

Toilet Training

It's official - you can be sacked for going to the toilet while the train is standing in the station.

Lose the Levy

Bad idea to use Tory laws to stop sending your cash to New Labour's coffers? The alternative is feeding the beast with your hard-earned...

Hard labour

Gordon Brown has 'declared war' on everyone who hasn't got a job or loads of money. Casualisation and humiliation is the name of the New Labour game.

Getting the goods at Sainsbury's

Workers at Sainsbury's Pindar Road warehouse in Hoddesdon, Herts, were offered an unusually good millennium overtime deal. However, it wasn't long before the dealers started trying to reshuffle the pack.

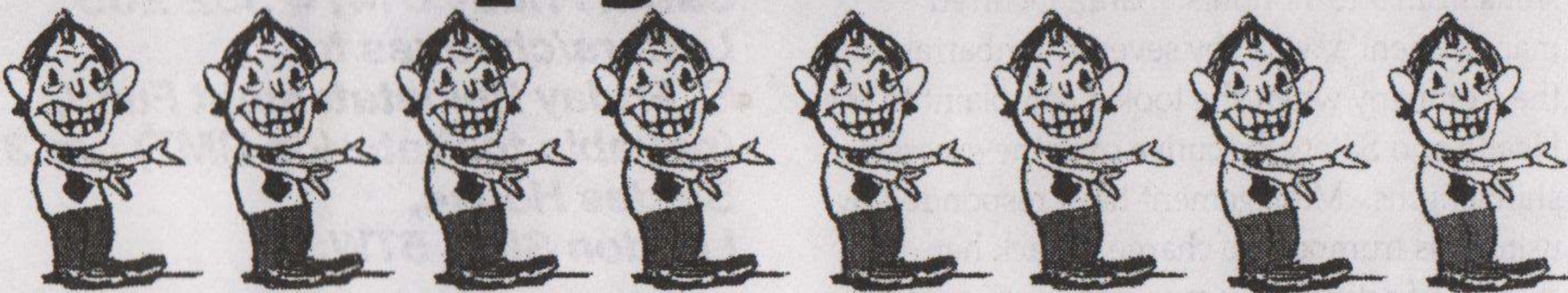
A poorly drafted offer from management suggested 10 days pay for 5 days work, plus a bonus and lieu days holiday. A natural reluctance to work over the millennium break was thus overcome, with the most strapped workers jumping at the chance to get some extra cash for once. It wasn't until after the work and the millennium that the payslip arrived, saying the workers had been overpaid. Those workers who were 'confused' were invited to one-to-one 'explanations' by management. Despite this tactic, very few people were having any of it. The workers were being made to pay for either a piece of spectacular management incompetence, or a deliberate deception.

The union, the USDAW, then got involved, as the rep explained that management were right in principle and law, and that the right collective solution was for everyone to repay the 'overpayment'. The union then proceeded to parrot the official (mis)interpretation of the deal in an attempt to convince the workers to give up their pay packet. A form was issued to everyone asking them to choose one of three methods of repayment.

Despite the management's blatant control of the union, the workers remained hostile, and not a single form was signed. Attempts to hoodwink the workers with points of law were thwarted by North East London Solidarity Federation (NELSF), whose members distributed leaflets and spoke to workers inside and outside the workplace, assisting in outlining the legal issues from the workers' own perspective. They also posed the necessity of an anarcho-syndicalist organisation as the only effective way of defending and extending workers' interests. The effect of obtaining useful information for once bolstered confidence among the workers, who, like many, have endured endless snide paternalism from Sainsbury's management and empty bullshit from the union.

With renewed confidence, the workers fought on and eventually, in March, Sainsbury's caved in and gave up all its demands. Direct action gets the goods!

CreepyCrawlies



After 3 years of New Labour, those who thought the new government would bring some respite from Thatcherite free market onslaught must be bitterly disappointed. The Blair Government remains firmly committed to those economic policies which proved so disastrous to the working class during the Tory years.

