

**The
Activist's
Guide
to
Industrial Action**

Joe Hill

A straightforward, step-by-step guide to planning, organising and carrying out Industrial Action in Britain today.

- To Strike or Not to Strike?
- Prepare to Ballot
- The Balloting Process
- After the Ballot
- The First Day of Action
- What Next?

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Industrial Action in Britain today.

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This booklet does not pretend to be a comprehensive
guide to Employment Law, but every effort has been
made to confirm the accuracy of the information it
contains.

Joe Hill

Joe Hill was born in Sweden in 1879 and emigrated to the USA at the age of twenty-three, working at a variety of manual jobs.

In 1910, he joined the Industrial Workers of the World trade union, which believed in workers' control and was then involved in a series of bitter strikes, especially in the mining industry. These often led to violence between strikers and company private armies, operating with the open support of the police.

While organising a strike against a copper-mining company in 1914, Joe was framed for the murder of a local shopkeeper and, despite a nationwide campaign across the political spectrum, he was executed by firing-squad in 1915. His last telegram to IWW leader Bill Haywood read: "Don't mourn for me - organise!"

Ten years after his death, Alfred Hayes wrote "The Ballad of Joe Hill", the song which has carried his name around the world and across the generations. It includes these verses:

I dreamed I saw Joe Hill last night,
Alive as you and me.
Says I: "But Joe, you're ten years dead!"
"I never died", says he.

"Joe Hill ain't dead", he says to me,
"Joe Hill ain't never died.
Where working folk are out on strike,
Joe Hill is at their side."

As a trade union Organiser in the 1990s, I have been proud to use his name, first for my "Diary of a Union Organiser", which appeared in the "Guardian" during

1995 and 1996 and now, as author of this Guide. Whatever "New labour" says - or "New Trade Unionism" for that matter - as long as one person can take a decision to put another out of work, there will be a need for Joe and Josephine Hill. And don't forget, if I can be Joe Hill, so can you!

* * * *

Any profits that come to me through the sale of this booklet will be donated to the strike funds of workers in dispute.

* * * *

Dedication

This booklet is dedicated to my sisters and brothers in the Trade Union Movement, to Adrian King, whose efforts and encouragement have been vital in getting the show on the road, to my partner for her unwavering support and to my children, my hope for the future - and yours, too!

Introduction

Let's face it, in these days of New Labour and New Trade Unionism, industrial action is not popular. Government and TUC alike parade the "number of days lost" total as if it meant that employers had stopped being nasty to their workers and industrial action could therefore be consigned to the National Museum of Labour History.

But the truth is quite the opposite: public services continue to suffer serious cuts and private industry remains obsessed with "flexibility" and "value for money", i.e. attacks on conditions and cuts in the workforce.

Trade Union leaders have increasingly become co-opted into this supposed New World and there is no less pressure now than there was before the last election to do nothing to upset the Labour Party. Most make the right noises then give way - and some see their whole reason for living as a crusade to discourage militancy in general and industrial action in particular.

One result of this development is that expertise in running strikes and other action is getting rather thin on the ground, as older organisers and activists retire or are made redundant. What was once the bread-and-butter of trade unionism is too often now a mystery and a cause for fear in itself - and this, of course, suits those running the show.

This booklet is a small attempt to redress the balance: it looks at both the law on balloting, picketing, etc. and at ways of organising some typical action - insofar as there is such a thing. There are tips on what to do and what to avoid and on whether action is actually possible (or appropriate) under the circumstances.

This last point is as important as everything else in the booklet, because strikes or other forms of action are not always the answer. It is as impractical and indefensible to advocate "strikes for everything" as it is to try to discount them altogether. Industrial Action is a means to an end - usually a clear and fairly limited one - and it needs to be tailored to achieve that end.

To Strike Or Not To Strike?

