

STRIKE UPDATE

ISSUE 1

Job & Talent staff - ACTION NEWSLETTER

End the bullying of bin workers! Join the strike!

- End bullying
- Permanent in-house contracts



Agency workers have had enough. Enough bullying and victimisation. Enough being treated as second class. Enough years waiting for permanent jobs. Enough of working without sick pay or compassionate leave. Enough broken promises. Enough intimidation and blacklisting.

So we're planning to go on strike. To strike against bullying and blacklisting. And with a key demand: permanent in-house jobs now.

Unite has now served notice to Job&Talent that we are balloting agency workers to be able to take strike action.

Only Unite members will get a vote. So if you want to be part of this, join now!

The ballot period will start 7 days after notice is given to the company. You'll get further details when it starts.

This is our moment. Taking action together is our strength. It's time to stand together and win permanent jobs and good conditions.

HAVE YOUR VOICE HEARD - VOTE YES!



Caught red-handed: Birmingham Blacklisting hits the news

In the handbook of management intimidation, rule number one is: don't get caught.

So it's not a great look for J&T manager [Mark Asson](#), who went national on Sky News on Monday night. He was caught on camera speaking in a staff meeting at the Atlas Depot last week. His words:

"Now I've spoken to Chris [Smiles], I've spoken to Rob Edmondson, and I think, you know categorically the council are not going to employ anybody that they don't want to employ."

"So those people that do decide to join the picket line, then the council have confirmed to us that they are not going to get a permanent job."

What he was talking about is **blacklisting**. Blacklisting means businesses targeting workers who are in a union or plan to join a union, or planning to take industrial action, involving being on strike or being on a picket line.



The problem is, unlike cutting people's wages, blacklisting is actually illegal. So that news story led to squeals of horror and denial. The Council, which hires J&T, sent round a press statement saying: "Blacklisting will not be tolerated. We will immediately begin an investigation to ascertain the full facts."

Unite will now make sure that an investigation really happens. It should start with suspending the managers involved. And, as the issue could go right up to the council leadership, it should be an independent investigation.

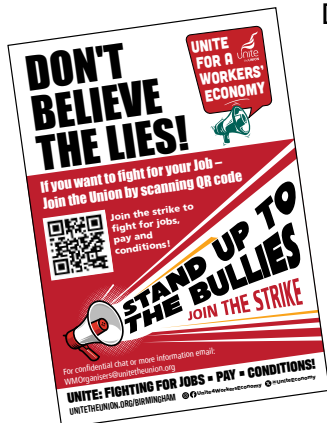
But right now, the good news is this has put a big bright spotlight on what's happening in our depots.

With the media eye on J&T and council managers, and a promised investigation, they will have to be more careful how they treat workers.

Don't be afraid to stand up for your rights. Standing together, we've all got each other's backs.

What does the law say about blacklisting?

Blacklisting is illegal under the 1999 Employment Relations Act. Court cases since then have determined some key points. It doesn't matter if you're agency or permanent. It doesn't matter if there's a written list somewhere or not. When managers identify certain workers as pro-union, and penalise them in ways like refusing permanent jobs, this is breaking the law.



HAVE YOUR VOICE HEARD - VOTE YES!



RESULT: Unite 1: Job&Talent 0.

Job&Talent make written promise to union that no one will be disciplined for joining a strike

After Unite exposed this intimidation, Job&Talent have now written to us promising they will not blacklist workers. They wrote:

"We do not engage in or condone any form of blacklisting, and no worker has been denied employment opportunities for participating in industrial action."

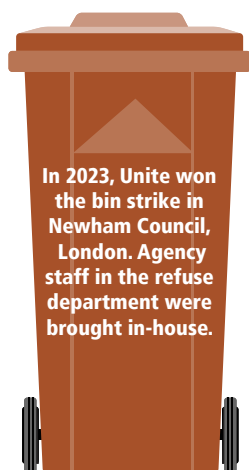
"We have not taken any action against workers who have joined the union or are taking part in the ongoing industrial action."

