

British Gas engineers denounce GMB union for claiming “victory” after 500 lose their jobs

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The GMB union this week formally ended its dispute with British Gas, farcically claiming that it has won a “new, improved pay deal” in “gruelling negotiations”.

The engineers involved were incensed by such lies. The reality is that the dispute ended months ago in April, with the GMB overseeing a sellout in which almost 500 workers were sacked, and the rest of the workforce forced to accept inferior terms and conditions.

After 42 days of strike action, British Gas was able to enforce its “fire & rehire” contracts, including a 15 percent pay cut by the April 14 deadline. In late March, the GMB had already instructed around 7,000 British Gas engineers that they had no other option other than to sign an ultimatum contract from the company. Almost 500 workers who refused to sign the inferior contracts were fired, with no opposition from the union.

In its July 20 statement, the GMB is forced to acknowledge the outcome of its betrayal, admitting that “In the end, almost 500 workers were dismissed.”

GMB National Secretary Andy Prendergast cynically declares that the union “will never forget British Gas’s unnecessary and cavalier actions over the past six months,” before reassuring the company that “this new agreement does provide a way forward.”

No call is made for the sacked workers to be rehired. Instead, Prendergast adds in a throwaway comment that the new deal has “left the door open for those who were sacked to come back should they wish to do so.”

On the union’s Twitter account, the GMB announced the deal with the fraudulent claim, “We have listened to what our members at British Gas wanted and have delivered the improvements necessary to bring this dispute to an end. Members will see significant improvements to their work life balance and will get a little bit more in the process.”

Workers responded with unrestrained hostility. Several pointed out that the deal being hailed as a great improvement is the one previously negotiated by the union with management at the government’s Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service (Acas), which was rejected by the membership during the strike by a majority of 4 to 1.

One worker stated, “What an absolute disgrace of a Union... Pretty sure over 70% of members voted for further industrial action, while you entered talks against the result of that ballot, to get the same deal that had already been rejected by members. Absolutely embarrassing!”

One worker asked, “All the company have done is bring in the agreement that was negotiated with Acas that was then rejected by the members... how is that reason to say the fight is over?”

Another commented, “It’s not a win at all... It’s just the ACAS contract and the union are taking the credit for it... 460 people still got fired. Engineers are still working extra hours a week for no extra pay.”

Another wrote, “GMB would be better saying nothing, rather than claim they ‘successfully’ negotiated an end to a dispute, which had effectively ended months ago, in defeat, despite the best efforts and courage of striking members and their families. Shameful posturing.”

One sacked worker stated, “This has to be a sick joke. The dispute was over in April when they fired me and countless other employees for not agreeing to worse terms.”

Another said, “Well you didn’t save my job... There’s no glory here you can’t take 20 quid off me then give me back a fiver and tell me I’ve won. Shame on GMB & BG.”

The wife of one engineer wrote, “My husband is still

working 40 hours a week, lost his non working days so no... It's not over... and if it is from your point of you... then shame on you to be in bed with the business.”

An engineer added, “I can’t believe you’re dressing this up as some sort of victory! Our contract is still a bag of shit and we’re still being forced to work an extra 156 hours per year for free. Pathetic GMB yet again rolling over like a little lap dog!”

Even a GMB steward wrote, “I find this statement disgraceful, claiming this is some kind of victory is an insult to our members who were out in all weather’s on the picket line and to those that were sacked in April. This wasn’t a victory it was a crushing defeat.

A former union rep commented, “Very misleading this article and not very sensitive to the workforce. I’ve supported GMB and was a rep but feel they’re losing the workforce.”

Several workers insisted the fight was ongoing. One commented, “I don’t know any engineer that thinks or feels this is over... if GMB really think that then they are wildly disconnected to the mass.”

Another wrote, “Over? you are having a laugh? It’s far from over... fired and rehired on worse terms and a tiny claw back towards the ACAS deal.”

One said, “Still working longer hours for nothing. So what significant improvements will I see?? I don’t want extra money for overtime as I won’t be doing any at all. I want the time I used to have with my family. In my eyes the dispute isn’t over.”

In one fire and rehire dispute after another, from British Airways to British Gas, Go North West and Jacobs Douwe Egberts, workers are drawing conclusions about the role of the trade unions, which function as an arm of management no matter the cost to their members.

Commenting on the deepening relationship between British Gas and the GMB, an engineer wrote, “All you have done is keep your feet under the table and not speak for the workers at all. GMB union are a disgrace.”

Several workers referred to a senior member of the union bureaucracy who has made the transition directly into the management of British Gas:

“‘Delivered improvements!’ A turd rolled in glitter is still a turd. But still, a senior member moves sideways into Centrica [owners of British Gas] management and the collective are back around the

table.”

Another wrote, “Engineers I’ve spoken to do not see this as a victory but crumbs being offered instead of a reasonable offer. Plus a senior rep joining management hasn’t helped the mood.”

Another asked pointedly, “The question is how many more reps will be jumping over to the business?”

One engineer wrote, “Cancelling the membership... thanks for nothing.”

The outcome of the dispute is a devastating exposure of the Socialist Workers Party and Socialist Party, which insisted throughout that victory was possible under the leadership of the GMB providing only that a bit of pressure was exerted by engineers. Even after the GMB instructed its members to sign the fire and rehire contracts, the SWP insultingly urged workers to “push trade union leaders to confront ‘fire and rehire’...”

Only the Socialist Equality Party and *World Socialist Web Site* told the truth to British Gas engineers, urging them to establish a rank-and-file committee to take the dispute out of the hands of the union bureaucracy.

Workers should study our record and **get in touch** to discuss the way forward in the fight against British Gas and their corporate partners in the trade union bureaucracy.



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