That is the question. By and large, it makes sense to regard industrial action - and particularly strike action - as the last resort rather than the first. There are several good reasons for this: from the employer's point of view, if action is threatened every time negotiations on anything get under way, it is likely to have one of two negative effects:

Firstly, because you obviously haven't taken action over every issue in the past, they won't believe you will now or in the future and are likely to ignore the threat, or assume you are bluffing. Secondly, rather than discounting the likelihood of action, they may see the threat as a sign of weakness and challenge you to put your - or your members' - money where your mouth is. If you can't then deliver, your credibility with both employer and members will be permanently and perhaps fatally damaged.

From the members' point of view it is essential, because realistic, to start from the basis that they don't actually want to go on strike and would prefer to avoid it if at all possible. If even a significant minority come to believe either that you are being unduly reckless on their behalf or, even worse, are using them for political ends or macho posturing, you are dead in the water. Most union members in most workplaces are fairly apolitical and can only be persuaded to take action which costs them money over something very dear to their hearts. This need not only be pay, but could also be attacks on conditions/working practices, in defence of a workmate who has been victimised or, in the public sector, defence of services.

From your point of view, organising strikes is very difficult and time-consuming, so it's wise to use your energies to the best advantage. Most activists play a number of union and political roles and we all have lives to lead as well: striking is not something to enter into lightly. It would be nice if everything else could be persuaded to wait until the dispute is over, but it won't. Trying to do too much with too few activists and too little time is a recipe for a breakdown - and then you won't be much use to anyone.

So, before you go down the obstacle-course that Tory legislation has made the road to strike action, you need to be sure it's the only alternative. There will have to have been a genuine debate among the activists and with the members about all of the options, leading to a clear and well-supported outcome. This is sometimes difficult to achieve and you can be sure that someone is going to ask an unexpectedly tricky question at a members' meeting. On occasion, it becomes difficult to see the wood for the trees when you are very close to something, so this very practical exercise can be useful, to make sure you've covered everything:

- (1) Think up three possible ways forward. Don't judge whether they're good or bad at this stage; the only qualification is that they're possible.
- (2) Make a list of the advantages and disadvantages of each; be sure you don't favour one or other solution - think of each one as if it was the only option.
- (3) If any are completely impossible because of a particular disadvantage, rule them out. This will often leave you with one - and if there are more than one, they must all be possible, so need detailed consideration and comparison.

The advantages of strike action are:

- (a) It shows you're serious and mean business.
- (b) It can bring the workforce together - including non-members.
- (c) It offers the opportunity of a quick end to the dispute.
- (d) It can kick-start stalled negotiations.

The disadvantages are:

- (a) Unless you've prepared properly, it can reveal your weaknesses.
- (b) It can lead to damaging splits in the workforce, especially if a large minority are not members and/or can be bought off by the employer.
- (c) If the strike isn't won quickly, it could drag on, with support gradually melting away.
- (d) It can polarise the situation, making it more difficult to reach a solution: once an employer has been driven into a corner, he won't want to lose face.

As you can see, the advantages and disadvantages are largely mirror-images of each other - no one viewpoint can be taken without considering the opposite possibility.

What alternatives to strike action could there be? These basically fall into two varieties of disruptive action, one of which requires a ballot and one of which may not:

Disruptive Industrial Action: This covers action short of strike action which is nevertheless a Breach of Contract; it would include a refusal to do certain parts of the job or carry out certain instructions from management.

Its advantage is that, in many cases at least, members will continue to be paid. For groups of workers with little or no experience of strikes, or even of trade unionism itself, it may well be seen as a less frightening and more acceptable option - even union members read and believe the gutter press and its anti-union propaganda.

Its disadvantages are that it may not be strong enough to win the dispute and will, in any case, require a formal ballot, with all that that entails.

Disruptive Non-Industrial Action: Includes all action which can be taken without causing a Breach of Contract, such as banning voluntary overtime, working strictly to Job Description and a general withdrawal of goodwill and co-operation. This can be extremely effective if everyone enforces it rigidly but, without a ballot, it can only be regarded as voluntary.

