

TRANSPORT WORKER

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CITIZENS OR COWBOYS CHARTER?

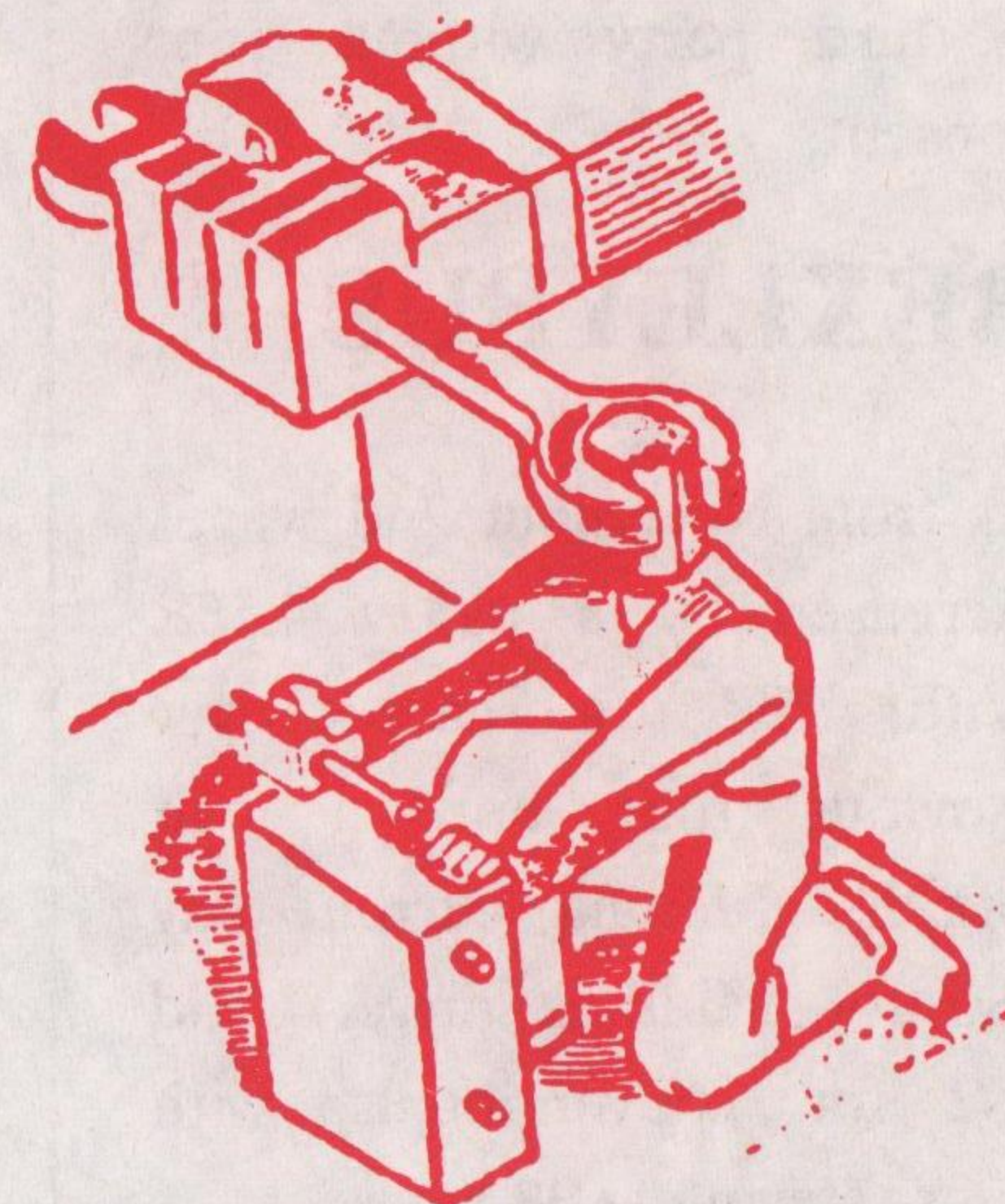
John Major's Citizens' Charter has started the Tories' 1991/2 election campaign on a new wave of lies. A few consumer protection measures have been thrown together as a cover for even further privatisation and deregulation of public services and transport, as well as victimisation of ordinary workers. The 'commitment' to public services is a fraud, just like the so-called classless society. Instead, it is elitism, two-tier services in education and health, and the profits of cowboy contractors and private medicine that is being promoted.

