

The Syndicalist

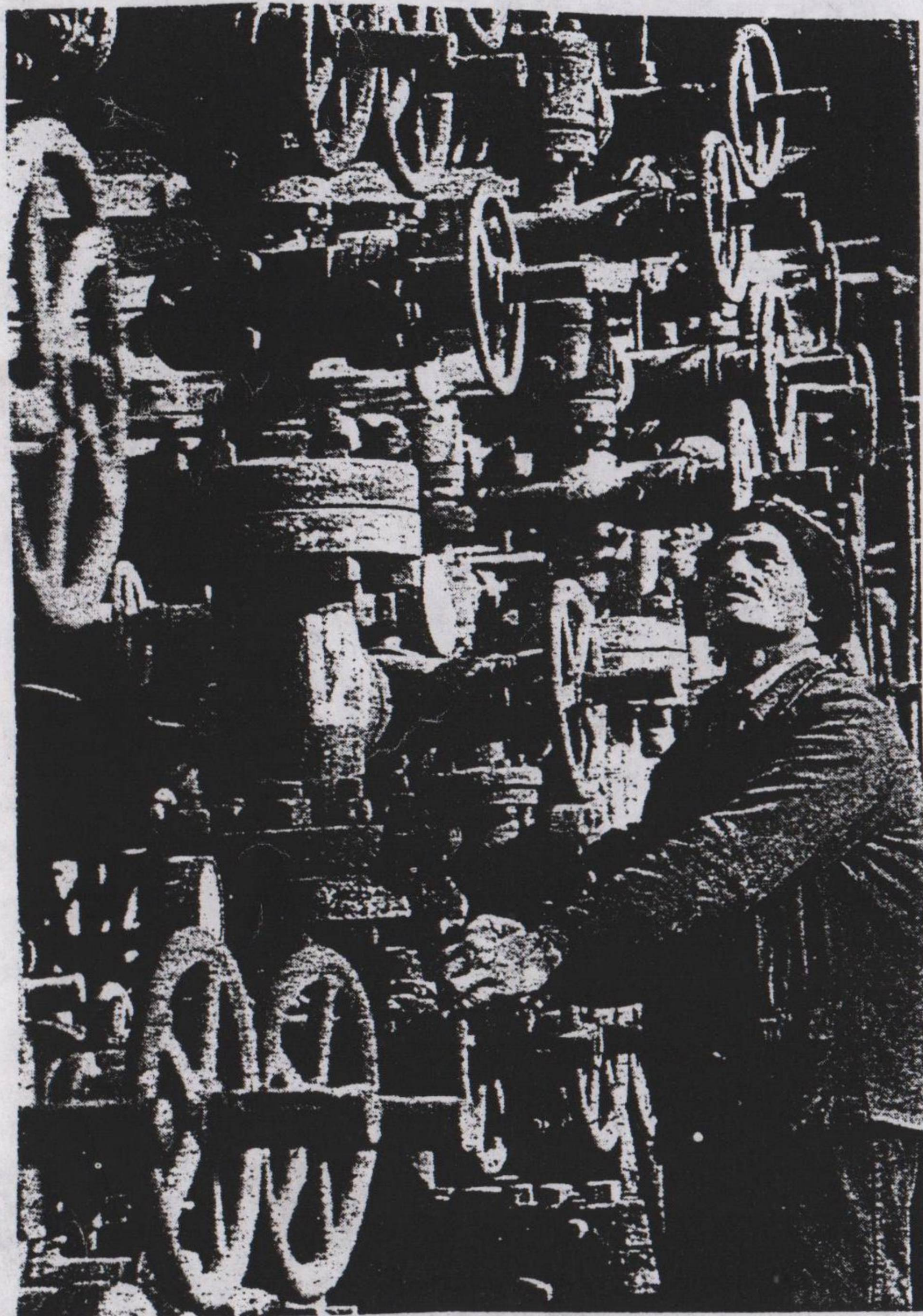
Special Issue – Anarchist Bookfair – October 98

Produced by the Syndicalist Alliance

TAKE A BREAK!