Its advantages are that members will continue to be paid and, as there is no need for a ballot, it can start immediately - balloting now takes at least five or six weeks to complete.

Its disadvantages are that it may simply delay an inevitable ballot and can give people who would feel bound by a ballot result an excuse to wriggle out.

Prepare to Ballot!

OK, you've tried (or at least considered) the alternatives - now it's the real thing! But before you go ahead to the ballot, there are some more things to consider:

Bringing in the Union Hierarchy: Whether you like it or not, this is pretty well inevitable. Even if there are less than fifty members involved and there is no requirement for an Independent Scrutineer, the Hierarchy will want to be sure that the action is going to be effective and (of course) that you've done everything possible to avoid it. In most unions, you cannot now take action without permission from regional, or even national, level.

If less than fifty members are involved, the Hierarchy will probably take over the balloting process, or at least issue instructions as to how it should be carried out. If there are over fifty, the law insists that there must be a postal ballot held by Independent Scrutineers and, once approval to ballot has been given, a long and complicated process will automatically take over.

Straw Poll: This has two functions: it will give you a better idea of your level of support in the real ballot and will reassure the Hierarchy that the members are champing at the bit.

As it is entirely unofficial, you can organise it however you like, but it is in your interests to do it properly - after all, you wouldn't really want to risk losing the genuine article, would you?

Assuming a good result, you can also use it to put pressure on the employer to reopen negotiations.

Once the balloting process is underway, there's lots to do to ensure success. You will have to take the members with you while, hopefully, whipping up some interest in the wider community:

Members' Meetings are absolutely essential at this stage, to settle fears and involve them in the process: strikes need to be properly managed, but everyone involved should feel they have a part to play. For most people, the whole idea of striking is alien and frightening; there will be fears of victimisation and getting the sack, not to mention good old apathy and inertia. These can all be addressed and dealt with in a safe atmosphere but there will always be some who prefer to stay in bed or go shopping, whatever happens!

The meetings should be about weekly, but don't have too many, or people will get bored and stop coming. Use them to inform, but also to ask for help, on picket-lines, for example. It's essential that members feel it's **their** strike, not yours.

Publicity is another must, both to keep members up to date between meetings and to get them to attend. Try to keep leaflets simple, with big headlines and a small amount of text, or most of them will end up in the bin. Encourage members to use them as posters and to stick them up all over the workplace: this is good for morale and has the added bonus of irritating management.

Informing the wider community involves using the **media** - and trying to stop them using you. This is not easy, even if you stick to the ground rules. The main thing to bear in mind about the media is that they aren't remotely interested in you, the members or the dispute. All they want is to fill up space in a paper, or on a radio

or TV programme - it might as well be you if you sound interesting enough, but it could equally be someone else. If you have realistically low expectations of media coverage, you won't be disappointed and might actually be surprised from time to time.

It's wise to prepare by buttering them up in advance, though this tends to work better with the press than the broadcasters. Arrange to meet up before you need them, to give an off-the-record briefing. This could lead to useful advance publicity but, more important, it gets you known personally and can bias later stories in your favour. Don't send out a stream of Press Releases before anything has happened - they get a dozen every day and most go straight in the bin.

All of the media prefer a story with an angle of some sort. The dispute may be the issue of the day to you, but you'll have to sell it to them; sad to say, if someone reports a cat up a tree, they'll be off like a shot. Think about what sort of stories they like and try to present your dispute to fit in - it's not hypocrisy, it's to help you win!

The Balloting Process

This is the most boring (and indeed, irritating) part of the whole venture, but the law says: "Get It Right, Or Else" The balloting process has been designed specifically to dissuade unions from considering Industrial Action and trying to trip them up if they do. Even a trivial mistake can allow an employer to ask a Court to declare the strike illegal - and big names have been caught out and told to go back to square one.

