Blowing the Fuses

Electricians have fought back with unofficial actions against the decision by Balfour Beatty and seven other construction firms to pull out of the Joint Industry Board (JIB) national building industry agreement for electricians. This would mean a massive pay cut for electricians. Balfour Beatty issued 90 day notices of termination of employment for 890 electricians on 14th September. The dispute has been continuing for many weeks now and there have been actions all over the country:

Demonstration in Newcastle at Balfour’s regional headquarters.

Two demonstrations in Manchester.
In Liverpool, electricians refused to cross the protest picket line at the Shepards site, central Library.

In Nottingham, there was a walkout at Ratcliffe power station.

In Scotland at Cambuslang on Balfours, electricians walked off site with 150 outside the gate, where firefighters supported with tea and biscuits.
In Glasgow, there was a protest at the hotel where construction firms were holding the Apprentice of the Year awards.

In London, actions have been continuing for many weeks.

The road blockings and occupations of sites have made MJN Colston, one of the eight employers, lose their nerve and go running back to the JIB.

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The employers’ plan:
• Pay cuts of up to 35%
• Travel time and fares to be scrapped
• End of right to claim unfair dismissal from beginning of job
• End of JIB pension
• End of right of hearing under JIN disputes process
• Downgrading of apprenticeships
• Downgrading by the bosses of electricians when they see fit

The walkouts at Grangemouth and Immingham were the start. These were followed up by the actions at the Olympic site, Farringdon and Oxford Street in London, the Tyne tunnel, MediaCity UK in Manchester, Edinburgh city chambers, Glasgow Velodrome and SPIE Matthew Hall in Liverpool. The actions have included direct action, blocking roads at the Olympic site, King’s Cross and Oxford Street and moving on to sites to occupy.

Several minibuses full of construction workers refused to cross the picket lines at the unfinished Carrington Paper Mill on October 12th. Many workers also used their holiday entitlement, refusing to work. The day before management had threatened that any workers not reporting for work on the day would be sacked. Electricians targeted the site which is run by Balfour Beatty. The paper mill contract is worth £250 million and is already two months behind schedule. The electricians have hit at the Spanish paper company SAICA for hiring Balfour Beatty to carry out the contract. The action was followed in the evening by a solidarity meeting with the electricians at Manchester University. And yet what have the Unite leadership done to support the cause of the electricians? Len McLuskey, General Secretary of Unite, has sent out a letter stating “If you fail to work normally you will be taking part in unofficial action.”

For his part Bernard McAulay, Unite’s National Officer for Construction in a leaked email was to state that: “My colleagues will not throw away this wonderful opportunity the employers have given us to re-engage with the workers in the industry as opposed to this poisonous campaign by these mindless individuals”.

By "mindless individuals," McAulay means the rank and file committee. The “wonderful opportunity” he talks about is the decision by the eight employers to pull out of the JIB! Gail Cartmail, Unite Assistant General Secretary, promised a ballot for strike action at the rally in Farringdon. This is a long time coming! In the meantime, the seven employers who have opted to pull out of the JIB are becoming more aggressive.

Five of these employers - Balfour Beatty, Crown House Technologies, Spie Matthew Hall, Shepherd Engineering Services, and NG Bailey - have announced their intention to start sacking and to re-employ under worse conditions and pay on December 7th.

There is no time for delay waiting for a ballot that might not materialise at any time in the near future. Unofficial strikes need to spread across sites with the setting up of unofficial committees and mass meetings.

Where unofficial strikes are not yet possible we need to strengthen the numbers on the days of action. That means calling on other workers, students, pensioners, the unemployed to join the morning actions.

Kensal Rise Library Blockaded

Brent Council in London has spent £100 million on a new civic centre. It has the money for this - even though anticipated profit from it will not be realised for 20 years - yet it is prepared to save £1 million by closing down six well-used and much-loved libraries. These library closures received a lot of recent publicity when celebrities like the playwright Alan Bennett mounted unsuccessful moves to halt the library shutdown in court. Hours later Brent Council padlocked the buildings. This was followed by hundreds of people forming human shields to prevent the council boarding up the buildings at Kensal Rise Library. They have vowed to keep up their presence. The protestors - mainly women and children - are being supported by neighbours who have supplied them with hot water bottles, blankets and tea. They have stopped three attempts so far to board up the library. Some people have camped out overnight. A make-shift library has been set up outside. Another library at Cricklewood was blockaded but the council sneakily boarded it up at night.

