

Now blockade Vestas!

"Vestas, this is only the start, you will lose", read the sign which occupying workers put up at the wind turbine blade factory at Newport before they were evicted at midday on Friday 7 August, on the 18th day of their occupation.

A large crowd of workers and supporters greeted them, including some 25, responding to an emergency call from Workers' Climate Action, who arrived from London around 3am Friday morning.

The occupiers have done what Hugh Latimer famously claimed to have done in 1555: "light such a fire in England as shall never be extinguished". They are determined to make sure that the fire is not put out.

As occupier Mark Smith said at the daily 6pm factory-entrance rally on 7 August, the priority now is to blockade Vestas - to make sure no work is done in the factories, nothing goes in, nothing goes out.

Some say that Vestas can wait a long time, at least until November, to get the stuff they want off the site. That may be the case with some stuff. It is unlikely to be the case with everything. It is especially easy to stop Vestas getting stuff out, since a lot of it can go out no other way than through the "marine gate" which leads from the factory to a jetty where stuff can be loaded onto barges to go up the river Medina and over to Southampton docks.

It can go only at high tide. And it has to go across a cycle path which is public property and a public right of way.

The Visteon Enfield workers won their victories by maintaining a picket at their factory after leaving their occupation.

A mass picket will keep up the pressure on Vestas. It will provide the central flame to ignite a fire all over the country, in rallies and industrial action on the 12 August day of action. It will inspire workers in other workplaces to occupy and blockade. There should be a trade-union boycott on handing any consignments to or from Vestas until they come to an agreement with the workers.

It is vital to keep as many as possible of the Vestas workers actively involved. That can only be done by activity at the factory, and by the main organisers and leaders from among the workers being present on the spot.

That the Government held talks with the RMT on Thursday 6th shows that the campaign is putting pressure on the Government. We can be sure it is putting pressure on Vestas too. We need to keep up the pressure on both, demanding that Vestas hand over the factory and that the Government nationalise it to save jobs.

The Vestas workers have a mass meeting planned for the evening of Wednesday 12 August, at the Southern Vectis Social Club in Newport. This is important - a meeting where all Vestas workers can contribute, with adequate time for all views to be aired. It can make firm democratic decisions about the future direction and organisation of the campaign and about what the Vestas workers want both from the RMT and from the activists who have come to support them at the roundabout outside the factory entrance. It can lay the basis for more organised dialogue between Vestas workers and supporters about tactics.

Supporters of the Vestas workers should take the eviction as a signal to step up the mass pickets, not to wind them down.



The story so far

PHASE ZERO: 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.

PHASE ONE: 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 tell 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.

Tuesday 29 July: Court says Vestas bosses will have to try again for a possession order on 4 August.

Monday 3 August: Workers' Climate Action activists blockade the entrance to Ed Miliband's Department of Energy and Climate Change, in London.

Tuesday 4 August: Despite a big demonstration outside the courthouse, Vestas get their possession order. Activists occupy the roof of the Vestas Venture Quays factory in East Cowes.

Thursday 6 August: Government agrees to meet Vestas workers for the first time, with RMT. Warm words from Joan Ruddock, but no clear commitments.

Friday 7 August: After Vestas get their eviction order, occupiers finally leave, defiant. At the 6pm rally the occupiers call on us to gear up for PHASE TWO of the campaign.

Saturday 8 August: Demonstration in Newport.

Wednesday 12 August: National day of action. Vestas workers' meeting, 7pm, Southern Vectis Social Club, Newport.