You will have to work out the Ballot Timetable, going backwards from the day you want the action to start, or forwards from today, if you're not aiming to coincide with a particular event. This is a typical Timetable:

Notice of ballot to employer (see Appendix 1)	- May 14th.
Employer to receive ballot paper (see Appendix 2)	- May 16th.
Despatch ballot papers to members	- May 21st.
Ballot papers return date	- June 3rd.
Approval of action by Union Hierarchy	- June 5th.
Notice to employer of start of action (see Appendix 3 & 4)	- June 6th.
Action begins	- June 13th.

If you add in asking permission to ballot, time for a straw poll, etc., this gives a total time scale of five to six weeks - very frustrating, but unavoidable. It is of course

possible to avoid all of this by taking unofficial action, i.e. a "wildcat" strike, but you should think very long and hard about the consequences before going down this road. The Union Hierarchy will immediately be challenged to disown the action and will do so without hesitation, thus cutting off support and, more important, cash. Whether they do so because they want to keep a Stalinist grip on the members or because they are genuinely fearful of having their national assets sequestered (sued for damages/contempt of Court) is irrelevant - the result will be the same. The other big danger is the Miners' Strike Syndrome, where debate about the causes of the dispute is largely overtaken by debate about its conduct and organisation.

The main points to bear in mind about the actual ballot process are:

- The employer must receive a copy of the ballot paper (but not any accompanying information) three days before it is sent out to members.
- Information about the ballot and the proposed action can be sent with ballot papers.
- All union members who would be involved in or directly affected by the action must be balloted.
- People who join the union before the end of the balloting process have a right to vote.
- The employer must be given details of the result of the ballot seven days before the action begins.
- If the action is delayed, e.g. by last-minute negotiations, it must begin within **twenty-eight** days of the ballot result being declared, or you will have to ballot all over again.

During the ballot, which should be open long enough to ensure that everyone gets a chance to vote - say, ten days to two weeks - it is essential not to just sit back and wait for the result. Meetings and leafleting will need to continue and, perhaps most important, activists need to hold workplace meetings and try to get round every member individually, if possible.

This may seem like overkill, but the reality is that even 80% turnouts are very rare and a majority on a low turnout could be seized on as an excuse to refuse permission to go ahead.

After the Ballot

This is your main opportunity for last-minute negotiations - and bear in mind that however chuffed you feel with the result, the strike is for a reason, not an end in itself. If you can achieve a settlement without going ahead, the members will be overjoyed and the employer will be a lot more wary about taking you on next time.

Proposing talks before the strike starts will be very hard for the employer to turn down and will put you on the moral high-ground when it comes to the Battle of the Media. At the talks you can point to your (hopefully) substantial support for decisive and damaging action and give the employer a chance to withdraw before the public confrontation starts. This is also the time to come up with a bit of lateral thinking - are there any other ways of getting a satisfactory settlement, by repackaging or giving up a little in one area in exchange for a lot in a more important area?

If you can suggest something you believe would be acceptable to members that would "get a result" and enable the employer to claim he hasn't backed down, then go for it. However tempting it is to go only for a result that grinds the employer into dogfood, resist heroically! The more you drive him into a corner, the more difficult it will be to tempt or lever him out later on.

Even if you are promised negotiations, don't be tempted to delay your preparations for the first day of the strike. There's a great deal to do and it can't be left to the last minute. These are some of the most important things to organise - but the list is by no means exhaustive and

will, to some extent, vary with the circumstances of the dispute:

- **Picketing:** Very important. Make sure there are picket-lines on every entrance to workplaces involved. TUC Guidelines (which, in effect, have the force of law) specify no more than six pickets on each line. Members should only picket their own workplace or the organisation's HQ, to avoid accusations of Secondary Picketing, which is now an offence. Branch Officers, Convenors and Full-Time Officers may go on any picket-line. In theory, picket-lines should not be on the organisation's property, so beware obstruction of roads and pavements. Make sure all pickets have armbands or badges and placards saying "Official Picket", or something similar. They should all have a copy of the picketing guidelines, covering what they can and can't do, e.g. no jostling or intimidation. Ideally, there should be a special meeting for pickets before the strike starts, to go over this.

