

ROAD TO REBELLION

A SPANNER IN THE WORKS

Welcome to the first edition of Road to Rebellion. This humble beginning will hopefully lead to some great things. The Despatch Industry Workers Union (DIWU), like Road to Rebellion, is a small entity at the moment, but the potential is enormous. There are at least 5,000 riders, drivers, mechanics and office staff working in the despatch industry and our goal is to get everyone in the Union.

This Union has no rich backers or political leaders. Nor do we want them, because the DIWU should never be a puppet to anybody. It is a Union controlled democratically by the membership.

If all of us who work in the despatch industry get properly organised we can get anything we want. And there is a great deal that we all need eg. sick pay, holiday pay, minimum wages, vehicle allowances, job security, etc. As the Union increases in numbers (and therefore strength) we aim to force the employers to give us what we need or else be faced with a strike or some other form of industrial action. Due to the high-pressure nature of the despatch industry, just a short strike will have the boss sweating buckets (as seen in the report from Germany) In that sense we can have a great deal of industrial 'muscle'.

Winning better pay and conditions is the first job of the DIWU, but there is more to the Union than that. We see the bosses in our industry getting filthy rich thanks to our hard work. We have to struggle to make ends meet and we take all the risks while the bosses laugh all the way to the bank. This state of affairs is unjust. We believe that the

despatch industry and all other industries can and should be run collectively, democratically and fairly by and for those who work in it.

The key to getting these things is solidarity. If we stick together and go on strike, or threaten to strike we can get the boss grovelling at our feet to please, please come back to work.

But solidarity is essential. If half the despatch workforce walk out on strike from a firm, but the other half work double to cover then the strike will be lost. If we all stick together the boss must give in to us or face bankruptcy.

A large, strong and militant union is the best thing that could happen to the despatch industry. If you agree with the DIWU Basic Principles on the back page you should become a member. DON'T DELAY. JOIN TODAY!



"All they think about is money..."



No. 1

CONTENTS:

Liable, Slander, Blasphemy, Treason, Incitement to Riot, Obscenity, Heresy, High Treason, Piracy, Incitement to Disaffect, Incitement to think for ourselves, Conspiracy to have a good laugh.

STRIKE VICTORY!

Despatch riders at Top Case, a large firm in Frankfurt, Germany recently had a two-hour strike and won a massive increase in wages as well as other concessions.

Before the strike the riders got 60% of the fee charged to the customer. Now they get 85%! They have set a fine example to us all.