There is no point in the Tories winning the next election if they cannot continue to throw a party for the rich through privatisation and deregulation. They cannot do that if they don't win the election, so the Citizens' Charter is an attempt to do both. Public service workers know punters do not get to meet the faceless bureaucrats who make arbitrary decisions which have a devastating impact on services. Forcing the low-paid frontline workers who get the flak for these decisions to wear name badges is just opening the way for the victimisation of individuals who will be blamed for the failures of 15 years of underfunding.

Since greater state investment in public services and transport is not on the cards, the collective right to decent public services is not proposed by the Charter. The issue is being buried by the red

herring of the individual's right to compensation for the inevitable failure to deliver. Incidentally, the right to compensation will apply only to public services - once it gets privatised you can forget it. In transport, since most bus services have already been deregulated, these measures will affect railworkers and bus workers in London.

Compensation will also be available from the 'organisers' of 'unlawful' strikes (and presumably of other forms of industrial action), subjecting shop stewards and branch officials to potential financial victimisation. If past experience is anything to go by, compensation provisions will be used by far right groups like the Freedom Association to orchestrate campaigns of financial haemorrhage against public services and victimisation of union activists. The Tories are planning a return to the attacks on public service workers by middle class 'Mr Angrys' - a feature of the early '70's.



Apart from NALGO putting out adverts saying 'don't blame public service workers for the mess', the unions have been silent. This is hardly surprising, given their past ineffectiveness when confronted with deregulation of the buses, and the rail unions' virtual silence regarding the prospect of privatisation of the railways. Nor will they be too displeased if the Charter curbs unofficial industrial action, something the unions are only too willing to see less of anyway. If we are to find ways around the Charter we are going to have to rely on ourselves, whether this means having local funds to meet compensation claims or being organised enough to meet the victimisation of individuals with action. Whatever happens, we must not be scared to take action when our pay and conditions are under threat.'