Picketing is essentially designed to stop people affected by the strike from going into work - you can't expect members of other unions, especially those doing entirely different jobs, to turn round and go home, though it's wonderful when they do! Other unions will normally advise their members to work normally and do nothing to undermine your action: to do otherwise would, strictly speaking, be illegal. So don't get too upset if they sympathise and go on in - you need to concentrate on non-union staff in your area of work and, perhaps, members of your own union who have been persuaded to break ranks. It's also worth making a special effort to dissuade deliveries, especially of milk, post, etc. Postal workers,

in particular, are traditionally disinclined to cross anybody's picket-lines.

- **The Rally:** As only a minority of members will be needed for picketing, it's important to have a focus for the day, to bring people together, boost enthusiasm for the task ahead and gain useful publicity. A rally, perhaps at lunchtime, provides this and is, unlike most other aspects of the strike, completely under your control.

The venue will depend on lots of factors, but don't go for a large one unless you can guarantee to fill it, don't go for anywhere too noisy, and beware the weather! Keep it reasonably short - not more than an hour, or everyone will be bored stiff and drift off - get speakers who have something interesting to say and don't drone on and on, make sure everyone can hear and chair the meeting efficiently.

Don't invite the media unless you're quite sure it's going to be a success (they probably won't come anyway) and avoid confrontations with security guards, management or the police. Some people might enjoy this, but it will put most members off the dispute and risks setting the wider community against you. If there is trouble, make sure your version gets to the media before anyone else's, supported by photos and statements from "solid citizens" if possible.

A march is also worth considering, but only if you can guarantee a large turnout. Routes need to be agreed with the police in advance. In the case of either a rally or a march, some thought should be given to slogans for placards. Because the media tend to go for catchy or funny slogans, this could - believe it or not - influence the amount of publicity you get. If you want

to make a point about "fat cats" for example, draw them on your placards.

- **Press Releases:** Make sure all of the local media get a Press Release - you'd be surprised what people read and listen to. PRs can set the tone of the coverage if you're lucky and, at the least, get people interested. Keep them reasonably short and to the point - one page of A4, if possible - and full of quotable statements. Journalists and editors are often busy/lazy and will use the PR instead of an interview if it suits them, so put in at least one paragraph reading: "Josephine Bloggs, union Branch Secretary, said..."

Don't send PRs out cold: as noted above, all media organisations get dozens every week. Phone up before you send/deliver/fax it and try to talk to the Industrial Specialist, or whoever - you can then explain the issue on the phone and answer any questions. Make sure there's at least one contact name and number on the PR - and be prepared to do interviews early in the morning, if necessary! Remember, this is the age of the soundbite; if you can't sum up the issues clearly and briefly, you won't get another chance.

- **Media Interviews:** Beware! It's very difficult to do a good interview, so don't start at all unless you're confident and well-organised. Reporters will have their own agendas (which will be nothing to do with putting over your point of view or informing the public) so you need to be quite sure of the main points you want to make and determined enough to make them. Look out for traps designed to get you to say something controversial and be aware that they may

relay your interview to the employer for his comments before anything is printed/broadcast.

If you are interviewed jointly with management, keep calm, make your points clearly and don't get abusive, however much you're provoked. Remember, they may well be deliberately trying to wind you up and once you've said something, you can't take it back.

- **Other Unions/Non - Members:** Other unions represented in the workplace but not taking action need to be kept informed of what's going on so they can advise their members. Liaise with the relevant officers and, if you can, produce leaflets for them to distribute to their members - if you don't, they probably won't do anything themselves. Even if they haven't been helpful or supportive in the past, don't attack their members or officers - explain why you are taking action and ask for their support.

It may stick in the gullet, but it's usually also a good idea to do a letter/leaflet for non-union workers in a similar vein. Although they haven't joined so far, they may now be prepared to reconsider or may at least go off sick rather than scab. Point out that there will be pickets on all entrances. but don't abuse or intimidate. It won't do any harm and it might do some good.