Winning the working time directive

By Guy Cheverton



Syndicalists never look to governments or the European Union to sort out workers' problems, instead we rely on our own strength as a class. Having said that why should we look a gift-horse in the mouth?

Earlier this month the European working time directive came into force in Britain. It seeks to limit excessive working hours and gives three weeks paid holiday to all employees with three months or more service, this rises to four weeks in October 1999. This will benefit millions of people in shit work industries, from your local pubs bar staff to office temps.

Many unions have been holding seminars on the working time directive for the last two years, but when recently I phoned my MSF regional office for guidance on eligibility for holiday pay for so-called casual staff in my workplace (so casual they've worked there for four years in some instances). The official told me "Roger Lyons" (MSF General Secretary) has circularised us saying "do nothing until some legal test cases have been won".

Even when it's "the law" most unions fight shy of enforcing it. So, it is up to us! The one good thing that the union did on this occasion was to send us the actual chapter and verse directives. Thus armed a colleague went to the office manager who did not know the directives fine print and got himself his rightful weeks wages for the five days holiday that he had booked to take the coming week.

Without our spreading the word this minor revolution in working conditions in our workplace would not have happened. If most workers who are eligible for its benefits are ignorant of the directive then so luckily are many employers.

The Syndicalist Alliance is an organisation of pragmatic idealists, we have our principles but little dogmatism, and we want to win some victories for a change. Education and direct action can make the provisions of the directive known to the precariously employed; the cucumber picker, agency worker, factory packer and security guard. This can be done through leaflets produced by union branches, trades councils or our own Syndicalist Alliance. We can bring the dead letter of this law to life, help build organisation and show that direct action can be the key to unlocking the rights that are already ours.

THE WORKING TIME REGULATIONS, 1998

- ✔ Means workers outside the transport industry, marine workers and some health staff cannot be forced to work more than a forty-eight hour week.
- ✔ Workers who have worked for the same employer for more than three months can claim three weeks paid holiday this year, rising to four weeks in October 1999.
- ✔ The regulations also cover rest periods, night work and monotonous work.

For a copy of our user-friendly 8-page guide to the directive send an A4 SAE to the Syndicalist.

FRANKENSTEIN'S KITCHEN PRESENTS ...



In September, the High Court in London, bio-tech giants Monsanto granted what has already been dubbed the most 'wide ranging injunctions ever seen in British law.'

Five women from the Genetix Snowball campaign along with the press officer have been effectively *SLAPP*'ed. *SLAPP*'s are *Strategic Lawsuits Against Public Participation* and are a common weapon frequently used by American companies. Andrew Rowell author of 'Green Backlash' said the *SLAPP* was intended to "intimidate its critics into silence."

The injunction orders the six not to trespass on Monsanto's land and premises; uproot, destroy or otherwise damage or interfere with any of the companies plants or crops; plant or insert into the land or leave any crop or other article at a Monsanto site, or attempt or conspire with others to do any such act. In addition the six will be liable for any damage caused at Monsanto's sites by other 'members' of Genetix Snowball. This despite the fact that the campaign has no membership. In effect this means the six could be liable for damage done to genetically engineered (GE) sites without them even knowing the people involved!

The injunctions were rushed through last week to stop a planned mass Genetix Snowball action where plans were afoot to plant an organic garden on a GE test site. The bio-tech industry obviously feels it's a little under siege. This summer's favourite past-time for the direct action movement seems to have been 'hunt the gene field' before trashing it! So far 38 have been 'de-contaminated'. However these often late night activities differ considerably from the snowball campaign in which people are up front about their activities telling the landowner and bio-tech companies what they are about to do. Dubbed 'a campaign of non-violent civil responsibility' they dig up GE plants and put them in biohazard bags. People are prepared beforehand in case of arrest. Those participating then hope to incite at least two other people to do the same thing - and so the snowball gathers momentum. However, the *SLAPP* could stop the campaign dead in its tracks...or will it? Rumours have also emerged that the bio-tech industry may even announce a 5 year voluntary moratorium in the UK to show they are listening to public fears. In a recent MORI poll 77% of those questioned wanted GE crops banned. However, even if its stopped temporarily in the UK, it doesn't mean we won't be eating GE foods. For example 60% of processed foodstuff we eat contains soya - and this could be genetically modified, but with no effective food labeling it is impossible to tell.

