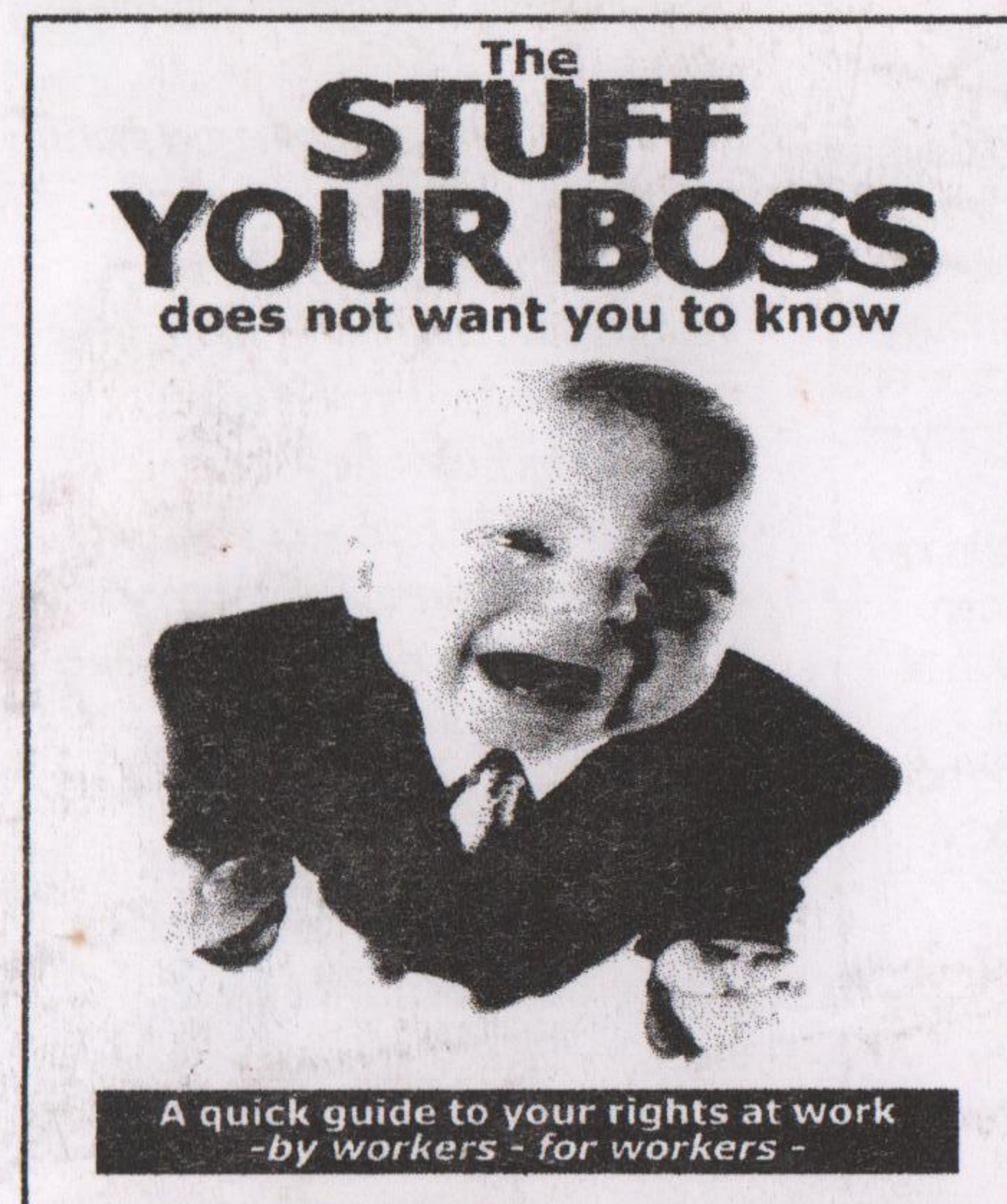


Catalyst is produced for workers everywhere, by workers in the Solidarity Federation. To join SolFed, for info, for copies of Catalyst or to send contributions, contact 07984 675 281. Catalyst, SF, PO Box 29, SWPDO, Manchester M15 5HW. solfed@solfed.org.uk



