

Reply to UK trade union official on Southampton Council strike

Tony Robson
8 November 2011

The following e-mail was sent by Ian Woodland, a regional coordinating officer for the Unite trade union, in response to the article, "Unions move to sell out Southampton Council strike". It is followed by a reply from the author.

Tony. I am more than happy to put you right on all the factual inaccuracies in this and all your other articles.

Yours fraternally,

Ian

Your "fraternal" offer to discuss "factual inaccuracies" in the Socialist Equality Party's coverage of the Southampton council workers dispute is dishonest.

It stands in marked contrast to the vituperative and threatening posture of your posts elsewhere on the Internet.

On the Facebook page, "Southampton Students Against the Cuts", for example, responding to the posted *World Socialist Web Site* article, "Are Obama and NATO plotting a military coup in Greece?" you wrote, "Completely paranoid, barmy unscientific crap from Capitalisms favorite scab sect, the WSWs!!!"

The rest of your comments are similarly abusive.

As a Unite official who has played a major role in the Southampton dispute, you are clearly aggrieved by our assessment of the role of the unions and their collusion with the Conservative-led council in attempting to push through a revised pay cut. But rather than set out your differences in an honest and coherent manner, you indulge in double bookkeeping.

Publicly you pose as someone concerned with debate, while, behind the scenes, when you feel you are among like-minded union officials, Labour Party members and

the ex-left fraternity, you seek to whip up hostility against the SEP. This extends to implied threats against our members.

"I am waiting for the day they turn up on a picket line in Southampton. Let me put it another way, certain bin men might be waiting to greet them on a picket line if they have the guts to turn up," you write in another of your postings.

Given your description of the WSWS and the SEP as "scabs", this can have no innocent interpretation.

Your rantings have had some response from within the trade union and Labour Party apparatus. Derek Kotz, Stalinist PR man for the Rail, Maritime and Transport Union, empathised with you: "The WSWS is full of nasty, sectarian attacks on the people who are at the sharp end fighting the Tories and the cuts. It is shameful stuff that sows disunity."

Sarah Evans of the Labour Party wrote, "It's not helpful to right [sic] this sort of stuff. We are all where we are not where a few people might demand where they think people should be. Let's stand together—don't start doing the Tories' dirty work please."

The trade unions are doing the Tories' dirty work, not us. Unison and Unite have called off any further strike action against the pay cut imposed in July and signed a joint statement with the Tory council to make a revised pay cut the basis for ending the dispute. The unions' claim that they will "let the membership decide" on the latest offer has little meaning when the one option that is not on offer is opposition to any reduction in wages. It is an indictment of the role of the trade unions that one of the few times they have organised any strike action under this coalition government is to pressure a Tory council to agree to "better" pay cuts!

While Unite has belatedly called for a rejection of the

proposed settlement, this is a token gesture, given that it signed up to the resolution put to the mass meeting on November 2 that stated, “Both unions believe that the Council’s proposals are the best that they are able to negotiated with the Council.”

Your assertion that the WSWs has been invisible during the dispute is disingenuous. Your vitriolic response to our coverage proves otherwise. Our articles and statements on the dispute have been widely circulated, including the article that is the source of your complaint that was distributed outside the November 2 mass meeting.

During the last strike day, on October 6, the article, “Lessons of the Southampton council strike,” was circulated. A reporting team conducted interviews with strikers who voiced their opposition to Unison and Unite’s limiting of the industrial action to selective stoppages. (See “Southampton council workers criticise union”)

Our articles have been well received and widely discussed. It is because they are getting a hearing, under conditions in which Unison and Unite are moving to sell out the dispute, that you are seeking to poison the atmosphere in the hope of preventing any discussion on the critical issues involved.

The Socialist Equality Party has nothing but contempt for your threats. We will circulate this exchange among council workers, who will no doubt be interested to learn that your main concern is to mount a witch-hunt against socialists when they are fighting to safeguard jobs and conditions against the Tory council. We will also send a copy to the Unite Executive, and demand it make clear whether your abusive threats are made in an official capacity.

You are at liberty to make public your complaints about the coverage of the WSWs. When—or if—you decide to make clear what it is you object to in our coverage, we will respond accordingly. That is in keeping with an honest and open debate.

Tony Robson



To contact the WSWs and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact