

Manchester Piccadilly Reps - LATEST

The recent strikes should not allow workers to forget the 4 sacked Piccadilly LDC reps. They are still awaiting their industrial tribunal.

A 3-day pre-hearing is to decide whether or not the case can go to a full tribunal was listed for May/June. Unfortunately, after the RMT had gone to great lengths to ensure that all their witnesses would be able to attend, BR decided they would not be ready and the hearing was again postponed. The hearing has now been set to start on July 14th. The date for a full hearing, if it gets that far, is still unknown.

This is little more than an insult to the four, who after being sacked for over eight months, are still awaiting a decision on their case. This only goes to highlight the disgraceful decision of union leaders who put money before the membership by not calling strike action in defiance of the courts. To hope that the four could win re-instatement through an industrial tribunal was only ever a way out for union leaders, never an option.

It is not just for the sake of the men involved that the case of the Piccadilly 4 should not be forgotten. The whole episode should be a constant reminder of the union's failure to defend the very basis of trade unionism - the right for reps to function without fear of the sack. If the union cannot defend elected reps, who can it defend? Nor does it end there. LDC's still do not form part of the RMT rule-book and until they do all LDC reps have the threat of the sack hanging over them.

The 4 sacked brothers, despite all that has happened, remain active and stand as a shining example of workers who were prepared to stand by their trade union principles. For all our sakes they should be supported and not forgotten.

Send donations to: M Harrison, 9 Shelford Ave, Gorton, Manchester 18.

LONDON BUSES cont.

Once again the trade union apparatus appears to be serving its own interests rather than that of bus workers, carefully laying the ground for a mediated compromise, in reality a defeat that they will then trumpet as a victory. Why should we put up with such inadequate tactics? Every time we take action it has to be done despite the trade union officials, or left in their hands inevitably doomed to failure.

Taking the running and direction of a strike into our own hands will mean organising from scratch and making the best of a bad job! Links between workplaces and spreading information are primary tasks. A common problem thereafter is the building of solidarity action from workers in the same industry - once again we will meet the brick wall of union officials stifling control that prevents any action.

Workplace controlled organisation clearly needs to be established far and wide for all of our interests, now and in the future. We must on all accounts avoid confusing any sentimental loyalty to the unions we belong to, with loyalty to fellow workers. Which after all are important? Trade unions are supposed to put our interests above all else - clearly however their performance, politics and structure say otherwise.

If in order to salvage the current dispute from union incompetence, we set up workplace level organisation and real workers' control then we must be conscious of quickly falling into the same pitfalls as does the TGWU. It will take considerable work and determination, and face equal opposition from both management and TGWU.

Would a permanent bus workers' organisation, even if a minority in terms of membership, save us much grief in the future by its maintenance of a network of workplace level links, in its ability to break the union officials' monopoly on information, by demonstrating that an alternative is possible that can be maintained and over time built up further?

If you think so, we do, then we urge you to give it thought join the TRANSPORT WORKER NETWORK, and most important of all start the work now so desperately needed.

TRANSPORT WORKER

By Transport Workers - For Transport Workers

No. 5 MAY/JUNE 1993

FREE

RMT Strike - Knapp or victory?

By the time this issue of Transport Worker appears the result of the RMT ballot on the current strikes will be known. We can only hope the result will be a massive vote in favour of continuing the strikes.

The fact that we have been reduced to yet another vote after a strike ballot and 2 successful strikes, is a disgrace. Knapp and his cronies on the Executive Committee (EC) used every manoeuvre in the book to try and get the strikes called off. In the end, despite a majority on the EC in favour of further strikes, Knapp, with the help of the President was able to get the strikes suspended through a highly dubious use of the rule book.

