

THIS IS A STRIKE. IT NEEDS SOLIDARITY. STAND ON OUR SIDE OF THE PICKET LINE

SOLIDARITY IS NOT JUST A WORD — it's what gives a strike its strength and makes bosses think twice about attacking wages and conditions.

The more people cross and stay on the wrong side of the line, the more our employers think they can get away with cutting everything to the bare bones. The more people are on our side of it, the more leverage we have and the more wary of attacking our jobs and wages they'll be.

WE WANT YOU TO JOIN US and you have the right to do that. Not in the union? It's your right to stay away. Worried about standing on the picket line? It's illegal to single you out for union activity and just staying home is fine too. Strapped for cash? The union may well have a hardship fund.

Concerned you'll get behind with your work? That's the point of the strike! They can't keep this place running without us, and a strike is designed to remind them of that as blatantly as possible. It'll be their fault if things are running behind schedule, not yours — it's them who tried it on.

SAYING "I SUPPORT WHAT YOU'RE DOING" AND WALKING BY IS NOT ENOUGH, because you are still physically helping the bosses by going in today. Support is when you don't cross the line. If you're in work right now and your colleagues are striking, walk out. Management can't stop you.

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STRIKE

A GUIDE TO WALKING OUT

Second edition

INTRODUCTION

A rise in strikes due to austerity after a long low period means that many people are going on strike for the first time, in workplaces where perhaps there hasn't been a strike since the nineties. The Solidarity Federation is producing this pamphlet to get the strike experience of different workers down on paper, so that others can see what has been tried and what experiences they've had.



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THE PROCEDURE

Below is the formal procedure for going on strike lawfully. It is deliberately designed to disempower workers and to make industrial action more difficult. These are what the law demands, other procedures may vary from union to union so check the specifics with someone experienced.

1. You must declare to all parties that you are in dispute.
2. You must ask your union's industrial action committee (at regional level) for a ballot.
3. Your employer must be given seven days' notice before the opening of the ballot.
4. The ballot list must be accurate and up-to-date, including all and *only* current members.
5. After the ballot is complete (this will usually take up to a month), inform your members and boss of the results.
6. You must give your employer seven days' notice of what the industrial action will be and say if it will be continuous or discontinuous.
7. Unless the employer agrees otherwise, you must take your action within four weeks of announcing the result.

