

TRANSPORT WORKER

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FREE

PRIVATISATION SHAMBLES

The Government's "Railway Privatisation Bill" eventually published on February 1, is an utter shambles. Not from the point of view of a railway worker (although it will certainly mean mass redundancies, wage cuts and the scrapping of safety standards and conditions if implemented) it is a shambles because it runs counter to the Board's own strategy for privatisation and because it has failed to achieve any support from the finance capitalists of the City of London in whose interests it was originally conceived. It is clear to even the most loyal Tory propagandists in the media that MacGregor has come up with a real turkey.

It was politically important for the Tories at the last election to promise to privatise the railway. Partly for John Major to satisfy those Tories who doubted his Thatcherite credentials, and partly to maintain the flow of wealth to the City financial interests from asset stripping the industrial infrastructure, but mainly because the railway represents a body of organised labour which defeated the government in 1989, and is still capable of doing so today.

Anyone who believes that the rail unions are as impotent as our leaders pretend, or that the Tories have forgotten the coordinated strikes on the railway and London Underground, has fallen for the oldest trick of the boss class - whenever possible bury discontent under a conspiracy of silence (the Manchester Piccadilly guards, the LU company plan) - but if they are threatened with coordinated industrial action they will respond with a deluge of lies which would make Saddam Hussein look reasonable.

UNPOPULAR CAPITALISM

The recession has made a mockery of the governments already incoherent plans to sell off the railway. Certainly, it is impossible to maintain the charade of 'popular capitalism' through a public shares issue when the public are suffering from a recessionary crisis. It is even proving difficult to interest the financial sharks and playboys (StageCoach, Branson etc) who might have been expected to rush in while wiser and wealthier predators circled impatiently waiting for disaster to strike in order to snap up the bargains. MacGregor claims over 50 expressions of interest in taking on a franchise, but has successfully resisted the urge to name one. The Tories have ended up with the humiliation of privatisation without any buyers. Unless they are prepared to make massive investments in infrastructure quickly, buyers will not come forward.

CONTRACT CRAZY

The rearguard action of Bob Reid and the BRB, to resist the breaking up of the InterCity network is the most public example of their opposition to the Government's plans. BR management have their own strategy for reducing labour costs. This involves keeping intact a small national rail network, but drastically reducing the size of the workforce from 130,000 at present to about 30,000 essential staff and then contracting out the remainder of the work to outside companies. This would restructure the industry along the lines of the NHS with the emphasis on an internal market and extensive use of contracts to outside companies.

TRANSPORT WORKER NETWORK LAUNCHED

As this is the fourth issue of Transport Worker, in addition to a number of leaflets, we have decided to put things on a more formal footing. Therefore we have now formed the Transport Workers Network which will be open to all transport workers and will be run democratically.

Though we are a small group at the moment we hope to expand our propaganda and contribute to the growing debate as to the direction the British labour movement should take. Our immediate aim is to get Transport Worker published more regularly and we hope to organise some public meetings in the near future.

We should be clear that we are a revolutionary organisation, independent of all political parties who see the building of revolutionary unions as the way forward to a society based on workers' control of production, distribution and consumption. We see networks as propaganda groups,

which will be the embryos for forming future revolutionary unions.

These ideas are far from new - in fact they have a long history. In Britain they date back to the turn of the century to the so-called "Syndicalist Revolt". At that time attempts were made in both Britain and Ireland to form a new union movement. This movement sought on a day to day level to fight management instead of compromising and selling out as is the norm with the current trade unions, and in the long term sought to prepare workers for the day when they would take over the running of society as a whole.

At present we have links with the International Workers Association, an anarcho-syndicalist organisation which has sections in several countries throughout the world.

If you are interested in finding out more about our ideas (or if you just want to send a donation to help keep Transport Worker going then drop us a line at:

Transport Workers Network, PO Box 73,
Norwich, NR1 2EB.

PRIVATISATION SHAMBLES contd

During the last year, examples of the drive towards contracting out have become more and more common, particularly affecting S & T and Per'Way departments. At present a consultation document from Network South East is being passed around, in which management propose to contract out all P.Way renewals, tamping and lining, drainage, fencing, track welding and lineside management. This would leave track maintenance, inspection/patrolling duties and ultra sonic track testing to be carried out by P.Way workers. Management on Thames/Chiltern (the line in question) are looking towards 75% of all work contracted out. This strategy is probably more dangerous than MacGregors dogmatic shambles, because it could be implemented as an extension of the OforQ management restructuring exercise, already in place.

A REVOLUTIONARY UNION

What both the strategies for industry have in common, is that they are both attempts to drastically reduce the ability of railway workers to organise against the demands of modern capitalism. This is interesting because it underlines the threat that industrial organisation still creates for capitalism in the 90s. The lesson for railway workers is that we must take every opportunity to move the struggle to restructure our industry onto our terrain. This means industrial action; united with workers in the coal industry and local government. The TUC call for a 'One Day Strike' on March 17 is pathetically inadequate. The big question for workers trying to defend their living standards and jobs today is **"how to, fight and win without seeing a repeat of the TUC's treacherous role in the 1980s?"**

ROT AT THE TOP

RMT funds pay for good life

It may come as a shock to many RMT members in these days of financial restraint by the unions to find that the union does have money when it comes to ensuring that officials are kept in the lifestyle they have become accustomed to, as the following will demonstrate:



At the 1989 Labour Party conference, Brother Knapp and half a dozen of his hangers-on, including one RMT-sponsored Labour MP, had a week's hotel bill of over £8,000. More than a year's net pay for most railworkers. At the same conference, over £4,000 was spent on a free bar at a reception in a top hotel to which Labour Party and union dignitaries were invited.

WHITE ARROW TO EAT PARCEL FORCE

Some companies are set to do very nicely thank you from the government's headlong rush for privatisation. One of these is White Arrow Express, a delivery company owned by Great Universal Stores, the catalogue company. Until recent years White Arrow was simply the delivery arm of the GUS group but has been moving out into other areas of delivery than purely mail order.

It seems certain that after British Rail, the Tories have their eye on the Royal Mail as the next candidate for privatisation and rumour has it that White Arrow are set to make a bid for Parcel Force, the parcel delivery section of the Post Office. Certainly there have been numerous meetings between the two companies over recent months.

"Honest Sam MacCluskey" received a £75,000 pay-off to leave the union and still retains a union mortgage.

At Maritime House, the old seamen's head office, there are over 130 flats. These are currently being let to union officials and others, for the princely sum of £25 a week, which isn't bad for a flat in central London. On further investigation it was found that one seamen's official had been sub-letting his flat at full London rates for a number of years. Another, based in Liverpool, had installed his daughter, a student, there over the last 3 years. It also emerged that John Prescott has a whole annex to himself for which he pays a princely £35 a week. It is little wonder the man can afford to run a Daimler.

It gives us no joy to report the corruption, both moral and financial, which is eating into the very heart of our union. It also highlights the true nature of the financial cuts now being pursued within the union. The moves for a part-time EC and the financial strangling of the branches which is now taking place is little more than an attempt to centralise all power into the hands of union officials away from the activists. The union's financial problem could be solved overnight if all union employees, including Knapp, were to receive the average earning of a transport worker.

White Arrow is currently set to overtake Parcel Force as the country's leading delivery service. It has been able to reach this position through undercutting the prices charged by other companies. GUS pays over-inflated rates to White Arrow for the deliveries made in its behalf which in turn allows it to charge lower rates for its other business. This is, in effect, a subsidy, the sort of unfair business practice that private sector companies are quick to condemn when the likes of British Rail or the Royal Mail (Red Star or Parcel Force) are the recipients. But of course, we shouldn't expect the Tory government to take much notice of this - after all it's the same people who are trying to deny "a level playing field" to the coal industry.

PICCADILLY FOUR UPDATE

The 4 LDC reps at Manchester Piccadilly remain sacked. You may be forgiven for not knowing the latest position on the four sacked men or in some cases, even for not knowing the background to the sackings. None of this is surprising given that the RMT has refused from the very beginning to circulate any details to the wider membership. This was partly due to fear of losing "precious" funds through legal action - but then as far as the union is concerned money is far more important than the fundamental trade union right of workers to elect shop stewards and for those stewards to then represent them without the fear of sacking.

It also seems to us here at Transport Worker to reflect a general defeatism in the union leadership (though it must be stressed that a minority of EC members did support the Piccadilly Four) which now extends right down to many branch secretaries. Whether that be refusing to fight privatisation; giving away basic negotiating rights by allowing BRB to impose a "new machinery"; doing nothing to defend our rights to union representation. It now seems the case that the union is more concerned with attacking activists within the union than with fighting management. There has even been a concerted whispering campaign by some RMT officials against the Piccadilly Four, from claiming they were drunk to even going so far as to say they were "mindless hotheads" who deserved all they got. Is this any way to treat 4 union members who were sacked for defending both national and local agreements and now face the blacklist and a lifetime on the dole?

