

Workers' control

If we can get the Vestas factories nationalised, we certainly won't have the old Vestas management in there. What do we want instead?

Some workers just say "a management that will listen to the workers". Others say "a workers' cooperative" - that is, managers elected by the workers, accountable to the workers, and paid an ordinary worker's wage.

We agree. It is possible. In Argentina, the Zanon tile factory workers occupied their factory when the boss tried to shut it down in 2001, and have renamed it "FasinPat" - factory without bosses.

The police

From Monday evening to Wednesday, the police were aggressive and very markedly on the side of Vestas bosses. Since then they have changed tack. That is a response to the strength of the workers.

Police from outside the Isle of Wight were used in the aggressive period; more recently, it's been Island police. It's a general rule that when police are being used heavily against workers, they are brought in from other areas. Local police are influenced by the community they live in, and may have friends or family among the workers. So the police used against the miners in their great strike in 1984-5 were always deployed outside their home areas.

Democratic accountability of the police - stopping the Government, or police commanders, deploying force at will - is the answer to that.

RMT and Unite

RMT activists - initially, branch officials from the RMT Portsmouth branch, which organises the Portsmouth-Ryde ferry workers - have been outside the factory helping the workers since very early on.

Many workers have now joined RMT, including many who had previously joined Unite in the hope of getting help from a union.

Unite Executive member Tom Cashman visited our protest on Saturday 25th - not, sadly, as a representative of the Executive, but to show his support as an individual trade unionist. We hear that Unite officials from Southampton who wanted to come and give support have been instructed by higher-ups in the union not to do so.

The difference between Unite and RMT here is that RMT has a better level of democracy, and full-time officials more responsive to the demands of rank and file workers.

Throughout the trade union movement, the big problem is the role of full-time trade union officials, paid much more than the members they represent, and subject to little accountability (often not even elected). Unite members in other workplaces will need our help to democratise their union, to demand officials paid a worker's wage and accountable to the members.

Organise, organise, organise!



The election of a committee by the Vestas workers outside the gates, and the growth of that committee as new activists join it, has made a huge difference to the strength and confidence of the Vestas workforce. The key to victory is that we keep on building up that level of organisation at the factory gates, to complement what the occupiers are doing inside the building.

Even if the occupiers are eventually forced out, if workers stay organised, that is far from the end of it. Vestas still have work and assets inside the factories that they need to get out. If they remain scared to let Vestas workers back into their own workplace - as they probably will - and if we remain organised outside the gates, it will be difficult for the Vestas bosses.

Meanwhile support from the wider labour movement and the community, and media coverage, continue to grow, putting pressure on the Government.

Film showing: With Babies and Banners

Plus discussion on how factory occupations can win
Organised by Workers' Liberty

Sunday 26 July, 7.30pm, Victoria Hall, Methodist Church, Quay St, Newport

The film tells the story of the General Motors car workers' occupation in Flint, Michigan, USA, in 1936, which won union recognition in the US car industry, and especially of the Women's Auxiliary in that dispute.

How workers can win: lessons from history Discussions 8pm every evening from Monday 27 July, at the roundabout outside Vestas

A series of discussions organised by AWL. All welcome. A pack of readings is available for these discussions, covering the 1936 Flint occupation, the big wave of factory occupations in Italy in 1920, summings-up by Leon Trotsky, and pointers from recent experience in the USA and Canada. Ask any Workers' Liberty member or phone Ed on 07775 763 750.

Alliance for Workers' Liberty

The Alliance for Workers' Liberty is a socialist political party active in Workers' Climate Action, in many trade unions, among students, and in other fields. We want a workers' government, based on and accountable to the organised working class, in place of Tory and New Labour bosses' governments. We want to see society reorganised on the basis of common ownership and democratic control, in opposition both to capitalism (the rule of profit) and the Stalinist model of the old USSR and China and Cuba today.

Why join the AWL?

Members of the Alliance for Workers' Liberty (AWL) have been active on the Isle of Wight for five weeks. With other activists from Workers' Climate Action, we leafleted the Vestas plants and helped set up the public meeting on 3 July. We have been active in supporting the occupation, proposing our ideas about how to organise, and winning support from other trade unionists in Britain and internationally.