› **DECLARE
DISPUTE**

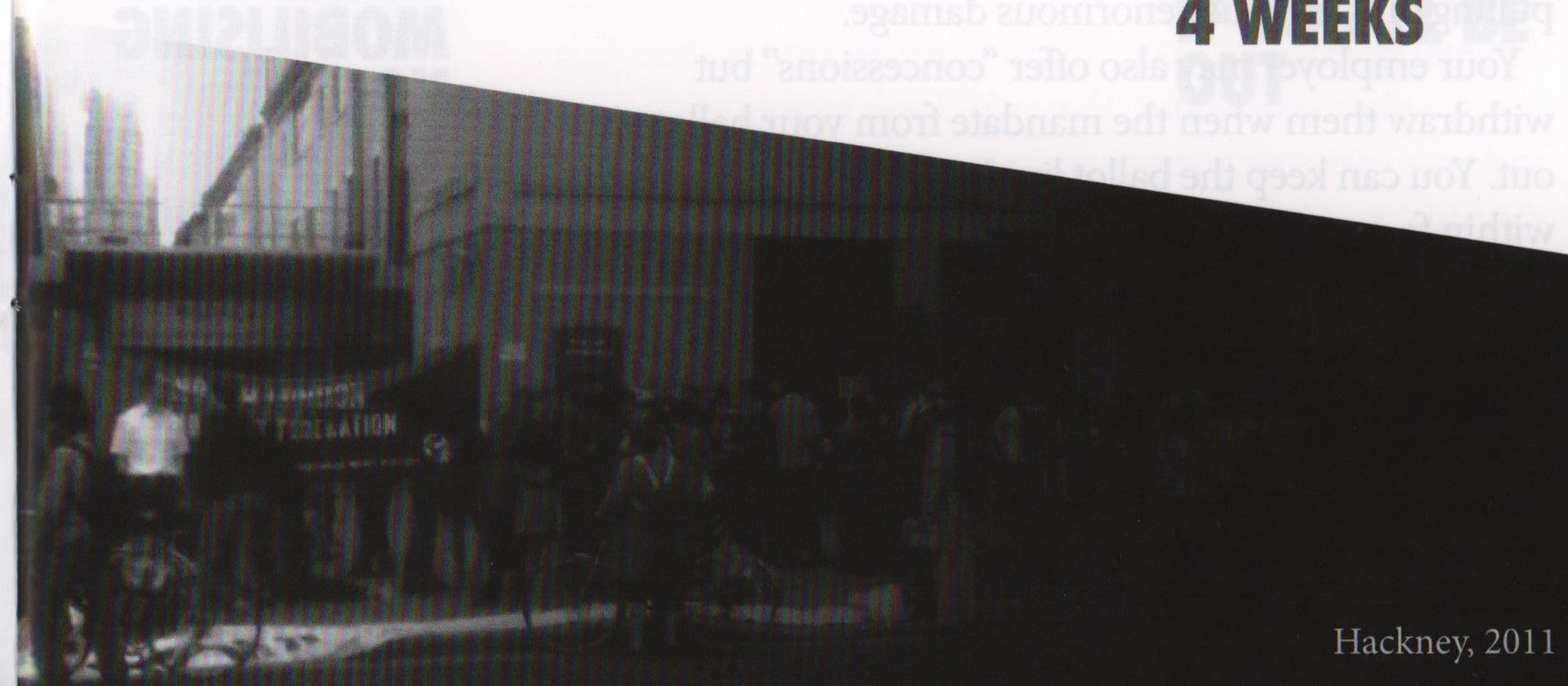
› **ASK THE
REGIONAL for
A BALLOT**

› **GIVE 7
DAYS' NOTICE
TO BOSS**

› **RELEASE
RESULT TO
ALL**

› **INFORM
BOSSES OF
ACTION AND
GIVE 7 DAYS'
NOTICE**

› **ACT WITHIN
4 WEEKS**



WHAT TO WATCH OUT FOR

There's a lot of potential pitfalls when balloting.

Right at the start, the regional officials may not allow you to proceed with a ballot, insist on an "indicative" ballot (which wastes time) or mess about for weeks for no discernable reason. Showing them members want immediate action is important to avoid being demobilised.

Your employer may apply for an injunction and union funds can even be seized if the ballot list is inaccurate, even if it's just because old staffers haven't been taken off.

In national disputes, further strikes are often postponed "for negotiations" which demobilises everybody. If more than one union is involved (normally a good thing) and you are on strike together, this can mean unions operate at the level of the weakest link — one non-militant union pulling out can cause enormous damage.

Your employer may also offer "concessions" but withdraw them when the mandate from your ballot runs out. You can keep the ballot live by taking a limited action within four weeks, which gives you a lot more leverage.

The period when you are trying to get your strike underway can be stressful and feel disempowering, with lots of waiting for decisions. Key in this period is:

1. Getting accurate information out quickly, as people

› **TRY NOT TO GET PUSHED INTO DELAYING**

› **THE BALLOT LIST HAS TO BE ACCURATE**

› **WATCH OUT FOR PHONY CONCESSIONS AND TALKS AIMED AT DEMOBILISING YOU**

- feel vulnerable when they don't know what is going on.
2. Making decisions as democratically as you can, by as many affected people as possible, and make sure small groups don't water down mass decisions.
3. Carry out whatever actions you can at work that involve lots of people to build confidence and solidarity.
4. Go and talk to other people in other workplaces, cover your workplace in strike propaganda, start raising money. Get people involved who have never been involved before, whether it is painting a banner or joining in with an action.
5. Try not to let tension turn into pointless rows. Support each other.

The legal inhibitions on effective striking are often exaggerated, either through ignorance or as an attempt to hold back action. Here are some clarifications:

You are under no obligation to inform your manager if you will be going on strike or not, if you are pressured you can say you are "still thinking through the issues."

Non-union members can strike, and shouldn't be disciplined, though you may have problems with being accused of "secondary action" if your actual section isn't out (eg. if nurses are on strike, and you are a security guard).