All messages of support and financial donations to:

M Harrison, 9 Shelford Ave, Gorton, Manchester 18.

Nor can it end there. The courts ruled that as the 4 sacked men were LDC members and as LDC members don't appear in the RMT rulebook, they were not part of the union, and further ruled that the union could not take industrial action in their support. With this decision it now means that management can sack or discipline any LDC member and the union can do absolutely nothing to defend them. So far the union leadership has refused to rectify this. They have issued guidelines to LDC's which begs the question that why when we pay over £2 million a year to union solicitors, it takes the sacking of 4 men to issue advice on anti-trade union legislation. It also raises the question of what use guidelines are next time some Tory nutcase of a manager decides to sack an LDC. The only explanation as to why the union refuses to include LDC's in the rules is that they would then be liable for their action which would again threaten what matters most to them - £s.d.

This is an intolerable situation - what is the point of having a union if it cannot protect elected representatives? Here at Transport Worker we feel that the only hope for railway workers is to build an alternative, revolutionary union. In the meantime we cannot allow the union officials, whose wages we pay, to go unchallenged. We therefore urge all branches to put resolutions in, both to ensure that LDC's are placed in the rule book and to condemn the union leaders' betrayal of our 4 sacked brothers.

The collaboration of the union in allowing management to sack the 4 is a potent symbol of a union no longer functioning. By defending the Piccadilly 4 we are supporting the whole movement for change that is slowly gaining strength within the union. For that reason alone we urge the continued support of the Piccadilly Four.

HOW TO BE YOUR OWN BOSS

As the economy collapses into a depression today, it's worth looking at the demands put by railway workers before the last great depression of the 1920's to see what we can learn from our own history. Nationalisation of the railways was seen as a means of improving pay, conditions and industrial relations, by the first railway union, the Amalgamated Society of Railway Servants (ASRS).