This all begs the question that if Knapp and Co were going to accept the first offer put forward by BR - that is, if you can call what's on the table an offer - why call us out on strike in the first place? The answer seems clear. Knapp, along with many officers of the union never wanted a strike, but was bounced into it by a majority of the EC at a

meeting with the miners. He then faced criticism by the Labour Party and TUC for calling a strike and did little to organise an effective campaign. In some areas full-time officers and branch secretaries refused to set up strike meetings and there are even reports of branches returning ballot papers. Knapp, after going through the motions of a speaking tour, was saying in private that the strike ballot would be lost. Is it any wonder then that he attempted to call the strike off at the earliest opportunity?

If the ballot does prove successful the majority on the EC should by-pass Knapp and take control of the campaign and the aims of the strike should be widened to defeating the government's privatisation plans. This will mean the whole of the union's resources being turned over to ensuring the argument is taken out into the membership. This is a major task but how else can we defeat threatened mass redundancies and attacks on pay and conditions other than by defeating rail privatisation?

London Buses

New contracts for London bus workers mean pay cuts of up to 60 a week, longer hours and doubtless job losses. The response has been a series of one day strikes, that have been solid with exception of two subsidiaries. The new contracts have been forced onto bus workers by management keen to minimize running costs in the run-up to privatisation in order to guarantee fat profits for bosses in the future.

Yet again the day-to-day reality of work and the 'economy' shows to whose benefit it serves, not the 'consumer', nor those who produce the wealth - the workers.

The TGWU tactic of one-day strikes has failed to shake the bosses and government. It promises to go down along with so many others as another solid strike, but in the final analysis a glorious defeat for working people. (See this issue's editorial on page 2). - Continued on back page



Interested in the TRANSPORT WORKER NETWORK? For information on membership, meetings, etc tick here _____ For further copies of this TRANSPORT WORKER bulletin and future issues, please fill in this form and return to PO Box 73, Norwich NR1 2EB.

Name

Address

Industry / workplace

Quantity

(Transport Worker is run on a shoestring, so donations are very welcome).

T.W.N. Editorial

What use political parties & hamstrung trade unions?

During recent one day strikes we have noted that the Labour Party refused to support rail, bus and mine workers. When pressed by Tories to support or condemn the strikes, the response of the Labour leadership was to say nothing and hope no one would notice. But behind the scenes they, along with the TUC, informed the unions involved of their displeasure on the grounds that the strikes would alienate public opinion.

Few trade unionists are shocked by the antics of the Labour Party - indeed, there is a growing mood inside at least one transport union, the RMT, to disaffiliate from the party. The problem is, though, that while people are turning away from the Labour Party in increasing numbers, they tend to give up "politics" or join with the growing numbers who are looking towards the formation of a new socialist party.

Here at Transport Worker, we feel that both positions are wrong. The problem lies not in what type of political party - more militant, Marxist or reformist - but in the nature of political parties themselves. Political parties represent an artificial divide between economic and political struggles. All economic struggles are political by their nature. Thus a simple dispute about break times soon turns into a dispute about management's right to manage. The miners' strike soon became not just a fight against pit closures but a fight against the state's attempt to smash the miners along with the rest of the trade union movement. Similarly the one day rail strikes are not just about compulsory redundancies but management's systematic attempts to break unions and conditions in the run-up to privatisation.

The trade union movement, when it took up the Labour Party as its "political wing", went against this basic truth. By limiting themselves to pay and conditions, not only were the unions making the fundamental mistake of not seeing these issues as a vital part of a far wider struggle which had to be fought on a class-wide basis, they were also limiting their own power. Hence, with the collapse of the post-war economic boom and the election of the Thatcher government, instead of organising a class-wide attack against a class enemy, the unions limited their role to defending jobs within their own industries, allowing the Tories to pick off one industry at a time. This process has not ended yet, witness the rail unions refusing to join with miners and London Bus workers at the head of a campaign against privatisation on the grounds that this would be political.