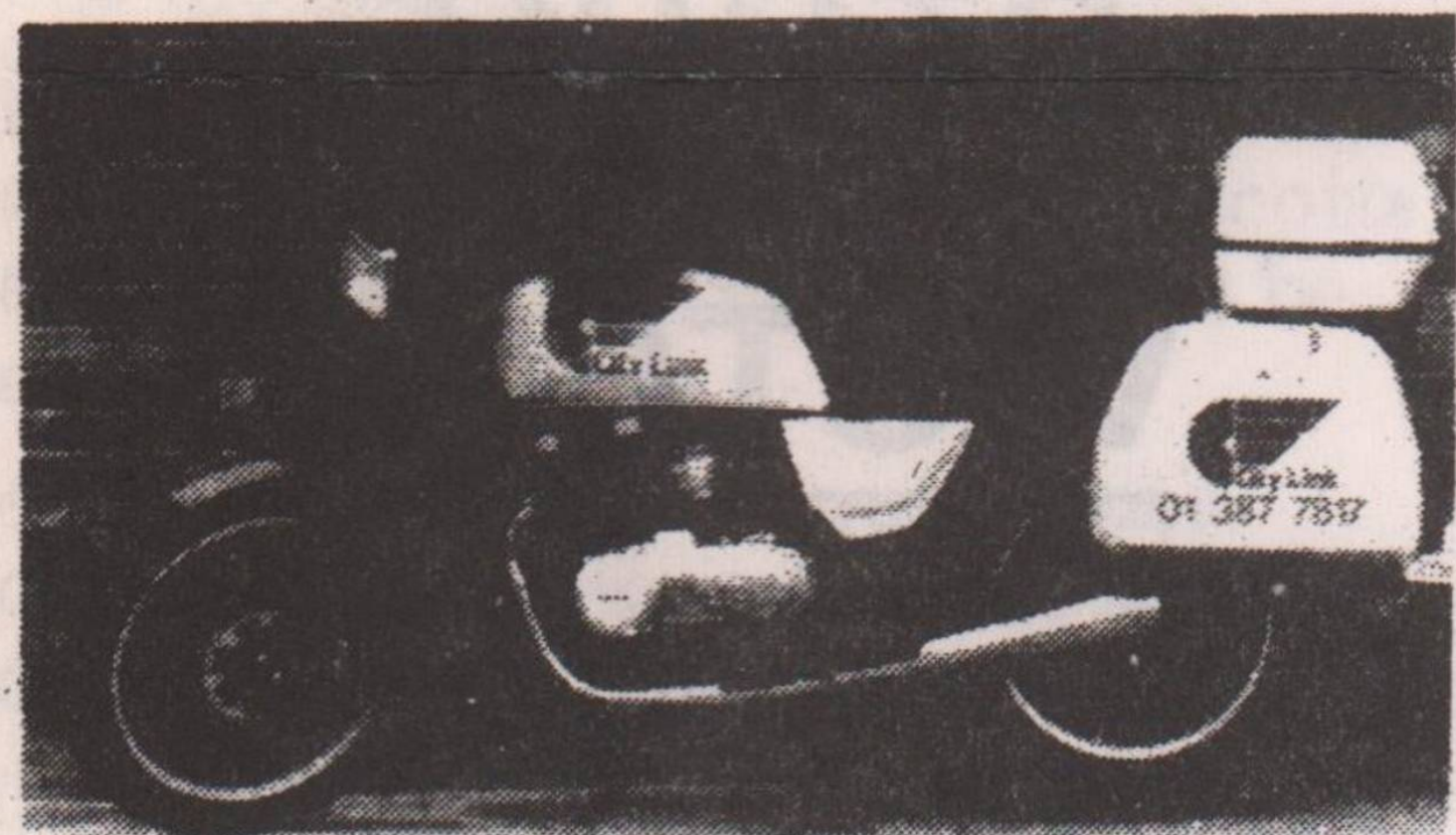
This story is especially relevant because the boss of Top Case, Harold Frenckel, occasionally comes over and tries to recruit riders here to work in Frankfurt. Apparently some British riders have already been badly ripped off, caught between a bastard boss and the German tax system — so look out.

LATE NEWS...Harold Frenckel came into Britain on Friday 5th May on another head-hunting trip. More info on this next issue.

ALL THAT GLITTERS IS NOT GOLD

Have you noticed how interested everyone has suddenly become in despatch riders? The 'official' motorcycle newspapers and magazines now have pages turned over to news and gossip about the goings on of London's finest and until recently a couple of 'independants' were being circulated. We even have a 'Despatcher of the Year' competition, with all these nice companies and organisations sponsoring it. Well, I don't mind them handing over free bikes to the lucky winner, but I can't help asking why?

Now as we all know, the motorcycle business is in a bit of a state at the moment, with sales of their overpriced machines somewhere in the doldrum region. Probably the