One of Labour's proudest boasts is that they have cut corporation tax to the lowest levels in Europe, while the unemployed are told to get on their bikes and look for work. It seems a long time since Dennis Healy, then on the right of the Labour Party, promised to "tax the rich until their pips squeak". Today's Labour Government sees the solution to all of society's problems in the free market. The aim is no longer to limit capitalism, let alone replace it with socialism, but rather, give it free reign, most notably in ensuring a de-regulated labour market. Further, Blair sees his role in Europe as one of leading the way in extending Thatcherism as far as possible within the social democratic EU. Top of his free market list is to ensure that across the EU employment rights are removed to allow management to hire and fire at will.

Labour's vision for Europe is practically the same as the US, where soul-destroying poverty coexists alongside grotesque wealth. While contemptuous of the Trade Union movement, the Labour Party still seems quite happy to take its money. Just why do Trade Unions continue to fund such a blatant anti-trade union party? No surprises there. Rather than organise resistance, union leaders cling in desperation to the hope that Labour will throw them the odd crumb of comfort to help them maintain their privilege.

Much is made of the new legislation allowing unions to organise should a majority vote in favour of a union. Nothing is said about doing away with the barrage of anti-trade union

legislation put in place by the Tories, which all but makes effective trade union action impossible and illegal.

The union leaders stick to the "anything is better than the Tories" simply because they have no alternative. But there is an alternative. It is not just about a few corrupt leaders holding back militant workers. If that was the case, such leaders would have been swept away long ago on a tide of militancy. The problems are more fundamental.

Firstly, most workplace organisation has been destroyed by sustained Tory attacks and major changes in the structure of the economy. Without workplace organisation there is no hope of organising effective action against bosses. Struggle for change is not spontaneous, it depends on forethought and long term preparation. Certainly, spontaneous actions happen, but only when they are backed by organisation can they be expected to be successful.

Secondly, the Trade Union movement has long lacked a wider political perspective. Politicians from both the Marxists and Social Democrats variety have argued that workers should limit themselves to day-to-day economic struggles while leaving wider issues to the politicians, a bit like leaving one's neck to the safe keeping of the hangman. If the capitalist onslaught is to be resisted, and it must, workplace organisation has to be rebuilt from the bottom up. This time, it must not only be about daily struggle, but also the wider political struggle aimed at replacing capitalism with something better. It must be based in a wider working class community. Workplace organisation must be democratically controlled by the workers themselves and kept well away from the Party officials and other slimy leadership types. A first step is to create a network of workers as a means of promoting ideas and organising support for all of us at the sharp end.

Toilet training

Little wonder SW Trains have a habit of leaving the rails and killing people.

A London train driver has been sacked for not telling her supervisor she was going to the toilet. It so happens that the driver concerned, Sarah Friday, is a trade union activist at Waterloo Station. For the last 3 years, she has played a prominent role as Safety rep, resisting management pressure to drive down workers' conditions at Waterloo Station. Her employers, SouthWest Trains, are the only Rail Company whose drivers must work 7 hours without a break. In 1995, SW Trains increased drivers shifts from 9 to 11 hours. Sarah incurred management's wrath by severely embarrassing the Company when she took a complaint to the Health and Safety Executive over the excessive shift lengths. Management have responded by using this trumped up charge to sack her. The sacking of activists is now a common practice by rail managers as a simple means of smashing organised workplaces in order that they can undermine collective organisation and pay and conditions with a completely free hand. In 1992, management sacked four shop stewards at Manchester Piccadilly, in an attempt to destroy a well-organised depot. This success spurred them on to use the sackings strategy to instigate fear across the workplace. The RMT has been content to channel anger over such sackings into the dead end of the Industrial Tribunal. However, where workers have been organised, they have been able to force the union to take

action, most notably in the case of Pat Sikorsky, where management were forced to reinstate him after he was sacked on a trumped up charge. Thankfully, Sarah also has the support of a well-organised depot, and has been able to mount an effective campaign which included workers at Waterloo voting overwhelmingly to take strike action in an attempt to force her reinstatement. As we go to press, ballots for a company-wide strike are taking place.