Nor is this stunting of power the only detrimental consequence of the split between the economic and political. The idea that the unions and the Labour Party are equal partners in the same movement, pursuing the same ends, is little more than a myth. The aim of political parties is to gain power in a society, based not on workers' control and self-government, but on rulers and ruled. If, in a political party's search for power, the interests of workers comes into conflict with party interests, the party will always come first. This has been the history of the Labour Party and of all political parties, Marxist or non-Marxist.

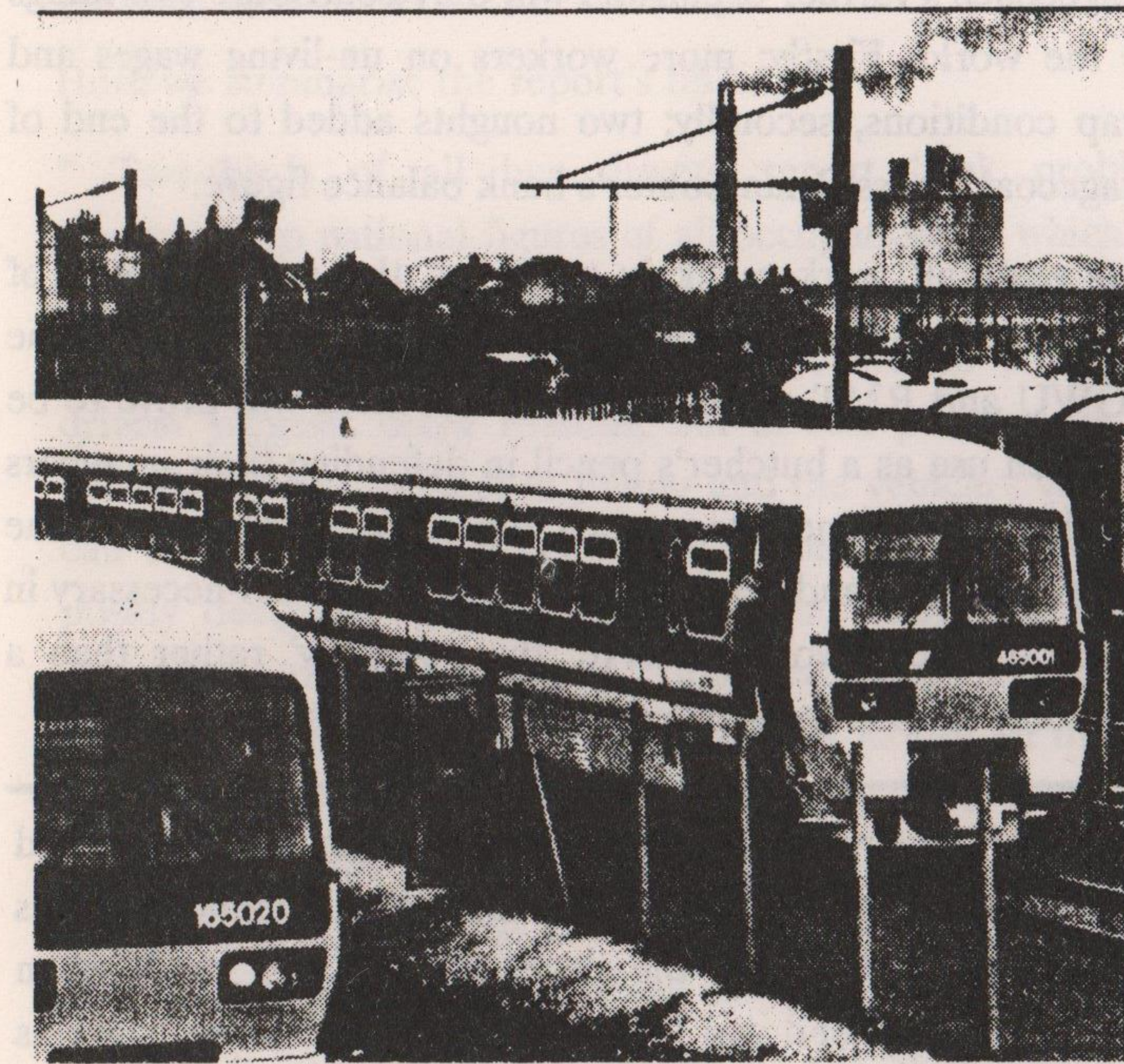
At Transport Worker we believe in trying to avoid the mistakes of the past and are against trying to build a new socialist party. We state quite clearly that we are independent of all political parties. This does not mean that we see ourselves as non-political, just the opposite. We seek to build a politicised union movement, one that does not divide the political from the economic but starts by seeing the fight for pay and conditions as part of an on-going struggle between capital and labour. It will be a movement, not just based in the workplace but also in the community, that will unite large sections of the working class into one organisation, whose long-term aim will be a new society based on workers' control. This is not, we might add, a new way of organising but one with a long tradition in the workers' movement.