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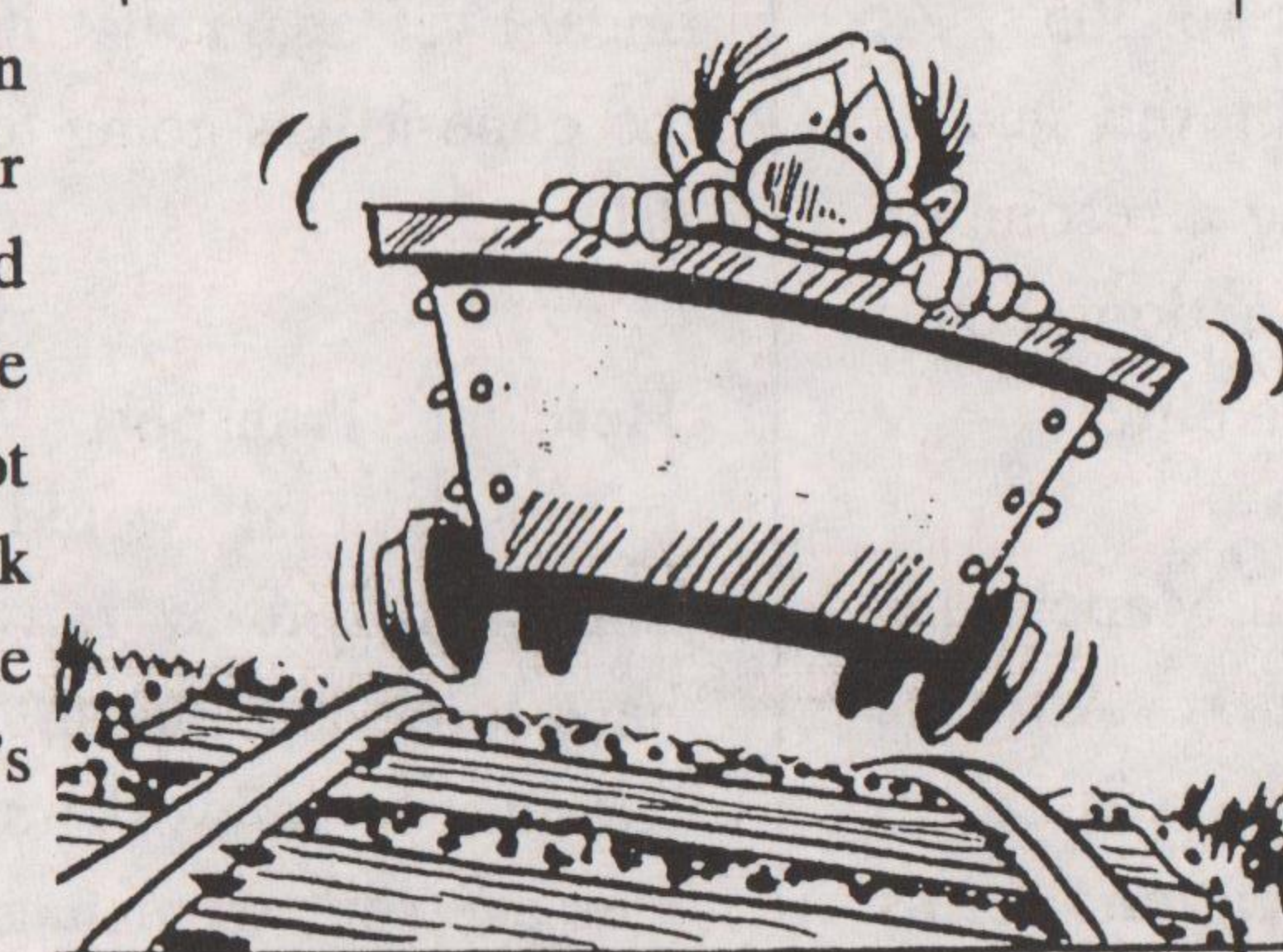
PRIVATISING THE WORKFORCE

"BR's Sir Bob must go!" says the Sun "newspaper". We couldn't agree more, and let us not forget all the other overpaid useless deadwood, collectively known as "the Board", who we could also well do without.

But what could account for the Sun's sudden conversion to good sense? All is revealed in the editorial; apparently Sir Bob is not as keen as mustard on the idea of privatising the railways. Even worse, he's not sure if it would work! (Shock Horror!) Back in reality, the Sun has its head stuck up its own brakepipe as usual.

As Sir Bob has found out, privatising the railways means shutting the vast majority of their operations, because they do not make a profit, and doing terminal damage to whatever parts are left by cutting off their lifeblood - the loss making local rail networks. He knows that there is not a single example in the world of a private railway successfully running an integrated mass transport system without subsidy and for profit. If there was one the Sun would have told him by now.

So if a profit-making private railway is economic nonsense, why do the Tory Party and their newspapers go on about it so much? Is it because at election time there is a market for this sort of thing on the loony right of the Tory Party? These are the same people who thought the poll tax was a brilliant idea!



BEATING THE WORKERS

The point of privatisation has been its ability to push down the cost of labour. Whether in the NHS, where the cleaners and other ancillary workers have been sacked and re-employed at cheaper rates for longer hours. Or manufacturing industries, such as car and ship-building where the privatised companies have been able to lay-off large parts of their workforces. The privatisation of industry has

been bad news for workers.

Private companies appear to be better than nationalised ones at disciplining their workforces, they can always claim that the market dictates the wages they pay, and so force the Trade Unions to trade-off with a choice between either wage cuts or redundancies. To Sir Bob this is what's on offer. Even if a private railway doesn't run on time and at a loss, a workforce which is split into rival, manageable sectors looks very attractive - if you are sitting at the top table.