Phone Margaret Bailey, chair of Brent SOS Libraries, on 07813572468 to check the latest situation.
**Student Protest Forces Greek Interior Minister to Abandon a Night at the Movies**

On the night of Saturday 8th October, a group of students stormed a cinema in the centre of Thessalonika to protest the brutal conditions being imposed by the Greek government, the EU and the IMF. Around 100 students departed from a nearby concert organised by the General Assembly of Occupied Universities and headed towards the neighbouring ‘Olympion’ cinema where they had heard that Haris Kastanidis, the Interior Minister in charge of making sure that Greece dances to the IMF’s tune, was enjoying a night at the movies. This is while ordinary Greeks are being taxed to the hilt and finding it ever increasingly difficult to pay for such ‘luxuries’ as food and electricity.

The students entered the cinema, unfurled a banner and shouted various slogans, forcing the suspension of the film. In the video made by the protestors the students can be heard chanting such slogans as “We’re here, we’ll be everywhere, we’ll be the fear of every minister”, “People keep going, don’t lower your head, the only way is to resist and fight” and “Terrorism is wage-slavery. No peace with the bosses.”

Whilst the group continued its protest, some of the students headed towards the minister telling him that the government was destroying their lives and that he was driving them into unemployment. It was at this point that someone threw yoghurt at the minister. Some of the other film-goers joined the students’ flash protest by shouting for the minister to leave and shortly afterwards, with his expensive suit stained with yoghurt, Kastanidis decided it was indeed time to make his departure – but not before confronting the students and throwing insults at them. With the minister evicted by popular consent, the lights went out and the film started up again.

Having achieved their objective, the students left the cinema and marched back to the concert that had been organised to celebrate the huge number of occupations of schools and universities that are taking place throughout the country. As they marched the students were flanked closely by police in full riot gear, prompting the group to chant slogans about the police’s role of defending the ruling class’s interests and how their constant presence on the streets of Greece is reminiscent of the country’s past military dictatorship. Political awareness, solidarity and organisation are aspects of the Greek student movement that students in Britain need to adopt if their battle against privatisation is to be successful.

**Egypt Update**

Whilst the action of masses of people in Egypt forced President Mubarak to resign and flee the country, the Army generals are still very much in the saddle. Strikes broke out on 8th to 10th February involving hundreds of thousands of workers. There have been strikes by tens of thousands of textile workers, 100,000 doctors, 200,000 health technicians, and 4,000 dockworkers, as well as almost a million teachers. Bus drivers, ticket collectors and mechanics to the tune of 45,000 came out on strike in Cairo, some linking up with teachers’ actions at the same time. Encouraged by the original protests, workers are swinging into action in larger and larger numbers, incensed by the political and economic situation. Food prices have soared 80% since January. Workers have mobilised around the promised (and unfulfilled) concessions announced back in February and March.

**Students Occupy Scottish Universities**

On Thursday 29th September, around 40 students occupied the Collins building at Strathclyde University in Glasgow in protest of the recently announced £27,000 fees for RUK (Rest of UK, apart from Scotland) students. This followed a similar occupation the week before at the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland and one at Edinburgh University on 16th September after the announcement of the introduction of £36,000 fees for RUK students at these two universities.

This year Strathclyde has had an intake of fewer than 170 Humanities and Social Science students with many staff and students blaming cutbacks in these departments for the drop in student numbers.
29-S - More than 30 Protests and Rallies throughout Spain Call for a General Strike
(The following is a translation from CNT Number 382 October 2011)

After their meeting on the 2nd September, CNT, CGT and Solidaridad Obrera made the call for the 29th September to be a day of mobilisation under the banner ‘La lucha está en la calle – Hacia la Huelga General’ (The fight is in the street – towards a general strike) urging workers’ collectives and social movements to take back the strike by breaking away from the CCOO’s and the UGT’s (Spain’s two mainstream unions) policy of demobilisation and governmental collusion. Answering the call, tens of thousands of people came out into the streets to voice their discontent and call for a true general strike.

