

Morning Star

Incorporating the Daily Worker www.morningstaronline.co.uk

For peace & socialism Thursday November 10 2011



Ask the people or go Greek?

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POLICE SMASH UP SPARKS' PROTEST

Baton-wielding officers hit out at construction workers

by John Millington
at New Bridge Street, London

BRAVE construction workers refused to be cowed by strong-arm police tactics yesterday as they marched through the streets of London against savage pay cuts in the industry.

Two-thousand rank-and-file Unite members from across the country joined what had been intended to be a peaceful day of action to highlight plans by seven rogue employers to force through 35 per cent pay cuts and push down standards in the industry.

But the protest was marred by heavy-handed police officers armed with batons, militaristic body armour and stun grenades.

The day of action by construction workers began at 7am with minor scuffles with police at Bishopsgate and a march to Blackfriars construction site.

A phalanx of workers holding red Unite banners urged colleagues on site to join the protest, roaring "All out!" as they passed by.

Unite general secretary Len McCluskey, who was at the protest, confirmed that the union had begun a ballot of 1,000 members for strike action at Balfour Beatty which could lead to a walkout on December 7.

He praised workers for their stand, but criticised police over reports that they were intent on hard-line policing of yesterday's student demo.

Mr McCluskey said: "To see officers with stun grenades and baton rounds on the day our kids are taking to the streets is quite disgraceful.

"It's becoming more and more like a police state.

"But they are mistaken to think it will intimidate us."

After two rallies the demonstration split up with the majority going to Parliament to lobby MPs and up to 150 trying to join thousands of students in London to demonstrate against fees and welfare cuts.

It was then that police struck.

Unarmed trade unionists were punched, struck with batons and thrown to ground by officers who moved in to tear down union banners before kettling the crowd.

Following 90 minutes trapped in a police "kettle" the commanding officer ordered that all names and personal details be taken under section 60 of the Public Order Act.

Officers justified their use of the law to prevent a "breach of the peace."

But Unite members disputed the police account of events.

Sixty-nine-year-old lay union member John Lynch, who was held and searched, accused police of using "disproportionate" tactics.

And speaking after his release from the kettle regional organiser Malcolm Bonnet told the Morning Star: "The government is in lead with the employers to attack working men and women."

johnm@peoples-press.com

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Marquez desperate to be Pacquiao foe

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