- **The Ultimate Employers:** Another possibility to pursue, either at this stage or later on, is to write to the Ultimate Employers, i.e. Board of Directors, Governors, Councillors, etc. This should be designed to undermine the one-sided story they will already have received from management, by explaining calmly and convincingly how the dispute has arisen,

what steps you have taken to prevent it getting this far and the response from management, the damage you are afraid will result and how sad it is that a loyal and long-suffering workforce has been forced to take strike action. Again, this may not do any good, but it can't do any harm and you can always release the letter to the media later on, to show how hard you've worked for a settlement.

- **Planning Future Action:** Because of the current economic, social and political climate, many ballots for Industrial Action propose a series of one-day strikes, with other action continuing in between. This will usually be some form of "Work to Rule", such as non-co-operation with normal methods of working or banning overtime.

Members will need to give their support to the specific action proposed and should have a clear picture of what is expected of them - it also needs to be made plain that this is as much part of the action as striking and may in the end be decisive. It is **not** voluntary.

Some members will be more worried about this than about striking and will (justifiably) fear intimidation. This will need to be addressed at Members' Meetings and it is essential that plans are made to keep up with what is happening on the ground and to pursue cases of intimidation immediately and vigorously.

The First Day of Action

If you've prepared well, most things should go right and you should have a fair idea what to do if they don't. Everyone should know what their job is and be able to get on with it: they should also know how to get hold of two or three other key people if there's an unexpected crisis.

Try to arrange a meeting of activists later on in the day (when things should have calmed down a bit) to review what happened and how it went - you won't get everything to go right, but you can learn from experience and do it better next time. Many union branches have an Industrial Action or Disputes Committee to take on this role and it is certainly important to be able to step back from the minute-to-minute organisation of the dispute and revise tactics if necessary.

What Next?

It would be great if all disputes were won after the first day's action, but of course they aren't. Each will have its unique set of circumstances, so there can't be any general guide to the future. However, there are some points which should be borne in mind in planning continuing action:

Firstly, you will rarely get everything you and your members want. This means that the final outcome is likely to be some sort of compromise at best and the wise activist will have this in the back of his/her mind from the start. This does not mean selling members out - if the dispute is not winnable, you can't win it by definition and opinions on this may well change as the situation develops. What you end up putting to members - with or without recommendation - will probably be the least-worst rather than the best possible option.

Secondly, the longer a dispute goes on, the less chance you have of winning it. At every point in a long-running dispute, there are better or worse odds between what is on offer (or realistically attainable) and the likelihood of something better being forced out of the employer in the future. These odds can change in your favour, e.g. if other unions join in the action, or they can change against you. It is essential for you to keep the odds under review at all times, as this is the only thing that can tell you at all realistically what your chances of success are.

Thirdly, morale is crucial. If it is good, you can keep an apparently hopeless dispute running for months - or years - if you want to. If it is bad, the dispute can collapse around your ears just as you thought you were about to win. It's often difficult to see why things go one way rather than the other, but there are positive steps you can take to keep the show on the road. It is especially important to maintain a genuine two-way communication with members: listen to what they say,

even if you don't want to hear it. It's very easy for activists to become isolated and out of touch - and it's better to settle for something than have the dispute collapse and get nothing, if that's the way it seems to be going.

Finally, if the dispute has dragged on for months with very little happening, the only way you can change the odds in your favour is by some sort of major escalation - more of the same won't be enough. This can only be done after careful planning and with the full and realistic support of the members: they have to have a clear understanding of the options and make an informed choice. If escalation comes simply out of frustration or desperation, it is likely to fail.

Postscript

Given the society that we live in, with its built-in inequalities and bias towards employers, it is inevitable that we will lose more disputes than we win. In many ways, it is a miracle that we achieve as much as we do and this booklet is a small contribution to improving the odds.

