

Vehicle ploughs into Sellafield picket, hospitalising strikers

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A striking worker from the Sellafield nuclear site in Cumbria, England was seriously injured Wednesday when a vehicle ploughed into construction workers picketing the Calder Gate entrance.

The driver of a Polaris Ranger off-road vehicle crashed into the picket of Unite members shortly before 9.00 a.m., with police confirming an Isuzu D-Max was also involved. A 55-year-old picket was admitted to West Cumberland Hospital with serious injuries, while a 39-year-old was taken to hospital with minor injuries and later released.

A Sellafield striker posted an update on their hospitalised colleague: “He’s had a CT scan, broken a collar bone, got a fracture at the top of his spine, fractured a rib and a small fracture of the skull which has caused a bleed on the brain.” He was reportedly being transferred to Carlisle hospital for monitoring over the next few days.

Four men were arrested, aged 16, 19, 50 and 52, and were held in custody on suspicion of dangerous driving and causing grievous bodily harm with intent. In the early hours of Thursday morning, police later charged Craig Fawcett, 50, with causing serious injury by dangerous driving, and Albert Fawcett, 52, with dangerous driving.

The brothers appeared today at Carlisle Magistrates Court, where they denied the charges. Both were granted bail and will appear at Carlisle Crown Court to enter a plea on 20 October.

Two other males, aged 19 and 16, were bailed with conditions.

Unite general secretary Sharon Graham issued a statement yesterday condemning the “unprovoked attack on our members” and calling on police to “use the full force of the law to prosecute those responsible”.

Ritchie James, Unite’s North West regional secretary

added, “The incident is both shocking and horrifying to all those who witnessed it”. He confirmed the strike would continue for the rest of the week.

More than 1,500 construction workers at Sellafield have been on strike since Monday in a dispute over site-specific pay entitlements for working in dangerous conditions. Sellafield employers are refusing to match pay premiums awarded at other nuclear projects such as Hinkley Point C in Somerset.

Multiple trades are involved in this week’s walkout, including electricians, joiners, welders, pipefitters, riggers and groundworkers. The strike will run until 11:59 p.m. on Friday. Picket lines are running at all gates from 5 a.m. to 4 p.m.

Speaking from the picket line earlier this week, a Unite rep said, “All the construction workers believe they should be getting paid some recognition for the work that they undertake. The site is the most hazardous nuclear site in the country, if not Western Europe.”

Construction workers at Sellafield are involved in decommissioning technologies at the old site and new projects being built. They are classified as “nuclear professionals” and are employed under the National Agreement for the Engineering Construction Industry (NAECI) and Construction Industry Joint Council (CIJC) Working Rule Agreements.

This week’s strike followed a work-to-rule that began August 23. A ballot held earlier that month delivered 90 per cent support for industrial action. The strike vote followed a series of provocative attacks by management including blocking reps from attending meetings and deducting wages from those engaged in union duties.

Unite officials have called for ACAS talks with the employers and a Unite rep said they are asking for £6

pound an hour for nuclear professionalism allowance, and £3 for working with advanced technologies. Unite stated that if Sellafield contractors refuse to negotiate then strike action will continue.

Workers at Sellafield must demand a full and independent investigation into the attack on the picket. Measures must also be taken immediately to ensure the safety of pickets. The fight to secure pay entitlements and the halting of company stand over tactics will not be achieved through ACAS. A rank-and-file strike committee is needed to turn out and win support among energy, transport and construction workers nationally.



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