Basic rights leaflet - free copies: SolFed, PO Box 1095, Sheffield S2 4YR. solfed@solfed.org.uk

Let us sack you happy

As reported in the last **Catalyst Britain's biggest insurer is axing over 2,000 jobs in one of the worst examples of outsourcing to hit the UK. It is now clear the job losses are to be centred in Norwich, York and Perth. Norwich has already been hit in a drive to outsource 900 jobs to Delhi and Bangalore. Amicus, who called the move 'despicable' and vowed to fight it, has delivered little in terms of saving workers' jobs.**

Outsourcing, recently endorsed by Labour Cabinet ministers as good for business ("and therefore good for us"), is projected to strip 200,000 jobs from the UK by 2008. Most of those affected are doing data input or call centre work; sectors already notorious for their high turnover of staff. Hence workers with little legal or union protection are being protected, and while the unions aren't much cop, they are invariably better than nothing.

Steve Bennett, who lost his job at Norwich Union in March, said: "A large proportion of the staff have been there for under two years, so there's not much chance of any action being taken. The management have been underhand on a couple of issues. To begin with they announced a 'goodwill' bonus of £500 to anyone working their full notice, subject to

performance and attendance. Six weeks later they moved the goal posts and announced the bonus would only go to staff who wouldn't be getting statutory redundancy. Just 20% of staff will now receive money." Norwich Union also withdrew the bonus to anyone subject to disciplinary warnings in the last two years. Of course, suddenly the number of these has increased. One worker was disciplined for taking one day off following the death of his grandfather.

3,000 UK jobs have already been moved to India in the past year, which at an average UK call centre wage of £12,500 a year has sucked around £37.5million out of Britain's economy. Indian wages for the same job are £1,200 a year, so India's economy has benefited by a mere £3.6million. So, guess who makes out of it?!

Norwich Union currently employs around 30,000 people in the UK, and has refused to rule out further outsourcing in the future in a bid to maximise their profits. Taking all costs into account, Norwich Union hopes to save 40% on wage bills, although it is unlikely any of these cost savings will be passed onto consumers. With 25 million customers, it is the world's 7th largest insurer, with a market value of £10.8 billion, and loads of naff adverts. "Let us quote you happy"? Try asking the thousands of workers thrown on the scrapheap how happy they have been quoted.

Catalyst

Freesheet of the Solidarity Federation - International Workers' Association

May 2004 #10

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Tesco - greedmerchants

Tescos are the biggest retailers in the UK, turning billions of profits a year. £1 in every £8 spent in shops in the UK is spent in Tescos. But anyone who thinks that all this money and profit means Tesco can afford to be reasonable to their workers is in cloud cuckoo land. It is quite the opposite - massive individual wealth like this only happens when massive exploitation is their agenda.

After a 13 year battle an unemployed employee of Tesco is likely to lose her house and find herself being made homeless after she lost her claim for £100,000 for injuries sustained during the period when she worked for the company. Tesco are poised to take court action against Mima Rae, aged 58, from Falkirk to claim expenses in the region of £23,000 against her.

Mrs Rae was a part time checkout operator at the Falkirk store from 1986 until she was sacked in November 1992. She regularly worked on the express checkout - one of the busiest. Its proximity close to the main doors meant, in Mrs Rae's words, "we often sat with our feet encased in brown paper bags to try to keep warm".

She experienced numerous problems with upper back, neck, shoulder and arm pain. In 1990, she began to experience pain radiating from the middle finger of her right hand. After a new checkout system was installed, there were numerous problems as it either ran slowly, over-ran, didn't stop at all, or jammed altogether. She took time off from work after suffering back strain. This should have been recorded in the in-store accident book by the staff manageress, but it wasn't. According to others who worked during this time the reporting of accidents was actively discouraged by store managers. An in-store maintenance engineer at the Falkirk store has confirmed that he was often called to repair the checkouts.