This is what is happening with the present re-organisation of BR into business sectors. Practically no-one outside the railways has the faintest idea of what is going on, and neither do many in BR, but what is being shoved down our throats is the message that no longer do we work for BRB, but for one of the new business sectors.

The privatisation mentality is being drilled into us through an attempted brainwashing campaign. From promoting a feeling of "company loyalty" to

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By Transport Workers - For Transport Workers

NEWS FROM MANCHESTER

On Friday 8th November the power box walked out bringing the whole of Piccadilly Station to a standstill. The strike lasted an hour before management saw the error of their ways. The panic the strike caused among management could be seen from the fact they were too frightened to admit the strike was taking place, announcing to passengers that the delays were due to electrical faults.

Trainmen/women at Manchester Piccadilly and Longsight are refusing to be trained on 305 units which have just been brought into service in the Manchester area. This is due to the fact that management have only offered a derisory 2 hours training to convert from 304 units to 305's. At meetings at Piccadilly the whole of the guards backed the trainmen/women, passing a resolution stating they would take immediate action should anyone be disciplined for refusing training.

Workers at White Arrow Express in Manchester held a half-day strike in October. After 2 successful ballots management had refused to budge on redundancy and relocation terms involved in the proposed re-siting of all the Manchester depots. The strike forced management back to the negotiating table and ended after workers secured full pay for the time spent on strike.

The above items were sent into Transport Worker. We welcome any such contributions as this is the only way ordinary workers get to hear what's going on as the unions seem to have the same attitude to us as gardeners do to mushrooms - keep us in the dark and feed us on shit!

- CONTINUED FROM FRONT PAGE -
our respective business sectors, through to trying to create a feeling of resentment to other railworkers.

O FOR Q...

At a Regional Railways "training" course last year, the "trainers" spent much time abusing intercity guards. Of

course divide and rule is not a new method. The private railways before the war pushed company loyalty for the same reasons. Workers who are forced to suffer the hours of tedium, management lies, waffle and bullshit involved in "Organising for Quality" training courses, may wonder why BR is prepared to spend money on conference centres

HIDDEN SAFETY!

BRB in many areas are now attempting to impose their interpretation of the Hidden Report into recent railway accidents. The Report stated that excessive overtime should be reduced. Management have come up with their own formula of a maximum of 72 hours work per week and staff having to have 1 day in every 14 off.

When our glorious union approached BRB to discuss the Hidden Report they were told politely to piss off. True to form the unions, instead of telling the Board that unless they negotiated an agreement over the findings they would instruct members to boycott any management proposals, have crawled away into the corner hoping the problem will go away. They issued a weakly-worded circular which to all intents and purposes meant yet again that if any fighting was going to be done it was going to be left up to the isolated LDC's.

Here at Transport Worker we welcome any proposals that would reduce the horrendous hours worked by railway workers but if hours have to be cut this should be without any loss of earnings to railworkers. This should be the clear message sent to management by the unions now, as it is clear that the BRB have a number of safety measures in the pipeline which they hope to finance at the expense of our loss of earnings.



and bar bills, when it can't afford any decent new rolling stock?

Could it be that it is cheaper to get you legless once a year, and fill our heads with a lot of servile rubbish about the consumer being right, than to invest in a proper transport system?

"O for Q" - (say it quickly and it sums up BR management attitude to the staff) - is a shoddy attempt to make us carry the can for management incompetence and negligence, and for the governments butchery of the railways over the years.

The trains won't run on time until the workers run the trains.

What's wrong with the unions?

