

Amicus UNITY *Gazette*

FOR A DEMOCRATIC UNION CONTROLLED BY THE MEMBERS

September 2004

AMICUS MUST SUPPORT THE WEMBLEY STADIUM WORKERS

On Friday August 20th, 240 workers employed by Fastrack Site Services, on the Wembley Stadium Project were sacked with two hours notice to quit site, after refusing to agree to new terms and conditions of employment.

The construction workers comprising of 140 GMB members and 100 Amicus members had originally been employed by Cleveland Bridge Engineering under the full terms of the Engineering Construction Industry National Agreement known as the NAECI Blue Book. Cleveland Bridge pulled out of the Wembley contract after a major row with the Australian main contractor Multiplex, leaving the workers without an employer. Amicus and GMB advised the workforce to accept redundancy from Cleveland Bridge and sign up with the new incoming contractor Fastrack site services, rather than make use of the TUPE regulations on business transfers. They also advised them that their terms and conditions of employment would remain unchanged. Shortly after commencing work with Fastrack, however, the company demanded that the workforce agree to new terms and conditions including unlimited compulsory overtime, compulsory weekend working and a points system for redundancy selection to replace the long established 'last in first out' procedure known as LIFO.

Following a meeting, the workforce mandated their Amicus Full Time Official Harry Cowap to inform the employer that the proposed new terms were unacceptable and had been unanimously rejected. Astonishingly Cowap in a written report to his Regional Secretary Nanette Cormack described the workers as 'disruptive and militant elements, causing great concern'. The workers were disgusted at this statement and Mr Cowap's stance of agreeing with the employer, an argument ensued which resulted in the Full Time officer abandoning site stating he was 'washing his hands of the contract'. When the 240 workers were sacked a few days later scandalously they were left to their own devices, with no Amicus representation, to fend for themselves. The men mounted an immediate picket, where they are still stationed today, fighting for justice and re-instatement.

In a shocking twist, the Amicus leadership repudiated the workers action, choosing instead to hide behind the petticoats of an excuse that union funds could be sequestered under anti-trade union legislation. Whilst the legal complexities of this situation are far from clear, it is believed that the repudiation took place on the same day that the workers were sacked, with the employer's views being sought and the views of the offending full time officer, but no explanation sought from the paying members whom Amicus are supposed to represent. To their credit the GMB however have not repudiated their members involved in this dispute and have given them full moral support from the start, with a GMB FTO in attendance on the picket line

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every day to oversee any developments. The Gazette would not wish to see the union's assets placed at risk, but it is outrageous that Amicus should capitulate straight away, without first exploring all legal avenues to support the workforce.

Amicus General Secretary Derek Simpson promised during his 2002 election campaign to 'keep both eyes on what the members want'. We want him to honour his election pledge by backing these victimised workers. Scandalously, in the face of pressure from the employers to demonstrate that the repudiation was more than a paper commitment, Head Office despatched two Amicus Full Time Officers to escort scab labour across our own members' picket line!

Construction workers up and down the country are now calling for national action in support of the sacked Wembley workers who believe they would not have lost their jobs had the Amicus FTO's acted in a competent and informed manner when dealing with their employment transfers. The main contractor Multiplex, are thought to have issued a writ for £2,000,000 against Amicus and are alleged, in a desperate attempt to entrap the workers and union alike, to have been resorting to a dirty tricks campaign not seen in the UK for many years. In anonymous phone calls, Wembley riot squads have been called out to quell fictitious violence on the picket line, only to arrive and find the workforce picketing peacefully. Local police in attendance each day have reported no violence or intimidation has taken place.

Questions now need to be asked as to how the leaders of our union have ended up in this position. Instead of turning their backs on long suffering members, surely our union should be supporting these workers and defending their rights.

A planned programme of action is underway which started off with a lobby of our NEC who unfortunately voted to repudiate the dispute, a demo outside the Football Association's Head Office and a protest at the TUC in Brighton. National, regional and local appeals to Trades Councils, MP's, union branches and workplaces are being organised and everybody should do their bit to help. Fundraising events are vital to the success of this dispute. Raising the profile of this campaign has been made much more difficult than usual, as most of the dispute activity has been subjected to a news and media blackout, imposed by the government who do not wish to impair the current submission of the 2012 Olympic bid.

Amicus must urgently reverse its decision to repudiate this dispute and instead give full backing to these members. These brothers need our support both moral and financial. With most of the workforce living in digs during the week they urgently need finance to maintain the dispute.

Wembley Dispute donations and letters of support can be forwarded to the following address: Wembley Dispute Fund, c/o Graham Caster, 18 Waxwell Lane, Pinner, Middlesex Or Contact Spokesman Tony Connor on 0778 9931476 for more information on how you can help.

It is the intension of the editorial board to produce a regular publication of the Amicus Unity Gazette in order to continue to campaign for a democratic and fighting Amicus. To do this we need finance to pay for production and distribution costs. We are therefore requesting that every subscriber send £5 per year to the address below by the end of the year in order to continue to receive your copy in the post. Also please don't forget to inform us if you change your address.

Please send to: Bill Young, 22 Swale Road, Rochester, Kent ME2 2TT.

Cheques to be made payable to 'Amicus Unity Gazette'

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