In 1991, Mima suffered strained ligaments and muscle spasms in her lower back and across her shoulders. She paid privately for osteopathic treatment. Her request to change her busiest and longest shift and for an

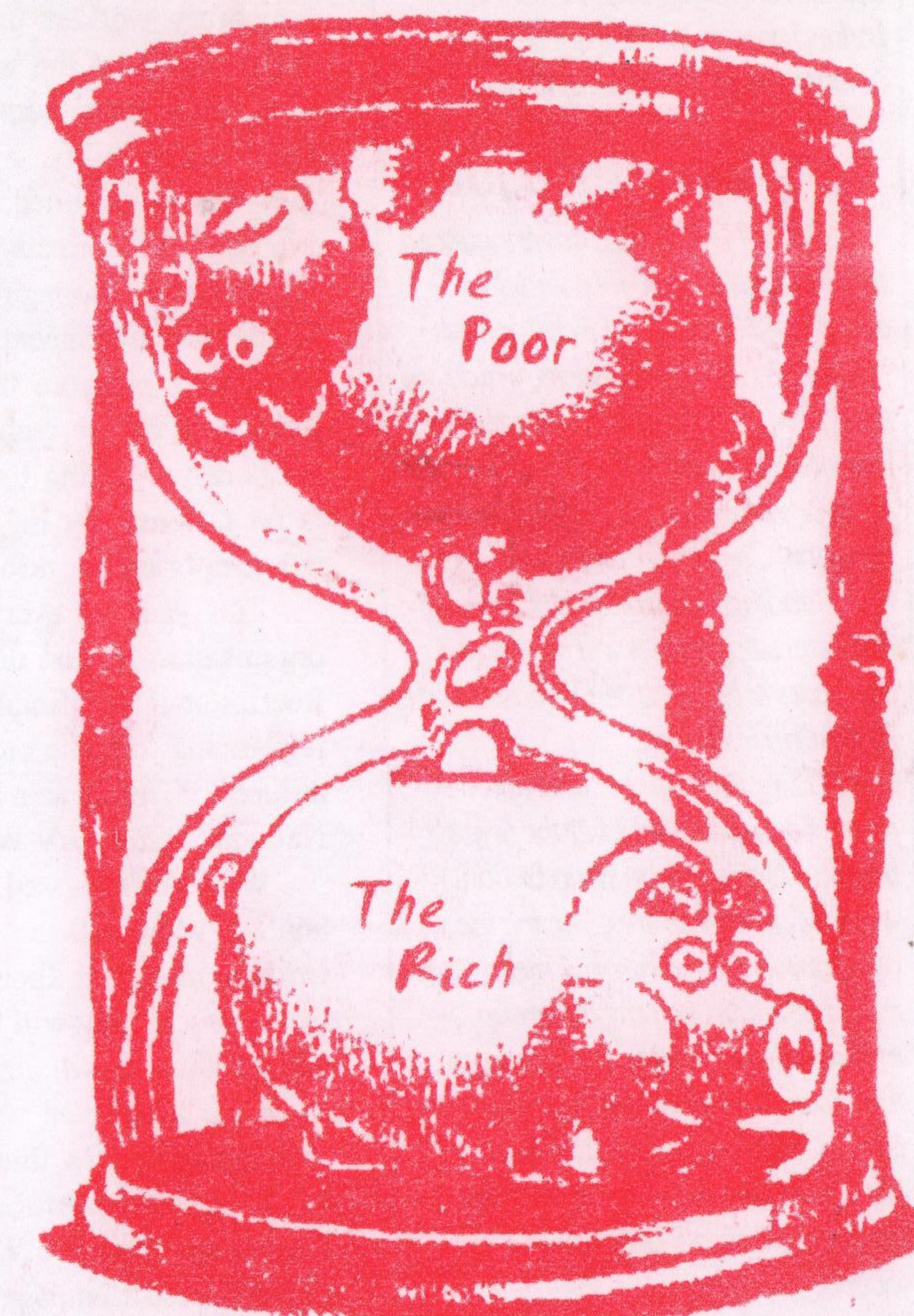
additional five minutes on her unpaid tea break were refused.

In December 1991, aware that her repeated absences were putting her employment in jeopardy, she approached Mr W Keeley, her USDAW representative who advised her to attempt to force Tesco's hand by getting the cause of the accident in 1990 retrospectively recorded in the store's accident book.

She was offered a job in Tesco's garage which she turned down, as it would have required prolonged periods of sitting down. She remained on sick leave to help her back recover until, in November 1992, Tesco sacked her. As this was illegal she followed Tesco's grievance procedures and, in February 1993, was told that each time a vacancy arose in the store, her suitability or otherwise for the position would be discussed with her.

