

newsworthy in itself: we had to constantly create new angles for reporters. New endorsements from national figures could create stories that our support was growing. When janitors held a rally, we placed stories about workers getting involved. We turned the dining hall workers' strike authorization vote into a story about a swelling labor crisis on campus... In addition to our press team on the outside, several members of the inside team did nothing but call media outlets and plan stories for three weeks.

By the end of the sit-in, about eight very creative and persistent campaign members working with no budget had secured coverage in every major newspaper in the country and every major TV news show.

<http://www.troublemakershandbook.org/Text/Strikes/harvard%20Sit-In.htm>

The story so far

15 June: Workers' Liberty activists arrive in the Isle of Wight to start leafleting and talking to workers about the Vestas factory closure and ways to resist it.

3 July: 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.

Wednesday 15 July: Government publishes a White Paper calling for 7000 extra wind turbines in Britain in coming years. (3000 are currently operating or being installed).

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*). Ed Miliband writes an evasive letter to the Guardian about Vestas.

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.

Tuesday 28 July: Vestas bosses issue notices of dismissal to eleven workers.

Wednesday 29 July: Court hearing on Vestas bosses' claim for a possession order. Case adjourned to 4 August.

Workers' Liberty • www.workersliberty.org • 07775 763 750

Stepping up the outside campaign

Not only has the occupation made a huge impact. In the last two weeks the Vestas workers' organisation outside the factory has made huge steps forward, too.

Having achieved that, we should think about what we can do to step up the outside campaign - to have the outside campaign take more of the weight of the battle and rely less on the inside campaign.

In the first week of the occupation, peaceful and non-violent, but persistent, protest outside the front entrance finally made Vestas bosses and the police put up a fence there. It fences us out, but also fences them in.

Similar peaceful and non-violent, but persistent, protest might make them fence themselves in at the back entrance too.

They will want to take blades some time soon through the marine gate. There, everything has to cross the cycle path – a public right of way, not Vestas property – on its way to the jetty. Peaceful and non-violent use of our right of way there could apply further pressure to Vestas bosses.

If we draw on the ideas and creativity of all the Vestas workers and supporters gathering at the roundabout, we can surely also think of further tactics to keep the Vestas bosses and the Government off-balance. Even stunts which do no more than gain extra publicity are valuable here.

In many ways time is on our side. But if we let the outside campaign drift into a monotonous routine, time will not be on our side. The pressures of everyday life will slowly pull people away. The media will lose interest.

All power to the imagination!



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. It is in the new issue of Solidarity.

How to win a sit-in

These are excerpts from an article by Amy Offner on the victorious 2001 Harvard Living Wage sit-in, in the USA. They are taken from a US trade unionists' website, "The Troublemaker's Handbook".

The Harvard sit-in was by students at a university, not workers at a factory (though it was about a workers' demand – for a living wage for the catering and cleaning workers at the university). An even bigger difference from our circumstances is that the Harvard campaigners had months to plan for their occupation, in a relatively liberal environment where (though they had to keep some secrecy) they could organize wide support networks in advance.

There are still lessons for us here.

On the inside, the major task of the first few days was just holding the space. The police did not try to drag everyone out, but made it very difficult for us to stay inside and function. For instance, they prevented people from leaving the room they were in to go to the bathroom, and they forced their way into a room that the inside team had staked out as a cop-free room for meetings.

The inside team eventually got the police to back down by threatening to go to the bathroom in wastebaskets if they couldn't use the bathroom, and by having the outside team make a huge amount of noise in the middle of the night to get the cops to leave the meeting room. The noise produced so many angry calls to the police department from students trying to sleep that the cops decided it wasn't worth staying in the room. For the remainder of the sit-in, however, the outside team was careful not to make noise at night because we didn't want to alienate students.

On the inside, we also worked to keep the cops from being thugs by videotaping them: at least four people on the inside brought in video cameras and recorded everything...

Filming on the inside was also a central part of our media strategy. The inside team tossed tapes of footage out the windows to the outside team, where a member with filmmaking experience quickly produced a highlights tape which we copied and gave to TV news crews...

Another early concern was food: we needed to get it inside. The campus dining hall workers solved this problem for us. On the first night of the sit-in, a group of workers marched to the building with a stack of pizzas and essentially browbeat the police until they were allowed to deliver the food. From that point on, the police let food in, and every day, the outside team arranged for donations from unions, community groups, and restaurants.

On the outside, the goal from the start was to bring as many people as possible to the building, to isolate the administration by eliciting active support from as many constituencies as possible, and to generate positive publicity about the campaign.

A first step was to see that, every day, the noon rally and 8pm vigil were well-run. We made sure the speakers list was diverse, including workers, union reps, faculty, representatives from other student organizations and community groups, politicians, alumni, parents, and big-name speakers. We included musicians, spoken-word artists, and comedians. And we had a good group of drummers who backed up the chants.

We spent a lot of time making phone calls and canvassing to increase our turnout

every day. Over the course of the sit-in, we chose three of our daily rallies to pump up into huge affairs: one after we'd been inside for a week, another about a week later when we got members of the AFL-CIO executive board [equivalent of TUC General Council] to come and speak, and one on the day we left the building...

We scheduled other events all day long so that people could always come by the building and find something happening. Events ranged from a teach-in on race and poverty by the Black Students Association to salsa dancing lessons in front of the building... Every morning, we would plaster the campus with posters announcing that day's schedule, and we included the schedule in our daily e-mail updates and on our website.

After the first few days, when it was clear that our support was growing, the police stopped fighting over space inside the building. At that point, members of the inside team split into work groups, and for the remainder of the sit-in, they spent all day making phone calls to turn people out to events, solicit endorsements from national figures, and speak to reporters.

Workers and unions took part in all the events outside the building, and also organized their own. Janitors held their own rally, and off-campus unions sponsored a solidarity night. For many people, the highlights of the sit-in were two explosive night-time demonstrations with the campus dining hall workers. The sit-in coincided with the dining hall workers' contract negotiations, and the two developments fed each other...

The outside team found unique ways to involve every possible constituency. We attended meetings of student groups to answer questions about the sit-in, and those meetings generated new endorsements. We then got supportive student organizations to co-sponsor our noon rallies...

A few days into the sit-in, our most supportive faculty members organized the Faculty Committee for a Living Wage. They wrote an open letter in support of the campaign, collected over 400 signatures in a few days, and published it in the Boston Globe. Some professors held their classes outside the building...

On campus, we worked to constantly escalate the pressure on the administration: we didn't want them to think they'd seen everything we could do. For instance, we arranged... to run a mass civil disobedience training on campus during the sit-in, and had people role-play getting arrested on the steps of other administrative buildings. The implication was clear: we were ready to spread the sit-in if necessary, and many new people were willing to risk arrest.

Our most important escalation was the sprawling tent city that we built outside the occupied building. The university actually has rules banning anyone from camping out in Harvard Yard, so campus police could have arrested the entire outside team for doing this. To prevent arrests, we assembled a large crowd to launch the tent city. Over the next few days, the city grew to 100 tents and physically transformed Harvard Yard.

We put tremendous effort into media work, and this more than anything was what won the sit-in for us. Many off-campus supporters assumed that we got a lot of media coverage because Harvard was an irresistible draw. In fact, we got almost no media coverage for the first week of the sit-in, most likely because Harvard was using its connections to black out the story. We broke the blackout by being creative and unremitting. We had supporters call and write to papers and networks to ask why they weren't covering us.

We also understood that once the sit-in started, reporters would not consider it