The existing trade unions are in disarray. After more than a decade of Thatcherism they are now desperately seeking a return to power through some sort of social partnership with the state and the bosses. Faced with the continuing threat of privatisation on the buses and on the railways, all that Knapp, Fullick, Morris and Co can offer are prayers for a Labour victory at the next general election. Even if the Labour Party does scrape home do we seriously believe that Kinnock will do anything to improve the pay and conditions of transport workers? The history of Labour governments speaks for itself. The present Labour leadership have made it clear that they have no intention of reversing the process of privatisation on the buses, which has led to lower pay, de-unionisation and chaotic services. What strategy do our union leaders offer if the Tories win again? Total surrender...

As transport workers we have always endured disgusting rates of pay for dangerously long and unsocial hours. After more than a century of labour organisation all that the unions have won for us is a daily grind at the end of which most people still find it a struggle to pay the bills. The existing trade unions in our industry are moving towards a future as bigger and richer financial institutions, offering services such as mortgages and credit cards with no attempt to defend, let alone improve, our pay and conditions.

It is no surprise that unions are increasingly concentrating on financial services - the whole structure of trade unions is increasingly divorced from workplace concerns. Even at the lowest level of the union, the branch, we have many officials who see their role, not as confronting management, but rather involving themselves in internal union business; sitting on endless committees; becoming JP's - in fact anything which will enable them to further their own careers and to avoid doing a day's work. The further up the union structure you look, the more remote the officials are and the better paid they seem to be.

When workers take the initiative themselves to organise industrial action they invariably end up fighting not only management but also their own union which appears interested only in getting them back to work as quickly as possible and restoring industrial peace. On the rare occasions that unions have managed to organise strikes in the transport industry, their members' sacrifices have been undermined by divided and competing unions - witness the 1989 railways strike when ASLEF instructed their members to cross NUR picket lines. No attempt has ever been made to coordinate action right across the public transport

sector. The nearest we have had to this was in 1989 when London Underground workers coordinated their unofficial one-day strikes with those of the NUR. Imagine the effect if bus workers had taken action at the same time.

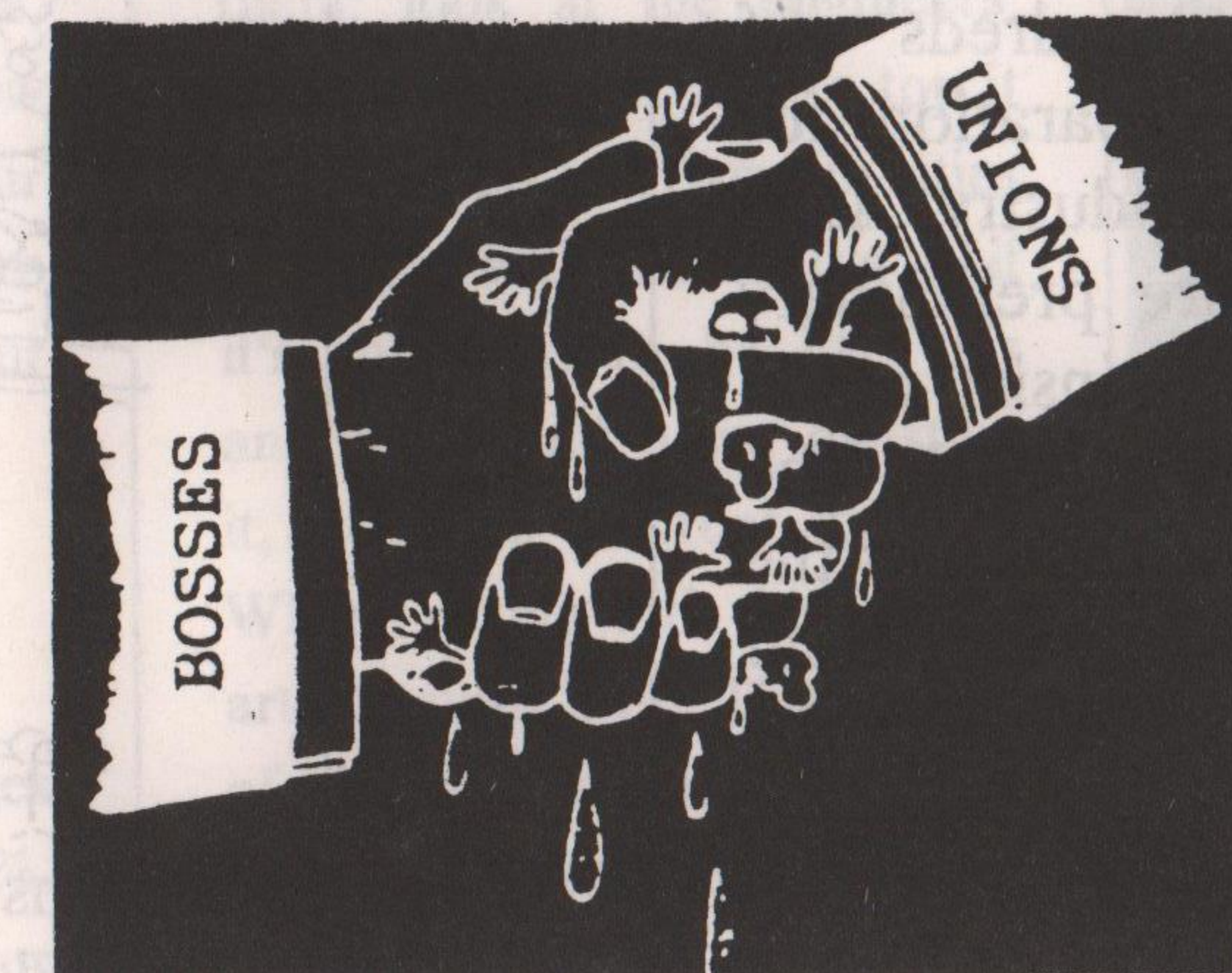
However, it is not only a problem of reformist trade unions that we workers have to face but the whole nature of the capitalist system which organises society into two classes whose interests are directly opposed. All this system can offer the working class today is increasing poverty. Nor do we see any role for any form of marxism, which as Eastern European workers know to their cost, results in greater misery and exploitation for the working class.