She was again offered a job in Tesco's garage but with shifts that ended at midnight, when public transport had ceased. When, in June 1993, she inquired about forthcoming job vacancies, she was told that the only job on offer was five evenings a week collecting damaged stock. Meanwhile, other Tesco employees in Falkirk began to report similar injuries, and Mima informed USDAW hoping they would discreetly contact the others workers. Instead on 19th July 1993, the union wrote to say they were no longer prepared to pursue her case. She got other legal representation and on 6 September 1993, one day before the three year time limit, a writ was delivered to Tesco, but the case remained on ice for the next four years. In 1997, Tesco offered to settle for £2,500 plus expenses.

Mrs Rae was not the only checkout operator pursuing an RSI claim. In June 1998, Doug Russell, Health and Safety Officer for USDAW, claimed to know of more than 650 cases involving USDAW members, with 50



checkout workers obtaining settlements for injuries. This is not surprising, considering that concerns for the welfare of checkout operators first surfaced in the mid 1980's, when it was suggested that the operation of some checkouts was associated with high levels of musculoskeletal disorders, principally affecting the lower back, upper arm-neck-shoulder region and in the hand/wrist area.

USDAW are currently pursuing "a few hundred" cases of RSI complaints. He said that since the 1980s "new technology has brought about big improvements" for checkout operators with "companies such as Tesco now involving operators in designing the structure and lay-out".

When the case finally reached tribunal it found against Mrs Rae. Her physical and mental health has been compromised over the past 13 years, and she now says she is unemployable. She is also broke and the financial drain has ruined a once happy marriage.

International News

Pakistan

The All Pakistan Federation of United Trade Unions (APFUTU) is active in the support of 800 locked-out workers at the Lone China Ceramics of Guiranwala. Its owner is Muhammad Aslam Lone, an ex-minister of the National Assembly of Pakistan. He closed the factory, citing high production costs, rather forgetting the lack of investment and the appalling conditions the workers have to face.

The APFUTU contacted the IWA, the anarcho-syndicalist international, for help and solidarity. \$3000 was sent to help the workers who were facing very hard times. Some of the families have members on the verge of dying by lack of food.

The APFUTU has asked for protest letters to be sent to embassies and consulates of Pakistan, the Prime Minister (Ullah Jamal) and other ministers. The workers of Chinese Lone Ceramics industry need our aid and solidarity.

Addresses:

Pirzada Imitas Syed, Secretary General, APFUTU Intiaz Manzal, Qasim Pura, Railway Road Gujrat, Punjab 50700 Pakistan [Fax: +92 433]525302,521420]

Mr Mir Zafar Ullah Jamalui, Minister House, ISLAMABAD (Pakistan) [Fax: +92-51-920 8890 & 920 1545]

Mr Abdul Sattar Lalika, Ministry of Labour, Block-B, Pak Secretariat, Islamabad [Fax: +92-51-920 3462 Email: sectab52@hotmail.com]

Spain

A series of unofficial strikes took place at the IZAR shipyards against threatened closures and job losses and for decent pay and conditions during February and March. The 'mainstream' union confederations, linked to the Spanish socialist (UGT) and communist parties (CC.OO), have desperately sought a way out of a dispute that has lasted for months. They even offered to reduce wage demands and accept an offer last year.

Instead, through their own mass assemblies, workers decided otherwise. Within these assemblies, the anarcho-syndicalist CNT has argued for direct action, and shipyard workers have increasingly taken this on board in the face of UGT/CC.OO inability to advance their cause - especially so among the 80% of the workforce employed by subcontractors. Not working directly for IZAR, these workers are not represented in negotiations, yet their jobs will be first up for the chop in any 'restructuring' deal.

The Spanish government deployed all of its state terrorist paraphernalia against the strikers. In mid-February, 38 strikers in Sevilla were injured when riot police invaded the occupied shipyard. With surveillance equipment and petty harassment on one hand, and rubber bullets and teargas on the other, state forces tried and failed to terrorise the workers into submission. Yet, for ministers and media sycophants alike, scenes of riot cops smashing strikers faces were predictably insignificant beside their outrage at workers daring to defending themselves.