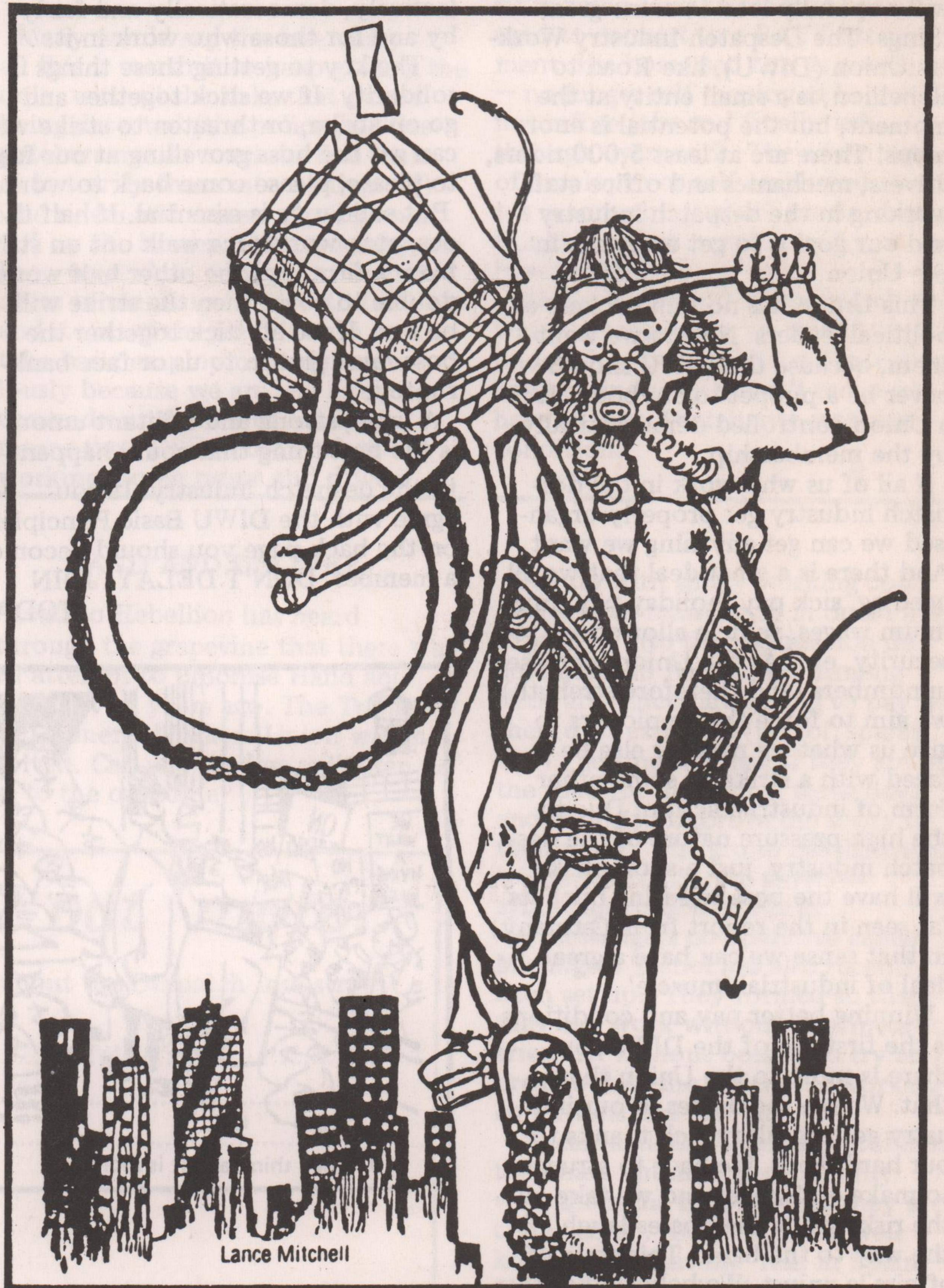
only thing keeping it buoyant at the present is the fact that there's 5,000 odd people out there who make their livelihood on bikes and so need spares, servicing and of course, new machines. You can just see the dollar signs flashing in their eyes.

On the push-bike front, the situation is not of falling sales, but of boom-time. Push-bike sales are up, as are 'cycling accessories'. Cycling clothing has made it into the realms of the Paris fashion shows. Hornets went out and got their riders black 501's (great until it rains) and the Observers fashion feature could come out with hype about the 'romance' of the 'two-wheeled Valentinos'. (There wasn't anything about the experiences of the many women riders, whose existence wasn't even hinted at). We have it on reliable authority that when the riders went down to the Observer to be photo-

graphed, some of them had their bags taken off them because they were considered too dirty. Then they were told to dress up in the trendy cycle gear from a big pile provided by the fashion industry.

Where all this is leading, is that people are being attracted to cycle messengering for the glamour and the street-cred, i.e. for illusions. This suits the bosses nicely: they can pick and choose from the increasing num-

ber of applicants and are under no pressure to improve conditions. It all reminds me of when I used to work in a famous posh department store. The shop assistants were so dazzled by the glamerous, Dynasty-type atmosphere and passing celebrities that they tended not to notice the paltry wages, the long hours on their feet and the supervisors acting like little Hitlers while the store took £6 million profit a week. When I got my first week's pay as a bicycle messenger I got that same familiar sensation: underneath the glamour and the hype, I was being had. Underneath the illusion of the 'two-wheeled Valentino', cycle couriers are little different from what the Observer normally regards as the 'greaseball motorbike despatch trade' - low-paid, undervalued wage slaves working an exhausting, dirty, and dangerous job.