The pressure on sacked workers is always enormous; messages of support should be sent to:

Greg Tucker 0171 582 2955 or 0771 339 9797

Sarah Friday 01474 352 265
Letters/cheques to:
S. Friday Reinstatement Fund,
(payable to Waterloo RMT) c/o 3
Blades House,
London SE11 5TW.

STRIKE OFF

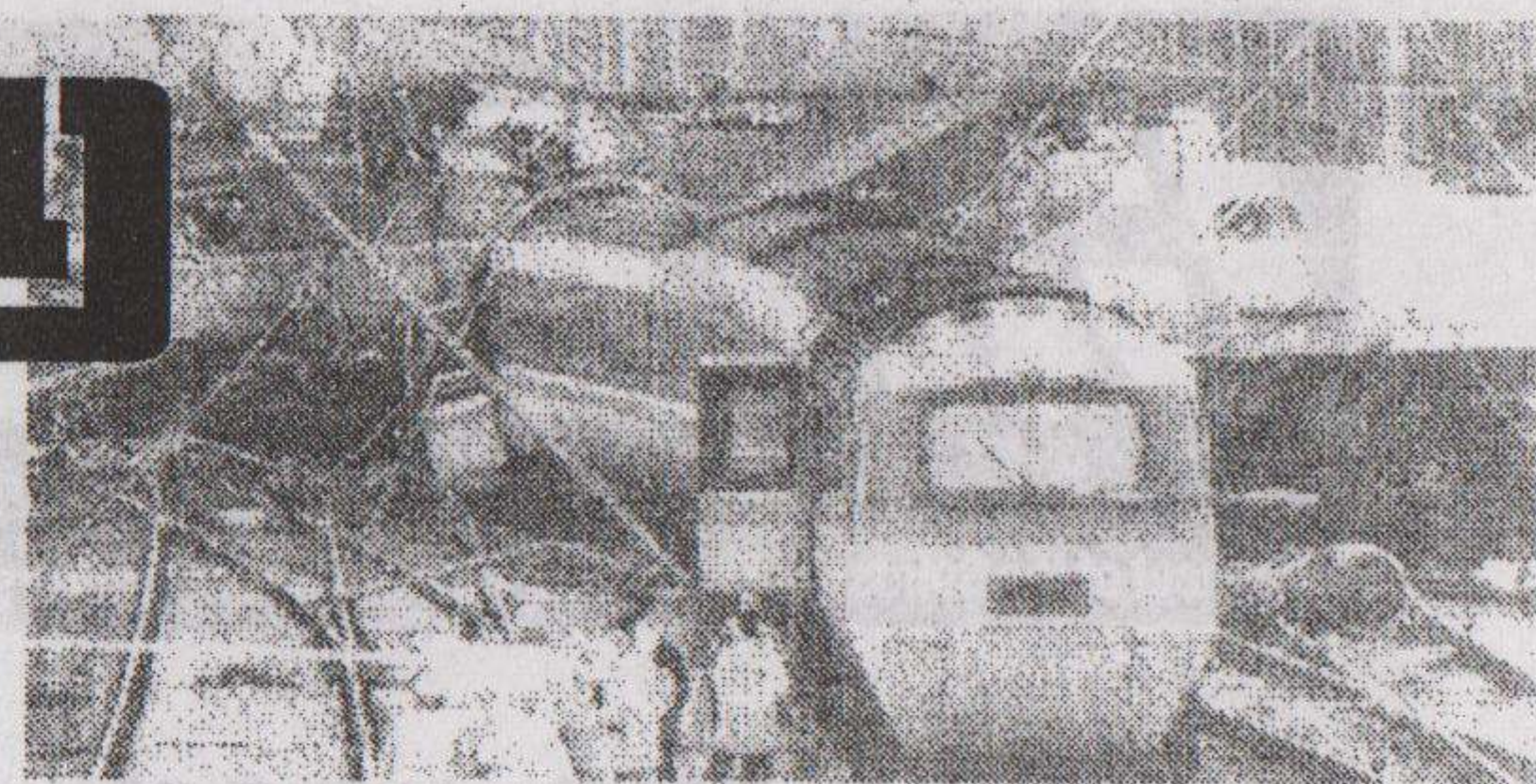
The proposed strike by rail guards has been called off by the rail union, RMT. It was called in response to management's latest attempts to reduce the safety role of the guards. Traditionally, it was the guard's main job to ensure train safety. In recent years, management have looked to undermine the safety role by introducing other duties such as ticket inspection and removing safety responsibilities.