Pics: <http://www.red-star-research.org.uk/rpm/>

On Madrid terrorist attacks

Following the terrorist attacks in Madrid in March, the CNT-AIT (Spanish sister organisation to the SolFed here) made the following statement:

"This morning Madrid woke up tinged with blood. The south of the capital, an area that concentrates the biggest part of the city's working class, was the scene of one of the most dreadful and wild massacres in its history. Thus, the workers of the Confederación Nacional del Trabajo (CNT) Local Union Federation in Madrid want to state our most sincere and strong rejection to the outrages that took place today, 11th of March 2004, in the city where we live and/or work. The ones behind the massacre have shown that they do not have any sort of class conscience. It seems unreal that, nowadays, we still have to keep reminding people that workers are exactly the same here in Madrid as in Cordoba, Barakaldo, La Bisbal, Kandahar and Bagdad.

At this moment, 7.30 pm, the figures we have give 186 dead and more than 1,000 wounded. Most of their lives were cut when they were on their way to work. We want to express our condolences and solidarity to the victims and their families. It is very hard for us to think that, in addition, many of them were immigrants from inside and outside the peninsula, people who had come to our city, which is everybody's city, to improve their living conditions.

We also appeal to all institutions, political parties, unions, the media and all others not to look for any type of profit or advantage for themselves in the suffering of victims and their families. Please, do not make a weapon of pain, too." Madrid CNT

£75K - price of life

A multinational company has escaped with a £75,000 fine after work systems described as a 'shambles' by a judge led to the death of a Doncaster man. Railway worker Terence Lowry, 39, lost his life in a preventable accident just outside Belfast in February 2002. His employer, Mowlem Railways - part of construction giant Mowlem - was fined a paltry £75,000 at Belfast crown court after pleading guilty to safety offences. The fact that this pathetic penalty was the heaviest ever imposed in a health and safety case in Northern Ireland speaks volumes about justice when it comes to accidents at work.

NTL axes 1500 jobs

Cable TV firm NTL has announced that it is to axe 1,500 jobs with the closure of 10 out of its 13 call centres across the UK. The closures, which will take place over the next 18 months, are part of a "business efficiency drive", the company said. Sites in Belfast, Glasgow, Brighton, Cambridge and Wymersley, near Reading, will be closed. However, call centre operations will be merged into bases in Manchester, Swansea and Bellshill in Glasgow.

NTL emerged from bankruptcy protection in January after the firm's bondholders agreed to swap £6.8bn worth of debt for shares, leaving the company in their control. A rights issue raised £824.3m, helping the group to turn cash flow positive, which means that it can generate enough money to run the business without incurring debt. Now, to ensure their profits, they are using a typical tool of the bosses - jobcuts.

Dear Catalyst...

That nice Mr Bunkett visited Little Hulton a couple of weeks ago. He was accompanied by lots of men in suits, a few women in suits, and enough coppers to fill Old Trafford. The reason was to sample the results of an "Initiative" to cut crime and anti-social behaviour. And the results of the "Initiative"? A big pole in the middle of the precinct with a camera on top.

In the real world, Hulton High School is closing, dozens of perfectly good flats and houses are boarded up awaiting demolition, and bus services are regularly suspended as they are often attacked by kids lobbing bricks at them. On a personal level, I've had my window put through twice, my bin set on fire and the back of my flat is regularly used by fly tippers and by joyriders to dump stolen cars...

Temp workers campaign

The Solidarity Federation have been at the forefront of campaigns to support temporary and casual workers. We would like to see these workers better organised and able to resist attacks on, and improve, their pay and conditions. We urge all temporary workers, and those in full time employment to support initiatives such as the Bristol Against Casualisation Campaign.

There are some 1.7 million temporary workers in the UK who make up 7% of the workforce. Capitalism uses temporary workers for their flexibility, in other words they can be exploited easier. Some are employed directly but many are employed through agencies. While the government and employers promote the illusion of choice with temporary working the reality is far different for the vast majority of the temporary workforce.

This year, as every year, that parasitic front organisation for the promotion of casualisation, the Recruitment and Employment Confederation (REC), is planning to name one lucky worker as "One in a million". This is as a part of their self-styled National Temporary Worker's Week.

While this blessed worker is bestowed with this honour, what will the other 999,999 temporary workers in each million be doing? Like every day, wondering if they will have work next week, if joining a union will get them the sack, guessing how much the permanent worker alongside them earns, contemplating how things might be better...