We therefore advocate the building of a revolutionary union of transport workers. This union would be federated to other unions in other industries to form one workers' organisation independent of all political parties. This union should be run by and for transport workers, free from overpaid bureaucrats and careerists. The aim in the short term being to improve pay and conditions and in the long term to prepare workers through taking direct control of their own struggles, for the day when they take control of their own industries and run them for the benefit of the

community as a whole, based on need not profit.

Obviously, a revolutionary union will not be built overnight. We therefore advocate the creation of a network of transport workers whose aim will be the setting up of such a union. This network would be open to workers from all sections of the transport industry. Initially the network's role will be to bring like-minded activists together to exchange ideas and circulate information. We feel there is a crying need for basic strike support within the industry, therefore the network will support any workers in struggle whether they are backed by the unions or not.

In rejecting the idea that the existing unions can be reformed into fighting organisations this network will oppose the strategy of standing for full-time union positions in the attempt to get more left wing union leaders. That is not to say the network will ignore the existing unions. We will try to force them to defend the workers they so readily take dues off and expose them when they fail to deliver. The network sees its role not as working within the existing union structures but rather in the workplace; that is where our power lies, where conflict with management arises and where we can involve all the people we work with regardless of which union they belong to.



ARGENTINA

A RAILWORKERS VICTORY

For nearly 2 months, from 12th February, thousands of railway workers were involved in a general strike that practically paralysed the whole of Argentina's railway network.

The origins of the conflict are distant. Firstly the colossal delay in salary re-adjustments. Hyper-inflation reduced real wages by 200% since the days of the Alfonsin government. Furthermore, the present government has just embarked on a rationalisation programme for the railways network (numerous line closures throughout the country) that led to hundreds of redundancies. All this in preparation for future privatisation of the industry. Low wages and staff reduction are preliminary measures that private capital insist on in order to 'salvage' the railway network. The conciliatory attitude of the leadership of the national union 'Fraternity' (with clear pro-government positions) aggravated the situation.