More telling is a comment by Tom McDermott, head of Monsanto's public affairs in Europe "Our genes are incorporated into approximately 19 million acres around the world, covering an area larger than Switzerland and the Netherlands combined. Can Europe at this point really resist?" As Jim Snail from the American Earth First! movement explains "It may be at the end of the day

that Europe can stay GE free, but unless resistance spreads there is still the rest of the world to lose."

Because even if you're not bothered about scoffing Frankenstein's food, the wider implications should set alarm bells ringing. As environmentalist George Monbiot points out, if Monsanto get their way then "a small number of companies will be controlling the biggest commodity market of all: food."

And that's just scary.

INFORM YERSELF!

To find out more about Monsanto, get a copy of the latest issue 'The Ecologist', which is entitled the 'Monsanto Files'. Order a copy from your newsagents or send £4 to Unit 18, Chelsea Wharf, 15 Lots Rd., London, SW10 0QJ

Genetic Engineering Network
PO BOX 9656, London, N4 4JY Tel 0181 374 9516

E-mail: genetics@gn.apc.org Web:

<http://www.dmac.co.uk/gen.html>

GenetiX Snowball Campaign

c/o One World Centre, 6 Mount St., Manchester, M25NS Tel: 0161 834 0295 (SEND a large SAE for a copy of handbook and strategy paper).

E-mail: genetixsnowball@orangenet.co.uk

Third World Network

228 Macalister Road, 10400 Penang, Malaysia. Comprehensive legal and scientific reports on the perils of biotech are available on <http://www.twinside.org.sg/>

GRAIN

Girona 25, pral, E-8010, Barcelona, Spain <http://www.grain.org/> [Turn your autoloading images off first though - the home page is a nightmare! - Online Editor]. Publish *Seedling*, a quarterly newsletter promoting sustainable agriculture / people's control over genetic resources and local knowledge.

GET (GARDEN) TOOLED UP!

- For a list of GE release sites go to <http://www.envirolink.org/shag/info/location/grid1.html> [Where's this gone? - Online Editor]. Not everyone thinks the snowball campaign is such a good idea - for a critique send a SAE c/o Leeds EF!, 16 Sholebroke Ave., Chapelton, Leeds, LS7 3HB
- Three people from the Scottish GenetiX Snowball were arrested in September and charged with theft and housebreaking after taking sample plants from a GE potato crop to send off to the Scottish Environmental Protection Agency. Apparently a poly tunnel is now classified as a house!

GLASGOW SOCIAL WORKERS UPDATE

The ballot for strike action, which followed the recent unofficial walk-out (reported in Issue 1) was lost 610-680, partly because the union bureaucrats refused to include some of those involved in the original dispute. Nevertheless, there is still a militant atmosphere amongst the workforce - another "stooshie" can't be far off.

If you like what you read then why not subscribe? Initially the **Syndicalist** will be quarterly, but in future who knows! £2 gets you the next 4 issues.

The **Syndicalist**,

39 Sheriff's Highway, Hedon, Hull HU12 8HA

NEPTUNE JADE – ROUND 2



• Robert Irminger at the 1998 IWW General Assembly

The Pacific Maritime Association is continuing its efforts to compel IWW member Robert Irminger to name each of the dozens of workers and supporters who picketed Yusen Terminal in the Port of Oakland, California, last Fall in solidarity with the locked-out Liverpool dockers.