In opposition to the REC and National Temporary Worker's Week, Bristol Against Casualisation Campaign is proposing a week of

counter events called Fighting Temporary Work Week. They are calling for a National Picket of Employment Agencies on 17th - 21st May 2004. Choose your target agency - in Bristol they picked Manpower offices but go for your least favourite agency and picket outside - or use your imagination to make them know we are fighting back.

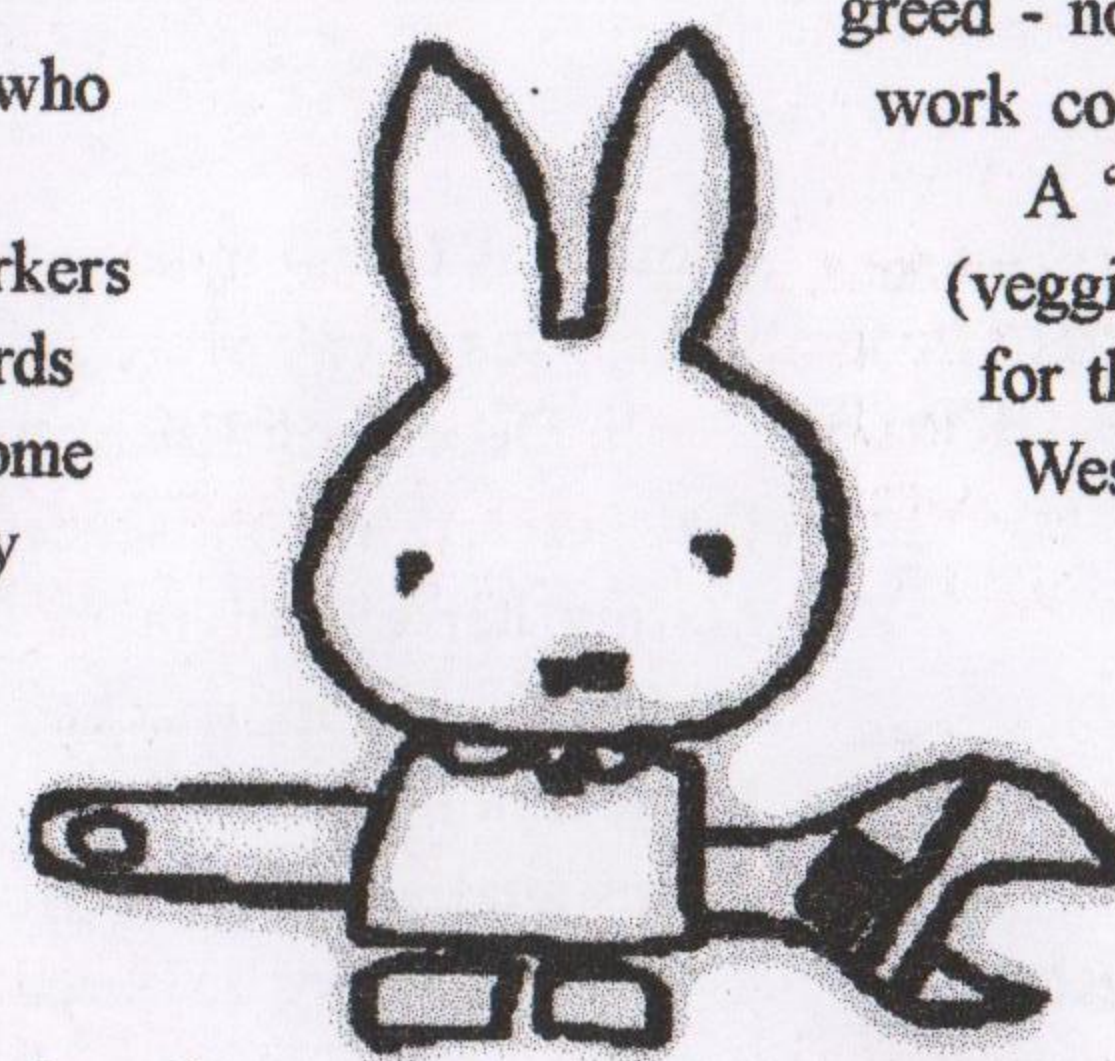
While the agency bosses quaff champagne, nibble canapés and discuss how to screw that extra penny out of our hard labours, we suggest everyone against casualisation; express your anger at their greed - no more death, poor pay and worsening work conditions.