The CNT launched itself into a multitude of events putting the call for a general strike into practice with more than thirty towns and cities seeing members of the organizing unions out in the streets alongside those of 15-M assemblies, social groups, and other workers’ organisations. Each protest had its own individual characteristics but all were united in their demand for a general strike in the face of a wave of aggression against working people.

In Andalucía, the largest protests took place in Córdoba, Málaga and Sevilla but there were meetings in other places such as Jaén, Jerez, Sanlúcar, Lebrija all of which were mostly in collaboration with SAT, USTEA (Andalucian workers’ unions), CGT and various 15-M assemblies. Equally, other assemblies from the movement took part in rallies together with unions in such places as Santander and various towns in Aragón which saw a variety of workers’ organizations take to the street in solidarity. One of the most eye catching events was in Zaragoza where a human chain linked the doorway of the Bank of Spain with Pilar Square, afterwards transforming into a spontaneous protest outside the town hall.

In Euskadi (Basque Country) the CNT organised rallies in Bilbao, Donostia (San Sebastian), Iruña (Pamplona), both independently and in collaboration with CGT, ESK and Solidari (Basque trades unions).

Some regions took the decision to concentrate protests in one city so as to better join forces with other groups, such as Murcia where the CGT organised a protest in the region’s capital in collaboration with many different 15-M assemblies. One of these assemblies had earlier occupied the headquarters of the Regional Confederation of Entrepreneurial Organisations (CROEM). In Mérida a central event took place for the entire region of Extremadura together with the CGT and CSU (union based in Extremadura) and numerous other collectives including ‘Ecologists in Action’.

In Catalunya the central event took place in Barcelona where the morning saw a bus followed by a long line of cars packed with militants traveling to various pickets to show both their solidarity and that business class unity needs to be confronted with that of the working class. Throughout the afternoon the protest had a large and spirited presence.

The morning events in Madrid were decentralised with pickets set up in solidarity with various worker disputes and protests happening in
areas such as Sol, Hortaleza, Vallecas, Móstoles and Leganés. The protest in the afternoon counted on the participation of a variety of organizations (including the CNT, CGT and Solidaridad Obrera) and exceeded even the most optimistic predictions with close to 8,000 people taking part. Especially intense was the activity in Valladolid where the CNT, CGT and TU made the city theirs and launched their call for a unified struggle towards a general strike. Events in the run up to 29-S included on the 24th a screening in a central plaza of a union debate and on the 28th a mass bike ride to demand strike action. On the morning of the 29th meetings took place in different institutions responsible for the crisis (employers, the union CCOO, Santander) with the afternoon protest having around 500 people taking part. A group of CNT militants also occupied the PSOE (Spain's ‘socialist’ party currently in government) regional headquarters on the morning of the 28th. Other places such as Miranda de Ebro, Gijón, Ferrol, Guadalajara, Ávila, Palma, Logroño and a long list of others joined in the day of protest with a vast array of action.

**Day of Action against Atos**

Friday 30th September saw a nationwide day of action against Atos Healthcare, the private company paid £100 million a year by the government to carry out the 'Work Capability Assessment' of those claiming sickness and disability benefits. So far, Atos have tried to stop the benefits of over 150,000 people and this has been met with condemnation by disabled people and their supporters as well as anti-cuts groups, claimants groups and medical professionals. Campaigners have argued that since Atos make a profit by throwing people off benefits, there is a clear conflict of interest in them administering the medical assessments these decisions are based on!

Actions took place outside Atos offices and assessment centres in seventeen towns and cities across Britain including London, Glasgow, Nottingham, Birmingham, Edinburgh, and Oxford. As well as handing out leaflets and generally raising awareness of Atos's dodgy dealings, some actions were more lively, with cardboard coffins and body-bags laid outside to represent those who have suffered and even been driven to suicide after being kicked off benefits. Those gathering outside the medical assessment centres talked with people going in and out about the whole process including encouraging them to appeal any negative decisions as appeals result in a loss of profits for Atos. Many were already well aware of Atos's underhand tactics and had been sent for assessment multiple times. Attacks on benefits claimants affect us all as most of us will be somehow disabled at some point in our lives, even if only through old age. The government’s benefits shake-up targets some of the most vulnerable people in society, using the rhetoric of ‘Big Society’ and ‘benefits culture’ to deprive and demonize a whole section of the population. The national day of action is a step forward in the fightback against Atos and against benefits cuts in general. For more info please visit: http://benefitclaimantsfightback.wordpress.com/

**Against Prison Slavery!**

The Campaign Against Prison Slavery (CAPS) was formed in 2002 by ex-prisoners, prisoner support groups and activists to campaign against compulsory labour in UK prisons and for the abolition of the Incentives and Earned Privileges Scheme (IEP).