The ballot resulted in an overwhelming majority in favour of strike action, pending

reinstatement of full safety responsibilities. However, in what has become a tried, trusted and rather tired pantomime, it only took a vague threat by management to take the RMT to court for the union leadership to back down and call the strike off. They got nothing more than a vague commitment by management to review their proposals for guards' duties. Widespread anger has resulted among guards, who are attempting to reconvene a national RMT Conference and get the strike action plans reinstated.

The fiasco of the guards' ballot is symptomatic of the RMT of recent years. Fear of the law in general and fear of union funds being seized in particular, have all but paralysed the RMT. In the face of declining wages, conditions and membership, activists within the union have argued for many years for the union to break the law as a means of taking effective action. Union officials are never going to put their exceptionally high living wages and lifestyles by taking on the state and management. They have too much to lose.

Several years ago, a campaign for a fighting and democratic union was launched, within which many argued that the only way forward was through the establishment of a new rail union. It is high time this idea was pursued further.



GLOBAL ACTIONS...

Capitalism is international, so we need to be organised globally to oppose it and build a viable alternative. Nationalism and patriotism lead to pointless and false divisions, used as tools to fuel economic and bloody wars. Solidarity Federation opposes these in favour of a movement built on global solidarity. Solidarity Federation is the British section of the International Workers' Association (IWA), the anarcho-syndicalist association. This gives it essential international solidarity and experience from much larger sections, such as the CNT (Spain) and USI (Italy). Founded in 1922, the IWA has a long history of solidarity in action; by the 2nd World War, over 5 million people worldwide were affiliated. A combination of war, fascism, and soviet 'communism' all but destroyed the movement, but after the Spanish CNT re-emerged in the late 70s, the IWA had a new lease of life. Today, there are sections ranging from a few dozen to thousands of members, and growth is rapid. At the last IWA Congress in Madrid, another 7 new sections were affiliated from South America, Africa, Europe and the former Soviet Union.

ITALY

Anarcho-syndicalist activists in Italy struck successfully in sympathy with workers who had been on a six-month long strike against MEI in Duluth, Minnesota, US. The global solidarity action created a major wave of media attention in the US as it was clear that management had had no interest in settling before the action started.

POLAND

A gelatine factory in Brodnica (between Torun and Olsztyn), has been taken over and is being run by a workers' committee. The workers "evacuated the bosses on wheelbarrows" and, despite subsequent threats from the government, the enterprise was still going on as Catalyst went to press.

ISRAEL

Israeli dock workers have been in long dispute against government privatisation plans, which include a new non-union port in north Ashdod. One worker stated: "This dispute is part of the battle of the government to break the organised working class. They want workers who beg for work every day. It pains them to see workers who earn decent wages and have job security." Support messages; Shlomo Shimoni, Workers' Committee, Ashdod. Fax +97288517826.

SWEDEN

30 Anarcho-syndicalist Youth Federation (SUF) activists forced the ticket barrier to the subway station at Slussen in Stockholm. They put up posters on the platforms saying 'Next train is free', then took a free ride to the next station, where they gave a short presentation on the subject of 'free public transport for all'. The subway has recently been sold to the French company 'Connex' who promptly put prices up.