Despite Fraternity's opposition, some local union sections decided to launch an engineers' strike. Very quickly dozens of sections followed and after a few days the strike was total. It was further strengthened by other workers like signalmen, technicians, etc joining the strike. The Menem government economics minister Domingo Cavallo (an ex-military dictatorship official) called the workers in struggle anarchists. And the President had threatened that "a line closed will remain so forever".

The 'Madre' (Mothers of the Disappeared) have actively supported the railway strikers from the onset. Menem complained: "What have the 'Mothers of La Plaza de Mayo' got to do with the railway strike?!" (Obviously he doesn't understand class solidarity!) Workers contradicted these words by participating in large numbers on a march

organised by the Madre in support of the strike, all shouting "Dear Madre, we will carry on your children's struggle". The Madre's offices hosted many strikers' activities. A big 'Fiesta' was organised in solidarity and in support of the strikers with the participation of workers, students and artists.



After two months of struggle, the demands were vindicated and the government promised to re-adjust wages and re-employ those made redundant. However, despite this retreat, the government maintains its sell-off plans. It announced privatisations including the creation of a metropolitan company and public sales of various sectors. Such initiatives will inevitably lead to line closures.

The railway workers' victory is, of course, not definitive, but their experience of the struggle is an exceptional event. The rank and file have taken charge of their own interests, democratically. They have broken the bureaucratic settlement monopoly and fractured the traditional pact between government, management and union bureaucrats.

Source: Le Combat Syndicaliste (Paper of the CNT-AIT, revolutionary workers' union in France).

PERSONNEL FILES YOUR RIGHT TO INFORMATION

If your company keeps any information about you on a computerised information system then you have the right to have access to it on request, although your employer may charge a small fee for this (if a tight bastard!). Information stored about you in this way must not be handed over for an authorised purpose. This right is enforceable under the Data Protection Act 1984. Also, regardless of how information is stored, your employer may not forward it to a third party without your consent.

BEXLEYBUS

As from November 2nd wages increased by a paltry 4.5%. With 5% increase over previous four and a half months. Making current pay 186 for Midibus drivers and 202 for conventionals, with hours staying at 38 a week.