A 'Cider and Pork Scratching Reception' (veggie option available) has been organised for the 20th May 2004, Parliament Square, Westminster, London - 4.00pm. There is

also a Fight Temporary Work - One-day conference, 22nd May 2004 (Free admission) to be held in Bristol, a forum for those engaged in fighting casualisation to discuss strategies and build alliances.

The job agencies have had it easy - it is time for us to unite in opposition to casualisation and fight back. If you need a start, contact SolFed (www.solfed.org.uk) or gather at the BACC Bristol conference - email bristolacc@hotmail.com (Box 4, Greenleaf Bookshop, 82 Colston St, Bristol, BS1 5BB Ansaphone: 0779 2018881). The objectives are:

- * To encourage dialogue between all workers involved in the struggle against Casualisation, to formulate strategies to fight against the erosion of workers rights and conditions.
- * To highlight the efforts of workers fighting back against this trend that is eroding workers rights and working conditions.
- * To promote awareness of the role of employment agencies in the growing use of casualised labour in all sectors.



Striking back

On train catering staff based at Manchester Piccadilly Train Station are taking strike action in protest at management's attempt to impose new rosters.

The catering staff, employed by Virgin West Coast, currently work a 14-hour shift in return for extra days off. Management plan to impose an 8-hour shift pattern, which will not only mean that on board catering staff will lose around 60 free days per year, it will also lead to significant job losses. At Wolverhampton, where the shift patterns were recently brought in, management have begun to recruit part-time staff, as the first step in the casualisation of the on board catering service on the whole of the West Coast Main line.

Predictably Virgin's much cultivated caring and friendly image was soon dropped when it

became clear that staff were prepared to take action. Prior to the first 24-hour strike, letters were sent to all staff threatening those who took part in the strike with the sack. After the second day's strike, a further letter was sent to all staff stating that Virgin had used management scabs to break the strike. It also stated that there had been a significant increase in revenue, which would be investigated, the implication being that staff had been thieving.

This management propaganda and intimidation has only strengthened the resolve of the strikers to resist management bullying. The next move should be to try to get the other depots to take similar action and create a united front involving all on-train catering staff employed by Virgin West Coast.

Problems at work

No. 8: Minimum Wage, Maximum Hours

The announcement that the minimum wage is set to rise to £4.85 next predictably had union leaders, desperate for a reason to stick with Labour, claiming that in the fight against poverty the Government really is making a difference. They are deluding themselves; the minimum wage is not about ending poverty, it is set so low it merely legalises poverty wages. Labour sees a low wage economy, in which the working class remain powerless, as essential ingredient of a 'successful' 'free market' economy. Labour's inspiration is not justice or equality, but the USA, where the minimum wage has been in force for years and has done nothing to prevent the growth in poverty and obscene inequalities.

The TUC is happy to hail the minimum wage as a triumph, but this reflects more their desperation and failure, rather than any use in the minimum wage. In the distant past, the unions linked poverty directly to the failure of capitalism, and it was seen as something that could not be tolerated. Today, unions have come to terms with capitalism and the inevitable poverty it brings. The days when the unions sought to empower the poor through organisation as the means of fighting a capitalist system that condemned them to a life of poverty are long gone. Now they would rather see the poor as helpless victims to be pitied and helped if possible - but not organised.

From this perspective, the TUC is the same as the Tories - they see poverty as due to the failing of the poor. The TUC talks much but cares little about poverty, and hide their indifference behind the minimum wage. The minimum wage amounts to throwing a beggar a few bob for a cup of tea in order to be able to sit down to enjoy the union expense-account dinner with a clear conscience. The TUC has given up the fight against capitalism and poverty - instead, they preach partnership with a system that condemns and stunts the lives of millions.

Hours - women lose out

British workers already work the longest hours and receive the least number of holidays in the EU. However for those at the bottom of the pile, the situation is much worse. Government statistics show that last year three million workers - two thirds of them women - did not get paid for bank holidays over the Easter period. As a result, they suffered a drop in earnings - and all because in the UK employers can treat bank holidays as a normal working day, and then send workers home without pay.