US

In February, Northwest Airlines began searching home computers of flight attendants, looking for e-mail evidence that the employees helped to organise a sick-out at the airline over the New Year's holiday. Northwest's action comes at a time when e-monitoring of employees online activities is undergoing explosive growth. Increasingly, courts have been willing to help companies crack down on so-called "cybersmearing" - bad-mouthing companies or their management online. "Business speech is not subject to the same protections as political speech," said a Minneapolis attorney who specialises in cyberlaw: "You can't say whatever you want about a company."

This latest action by Northwest workers follows that in spring 1998, when the company's mechanics, frustrated by the pace of contract negotiations, began an unauthorised work slowdown that forced flight delays and hundreds of cancellations. Union leaders disclaimed any knowledge or authorisation of the campaign, which employees advocated on Web sites and message boards.

Meanwhile, thousands of engineers and technicians streamed out of Boeing plants on 9th February, kicking off the first 'bona fide' strike ever by white-collar workers at the Seattle aerospace company. Departing workers clutched bags, boxes of files and personal belongings. At the Renton plant, pickets began massing at street corners. Picket lines went up around Boeing operations in Everett, Mukilteo and Lynnwood. The union, SPEEA, Boeing's second-largest, represents about 22,000 engineers, scientists, manual writers, software designers and technicians in Washington, Kansas, Florida, California, Oregon, Texas and Utah.

The Government has given the go-ahead to the Metropolitan Police to pursue a zero-tolerance policy towards beggars in Central London. They will now be swept from the streets. Paul Boeting has stated that "even passive beggars cannot be accepted". This has to be seen as part of the Labour's overt racism and its war on asylum seekers. The free market clearly does not extend to free access to jobs and opportunities, or even free access to the streets. At least, if you are 'foreign'. Whatever that is.