LETTER - A BUS DRIVER WRITES

Dear Transport Worker,

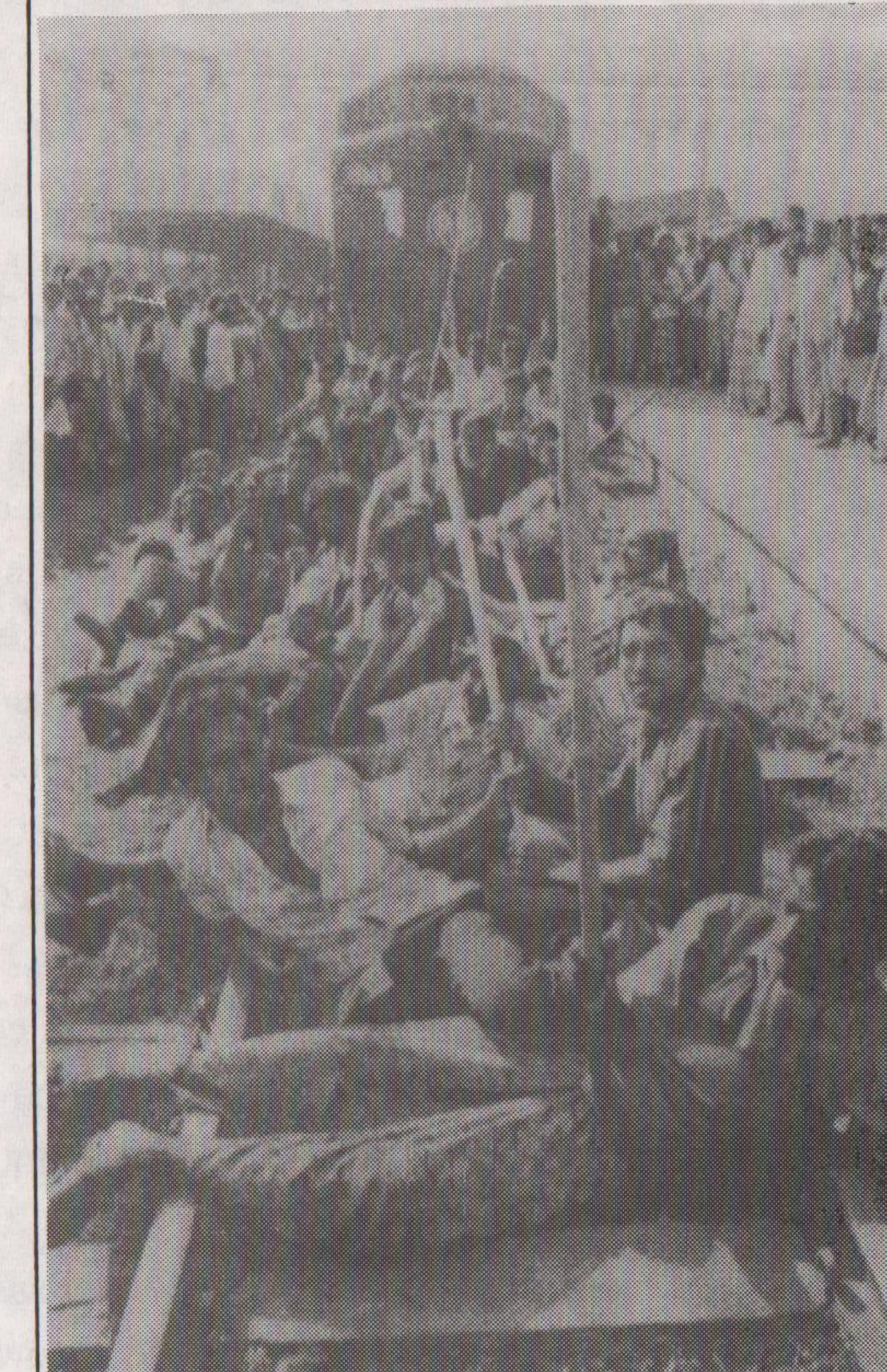
I have just read your news sheet - believe me it's a breath of fresh air! Not before time that we seriously work to build a fighting, rather than compromising organisation, after so many years of smug self-congratulation from our unions and Labour party

flunkies. My union the T&G, show all the drive and militancy of a blind, overweight snail. For too long they have done little but stand by, letting our wages fall, fall and fall. Too cosy with management by half! The hard issues for bus drivers seem to be ducked at all costs. Widening pay differences between conventional and minibus drivers (classic divide and rule), longer and longer working weeks when for years workers fought to shorten them; look at the engineers' limited successes, and to top it all the stress of driving in cities saturated with traffic. It's as if it's supposed to be like this and we should never question it, let alone confront it. Your What's wrong with the Unions article, sums it up. The amount of branch meetings drivers leave swearing and threatening to tear up their union cards says it all, never mind those who don't bother showing. The most important thing has got to be that we start taking these issues head-on, rather than sitting around moaning in the canteens; we can do it for ourselves. When we've lost faith in the unions whose first concerns are their power, position and finances, then it is time to organise ourselves, as workers for workers, and not fall in the same trap as them. That means no bureaucrats, all jobs being done by shopfloor workers, and fighting bosses and politicians (left or right) that play Gods and

slave-drivers with our lives. Excuse the rant, but its all stuff that needs saying, but more than that, needs doing. That means putting Transport Worker and it's ideas across - count me in.

In Solidarity, A.W.

THAT'S MORE LIKE IT!



Demonstrators blocking a railway line near Dhaka, Bangladesh on the 25th November last year, in protest at privatisation plans. Tracks were torn up and roads barricaded.....just what we like see - enthusiastic direct action and solidarity!

