

# Dispute enters second month...

# SUPPORT THE BATU STRIKERS

**F**or the past four weeks BATU staff have been on strike and have been picketing the union's main office in Dublin. The strike is against the forced redundancy of two union officials, Tom Fitzgerald and Rob Kelly, and against the threat to impose wage cuts and detrimental changes to the conditions of administrative staff. It is a strike in defense of basic trade union principles.

Meanwhile, for the past four weeks, current BATU General Secretary, Paddy O'Shaughnessy, Assistant General Secretary Brendan O'Sullivan and organisers Andy Smith and Greg Macken, have crossed the picket lines daily. They have done what all scabs do during disputes; they have spent their days trying to do the work of the strikers.

Tom Fitzgerald who has eight years service with the union has been replaced by the man he trained, Greg Macken who has thirteen months service. This 'organiser' is now answering the phones and doing the typing.

Before placing pickets on the building the first thing we did was issue a leaflet to members of BATU explaining that our dispute is with sections of the leadership of the union, not with the membership. The last thing we want is to damage our union, both Tom and Rob retain their BATU membership. We explained to members that the union leadership had

and continue to refuse offers of assistance to resolve the dispute from the Irish Congress of Trade Unions, the wider trade union movement and from the Labour Relations Commission. The union has also refused to attend the Labour Court.



BATU official Greg Macken crossing the picket line

We have had hundreds of members pledging support for our strike and organising work place collections. Members have also visited the picket line every single day to show support and

also to register their disgust at those passing pickets. The solidarity and instinctive defence of basic trade union principles by the members of BATU stands in stark contrast to those paid officials who are crossing picket lines daily.

The response of the General Secretary and his fellow scabs to the strike has been to use every trick in the book to deflect attention from the real issues; they

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tried to argue that our strike was really a smoke screen for 'UNITE / ATGWU' to take over BATU. In a barely literate letter sent on 14th May to members which offers not a single argument to back up its claims the General Secretary said that this 'big British union' with 'two million members' was looking to take over BATU and posed the question "which side are you on?"

This is not a dispute between rival unions. It is a dispute between, on one side, strikers who are defending trade union principles and, on the other, top officials of BATU who are acting like the worst anti trade union employer. By turning up to the picket lines to show support hundreds of members of BATU have already answered Paddy O'Shaughnessy's question and shown that they are on the trade union side.

The second attempt to muddy the waters was the letter of the 16th of May sent to members claiming that the strikers had engaged in a campaign of 'sabotage' prior to going on strike; it also alluded to financial irregularities. These completely unsub-



stantiated allegations amount to slander against loyal union staff and have been referred on to our solicitors. If these allegations have any merit why hasn't the General Secretary called the police or done anything on these issues other than throw mud? Because there is no truth to these claims.

The question of the finances of the union is now central. Three of the union's four trustees have advised the bank that all of the union's accounts should be frozen pending a full audit of the unions accounts. We welcome this move by the Trustees and wholeheartedly support the call for a full audit. What was Paddy's response? Firstly he tried to replace the trustees who called for the audit, now he is attempting to block the audit. Why? If Paddy is saying there are financial irregularities surely he should welcome a full audit?

There will no doubt be further attempts to deflect from the real issues at stake in this dispute but members should be clear that right now the issue for both our strike and BATU members is the fact that so-called trade union officials are passing picket lines. If you pass a picket line you are a scab, full stop - how can a blackleg represent you on site?

This dispute has brought into sharp focus the undemocratic nature of BATU and the discontent among members. The flouting of policies such as LAST IN FIRST OUT and the passing of pickets by senior offi-

## BATU Concerned Members Action Group set up

Two very successful and large meetings of rank and file members, attended by some members of the National Executive Council and some Trustees took place in Dublin over the last number of weeks. The overwhelming mood was of complete support for the strike. A number of members at both meetings called for the resignation of the General Secretary and said that they would not work with scabs in the future. This has now been followed up with concrete proposals as to how members can take back their union. Members from around the country attended the meetings and are now in the process of organising similar meetings in their region.

There was a call for all members to do everything they can to attend their branch meetings when organised and to attend the next meeting of BATU Concerned Members Action Group.

Officials will damage the union at a time when construction workers need a strong trade union to represent their interests. BATU has a proud tradition of fighting on sites and in workplaces for its members, but how can BATU officials insist on basic union rights for their members when they refuse to afford them to their own workers?

This strike by BATU staff and the struggle by members to reclaim the union are linked - we share a common interest in rebuilding BATU as a fighting democratic union.

**PLEASE KEEP UP THE SUPPORT & SOLIDARITY  
- WE ARE OUT UNTIL WE WIN!**

## WE DEMAND:

- Lift the forced redundancy notice on Tom Fitzgerald and Robert Kelly.
- All six Unite members back to work - no victimisation.
- No imposed changes to staff pay and conditions.
- Full recognition of our trade union Unite.

## What you can do to support the strike

- Visit the picket line
- Take leaflets onto your site or workplace
- Organise regular collections for the strike fund
- Ring your National Executive Council Member / Branch Member / General Secretary to register your disgust at senior officials passing pickets.

### For more information contact:

**Tom Fitzgerald -0872253755  
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