to shut down the sites unless the bosses back away from their attacks.

There was a determined mood with enthusiasm for maintaining weekly protests at big construction sites around Scotland every Wednesday morning. Socialist Party Scotland's #NO2ESO leaflet was well received by those attending.

London

Socialist Party members in London joined around 50 unite rank and file construction electricians to protest against de-skilling. The workers have been boosted by forcing back plans to train new 'Electrical Support Operative' grades at the Hinkley Point nuclear power plant. These would do electrical work at lower wages than time-served electricians.

The protest organised by the Sparks started with workers protesting at the headquarters of NG Baileys and then marched to different construction sites – receiving support from the workers on site. Construction workers had high rates of death involving COVID-19, working on unsafe sites with no adequate PPE. More than 360 construction workers died between 9 March and 25 May while suffering from coronavirus.

The Socialist Party has called for the closing of unsafe working sites and the stoppage of non-essential jobs. Our placards and leaflet calling for support and to shut the sites to stop de-skilling were welcomed.

The protest itself was fun, lively and power-packed. It included construction workers who have been working in the industry for 50 years, 40 years and some that have joined recently. Workers were acting together to fight and defend their rights.

Their collective action has already forced bosses to some retreats. The training course for ESOs may have been suspended but the fight continues until the threat of de-skilling is off the agenda. We will be supporting them next week.



Swansea

As part of the national campaign against the employers attempts at the de-skilling of construction electricians, 'Unite' protestors were joined by Swansea Trades Council and Swansea Socialist Party members leafletting and discussing these attacks with dozens of workers entering the site.

Obviously not all the construction workers who were going into the site were electricians but the threat of de-skilling spreading to other trades if this attack was not defeated was immediately recognised.

Some of the older

electricians were explaining to the younger sparks that this is just the most recent employers attack to drive down terms and conditions which has led to an almost a constant battle over decades with big contractors like NGB and the construction unions.

Plans were discussed to take the Unite protests to other sites across Wales over the coming weeks until the sparks get an absolute guarantee that de-skilling moves stop immediately!

Socialist Party Wales, Trades Councils and the Wales Shop Stewards Network members will be supporting and standing alongside them.



ORGANISE THE FIGHTBACK

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