BREL looks black

BREL, the privatised train manufacturer, has warned that it may have to close its Derby and York works if new orders don't come in soon. The two closures would mean the loss of 3,500 jobs and would leave Crewe as the only major works left in the group.

The announcement is yet another disaster in a long line of bitter blows to train manufacturing in Britain. It is also yet another indictment of the Tories' attitude to the manufacturing sector. Before privatisation BREL employed over 30,000 workers and was considered world leader in



many aspects of train-making. The Tories, through blind hatred of the public sector, set about the wholesale destruction of BREL with massive closures and job losses in the run-up to privatisation. The company was starved of investment with new orders being placed with firms which had little or no history of train-making. The disaster of the Leyland-built 142 and 155 units are the best examples.

The new owners of BREL, Swiss engineering giant, Asea Brown Boveri, are blaming the threatened closures on the government's privatisation plans which stop BR ordering new trains.

If this final nail in the BREL coffin goes ahead it will set the seal on a government strategy which has seen the destruction of whole areas with a train-making tradition going back 200 years at a time when there is a massive worldwide demand for new rolling stock. Compare this with Italy and France where huge public investment in new train technology is now paying off with worldwide orders and where train manufacturing now forms the cornerstone of a high-tech engineering base. It is a bitter reflection on Britain's slide into a third world economy, where workers get third world pay and conditions along with third rate trade unions.

YOUR NEWS. 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.

BUS NEWS BUS NEWS

HOUNSLOW & LEASIDE BUS WORKERS SACKED

Drivers have been sacked for refusing to sign the new contracts being imposed across London that mean lower pay, longer hours and many likely job losses. The TGWU has done its best to stifle any immediate response to the sackings. Its defence of these workers is all too similar to that of the RMT's for the sacked reps in Manchester.

GLASGOW - 2% REJECTED, STRIKE ON

As we go to print bus workers are set to strike Saturday May 1st. Yet again union officials are with management in pushing for acceptance.

WALSALL BUS WORKERS STRIKE AGAINST SACKING

Four one-day strikes have been held in response to the sacking of a rep by West Midlands Travel. The demand is full reinstatement. Management have now offered to reinstate the rep on condition that he has a written warning and is transferred eight miles away in Wolverhampton. This unsatisfactory response by the bosses has rightly been rejected by the workers who are sticking to their demand of full conditional reinstatement.

WORK TO RULE AGAINST PAY OFFER Bus workers in Pendle and Burnley are currently on a work to rule after management rejected their pay claim.

WESTERN SCOTTISH REJECT PAY OFFER Drivers here have not seen a pay rise since March 1990 and have gone on a series of one day strikes along with an overtime ban until management come up with a decent offer. An offer of 9 extra a week for conventional drivers and 7 for minibus drivers has been rejected as was the union officials recommendation.

WALK OUT AGAINST LACK OF CAB HEATING Management at Thornton Heath garage, south London in early March insisted a driver carry on working despite there being no cab heating. A midday meeting of bus workers resulted in a walk out.