Lance Mitchell

£50 A DAY minimum

(and that's just to get
out of bed in the morning)

It's 9a.m. You're in town, you're feeling good; you've made it in on time; you've got a full tank of petrol and you're just waiting for that Guildford wait and return.

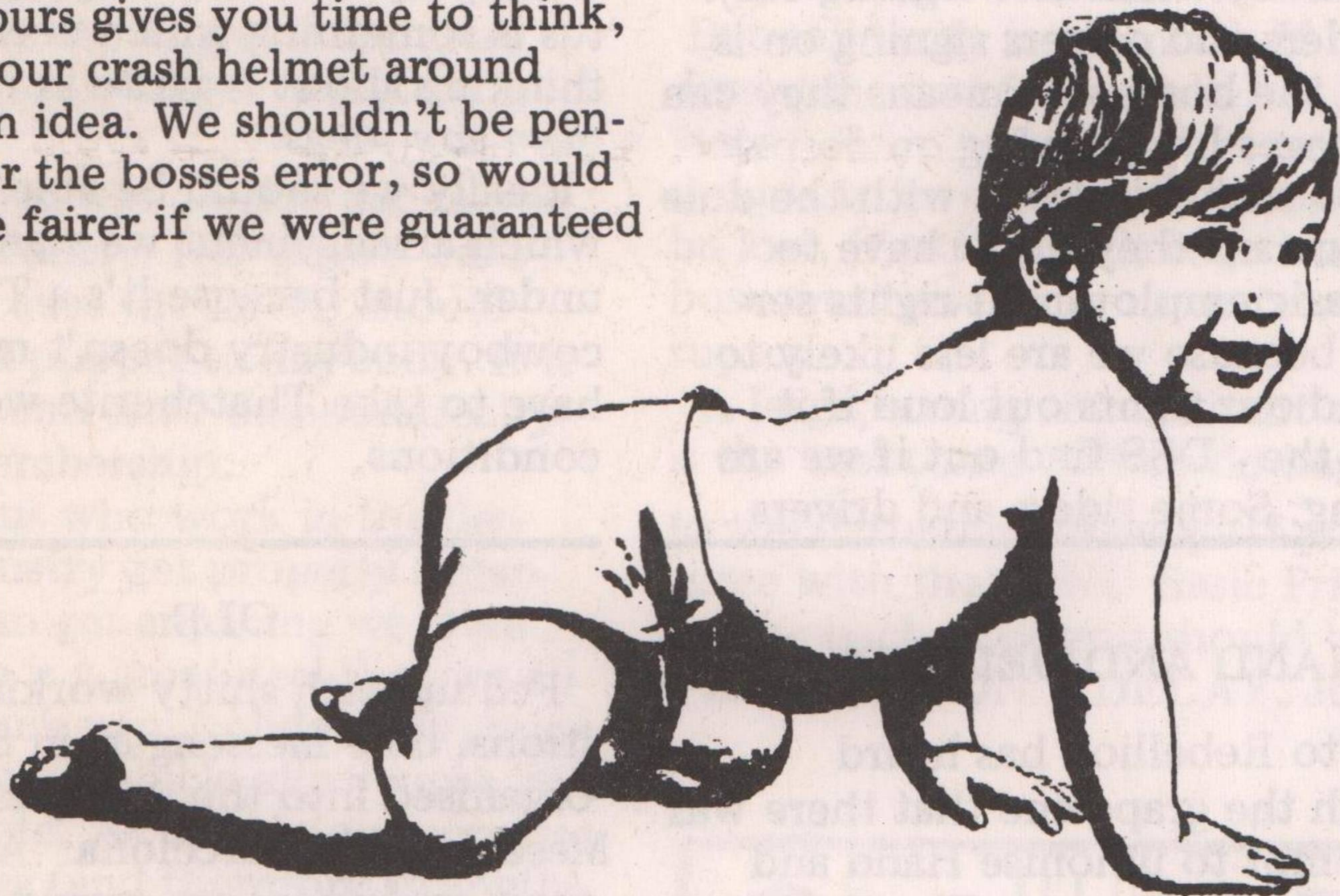
.....Two hours later and you are still waiting as your controller tries to palm you off with a W1 — W1 just to put ink on that empty job-sheet.