The bosses' association is also demanding the identity of everyone with whom FW Irminger communicated regarding the picket and detailed descriptions of those communications, and a list of all organisations with which he is associated. "A lot of the information I don't have," Irminger notes. "Word got out through the radio and just through an informal network, and people just came down on their own initiative and joined in the picket line. So obviously I didn't know a lot of the people, but of course if I did know their identities I would not divulge them."

Irminger, who is also San Francisco Region chair of the ILWU-affiliated Inland Boatmen's Union, served as picket captain during the three and a half days of picketing. After word got out that the Neptune Jade was due in port, several activists showed up early on a Sunday morning, meeting longshoremen with a picket line when they arrived to work the ship around 7:30 a.m. "Ordinary workers see the sense of solidarity," Irminger told the IWW General Assembly, and so they refused to cross the line.

When an arbitrator rejected FW Irminger's contention that he was a representative of the Liverpool dockers, the longshoremen refused to cross the line on health and safety grounds. The arbitrator agreed, a ruling that was repeated several times over the next three days. But the arbitrator ruled that there was no longer a health and safety issue when police showed up in force to break the picket line. The longshoremen still refused, "saying they do not cross picket lines with an armed escort, and especially with an armed police escort, citing the murder by police of six strikers in the 1934 maritime strike on the West Coast."

The Neptune Jade then fled for Canada, where longshoremen again refused to cross a picket line, and for Japan, with no more success, before being sold in Taiwan. While Superior Court Judge Henry Needham has cleared most defendants of the PMA charges, he has

allowed the suit to proceed against Irminger on the grounds that he bore particular responsibility for the action as picket captain. Irminger's only role as picket captain was to act as liaison with the arbitrator and police, and that he had no authority over the other pickets. He has already been subjected to hours of questioning by PMA attorneys who, Irminger says, seem incapable of realising that informal structures exist and that he and others acted on their own initiative. "The corporate world does not have a clue about solidarity," he said. "They think there has to be someone at the top giving orders."

The lawsuit seeks unspecified damages, perhaps running into the hundreds of thousands of dollars. The Pacific Maritime Association has been turning to the courts with increasing frequency in the past two years. Part of the shippers' strategy is to engage the ILWU in as many lawsuits as possible, forcing the union to divert funds and energy to the courts. Dockers closed San Francisco area ports for half a day July 22 and rallied at the courthouse during an attempt by the PMA to subpoena documents about the picket from the ILWU. Judge Needham ruled in the union's favour three weeks later.

The bosses had threatened to sue FW Irminger and other pickets during the action, but he didn't believe them. "They don't sue you for picketing, for god's sake," Irminger said. "But they do sue you, particularly when you're effective." Dockworkers wield enormous industrial power, he noted, and "the shipping bosses' worst nightmare is the port workers working together, co-ordinating their efforts."

The defence campaign has drawn wide support, "highlighting the fact that you bring out the best in people when you have a militant struggle," Irminger said. (Contributions for the legal costs can be sent to the Liverpool Dockers Defence Committee, PO Box 2574, Oakland CA 94614.)

Irminger placed the lawsuit in the broader context of a global assault against dockworkers' unions over the past 15 years. Shipping bosses are privatising ports and smashing unions around the world. Dockers are facing massive automation, speed-up and sub-contracting of support functions in an effort to break their industrial power.

The Liverpool dispute which prompted the picketing of the Neptune Jade ended with the loss of the last organised port in England. West Coast Mexican ports were privatised a few years ago, and the military occupied them when workers struck. A similar scenario developed last year in Santos, Brazil, the largest port in South America.

This year's Australian strike was another battle in this war. And dockers have come to recognise that they can rely only upon their fellow workers for support in this global class war. And workers are learning their lesson. When workers picketed the Los Angeles docks last summer to block unloading of scab cargo they had no picket captain to be sued. And ultimately the scab-loaded cargo had to be returned to Australia.