Members of other socialist groups have joined the campaign more recently: the SWP since early July, and the Socialist Party since the occupation started. We welcome their input. We believe the left should work together wherever it can.

Between 2000 and 2003, we were able to help pull together the SWP and the SP and other groups with us in a coalition called the Socialist Alliance. That was broken up by the SP quitting at the end of 2001, and the SWP trashing the Alliance in 2004 in favour of a lash-up called Respect with the MP George Galloway. We call for a new Socialist Alliance.

Our support for left unity is not because we think the political differences on the left are unimportant. On the contrary. Big working-class struggles need clear awareness to give them strength. They need a socialist movement with clear, sharp ideas - the ability to learn from working-class history and from its own mistakes. If the socialist movement has weak, floppy ideas, if it is inclined just to go along with whatever seems to be the popular oppositional mood, then the result can be disaster.

AWL stands for "Third Camp" socialist politics, which means seeking independent working-class activity on every issue rather than just going along with whatever seems to be the "oppositional" camp in mainstream politics. The SWP and the SP do not have the same approach.

We have been part of Workers' Climate Action from the beginning because we believe an independent working-class stance is needed on climate change. Much of what we have done around Vestas has been done in cooperation with other Workers' Climate Action people.

We think the SWP shamefully damaged socialist politics by ditching the Socialist Alliance in favour of a lash-up with George Galloway, who had a long record as a friend of the fascist Saddam Hussein regime in Iraq. Our enemy's enemy is not necessarily our friend. The fact that Galloway opposed the US/UK invasion of Iraq - as we did - does not make him a suitable ally for socialists. Just as the opposition of Saddam himself to that invasion could not make him anything other than a murderous dictator.

Galloway has now fobbed off the SWP, so that alliance is ended; but we think the SWP shows the same approach on other issues.

We believe in building member-led rank and file movements in the unions, from the bottom up. We reject the SP's approach of putting a lot of their energy into getting full-time union-official posts in the PCS union, where they are very influential, and then having PCS do nothing much beyond scattered one-day demonstration strikes.

Inspired by the strength of collective working-class action shown by the Vestas workers? Then join a socialist organisation so that you can work consistently, year after year, in both ups and downs of struggle, at helping to build that collective working-class strength. And take note that a socialist organisation is useful only to the extent that its ideas are clear and well-based. Check out our website, www.workersliberty.org, and join the AWL.

The story so far

3 July: after some weeks of leafleting, Workers' Climate Action and Cowes Trades Council call a public meeting to discuss campaigning against the closure of the Vestas factories.

Two weeks starting 6 July: a minority of workers begin to discuss action. As the conversations spread, the idea grows that there are alternatives. Meanwhile public campaigning against the closure continues on the streets of the Isle of Wight.

Monday 20 July: Vestas management hear about the conversations and try to forestall action by threatening workers. 7.30pm: workers decide that they should move before the management try further pre-emptive action, and occupy the St Cross factory.

From Tuesday 21 July: Vestas bosses tells all other workers, at Venture Quays as well as St Cross, to stay home (on full pay) instead of working. Workers outside the plant elect a committee to organise their campaign. Management make repeated empty threats against the occupiers. They also refuse to let in food. Support comes in from RMT, FBU, Unison, CWU, GMB, PCS, and many other groups.

Wednesday 22 July: a Families and Community Campaign is set up to back the Vestas workers.

Thursday 23 July: the Vestas story reaches the front page of the national press (*The Independent*). Vestas bosses start supplying food to the workers, but serve summonses for a court hearing on 29 July for a possession order. Police tactics change. RMT leader Bob Crow comes to Vestas and offers RMT lawyers to help the workers.

Friday 24 July: many Vestas workers join RMT so that it can represent them with the Vestas bosses. 300 people march from Newport town centre to the factory.

Saturday 25 July: Vestas bosses start giving the occupiers hot food.

Monday 27 July: Vestas workers are due to visit Denmark to talk with Danish trade unionists.