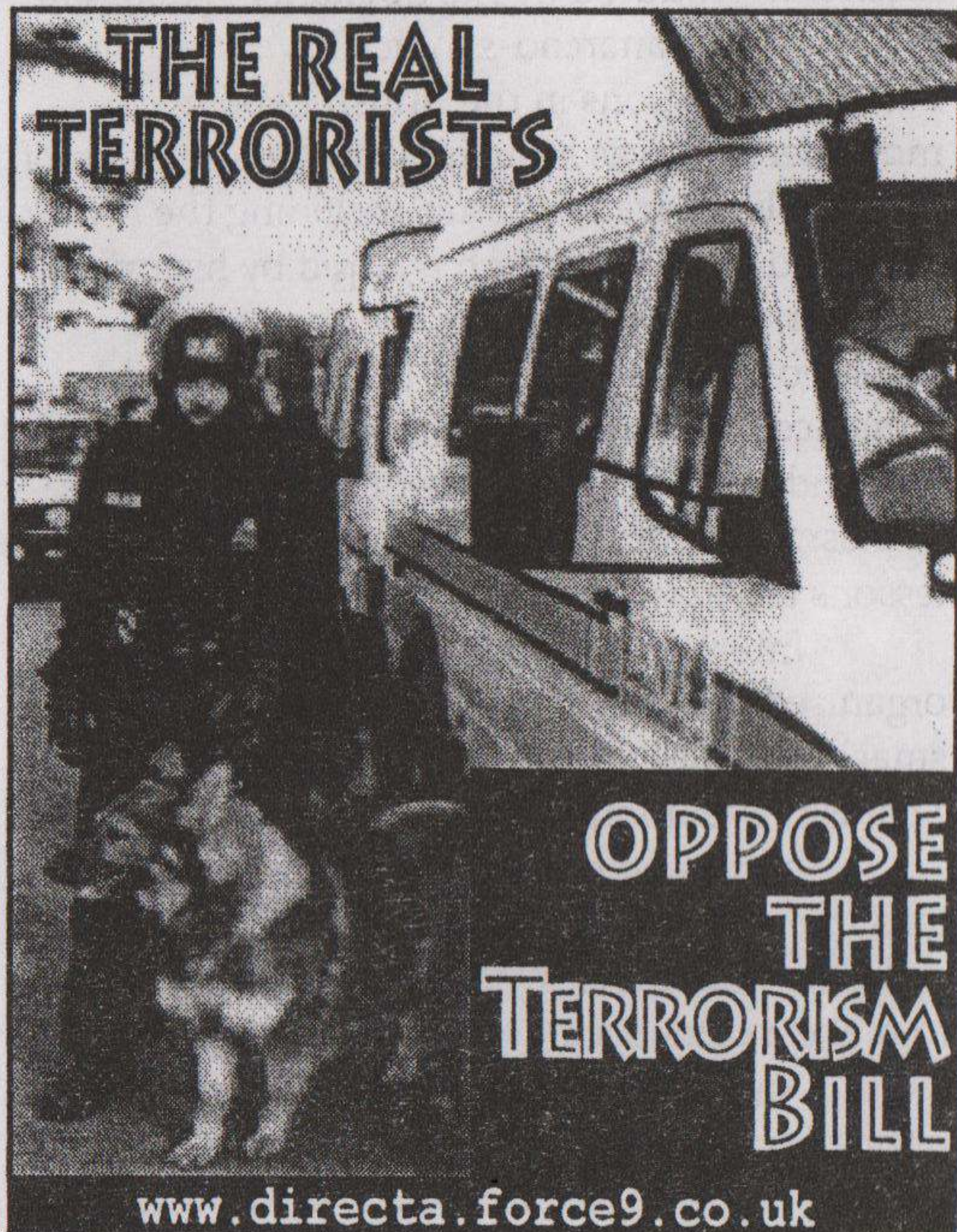


HARD LABOUR

If Labour has its way, Britain's economy will mimic the US. And let's not be fooled by the endless media hype about the 'booming' US economy. The 'success' has been built on the back of massive attacks on working conditions. The gap between rich and poor extends on a daily basis, and shows all the signs of a return to the 1920s. Unemployment has indeed been driven down to below 6% (compared to more like 12% typically across Europe). However, it has only come down due to savage welfare cuts, which has been successful in forcing workers to take miserable jobs in desperate conditions on sub-poverty wages. Recent announcements by the Iron Chancellor Gordon Brown confirms your worst suspicions. Labour is set to introduce the very latest in US-style welfare; he plans to merge the benefits and unemployment agencies. The so-called 'one stop shop' will intensify the pressure on people to work for dole or literally face starvation. Welfare changes in the US have led to a resurgence in casualisation. Workers are forced to humiliate themselves on a daily basis by gathering on street corners in the hope that employers will pick them out for a day's work. Welcome to the 21st Century dot.com economy. In Los Angeles alone, there are already 24,000 casual day labourers. The sight of workers assembling on street corners is already common in every major city in the US, from cleaners to gardeners to domestic servants.

The traditional US trade unions have long abandoned these workers as immigrants which are undermining the employment system for all. However, recently they have started to change their tune. Meanwhile, a new union has been formed, the Sindicato de Jornaleros ('wage-earners union'). It has already taken up the fight against police harassment, which is a daily experience for US casualised workers. So next time Blair talks about the need to deregulate the labour market, it is worth reflecting on what he is talking for – the US casualisation and humiliation wagon train.

THE REAL TERRORISTS



LOSE THE LEVY

Trade unionists are sick of the Labour Party. More and more are refusing to pay the political levy. The Fire Brigades Union has recently set up an independent political fund which will allow workers to pay a political levy without the money being handed over to a political party. The last FBU Conference against the wishes of the union hierarchy, voted to set up the fund, which will be used for campaigning by the union. It will not go to any political party. The Fire Brigade workers have seen sense. Paying the political levy to the Labour Party is like giving someone a stick so they can beat the crap out of you.