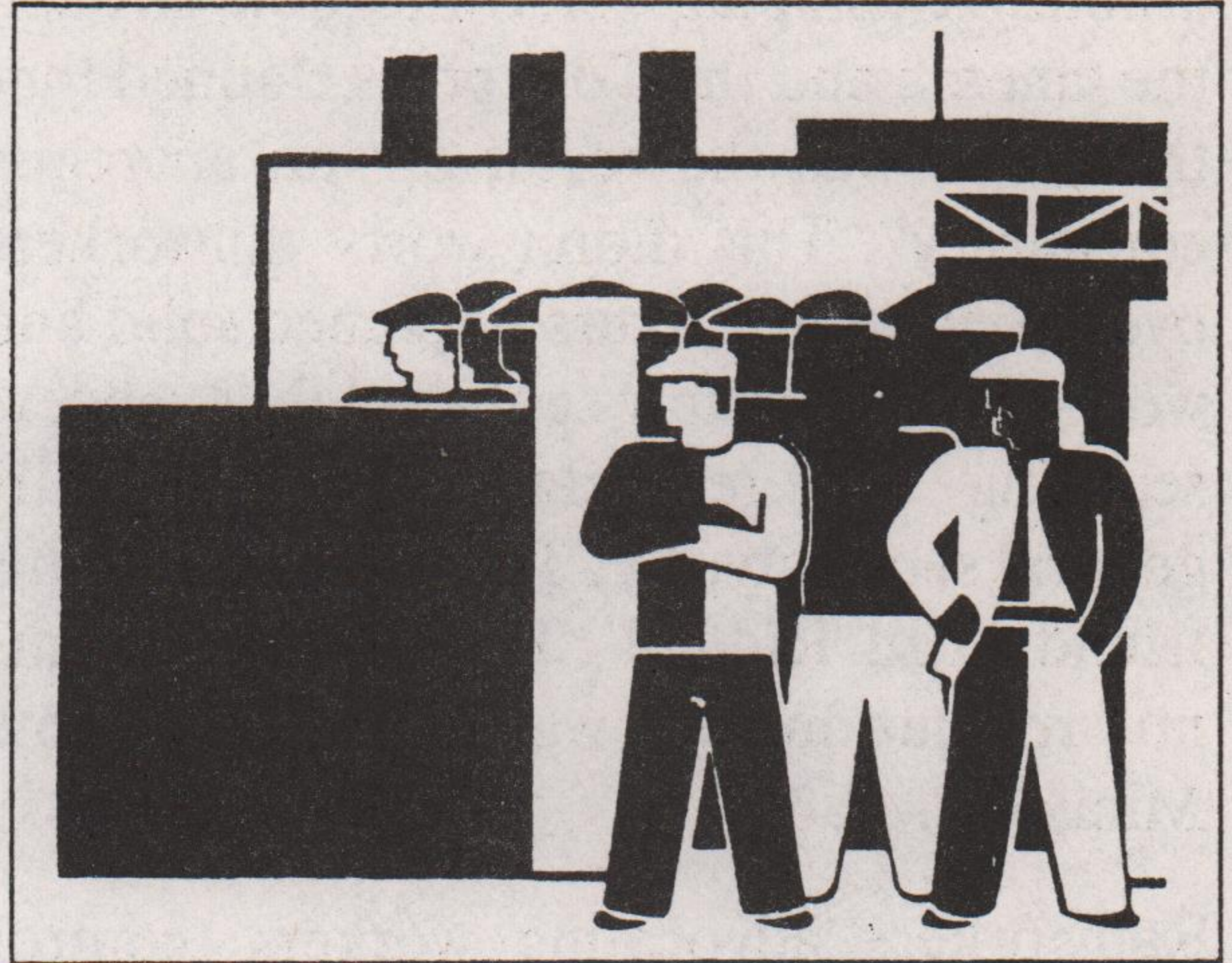
WORKERS' CONTROL

By 1910 with the growth of trade unions and industrial militancy, many workers started to go further. In particular, the syndicalists argued that "mere nationalisation" was just exchanging one set of bosses for another and that what was really needed was workers' control. This meant the workers in the industry taking complete control of all the managerial functions on the railway - however, to work it needed industrial unity (the abolition of union rivalries) and a willingness for the workers to take direct action to achieve their ends.

In 1912 at its annual conference, the ASRS became the first trade union of many to declare in favour of the full-blooded syndicalist demand for complete control by the workers.

In the years which followed, this demand was watered down by the union officials who preferred joint control of the industry by the state, the consumers and the workers. In 1913 the president of the Railway Clerks Association (forerunner of TSSA) told their conference that nationalisation would not bring about a higher social status for railwaymen, they needed a share in control.

In 1914 the NUR - newly formed by an alliance of the ASRS, a signalman's craft union (UPSA) and a syndicalist union for per-way grades (GRWU) - resolved at conference that: "...no system of state



ownership will be acceptable to the organised railwaymen which does not...allow them a due measure of control and responsibility in the safe and efficient working of the railway system".

During the First World War the government ran the railways and the unions argued it should continue to do so after the war. In 1917 the National Conference of District Councils of the NUR resolved that: "...seeing the railways are being controlled by the state...during the war...they should not revert to private ownership afterwards. Further, we believe that national welfare demands they should be acquired by the state, to be jointly controlled and managed by the state and representatives of the National Union of Railwaymen".

District Councils grew more powerful at this time due to the existence of an unofficial rank and file movement on the railways known as "local vigilance committees" and they forced the NUR executive to call a conference on "After War Matters" in Leicester during November 1917. The Leicester Programme stated: "...there should be equal representation both national and local for this union upon the management of all railways in the United Kingdom".

UNCLE TOM

The railway strike from 27th September to 5th October 1919 was the first test of

strength between Lloyd George's coalition government and the "Triple Alliance" between rail, road transport and miners' unions. A campaign of vilification through the cinema and the Tory press claimed that the strike was the result of "an anarchist conspiracy". This didn't worry railworkers overmuch - the strikers remained solid and won - but it certainly sent the NUR leaders scuttling for respectability. The NUR general secretary, J H Thomas MP, told his friend Lord Riddell "J H Thomas...wants no revolution...he wants to be Prime Minister".

Railworkers advocating workers' control clashed with a union leadership who wanted "...a better and saner policy of closer co-operation between capital and labour". In 1921 J H Thomas stated his belief that "many of our difficulties are caused by our not understanding the employers' point of view. If we are denied an opportunity of knowing their case, can you wonder that mistakes are made?". In layman's terms, he wanted a safety valve to avoid strikes, but at all costs sought to prevent workers from running their own industry, Whatever next? They might want to run their own union!

J H Thomas never got to be Prime Minister, but he entered the cabinet with the first Labour government of 1924, then went with a right wing rump of the party into the "National Government" in 1931 with the Tories and Liberals. In 1929 he told unemployment protesters at the Labour Party conference "I am confident that when February comes the unemployment figures will be far different and better than the figures under the late government". On the ball, as always, Thomas was a man who understood the employers' point of view so well that they let him join their club.