Yes, we've all had days like this and we all know what a piss-off it is. Why should we waste our time and potential earnings when we are there and ready to work. It's not our fault the jobs aren't there, it's the companys' responsibility to make sure that there is enough work — so shouldn't they pay and not us?

Sitting around in St. Giles for so many hours gives you time to think, so put your crash helmet around this as an idea. We shouldn't be penalised for the bosses error, so would it not be fairer if we were guaranteed

always in short supply and sought after.

Some companies use the guarantee as a weapon, offering a minimum of £100 a week only if the rider turns up at 8a.m. every morning. Other companies have joke guarantees. One I worked for paid a minimum of £75 for a five day week! It then took a big enough cut from the jobs to make sure few riders took home more than that. And they employed mostly inexperienced riders, often just out of school, who they could count on not knowing any better.



**A Boss is like a diaper . . .
Always on your ass and
usually full of shit.**

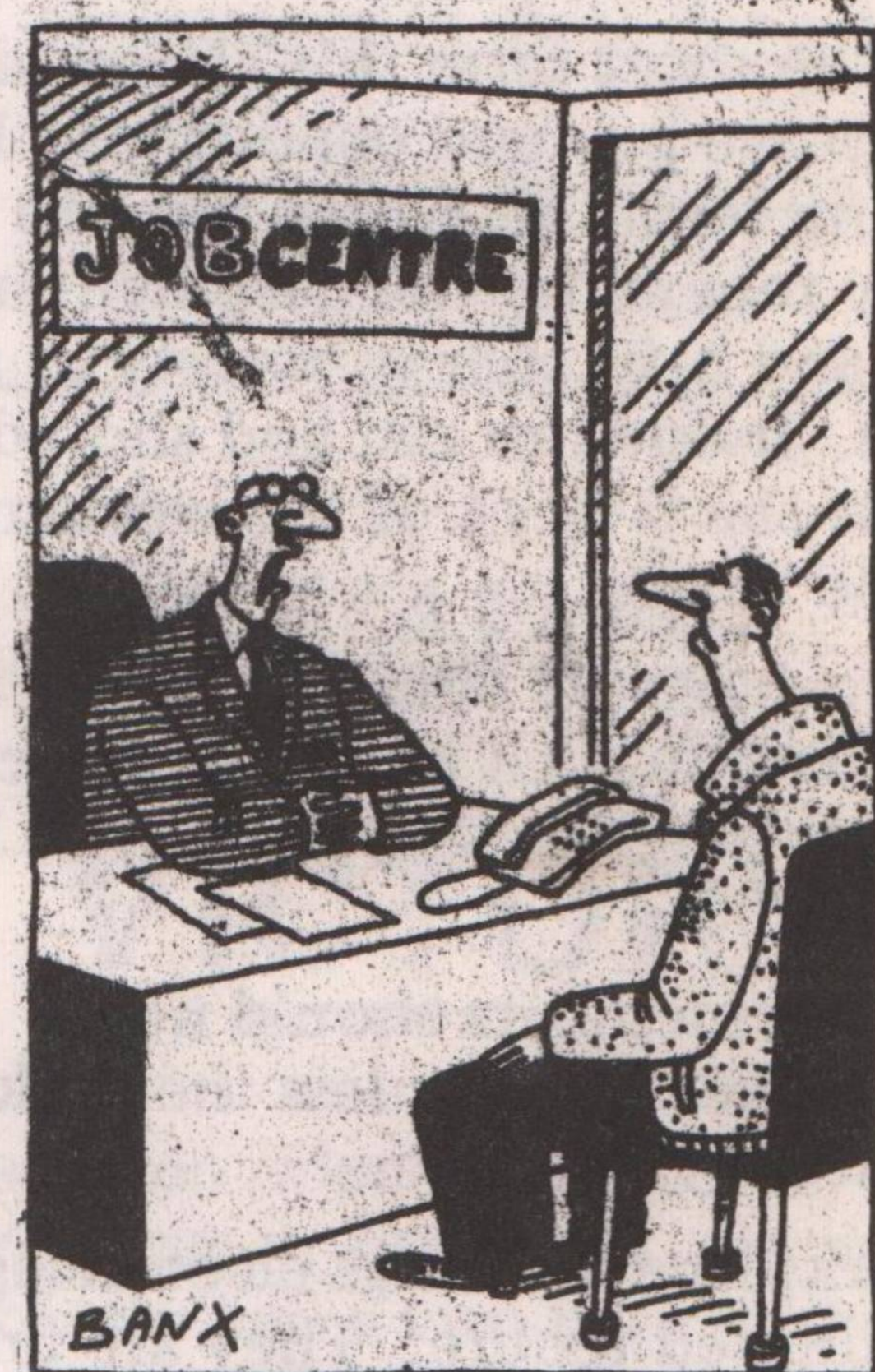
a minimum number of jobs and/or minimum daily earnings. If there aren't the jobs or the mileage to reach a decent minimum wage then the boss makes up for the difference. After all we're hanging around covering for them so why can't they cover for us?