All struggles are political by nature. Any action is part of an ongoing power struggle in which management continuously try to impose their right to manage, and workers continuously resist. This power struggle will only end with the defeat of capitalism, and victory by the workers. Any union of workers needs to accept this and operate accordingly by being overtly BOTH economic and political. The Fire Brigade Workers decision to use the political levy for wider political campaigning is a step in this direction.

It appears the Fire Brigade Workers are on course for a clash with the Labour-controlled councils. Management have signalled their intent to do away with national pay bargaining and introduce a system based on localised pay deals. As part of their proposals to undermine and do away with national agreements on pay and conditions, the local authorities seem set to place new workers on different pay scales and conditions of service, this attempting to split workers and their collective strength. The FBU is committed to taking strike action if the management plans go ahead. The same applies if they attempt to impose the new contracts for fresh starters.

PISSED OFF?

Why not spend 1 minute and 1 stamp for some instant gratification?! If you think New Labour are taking the piss, why not stop them snatching any more of your hard-earned cash? Don't pay the political levy. Just fill in the form below.

Political Fund Exemption Notice

I hereby give notice that I object to contributing to the Political Fund of the union and am in consequence exempt, in the manner provided by Chapter 6 of the Trade Union and Labour Relations (consolidation) Act 1992, from contributing to that fund.

Signature..... Name.....

Address.....

Date..... Branch:..... Membership number.....

Send this form to your Union HQ.

MEXICO

Over 100,000 people took to the Mexico City streets in February to demand the liberation of students arrested when police regained control of the city's main university campus, closed by a nine-month occupation of the University by students protesting against plans to introduce tuition fees.

NICARAGUA

At least 65 workers were fired, ostensibly for participating in a strike, but really as part of a wave of downsizing. Management promised retaliation against workers who had participated in the strike, and the sackings were the result. Reports conflict as to the exact number of sackings, partly because they are being announced by management a few at a time, apparently to cause confusion and to cut resistance. Protest to: Mr. Jeffrey A. Marine, JEM Sportswear, 459 Park Avenue, San Fernando CA 91340. Fax: (818) 361-8055.

COLUMBIA

Back in January, over 5,000 heavily armed Colombian Army troops invaded the U'wa traditional territory at Cedeño, at Occidental Oil's new well site. Over 250 people from the U'wa community have been occupying the site, which is established communal land protected by public deeds of collective property. The Colombian government is seeking to evict the U'wa by force because of "public utility and social interest". Support and solidarity is needed to help oppose and mobilise against the government and the oil industry. Info/messages of support; cobacata@colnodo.apc.org or cenat@colnodo.apc.org Protests to: Juan Mayr, Minister of the Environment, Juan_Mayr_M@hotmail.com and jmayr@minamb.gov.co Dr. Andres Pastrana, President of Columbia, Palacio de Nariño, Fax 2867434. Bogotá.

EVENTS AND CAMPAIGNS...

MayDay 2000

As Catalyst goes to press, the May Day Global Day of Action is about to happen. Peoples' Global Action are one of the co-ordinating groups, dedicated to building a strong, bold and creative grassroots movement for a society based on solidarity, co-operation, grassroots democracy, and ecological sustainability. For details and more info, visit the MayDay 2000 Web site at <http://www.freespeech.org/mayday2k/> or contact Catalyst. There is also a 4-day gathering of revolutionaries across London. If you read this after May 1st and you missed it and don't want to miss out next time, contact Catalyst and get on our mailing list.

Prague, September 2000

Following Seattle, the next summit of the IMF and World Bank is planned to take place in Prague in September. The general purpose will be to show the vastly impoverished peoples of the region that there is "no other future possibility" for them but to accept the new reality of "globalised capitalism". People will be out in force to make the IMF, World Bank, EU, NAFTA and the G7 feel unwelcome. The mass protest will include a list of demands to smash the IMF-World Bank, cancel the debt immediately and to present an alternative of a world-wide, anti-capitalist alliance.