Compulsory labour is a feature of most prison systems around the world, whether it be forced hard labour as punishment, direct ‘reparation’ for the costs of imprisonment, prison jobs such as kitchen or cleaning work that keep administration costs down or workshop jobs where prisoners manufacture the cell doors and prison bars for the jails that house them. However, the modern prison has also developed into a system for generating capital from a section of society that up until now has largely been held to have no intrinsic labour value, the marginalised elements that tend to be trapped on a roundabout of regular incarceration, never to hold down a ‘proper’ job or become a ‘productive member of society’. Thus we now also have in the modern prison system the prisoners who are used to create capital for private sector companies, either through labour in prison workshops manufacturing and packing goods for these companies or those prisoners handed over wholesale to the global outsourcing and security companies that run the private prisons, to do with as they wish, often ‘sub-contracting’ them out to third party companies.

The above text is quoted from the introduction to the CAPS from their excellent website. The site has loads of in-depth articles about compulsory work in prisons plus a Prison News page and a Prison Facts column.

www. againstprisonslavery.org
UK Uncut Block the Bridge

On the 9th of October around 2,000 people turned up in central London to block Westminster Bridge in protest against the government’s reforms to the NHS which threaten to invite private companies into the health care system.

This is the second mass action organised by UK Uncut, who before the 26th of March 2010 and the short-lived occupation of Fortnum and Masons which resulted in over 140 people being arrested, was organised around lots of smaller but just as noticeable local actions against companies which dodge taxes. One of the differences between this action and previous ones organised by UK Uncut was the fact that the occupation of the space was essentially facilitated by the police who had already closed the bridge at 11:00am; many protestors present recognised this and pointed out that this couldn’t really be considered a formidable challenge to the government and its plans.

Although there was a large police presence, including riot vans lying in wait down many of the streets nearby, the police seemed hesitant to interfere with the protest in any way. This might be due to the possible PR nightmare that could occur if the police were filmed attacking protestors as they have in the past in front of thousands of tourists who had come to photograph Big Ben and the Houses of Parliament. It is also possible that the police were happy for the protest to go ahead as long as it stayed static on the bridge and didn’t actually disrupt any other parts of the capital as previous student demos involving UK Uncut have.

Many people at the protest were agitating for bolder action; some advocated simply going on a more disruptive march around the city and others were suggesting occupation of another area in the capital. One of the positives of the demo was that it did not seem to be made up of career activists but instead a wide range of people were present, from students to NHS workers and whole families. Around halfway through the demo on the bridge it was announced that a general assembly would be held to discuss the occupations in Europe and the US. At first the assembly seemed to be heading in a bad direction with people standing and giving speeches to an almost silent audience and somebody even taking advantage of the occasion to plug a book that they wrote. However things looked up when the large assembly split into lots of smaller groups that could discuss various issues much more effectively. People discussed various things including the possibilities of the national student demo on the 9th and the huge strikes on the 30th of November. Any kind of decision making was absent from the process but that didn’t seem like the point of these particular assemblies.

The demo ended promptly at 4:00pm, and rather than stay to take part in anything more, the organisers began packing up and quietly and calmly heading for home. At one end of the bridge a group of young Anarchists gathered together and with a loud hailer began gathering support for a march to the next bridge along (Lambeth Bridge) which wasn’t closed already and block that one as well. A small crowd of about a hundred gathered and marched to the bridge but sadly they were not a large-enough group and they also didn’t move quickly enough. The police kettled them at the end of Lambeth bridge and arrested a number of them.