Of course some companies have 'guarantees' or 'retainers' already, especially for the mo'bikes who are

In fact the more you think about this industry the more you realise what a bad state it is in for us, the workers. But it is the likes of you and me who can change things. Don't bore your friends and family anymore by just whinging about the job. Join the Union and together we can get better pay and better conditions. And not least, you can get some self respect.

DOLE- DRUMS

There are some companies in this business that are so dodgy the bosses are even signing on! The despatching industry is famous for its cowboy operators. It is a product of the Thatcherite age — small business men and businesswomen getting rich quick, starting from nothing, putting their faith in 'free enterprise'. With it comes Thatcherite



"If you're actively looking
for work, what are you
doing here?" *

employment practices. We are supposed to be self employed, ie our own bosses. This is a con because while the despatch industry bosses don't have to worry about our sick pay, holiday pay, tax paperwork, pensions, accidents at work or unfair dismissal they get virtually all the same powers over and benefits from us, the workers, as PAYE-type bosses. As a self-employed worker you do of course have the right to refuse any job you are given and it might be a good idea to refuse a few jobs for no apparent reason, just to let your boss know how indispensable you really are. Also, if you are self employed, legally they may have trouble sacking you.

The bosses are happy with us being

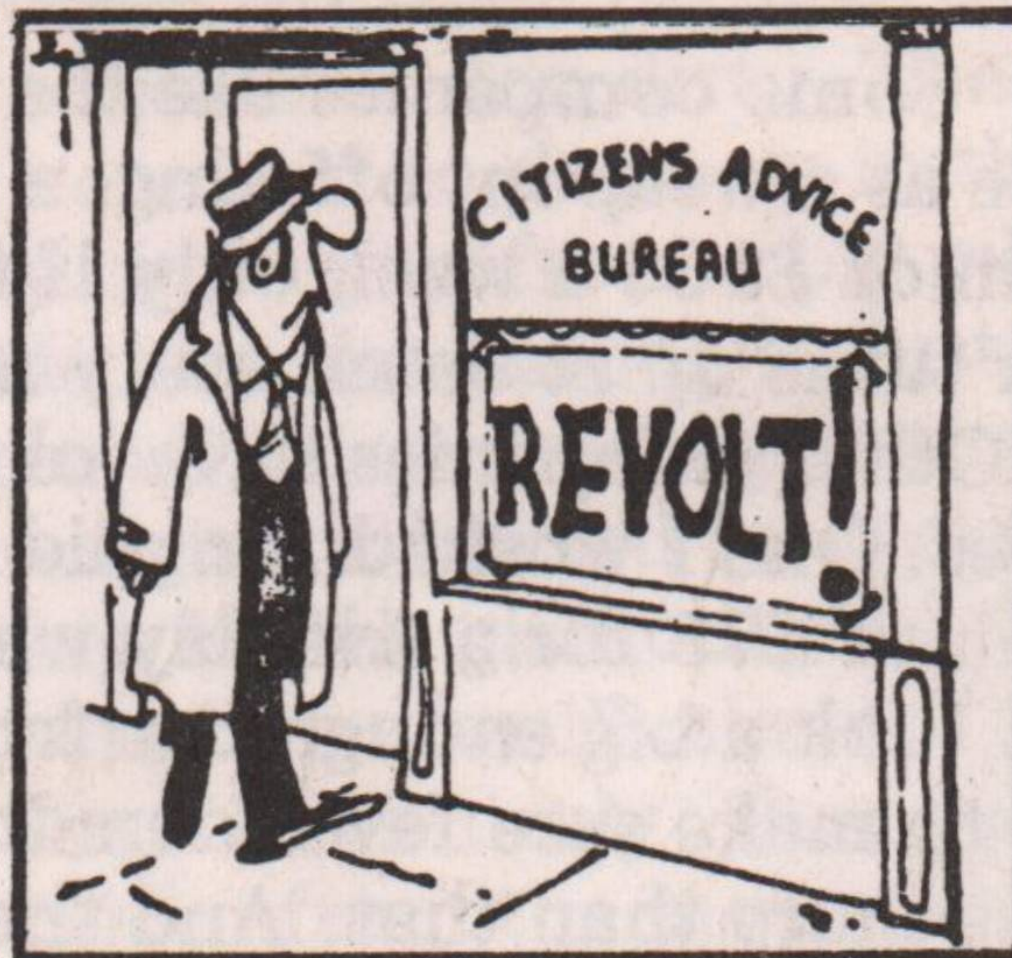
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DIWU

