

# Angry construction electricians invade Kings Cross station

Hundreds of construction workers held an impromptu protest and rally on the main concourse at Kings Cross train station on 31 September. Speaker Mick Dooley, left candidate for the Ucat general secretary election, competed with the station announcer as the campaign against de-skilling in the construction industry was brought home to thousands of commuters.

Mick read out a passage from the book *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists* to the assembled crowd.

The workers had just held their sixth weekly London protest, this time outside the Kings Cross Project, at one point stopping the traffic outside one of the gates. Protests have also been held in Manchester, Liverpool, Grangemouth, Glasgow and Newcastle with work being temporarily stopped on the Tyne Tunnel.

Workers have been buoyed up by the fact that one of the 'Big 8' construction companies, MJN Colston, has backed down from withdrawing from the Joint Industry Board (JIB) agreement which could mean some electricians seeing their wages slashed by 35%.

National Shop Stewards Network chair Rob Williams addressed the protesters, pointing to the example of the workers at West Burton power station and Saltend who walked out on unofficial strike the previous Monday to protest outside Lindsey Oil Refinery.

It is a massive boost to see Unite officials at the protest promising to get an official ballot organised - which now needs to be progressed, but the action at Lindsey shows that workers have the power, whether it's official or unofficial, to stop the sites and defeat the employers.

Many speakers gave solidarity, from Alex Gordon and Steve Hedley from the RMT to left Labour MP John McDonnell. Protests and action are spreading around the country and starting to shake the employers.

Rob called for Unite to organise a national conference, open to all electricians in the construction industry, to work out the industrial action strategy that will be necessary to win this battle. This should elect a democratic national strike committee with each region and site represented. It should also be the basis for ending the system of appointed convenors and shop stewards in the industry.

The rank and file movement that has been built up needs to be continued and extended to keep the union officials accountable and to ensure that workers democratically control their own dispute.

Alongside moves to a national strike ballot, electricians can act now through unofficial action which should be linked up nationally and appealing to other trades and labourers in a militant campaign that can defeat the employers.



The sixth London protest photo Paul Mattsson

## Getting organised for action

Hugh Caffrey

Up to 100 construction electricians from across the north and north-west met in Manchester on 1 October to organise in defence of pay and conditions. Others came from the south coast and northern Scotland to contribute to this important meeting.

Seven employers are walking away from the Joint Industry Board (JIB) national agreement between big employers and the trade unions in the electrical construction industry. The seven are doing this in order to drastically worsen construction electricians' pay by up to 35%, a loss

of £7,500 a year! Workers are determined to resist this - and the pay cuts, blacklisting and other attacks being made on them by the employers in and out of the JIB.

Speakers at Saturday's meeting outlined the current stage of the struggle with the mass protests at sites across England and Scotland, strikes at some sites and prospects of big strikes at several more. Numerous contributions from the floor debated how this can be developed to mass pickets and mass walkouts across all the sites.

A very democratic debate also heard from one of Unite's regional officials but was rightly dominated

by the voices of workers. Confidence was voiced by many that this is a winnable fight, provided strike action is organised swiftly enough.

Workers were clear that Unite needs to move quickly to ballot, and that they won't stand for pointless delays. In a constructive and fraternal way, Unite's national construction official was strongly criticised for failing to seriously lead struggle while attacking good activists from behind the scenes.

The meeting concluded by electing a north-west steering committee to coordinate the campaign and agreeing that this will work as closely with Unite as possible.

• Defend the JIB agreement - no cuts in pay, pensions and terms and conditions

• For Unite to start an official strike ballot

• For Unite to organise a national

conference of electricians in the construction industry to democratically elect a national strike committee

• Any unofficial strike action to be spread nationally throughout the construction industry

## Irish trade unionists meet to launch Activists Network



Fighting the bosses' attacks

Seventy Irish trade unionists launched the Trade Union Activists Network in Dublin on 1 October. Formed to counter decades of 'social partnership' in Ireland, which held down wages in order to boost the bosses' profits, the idea of a Network gained further credence when the right-wing trade union leaders signed the 'Croke Park agreement' in February. This allowed the bosses and the government in Ireland to try and buy social peace, following the anger and protests around the banking and property collapse and deep recession in Ireland of recent years.

The conference heard speakers from a number of unions, with plenty of discussion from the floor, on the best way forward to build an op-

position in the Irish trade unions.

With a tough budget likely in December and attacks on pensions which one teachers' union has called 'larcenous', it is possible that 2012 will be a year in which large sections of workers will have no choice but to fight back, with or without their leaders.

The conference was also addressed by a speaker from the National Shop Stewards Network in Britain who explained how that organisation has built and suggested ideas for strengthening a fightback in Ireland.

Interested trade unionists in Ireland can contact Terry Kelleher on (00353) 872 857665 for further information about the Network.

Kevin Parslow

## Fighting library closures Campaigners face bullying and harassment

A Waltham Forest resident

Waltham Forest council in east London has recently spent £18 million on private consultants and agency staff. But like many other councils we are facing the 16th round of cuts. Youth services have been decimated.

The anti-cuts union has lobbied, protested and marched against those cuts. But this set of Labour councillors, preferring to safeguard their own careers, voted these cuts through.

In the 12th round of cuts the local library service and Waltham Forest Direct (the council's one stop shop service) is facing a £1 million cut. It is being proposed that two libraries close, Harrow Green and South Chingford.

In response to this library workers have been involved in public campaigning.

Now management wants to "investigate" a number of library workers on spurious charges. We believe that there are now four library workers being investigated on trumped-up allegations.

Management's aim is to try to silence opposition to cuts from council trade unionists while outside the council local activists and campaigners face the same fate. An activist from the Save Harrow Green



Fighting library cuts in Southampton photo S. Slominski

Library campaign has been summoned before the enforcement officers to explain her campaigning activities, she has been advised to bring legal representation!

Activists have to 'book' campaigning space in our own square. There is nowhere for oppositional voices to advertise or campaign, especially against cuts. Now when we do what we are democratically entitled to do, like petition outside a library, we are harassed inside our workplaces and outside. But we will not be silenced.

### Hampshire

Hampshire Unison has slammed county council proposals to make further cuts to libraries.

Around a third of the county's libraries are likely to close for half a day a week and two are proposed for closure altogether - the council is looking for volunteers to run them!

Unison is building a campaign to defend the libraries, email unison@hants.gov.uk if you would like to get involved.