WILLEDON BUS WORKERS FIGHT SACKING Mid-March, in protest at management sacking a driver who spat at a scab bus, fellow workers gave a clear message by walking out and rejecting union officials advice not to.

Stagecoach to snap-up rail and bus co's

The Stagecoach bus empire is shortly to float shares on the Stock Exchange to the tune of 100 million.

With already twelve local bus outfits totalling about 1/20th of the UK's bus industry (as well as operations in Malawi, Kenya and New Zealand), Stagecoach have been among the worst offenders at cutting bus workers wages and attacking union organisation.

To maintain their operations on the lowest of pay and long hours Stagecoach have used the ploy of offering workers a stake in a Share Ownership Plan, which 2,000 have taken up. The effect as intended, has been to hoodwink the workforce, despite grinding and highly exploitative work, into believing they're then on the merry-go-round of being wheeling-dealing share owners. This con-trick is hardly highly sophisticated, but seems to have some success. The achieved result being that we are put in a position of having a strong interest in our own continued wage-slavery. The lower our pay, the higher the profits, the greater the value of shares.

Needless to say the lion's share of money made by Stagecoach in its operations and shares flotation will not be seen by the likes of you and I. It will go straight into three areas- buying

GOOD TRADE UNION PRACTICE?

To appreciate this I think you have to look at this in a different light. The question that was put was simple, would the members accept a settlement that had not been discussed by the branch? Put forward by the stewards and recommended for acceptance on the grounds that the Company could not afford any more.

No explanation about how they read the minds of the members and knew what their wishes were. No suggestion that this was, at 2.25%, an insulting offer. The picture of the Branch Secretary standing wringing his hands like Shylock while he defends the poor Company who are in dire straits. What straits? When questioned on the profit level and the share dividend, this information was not given but had to be pried out of them.

The interests and working conditions of the membership should be the first priority of the stewards, having been in place and unchallenged for a long number of years, this has led to a nice cosy relationship with the bosses. The result in this case is that they have become elected apologists, not what they were elected for.

A good example would be that they told us the Company had made no profit. This was untrue, the Company had made

into London Buses when privatised, the 35 municipal bus companies also soon to be privatised, and the future break-up and selling off of British Rail.

In order to shit on working people, Stagecoach throw rulebooks out the window. It's time we stopped worrying about laws, listening to wet union officials and do the same. That means playing dirty, taking direct charge of our own disputes and giving the likes of Brian Souter a taste of the misery he for too long has inflicted on our class.

Stagecoach's further expansion will only contribute two things to the world. Firstly; more workers on un-living wages and crap conditions, secondly; two noughts added to the end of Stagecoach boss Brian Souter's bank balance figure.

Bus and rail workers likely to be on the receiving end of Stagecoach's expansions would do well to note that both the TGWU and RMT on past and present form will prove to be as much use as a butcher's pencil in defending their members in what is to come. Stagecoach represent a 'triumph' of the capitalist ethos and dogma of profit-by-all-means-necessary in a world where workers serve 'the economy' rather than a economy shaped to fit people and their needs.

1.6million, this must be used for new vehicles, not for pay and conditions. £5million was paid to the parent company, profits up by 39% and in 1992 the shareholders had a shock when their share dividend was frozen - at 8.4%, the same figure as in 1991. The pay rise in 1991 was 4.3% and in 1992 2.25%. Is there an inequality between the treatment of the workers and the shareholders? Is this a situation that should be attacked by reasonable trade union reps? It should be, but in the case of Eastern Counties it did not happen, and in this there are a few lessons to be that can be learned.

The first is do not trust your representatives to go alone to the management, there should always be a mandate from the branch. Any information that comes back should go to all members, and be in a form that is understandable. Where there is evidence of profit then the workers are entitled to a share of what they have created.