All in all, it was a brave attempt but a case of too little too late. The more disturbing part of this episode is the fact that UK Uncut acted in a similar way to the NUS leadership in 2010 (although on a far smaller scale) by disassociating itself from the small group on Lambeth bridge and re-tweeting police statements over the internet because the Lambeth bridge group broke from the pre-planned action and annoyed the Met police. However, at the time of writing this article (10th October) UK Uncut has seen the light and said through twitter that it apologises for these comments and re-tweeting the police statements which it now points out were attempts to divide the movement.
Letter from a North East Anarchist marching in Manchester on October 2nd

We started at the education feeder march in Oxford Road. It was an SWP-organised event, but we met up with Liverpool SolFed and other comrades from Manchester and planned to block up with assorted banners on the march. It didn't quite happen like that because the swappies pulled a fast one and started to assemble the march while the last speaker was still on the mike, so that they could get their Education Activists Network banner right at the front. This caused everyone to surge off to try to get position with some of us older comrades being rather slow of the mark. Anarchy is not chaos (sigh).

The feeder march was lively and noisy and got a great reception from the trade unionists being held in a side road while we passed. I think that many of us had expected that the day might become confrontational and that the focus of any conflict might be the occupation of Albert Square alongside the Town Hall. In fact, when we got there, the occupation was already in progress; there had been no attempt by the bizzies to prevent it. We found a lot more anarchists in the square and as nothing much was happening, we set off to rejoin the main march with the circle A banner, drawing with us about thirty comrades, mostly young and mostly masked up. It wasn't a black bloc tactic of course, but it certainly looked like it to the police, public and press; it attracted quite a lot of attention and produced the best chant of the day:

"Tory scum, we know you!
We smashed up your HQ!"

Then we got to the TUC rally field and there was nothing much to do except frustrate the FIT. (What it is about Manchester FIT by the way? They spent most of the afternoon getting as much footage as they could of a bunch of teenage boys and were also observed filming people going for a slash; rather pervy if you ask me). A bit of a let down to be honest, but on the way home we talked about some interesting piss-taking actions that we might try out in similar circumstances in the future. Nothing illegal of course.

We left the youth and went off to look for a pub. Walking back past the Conference Centre, we found that the rumoured Hunt Sabs action was actually taking place; a lively static action right there in front of the Conference, as 'in yer face' as anything else that happened; the trouble was that it must have started after most of the march had passed the spot, so hardly anyone knew about it. Not being critical - it looked great, (and great fun), but if it had started an hour earlier, (or if the sabs had come on the feeder march), then our squad could have been there too; would have made it even livelier and would have allowed some good networking.

The younger comrades could teach us a few things about networking and communication to be honest. They seem to have their act sorted and to be developing some good systems. It's important. If we can't communicate effectively, then we can't plan and act together as effectively as we might, (and must). It doesn't matter whether we're AF, SF, Alarm or non-aligned, we have to talk to each other when we are all taking part in the same event. Not necessarily with the object of agreeing a common course of action, but so that we at least know what we're all planning and can back each other up as much as possible.

We have to address this problem in the north-east as well. Nine of us went in the minibus, but there was a shitload of people who self-identify as anarchists there from our region, (not to mention the ones who aren't quite there yet - what was that Socialist Worker seller doing in the middle of our 'black bloc'?). For me, it's not a question of taking a 'join the party/group' approach; it's a question of being able to plan, decide and act together as efficiently as possible, as often as possible. I don't want to own of a small group of people who plans and organises and expects others to follow; I'm a bloody anarchist.

Thanks,
A comrade from Newcastle
Joining the Anarchist Federation

The Anarchist Federation is an organisation of class struggle anarchists (based in Britain and Ireland, but with many contacts overseas) which aims to abolish Capitalism and all oppression to create a free and equal society. This is Anarchist Communism.

We see today’s society as being divided into two main opposing classes: the ruling class which controls all the power and wealth, and the working class which the rulers exploit to maintain this. By racism, sexism and other forms of oppression, as well as war and environmental destruction the rulers weaken and divide us. Only the direct action of working class people can defeat these attacks and ultimately overthrow capitalism. As the capitalist system rules the whole world it’s destruction must be complete and world wide. We reject attempts to reform it such as working through parliament and national liberation movements (like the IRA) as they fail to challenge capitalism itself. Unions also work as a part of the capitalist system, so although workers struggle within them, they will be unable to bring about capitalism’s destruction unless they go beyond these limits.

Organisation is vital if we’re to beat the bosses, so we work for a united anarchist movement and are affiliated to the International of Anarchist Federations.

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