Tameside Careworkers

Members of the Syndicalist Alliance joined hundreds of trade unionists, strikers and their families in a tremendous show of support in an incredibly wet Stalybridge.

A long, good-humoured and well received march through the town culminated with a rally and speakers including Noel Pine (UNISON Branch Secretary).

CHANGE THE GOVERNMENT BUT FOR GOD'S SAKE LEAVE THE POLICIES INTACT

By Derek Durkin, CWU (Personal Capacity)



The election of the "New Labour" government was greeted with loud acclaim by the great majority of the British public, including many postal workers. We felt that we could justifiably claim victory in our fight against privatisation. After all the Labour party in opposition had supported our "Stand By Your Post" campaign and pledged during the '97 election campaign to retain the Post Office in public ownership. There were those of us who were more than a little suspicious of that statement given the other pledges made by senior sources, like their refusal to raise taxes on the parasites who have bled the workers almost dry since '79 and their adoption of Tory spending plans for at least two years.

... the haggis will come off the hills and join the revolution!

The Tory spending plans were of course based on the massive windfall awaiting them following the sale of the Post Office. There were a host of people who would seek to convince us otherwise. After 18 long years of Tory rule "we" had to become electable. That means saying things that made "Middle Englanders" feel safe. Once in government they would of course carry through their real manifesto. Yes, and the haggis will come off the hills and join the revolution!

Margaret Beckett said that the post office was safe in public ownership as long as she was around (didn't Thatcher saying something similar about the NHS?) at this years annual CWU conference. Within 6 weeks she had been replaced at the DTI by the Prince of Darkness (a.k.a. Peter Mandelson). The master of spin didn't hang around, he promptly contacted his slugs in the tabloids who ran a story about a £2,000 bonus for "posties" in return for selling our industry to the pigs in the city.

If there is a lesson to be learned from this it is a simple one. Workers must be as blinkered in their approach to governments as the bosses are. Our allegiances must lie only with our selves, anything less is a dilution of principle which history shows us only ends in further suffering.

This government, and any other, can rest assured of one thing. We will not sit back and watch while the spin doctors, power-crazed politicians and fat cat bosses dangle carrots at us. The fight to save our industry and jobs is a real one in which we will not find wanting.

BARCELONA POSTIES FIGHT SACKINGS WITH HUNGER STRIKE

By Mick Parkin

Following on from the series of strikes which were reported in the first copy of the Syndicalist, the authorities have begun proceedings to sack 62 postal workers in Barcelona. Their crime was to refuse to work 'servicios minimos' which is the staffing level which the government decides is necessary to avoid excessive upset as a result of industrial action i.e. to make sure that the action is ineffective.

Their situation isn't helped by the fact that they all belong to the reformist CCOO union, which is no longer backing the dispute, but even so the CGT has taken up their cause. Two CGT members staged a four day hunger strike from the 5th to the 8th October in the main lobby of Barcelona's central post office. Their presence under the enormous domed roof of this impressive building eventually provoked the riot police to turn up and throw them out in the middle of the night, but when the doors opened next day they were straight back in again.

The strike got massive press and tv coverage, which we will be carrying details of in our next issue, and as a result the Assistant Director of the Postal Service arranged to come over from Madrid on the 14th October to discuss the situation, with our comrades confident that they will get a good outcome.

Syndicalist Alliance Conference

**REFORMIST UNIONS
CAN'T LIVE WITH 'EM
- CAN'T LIVE WITHOUT 'EM?
Liverpool, February 6th, 1999**

Speakers:

PILAR CARILLO - Militant of the CGT Postal Workers' section in Barcelona, currently involved in hunger strikes, work stoppages and occupations to prevent the privatisation of Spain's postal service

BOB RICHIE - Liverpool Docks Shop Steward

ALAN MacSIMOIN - member of the WSM in Dublin and active in organising the rank-and-file union paper "SIPTU Fightback"

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