AIMS & PRINCIPLES

1. The DIWU is a democratic organisation run by and for riders, drivers, mechanics and office staff. It is not open to employers, managers or persons acting on their behalf.
2. In the short term this Union aims to improve pay and conditions. In the long term this Union aims to totally reorganise the despatch industry and help change society as a whole. Industries can and should be run for the benefit of the workers not the bosses.
3. To achieve its aims the DIWU uses direct action such as strikes, boycotts and any other tactics deemed to be effective.
4. DIWU members should never cross picket lines, unless the strikers consent.
5. Workplace meetings elect delegates for a limited tenure. They are unpaid, accountable and recallable. Members of political parties cannot be delegates.
6. The DIWU is opposed to racism and sexism.
7. Members should accept these Basic Principles and pay their dues.

self employed. There have been quite a lot of civil court cases where they have fought hard to prove we are legally self employed. In all cases the law rules in the bosses' favour — but only just. Some companies have re-registered as a slightly different kind of company with a slightly different name after narrow escapes in the courts over whether or not we are 'self employed'.



Many would say the insecurity of all this is worth it to keep getting the dole, with all the risks that has of being detected (the police pull despatchers not so much to fine them as to terrify them into signing off). The riders and drivers signing on is OK by the bosses - it means they can keep wages low, relying on despatchers to make up for it with the dole and it means they don't have to take basic employment rights seriously because we are less likely to demand our rights out loud if it means the DSS find out if we are working. Some riders and drivers

HAND AND DELIVER

Road to Rebellion has heard through the grapevine that there was an attempt to unionise Hand and Deliver two years ago. The Transport and General Workers Union was involved. Can any readers enlighten us as to the outcome?

sign on not for the money but to make up for the deliberate neglect of their welfare by the bosses — they will at least get something when they're sick, and they'll get benefit if they leave their job. (As self employed don't qualify for unemployment benefit!).

Many despatchers have another job, which brings us to those who have signed off. When has any one of you had your boss offer any advice on how to do all the tax and National Insurance bureaucracy you are 'responsible' for? If you ever get around to sorting it out they will probably hit you for a few months (years) interest by then. You've no longer got the risk of the DSS on to you, but now the Inland Revenue might find out. If you are treated like an employee why can't you get some of the benefits of it?

We did hear of a 'self employed' rider being so valuable that he managed to convert to a PAYE arrangement. His boss used this as a weapon — no longer self employed he could not refuse jobs and finally left through over-work. The advantages of employee or self-employed status is something which needs more thinking about — write in if you have any ideas.

Ideally we should be able to choose which arrangement we want to work under. Just because it's a Thatcherite cowboy industry doesn't mean we have to take Thatcherite working conditions.

M.

OLE

Fed up with shitty working conditions, bike messengers in Spain have organised into the Agrupacion de Mesenjeros in Barcelona. Among their grievances are giving to pay all their own expenses (petrol, spares, etc.) ; getting the sack if they are off the road for more than three days, and trying to improve the safety of their work. The group has affiliated to the CNT-AIT, the anarcho-syndicalist union of Spain.

A messengers co-operative called Missatgers Trebol has also recently been set up. They formed so that they can work without intermediaries, i.e. without bosses, to try and break out of the ridiculous working conditions and low pay.

We can understand all the problems they have endured and can only wish them the best in what they are trying to do. Besides, it is a well known fact that the 'rain in Spain falls mainly on the despatch riders'!

Want to find out more?

Please send me more information about the Despatch Industry Workers Union.

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