› **DECIDE THINGS TOGETHER AND STICK TO THE RESULT**

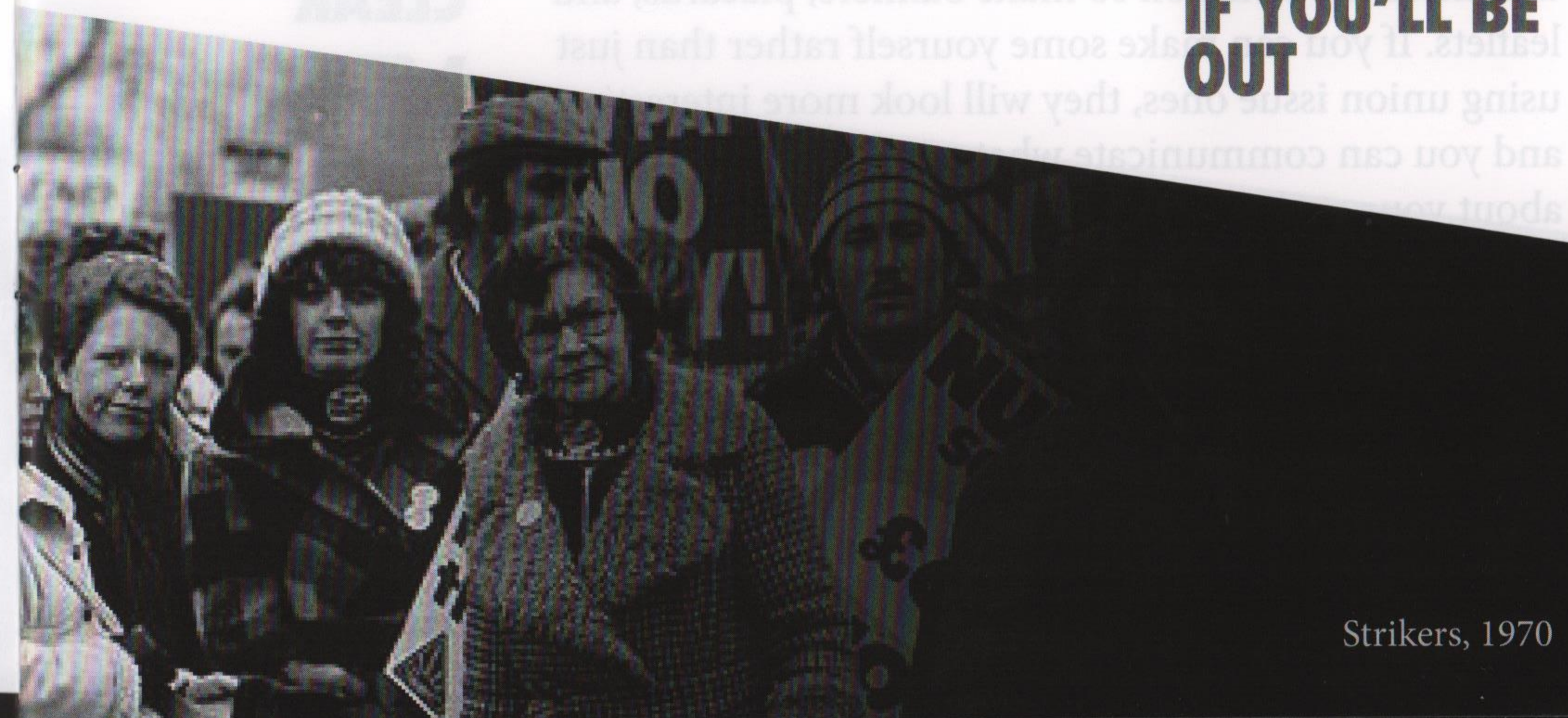
› **SPREAD THE WORD ABOUT WHAT'S HAPPENING**

› **BUILD BRANCH SOLIDARITY**

› **THREATS AREN'T ALWAYS AS THEY SEEM**

› **NON-MEMBERS CAN STRIKE**

› **YOU DON'T HAVE TO SAY IF YOU'LL BE OUT**



ON THE PICKET LINE

A good picket line is crucial.

The Daily Mail may rant about lazy strikers but you will need to be there well before people usually arrive at work, as some people will come in extra early to avoid pickets.

It helps if you make a strike rota which you take round before the strike asking people what time they can come to picket. Ostensibly this is to make sure you cover the time efficiently but it's also to badger people into coming along and turning up early.

Filling in the rota gives you a chance to talk to people and when people put their names down that is a commitment. Make sure you cover all entrances. You will need to communicate to people passing by that there is a strike on so make banners, placards, and leaflets. If you can make some yourself rather than just using union issue ones, they will look more interesting and you can communicate what you most want to say about your strike. Music and food will help make a happy collective atmosphere.

The picket line is not just a protest, its purpose is to STOP PEOPLE GOING IN.

Nowadays a lot of strikers are uncomfortable about really doing this. The long low period we have lived through in the class struggle means that a lot of our

› **MAKE A ROTA**

› **GET IN EARLY**

› **MAKE SURE PEOPLE COMMIT**

› **COVER ALL ENTRANCES**

› **MAKE YOUR CAUSE CLEAR**

› **STAY UPBEAT**

working class culture of struggle has been lost. People find the idea that you would try to impede someone from going in a bit shocking.

Many strike breakers see the issue in terms of their individual "rights" to do exactly what they want with no regard to the effect on other workmates who may be being victimised, losing their jobs etc. There is also the issue of disciplinary action.

You may have a couple of managers standing over you watching for "infractions" and also possibly the police. They may tell you that you cannot have more than six people on a picket line.

The law is very clear on this, the six person guideline on a picket line is only a guideline, it's not a criminal matter.

Secondary picketing, picketing a workplace not your own, is a civil not a criminal offence, and members of the public who happened to be passing by are free to stand on any picket line they like.