It was later revealed by Lloyd George's cabinet secretary that during the 1919 strike, Thomas and Lloyd George had struck a bargain. In return for the NUR dropping its demands for nationalisation and sharing in the control the PM agreed to encourage the railways to adopt

standardised working conditions and to recognise the railway unions for collective bargaining purposes.

BACK TO THE FUTURE

What are the lessons for railway workers today from this story of sell-outs? Firstly, the demand for workers' control was what employers and the government feared in 1919. When nationalisation was agreed in 1947, the miners who ran up red flags over their collieries were mistaken, they did not own the mines. On the railways, nationalisation meant delivering strategic industrial policy into the hands of the road lobby who ran the Ministry of Transport. Nationalisation meant generous compensation of the private railway interests, not workers' control.

Secondly, the weakening of the original syndicalist call for direct action to take full control of industry, to the more polite call for Joint Control Boards, was a slippery slope. British capitalism made major compromises to prevent revolutionary unions from developing after the First World War. Organised labour failed to break from the political influence of bureaucrats like Thomas. In 1919 the working class stood on the brink of a social revolution - the price for failing to defeat bureaucracy was 1926 when the TUC general council could sabotage the general strike leaving the miners to carry on alone for seven months and condemning the working class to a future of mass unemployment and another world war.

Lastly, as the world economy enters another depression, compromises with British capitalism are not on offer. The gains made by the railway unions during the 1920's - National Agreements (LDC's, sectional councils, etc) and national wage bargaining, are being scrapped today by employers and the talk is of pay bargaining at "profit centre level". It is time to give the boss class a taste of the fear again.

BR BOSSES MAD - OFFICIAL!

British Rail have finally come clean on what is their real attitude to staff. Rather than spend money on expensive equipment they have decided to use workers to test safe working distances from the new generation of high speed trains. They intend to lash workers to posts at nine, seven and six feet away from the track, no doubt with the intention being to see how close they can get to the trains before someone gets killed. This is yet another reflection of BRB's appalling attitude to safety which has seen a massive increase in the number of accidents and deaths on the railways and shows up a management that would rather gamble with human lives than risk damaging equipment. Workers should not worry, however, because Brother Knapp has condemned it as lunacy which we are sure will be enough to force a change of attitude by BRB just as union leaders done up in fancy dress as sardines, as part of the so-called "campaign" against privatisation, will force the government to change its mind on the rail sell-off.

BOOK REVIEW - ANARCHIST ECONOMICS

A pamphlet has just been published by the newly formed Industrial Syndicalist Education League. The pamphlet, "Anarchist Economics", explains by using actual examples, how the workers in Spain in 1936-39 were able to take control of society and successfully run the economy. This is a useful contribution in the debate on workers' control and points the way forward to formulating an alternative to the present capitalist system.

Copies are available, priced £1, from: ISEL/La Presa, PO Box 29, South West PDO, Manchester, M15 5HW. Cheques payable to "La Presa".

TRANSPORT WORKER

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If you would like to help distribute 'Transport Worker' at your own workplace or at other depots etc, please drop us a line letting us know how many you want us to send you.

'Transport Worker' is run on a shoestring so any donations will be gratefully received.

If there is anything going on in your workplace or industry that you think we should print, please don't hesitate to drop us a line.

► ANARCHIST ECONOMICS ★

an alternative
for a world in crisis



Abraham Guillen

ISEL/La Presa

BUS DRIVERS AND STRAIN INJURIES

Up to two out of three South Yorkshire bus drivers could be suffering unnecessary pain because of their work, according to a report by region nine of the TGWU transport union. Two thirds of drivers in the South Yorkshire Transport area responding to a union questionnaire reported back, leg or shoulder problems. These were caused by poor seat support, prolonged jolting and having to twist and stretch to take fares and drive.

For further information about The Silent Injury contact Martin Mayer, TGWU 9/10 branch secretary; tel: 0742-766351.

BUS STRATEGY

A STRATEGY FOR BUS WORKERS is now available from us should you not have seen a copy or would like more. It is a look at the bus industry, trade unions and our working lives by bus workers themselves and proposes a strategy for tackling the basic problems facing us - low pay, long hours, poor working conditions, a lack of organisation in small companies and increasing competition leaving us the losers every time.

We strongly recommend all busworkers read this and get copies around their depot.

DANGER PRIVATISATION

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STRENGTH**

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Workers in other industries are organising along similar lines to ourselves. In the future we hope to federate, with a view to creating a revolutionary union run by workers for workers, to fight for a world based on production for need not profit, to the benefit of workers and communities as a whole.

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