We may not trust managers. But exposing this incident has achieved an important result. With the law on our side and all eyes on them, Job&Talent will have to be more careful.

Winning permanent jobs for agency workers

We have heard many stories of people repeatedly being promised permanent jobs – but management never delivered. Some workers have worked for BCC through Job&Talent for **more than ten years** and still don't have a permanent contract.

Enough is enough. Unite's demand is clear: all our members who have worked with J&T for over six months must now be given permanent jobs with the council.



Unite has a strong record of winning permanent jobs for bin workers and others taking action. Some examples:

- ◆ In 2023 Unite won the bin strike in Tower Hamlets council, London. Bin workers got an extra £750 pay increase, and 50 agency workers were made permanent.ⁱ
- ◆ Also in 2023, Unite won the bin strike in Newham Council, London. Agency staff in the refuse department were brought in-house.ⁱⁱ
- ◆ In Sandwell in 2020, Unite won equal pay for agency bin workers, and back pay of £2,000-£7,000 each.ⁱⁱⁱ
- ◆ Unite has won many other victories for agency workers in other industries. Including permanent jobs for agency workers at Birmingham Airport (Menzies Aviation workers)^{iv}, Hackney Council school staff^v, DHL logistics workers at Jaguar Land Rover, and Balfour Beatty highway workers^{vi}.

“We’ve had enough”. Agency bin workers come out against bullying and bad conditions.

In a meeting at Unite’s office, workers employed by Job&Talent shared their stories. The room was full of anger but also a sense of power. Some said this was the first time they’d felt free to meet and talk together, to find their voice. These are just a few examples people gave.

- ◆ **Casual forever.** Many people have worked on agency contracts for over 5 years, and in some cases more than 10 years, with no permanent job offer. Workers have been promised permanent contracts for year on year, which never materialise. “It feels like a blackmail thing”, one worker said.
- ◆ **Two-tier workforce.** Agency workers are treated as second class citizens. Even basic things like having to get permanent colleagues to ask for PPE for you.
- ◆ **Work overload.** Agency workers are being pushed harder and harder to cover for understaffing due to the strike. “We are used and abused”.
- ◆ **Culture of fear.** Managers scare agency workers into thinking they can be sacked any minute, so mustn’t dare speak up. Anyone who does may be punished with extra work or disciplinarys.
- ◆ **No compassion.** Unlike permanent staff, J&T workers have no sick pay or compassionate leave. Workers have been told to work while ill. Or made to lose holiday allowance or pay while in hospital or attending parents’ funerals.

It’s time to end the bullying and insecurity.

This is our moment.

The blacklisting scandal has put the spotlight on the horrendous conditions in our depots.

The community is on our side. Over 90% support the bin strikes.

If we come out on strike, when our in-house colleagues are already on strike, our power will multiply and the council will have to listen.

It’s time to stand together and win permanent jobs and good conditions.



Have your say in the ballot:

JOIN UNITE



- i <https://www.unitetheunion.org/news-events/news/2023/september/tower-hamlets-workers-vote-to-end-bin-strikes>
- ii <https://www.unitetheunion.org/news-events/news/2023/september/newham-refuse-workers-win-across-the-board-payment-for-low-paid-council-workers>
- iii <https://www.unitetheunion.org/news-events/news/2020/december/unite-secures-huge-back-pay-victory-for-sandwell-refuse-workers>
- iv <https://www.unitetheunion.org/news-events/news/2023/august/birmingham-airport-strikes-off-as-workers-secure-improved-offer>
- v <https://www.unitetheunion.org/news-events/news/2020/january/hackney-school-bus-staff-dispute-ends-with-pay-and-agency-worker-win>
- vi <https://www.unitetheunion.org/news-events/news/2018/august/unite-secures-north-west-highways-umbrella-company-ban>