

Threat of eviction remains over Vestas occupation

Our reporters
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A legal bid for the immediate eviction of workers occupying the Vestas Blades plant on the Isle of Wight failed on Wednesday.

On July 20, 25 workers began a sit-in at the wind turbine plant to protest its closure, with the loss of 625 jobs. The plant is scheduled to close on July 31. Parent company Vestas Wind Systems is also shutting its plant in Southampton, laying-off 100 workers, and transferring production to the United States. A fence was erected around the Isle of Wight plant, near Newport, to prevent supplies from entering, but almost daily rallies have been held in support of the occupation.

Vestas' Danish owners had urged Judge Graham White, sitting in the Newport court, to fast-track its possession order. Adam Rosenthal, for Vestas, claimed that this was necessary because "emotions are running high" at the plant and there was the risk of disorder.

Judge White dismissed the claim, stating that he could see "no evidence of any threat of violence to property or person by reason of the individuals who are occupying the property remaining there."

The judge also ruled that the possession papers had not been served properly. As Vestas was unsure of all the identities of those in occupation, papers had been served on 13 named individuals and "persons unknown" it believed to be in the building.

The company was attempting to "get around the rules", Judge White said, in arguing that it was not necessary to specify the names of those that were the target of the legal action.

"One does expect the claimant to get their facts straight," he said. The case was adjourned until Tuesday, August 4.

There was jubilation outside the court, where some

200 supporters had gathered, expecting bailiffs to move in straight after the proceedings. But the occupation and the plant remain in grave danger. Appeals to the Labour government to nationalise the factory as part of a renewable energy policy have fallen on deaf ears.

On Tuesday evening, 11 of the workers occupying the plant were dismissed with immediate effect. The workers reported that notices of their sackings were enclosed in a pizza delivery. The termination letters also informed them that they would not be entitled to any redundancy payments because of their role in the occupation.

The notices came days after company spokesman Peter Kruse had warned that while Vestas owners were "patient people," the workers would face "consequences" if they continued their occupation.

"Everyone in here went absolutely ballistic," said one of the workers inside. "It's given us another week to spread the word and given our legal team time to strengthen the case."

Outside the courtroom, Mark, a worker at Vestas told the *World Socialist Web Site*, "I think the company should have been much more up front with us from day one, told us exactly what was going to happen rather than telling us very little during the consultation period and just dictating what was going to happen.

"They told us at the end of April. It was the first we really heard about it. Before that we were being told we were being converted to a different technology. It was all upbeat, all positive that we were going to larger blades. They took away overtime at Christmas. There were rumours on the factory floor. But nothing was said by management. We were called in one morning and told they were intending to close the factory, cease production and that we'd all be out of work.

"They took on a lot of people when I joined three

years ago, but a lot of people have been there less than a year and lot of people were taken on a short while ago when they must have known things were going wrong. We trained the Americans. That's the annoying part. That's where they've sent the business. We trained them for our jobs. The factory is being built in Brighton, Colorado. Logistics means it's cheaper. It will have an effect on other firms that make the resin for the blades here.

"I was a chef before joining. Some guys are lucky as they had previous careers. But in the present climate trying to find a chef's job that's anywhere near the kind of money we're earning at Vestas is hard.

"A lot of sacrifices were made by people for the company. I think that's where a lot of the bad feelings come from. We went onto a new shift rota a while ago—the Continental shift. It meant four days on, four days off. Sometimes we had a weekend off, sometimes we didn't. You could still earn overtime and get two days off and then they changed that. They cut out all the overtime overnight, went to this new shift pattern which is five days on. We have every weekend off, but you did one week 6:00am to 2:00pm, then 2:00pm till 10:30pm, then 10:30pm to 6:30am. When you came to your weekend, if you worked a night shift until half past six in the morning on a Saturday you'd go home shattered and come back on a Monday night with no overtime.

"A lot of people have made sacrifices for Vestas and they've made no sacrifice whatsoever. They've taken money off the government twice and gave no money back to the workers; no decent redundancy. Some guys are getting £200 to £300 for a £23,000 a year job. My question to Vestas is would they trade their job for £300?

"For three years I would have got six weeks redundancy. They're giving us the least they can get away with, considering they made £350 million profit. It's disgusting. Some of it is Vestas' fault; some of it is the government's."

A local pensioner supporting the occupation outside the court explained, "I used to be involved in fighting for green-field sites against building by big developers for profit. We were successful taking these big people on. That was 30 years ago. This today is more important than that as it's about livelihoods, so people can pay their mortgages. If they're allowed to do this,

who's next to go? They're all working class people."



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