For info, email ralf@anarch.free.de

Anarchist Trade Union Network

To subscribe and get a bimonthly newsletter, Bread and Roses, send six stamps with your name and address and any union affiliation details to: Box EMAB (ATU), 88 Abbey Street, Derby DE22 3SQ. williamgodwin7@hotmail.com <http://www.geocities.com/CapitolHill/Parliament/2522>

Pride 2000

Pride (London) Membership is open to anyone who identifies as Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual or Transgendered. Membership is £10 (£5 concessions) for individuals, and straight people can join as Friends, but not vote. A working group has been formed to help reclaim Pride in 2000, and to re-establish the Pride March as a community event in 2001. To get involved contact: Pride (London), BCM Box 6097, London WC1N 3XX. Tel. 07071 781904. info@PrideLondon.org <http://www.PrideLondon.org>

To get listed here, write to:
**Catalyst, SolFed, PO Box 29,
SWPDO Manchester M15 5HW.**
Answerphone: 0161 232 7889
Email: da@directa.force9.co.uk

Get Networking for real!

Education Workers' Network

For everyone in the education sector; cleaners, teachers, students, lecturers, etc.

Communication Workers' Network

New Bulletin just out, send SAE for copy or a big one for a bunch for your branch/mates. Main focus on Royal Mail.

Public Service Workers' Network

Open to all in public service - from care workers to nurses, council workers to home help, includes everyone in privatised public services.

FOR ALL NETWORKS, CONTACT:
PO Box 29,
SOUTHWEST PDO,
MANCHESTER M15 5HW.

To find out more about Catalyst and/or Solidarity Federation, write to us - your views, articles and anecdotes are always welcome;

*Catalyst, SolFed, PO Box 29,
SWPDO Manchester M15 5HW*

or

*SolFed, PO Box 1681,
London N8 7DN*

ANSWERPHONE: 0161 232 7889

**-Anti-bullying
-Networking with like-minded workers
-Spreading the word
-Going on the offensive**

ABOUT Catalyst

Welcome to the first issue of *Catalyst*. The aim in launching this paper is to build support among rank and file unionists and to support workers in struggle. With the unions now verging on being useless, the need for workers to organise is greater than ever. If we wait for the union leaders to come to our aid, we are doomed. During the Thatcher years, many people understandably looked to the Labour Government as a start and a useful one. However, they have simply taken over where Thatcherism left off, and it is now plain that they can no longer claim to be part of the solution, they are firmly confirmed as part of the problem. *Catalyst* is produced by the Solidarity Federation (SolFed). It is anarcho-syndicalist. Syndicalism has deep traditions in the British Labour movement. It was influential in the formation of many militant trade unions, including the RMT, T&G and AEEU. Though ignored by historians and Marxists, syndicalism was a mass revolutionary movement in Britain which influenced hundreds of thousands of workers. It was undermined by the rise of Marxism. Now Marxism is confirmed dead on arrival. Such lessons are hard learned.

Internationally, the syndicalist movement organised millions of workers before being smashed by fascism, most notably in the 1936-39 Spanish revolution and subsequent Civil War.

In the last few years, Marxism has gone into steep decline and the Soviet Union has collapsed. Anarcho-syndicalism has now started to make a comeback.

Anarcho-syndicalism is committed to the principle of working class self-organisation without recourse to politicians, with the short term aim of defending and improving conditions here and now, and the long term aim of replacing capitalism with a society based on workplace and community.

Given the miserable state of the Trade Union movement, a return to workplace

organisation aimed at organising action against management is long overdue. The idea that the state in the form of a Labour Government or any other Government, socialist or otherwise, is going to come to our aid is now totally defunct. The State has always acted in the interests of management. Who would trust the courts, the judiciary, the state, and management to have any regard for our interests?

Improvements to working class conditions have only ever happened when workers have organised and taken action themselves, successfully forcing capitalists to make concessions. This is the direct actionist approach, first pioneered in Britain by syndicalist movement, and later taken on by the shop stewards movement. It is part of that tradition that *Catalyst* hopes to play a small part in rebuilding the British Labour Movement.

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