This is not only the product of deregulation, but of the failure of trade union practice. This happened in a fairly large bus company with a large union membership. Clearly the people who are on the branch committee have such a degree of control that they have the arrogance to ignore the wishes of the membership and represent to a degree the views of the management. This can only be avoided by controlling the present union structure from the basic decision making body - the branch. The only other alternative would be to appeal directly to the workforce and form an alternative to the present structure. You could take this as a cautionary tale. Remember this could be happening to you, would you know?

Bus Driving & Strain Injuries

The recent publication of a South Yorkshire Transport committee TGWU report "The Silent Injury - strain injuries and bus drivers in South Yorkshire" makes a good start at pinpointing many previously unacknowledged hazards.

The report's findings, whilst not cheery reading, should alert drivers to their seriousness and inspire us to see that improvements are quickly made. For copies of the report contact R. Morrison, c/o TGWU Region 9, Blenheim Terrace, Leeds. Tel.0532 451587.

Here we summarise the report's findings:

* Two-thirds of all bus drivers report back problems. Compared to national figures of all occupations in which only 3.6% suffer. * Whilst back problems are commonly associated with heavy manual work, the high occurrence among bus drivers suggests other reasons. Sat in one position for long periods of time, subject to jolting and the vehicle's vibrations can do untold damage. The seat is much of the problem - poorly designed, difficult to adjust and badly sprung. Bus operators and manufacturers don't consider it a priority. Twisting to take fares at every stop takes its toll on the back. * Neck problems and back ache and pain are the most common. This connects directly with being sat in one position for long periods of time behind the wheel. * Half the drivers surveyed reported aching shoulders, half again aching or painful legs. The former caused by pulling and twisting to collect fares, the latter from poor circulation from long periods of sitting and cold draughts in winter. * A significant

proportion of drivers suffer arm, wrist and finger problems.

It is clear that the cab seat is the main culprit along with the lengths of time a driver is sat behind the wheel without a break. Long spells in poorly designed cabs are the main reason that such large numbers of drivers suffer back, neck, leg and shoulder problems from work.

What can be done?

-Cab seat and cab design changes.- New types of seat are on trial. These are the KAB seat, also the Grammer seat. Both of which are improvements on existing designs.

-Better compensation for strain injury sufferers.- A number of bus workers have had to leave work due to back and neck injuries, most often without compensation and rarely eligible for a pension under medical retirement rules. These strain injuries need to be recognised as qualifying for disability benefit. Bosses should be made to make payments to drivers forced to leave work for these reasons.

-Improve awareness of the dangers of strain injuries.- With sick pay being lower than basic pay, drivers are tempted to ignore symptoms and medical advice in order to maintain a living wage, but at the same time making matters worse. If advised to find other work that will be less damaging, we are in a hopeless position with so little work around.

Get copies of this report and most importantly make changes happen.

In the first issue of Transport Worker over 18 months ago we argued that the rail workers should join with the miners, London Bus workers and Tube workers in a joint campaign to defeat the government's planned attacks on their industries. This was not a hysterical empty slogan like the call on the TUC to organise a general strike but a practical solution to the continuing problems facing transport workers. The fact that on at least one of the 24-hour strikes bus, rail and mineworkers came out together, more by luck than planning, bears witness to the possibility of our call.

We remain convinced that unless workers begin to look beyond their own industries and unions to a class-wide fightback, then the attacks on workers will continue. For this to happen it will take more than the odd slogan but a change in direction with a worked out strategy. We believe that a change in direction is both possible and urgent and we hope to play our part in bringing it about.

BUS STRATEGY

'A STRATEGY FOR BUS WORKERS' is available from us. Written by bus workers, it takes a look at the bus industry, trade unions and working conditions, and proposes a strategy for tackling some of the basic problems facing us - low pay, long hours, poor working conditions, poor unionisation if any, and the industry's intense competitiveness.

For copies for your depot, write to Transport Worker Network, PO Box 73, Norwich NR1 2EB. (please state quantity required).