Such appeals to authority and hints that you might be doing something wrong are all attempts to make strikes ineffectual and pointless. Stand your ground as much as you can about everything — though in the end you have to use your own judgment about the risk of disciplinaries and victimisation.

› **TRY TO STOP LINE CROSSING**

› **STAND YOUR GROUND**

› **IT'S NOT ILLEGAL TO HAVE EXTRA PICKETS**

Saltley Gate, 1972





COLLEAGUES

You might have more than one union in your workplace and many people have been in the difficult position where one union is on strike and the other isn't.

This isn't easy to resolve. Most of the time you can't count on any official protection if you have not been balloted, so the only thing that really counts is how much support you can get from your workmates.

The ideal situation is that nobody crosses the picket line. If you can't manage to get enough people to agree to that, there are other ways that non-striking workers can support a strike. People should try to refuse tasks that are substituting for workers who are out. In some cases, people have stood on the picket line until the last possible minute and then walked in all together.

This at least shows support and gives people time to talk and a chance to think about not going in at all, and is better than people just crossing individually.

In other schools on strike, non teaching staff have come out at lunchtime to join the picket, or workers have organised a lunchtime picnic together. Anything that builds togetherness helps people to refuse next time.

› **AIM FOR A MASS REFUSAL TO CROSS**

› **MAKE SURE PEOPLE AREN'T COVERING FOR STRIKERS' ROLES**

› **ASK FOR SMALL SHOWS OF SUPPORT**

› **BUILD A FEELING OF SOLIDARITY**

Whatever the level of militancy of your picket, you need to talk to people who want to go in, not just give them a leaflet. Ask them to at least stop and talk to you for a moment.

They will probably bring up their mortgage and debts, or perhaps say that the issue you are striking over is nothing to do with them. People who think it's wrong to cross the picket line but are still going to do it might be very aggressive to you, as a way of getting out of feeling guilty.

The more you can get someone to stay and talk, the better. This is a difficult conversation to have but is really important, even if the person still goes in to work. Remember that it's not just about today, it's about convincing them to join the strike next time.

› **ENGAGE WITH PEOPLE**

› **THINK LONG-TERM**

› **AIM TO IMPROVE ON THE LINE NEXT TIME**

VISITORS AND ALLIES

People coming to visit the picket line to show solidarity can really raise strikers' spirits.

One of the best ways to get solidarity is to give it, so if you've visited other workers on strike recently then invite them. You might also leaflet a big workplace like a hospital if there is one very near you, telling them that you will be striking and asking for support on the picket line. Building up links gradually with other workplaces that you have some connection with will pay off when you strike.

Visiting supporters from political organisations can be very helpful to the picket line, but a lot of pickets will have had bad experiences with this in the past and will be wary or unfriendly. It's important not to come across as the stereotypical spotty student lecturing the workers on how they are doing it wrong. The first step is simply talking to people. Don't stand to the side talking to your own friends, ask questions about the strike, ask people about what it's like to work there, most people like a chance to talk about themselves. Bringing food is usually a good icebreaker. Ask before putting up your own banner.

Strikes these days can be pretty passive, with little attempt to stop people going in except giving them a leaflet. You may feel as an outside supporter that people obviously need to up the ante and be more aggressive.

You are probably right, but this can often lead to

› INVITE PEOPLE FROM OTHER WORKPLACES

› LEAFLET NEARBY EMPLOYERS ABOUT IT

› LEFTIES: THIS ISN'T ABOUT YOU AND YOUR POLITICAL MASTER PLAN

› TALK TO THE PICKETS, ASK ABOUT, LISTEN TO AND RESPECT THEIR WISHES

conflict and bad feeling with the actual pickets, which isn't helpful, and may possibly lead to workers getting disciplined. The important thing is to act in a way that helps empower pickets and makes them feel stronger, and that means that the pickets need to feel they have a say in what supporters are doing.

Of course, not everyone on the picket line thinks the same, you might get told off by the branch secretary for doing something that most of the pickets are very happy with, so talk to more than one person.

Don't do "drive by politics." The time after a strike can be very difficult for workers. There may be victimisation or speedup. Stand by people and maintain long term contact if you can. It's also important that you and everyone else understand that you're there because you want to help the strike.

› ENCOURAGE MASS DECISION MAKING

› KEEP UP YOUR SUPPORT AFTER THE STRIKE'S DONE

THE MORNING AFTER...

Strikes are emotionally intense. You will probably be tired, euphoric, angry, depressed or all four but the first day back at work is very important.

Try to remember to think long term: It's not all about one strike, it's about what happens over a few years. Talk to people, check if anyone is being bullied, find out what went well or badly, think about how to approach people who crossed the picket line.

It's a good idea if you can organise a social event to get the strikers together to maintain togetherness.

AND NOW, START BUILDING FOR THE NEXT ONE.