Write in for a full & frank answer to a problem at work, or contact the ansaphone helpline for advice - 07984 675 281 Catalyst, SF, PO Box 29, SW PDO, Manchester M15 5HW. solfed@solfed.org.uk

Mental health

A survey compiled by the Mental Health Foundation has found that Britain's intensive working culture is having very serious effect on mental health. The survey found that 61% of workers interviewed were suffering severe disruption to their personal lives due to having to work excessively long hours. This is hardly surprising. Over the two year period 2001-03, the number of people working more than 60 hours increased from 1-in-8 to 1-in-6. Within the same period, the number of women working over 60 hours doubled. UK

comfortably has dubious honour of having the longest working hours of any country within the EU. In the report, "Whose Life is it Anyway?", 48% of workers said they had sacrificed exercise to work longer hours, with 45% saying they lost time with partners and 42% losing out on contact with friends and other social activities. The report found that workers suffered specific mental health problems, including attempted suicide, as a direct result of pressure of work. More common but still severe results of high workload include irritability, anxiety and depression.



"ARMED WITH THE FACTS"

Many other people will be forced to take bank holidays as part of their minimum right to four weeks paid holiday. The UK is the only EU member state that allows employers to include public holidays in the European minimum of four weeks paid holiday. It is 133 years since the introduction of the Easter Monday bank holiday, yet a significant minority of UK workers are still not getting it.

Those most likely to lose out are women workers in low paid and less skilled jobs - in other words, those who can least afford it. The job types with the highest proportion of women losing out are sales and customer service jobs (23%) and personal service jobs (23%). Workers in the hotel and restaurant sector are the most likely to be sent home without pay (32%), while in health and social work over 400,000 people are affected.

Labour Britain is also now blocking an EU Directive that would provide equal pay and improved rights for agency workers. Agency workers are among the most exploited, with poor pay and often poor and dangerous conditions, where health & safety is ignored. The Directive would have improved pay and conditions of agency workers and brought some much-needed regulation to a notoriously unregulated industry. What few laws there are governing agencies are routinely ignored. It is not gang leaders that are at the forefront of exploiting illegal immigrants, it is job agencies, who treat them appallingly, knowing that they will not complain to the authorities.

The fact that Britain is out of step with Europe on casualisation is no accident. Poor pay and conditions and laws allowing hiring and firing at will are the bedrock of Britain's so-called economic success. More protection for workers is badly needed, but this is never going to happen under Labour because it goes against its fundamentalist free market dogma. In the long run, only a return of working class collective power will turn back the capitalist onslaught of the last 30 years. And that will only come about with the defeat of the anti-trade union legislation and a return to free collective bargaining.

Asbestos injustice

A widow will not receive a penny of the near £400,000 in compensation she is due for the death of her husband, after a court ruling by a judge.

Brian Sim was 44 when he died from mesothelioma in 1992. Three years later his widow, Moira, from Torrance, near Glasgow, won £200,000 compensation from his former employer, which went out of business in 1987. But a judge at the Court of Session in Edinburgh has ruled that Mrs Sim failed to prove which insurance firm was liable for the payout.

The case hinged on the fact that it is very difficult to prove which of several former employers or former insurers have contributed during what period to the development of asbestos cancers which can take 40 or more years to emerge. Hence, cases like this are not rare, and are likely to become even more common as a 'mesothelioma epidemic' grips the UK. This case serves as yet another example of British Justice backing capitalism when it comes to the mass murder of working class people caused by the use of



HSE isn't working

Surprise surprise, a recent official report says the Health and Safety Executive has too few resources and inspectors to do its job properly. It adds that the safety watchdog has opted to try and persuade employers to be safe, even though its own research shows that enforcement rather than persuasion is the most effective strategy. It states that "the HSE's continuing focus on the 'business case for safety' has been shown to have little impact in motivating employers". This will not exactly come as shock to anyone who has attempted to use the HSE to force managers to stop dangerous workplace practices. The only way the wholesale slaughter that is now taking place in the workplace is going to end is through workers getting together and organising to force management to make changes. Ultimately workplaces will only be safest when capitalism is got rid of and replaced with a system based on workers' control.