

Interview with a Pat the Baker striker

paid £5 if you abuse a picket

Workers Solidarity Movement

1993

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Noel Forbes of the strike committee spoke to Workers Solidarity.

What are the main issues in this dispute?

It's about recognition — union recognition. The way the company acts you'd think it was a crime to join a union. Look at the surveillance cameras over there — there are three outside here and more inside the plant. The canteen was bugged before we came out on strike. He (Pat Higgins, the owner) is spending a security firms and now has two P.R. firms working for him. We find it very hard to get publicity. His P.R. firms are making out its not a union/management dispute at all but a dispute between workers. This is a total lie.

Tell us about the works committee who say they represent the workers.

This is a made up thing by Frank Sheridan who works in Granard (the company's H.Q.). Neither Sheridan nor the works committee were ever seen in Cherry Orchard by John (the striker who worked longest for Pat the Baker in Dublin — 7 years) until the strike started. They're just a made up job, they don't represent anyone properly.

Tell us about the situation in Granard.

Well, there's 120 people working there, not 400 like Higgins claims. There's maybe 40 more in depots in Limerick, Cork and Cavan. The rest in sub-contract work. We have two letters from workers in Granard waiting to join the union. But the workers there are afraid of Sheridan and his thugs. We went up there to picket the place four weeks ago — six of us. We were beaten up, spat on, threatened, abused — all by Sheridan's gang and locals paid £5 a day to abuse the pickets. The Gardai helped us out in the end. The parish priest denounced us as communists off the pulpit on Sunday. They knew too much about us personally and about the SIPTU official in Mullingar too. It was ridiculous carry-on — the personnel manager and his wife and daughter spiting at the pickets.

Have you managed to effect production here with the strike?

Oh yes. It's down 15 — 20 %. Hospitals, the fire brigade, some supermarkets have all cancelled. They are using the plant here as a depot. They are wrapping the bread somewhere in Rathmines now — we're are trying to find out where.

Do you think the workers in Granard will ever come out in support?

No, they're too scared. Two years ago 26 workers joined SIPTU in Granard. There are only two of them still in the job. Frank Sheridan, chairman of the works committee has been with Pat the Baker for ten years. He's getting well paid to run the works committee farce.

SIPTU have done a good leafleting and publicity campaign but what more would you like them to do?

Well, the Industrial Relations Act is the the problem. We have to get the bread blacked by the supermarket workers. That's what we want to see. One supermarket has voted to black it but we need lots more. The lads are getting fed up now. We're only on £36 a week strike pay. One of the lads is about to loose his house over the strike. Four of them have given the union until the end of the month to get some serious blacking done or they will jack it in too. I mean we appreciate all the support we're getting but it is not enough to win the dispute without blacking.

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