If you have done as well as anyone else could have done in the same circumstances, you have no reason to feel downhearted if your dispute has not ended successfully - the Labour Movement lives to fight another day! As activists, paid or unpaid, we are the heirs to many hundreds of years of struggle for equality and justice. We have lived through defeat, imprisonment, transportation and death - and we are still here and still organising. Savour your victories, learn from your defeats and teach the next generation well!

Good luck,

Joe Hill

Appendix I

Employer's Address

Date [To be received seven days prior to despatch of ballot papers.]

Dear

TRADE UNION REFORM & EMPLOYMENT RIGHTS ACT 1993 - NOTICE TO EMPLOYER OF AN OFFICIAL INDUSTRIAL ACTION BALLOT

This Notice is issued in accordance with the provisions of the Trade Union and Labour Relations (Consolidation) Act 1992 and the Trade Union Reform and Employment Rights Act 1993.

It is the intention of _____ to conduct an Industrial Action ballot of those members described below, in relation to the following trade dispute(s):

[Nature of Dispute]

[Description (so the employer can readily ascertain them) of employees who will be entitled to vote. If members pay subscriptions by salary deduction we should include the statement "all of whom pay subscriptions via DOCAS" If any members pay by any other means they should be identified by name with sufficient additional details on a separate sheet.]

The despatch of ballot papers [insert date]

* The number of members involved in the ballot is 50 or more, and in accordance with the above legislation the following Independent Scrutineer has been appointed:

A copy of the ballot paper will be faxed to you by [insert date three days before despatch of ballot paper]

Any communication regarding this notice should be addressed to [insert name of Officer responsible for ballot]

Yours sincerely,

*This paragraph should be deleted for ballots of less than fifty members.

Appendix II

Official

Ballot for Industrial Action.

Re: Trade Dispute with [Title of dispute], including all matters arising out of and in consequence of the dispute.

BALLOT PAPER

ARE YOU PREPARED TO TAKE PART IN INDUSTRIAL ACTION IN THE FORM OF STRIKE ACTION?

PLACE AN (X) IN THE BOX OF YOUR CHOICE BELOW

YES

NO

ARE YOU PREPARED TO TAKE PART IN INDUSTRIAL ACTION IN THE FORM OF ACTION SHORT OF STRIKE?

PLACE AN (X) IN THE BOX OF YOUR CHOICE BELOW

YES

NO

If you take part in a strike or other industrial action, you may be in breach of your contract of employment.

PLEASE RETURN YOUR COMPLETED BALLOT PAPER IMMEDIATELY IN THE PRE-PAID ENVELOPE PROVIDED.

Please return your completed ballot paper to REACH this office [NAME & ADDRESS] no later than [TIME & DATE AS APPROPRIATE]

Your vote is completely secret

* As appropriate

Appendix III

TRADE UNION REFORM AND EMPLOYMENT RIGHTS ACT 1993

NOTICE TO EMPLOYER OF AN OFFICIAL INDUSTRIAL ACTION BALLOT

RESULT OF VOTING

This notice is issued in accordance with the provisions of the Trade Union and Labour Relations (Consolidation) Act 1992 and the Trade Union Reform and Employment Rights Act 1993.

This result of voting of the ballot of members advised to you in our communication:

Reference :

Date :

is as follows:

TOTAL NUMBER OF VOTES CAST.....

NUMBER OF INVALID (BLANK/SPOILED).....

NUMBER VOTING "YES".....

NUMBER VOTING "NO".....

A copy of the independent scrutineer's report is attached: [This will only be a legal requirement when the number of members voting is 50 or more]

Appendix IV

NOTICE OF INDUSTRIAL ACTION FOLLOWING A BALLOT

TO: [Name of Employer]

DATE: [To be received no later than seven days before commencement of proposed action.]

This notice is issued in accordance with and for the purpose of Section 234A of the Trade Union and Labour Relations (Consolidation) Act 1992 and Trade Union and Employment Rights Act 1993:

Following the result of the ballot of _____ members advised to you in our communication:

REFERENCE:

DATED:

intends to call upon the members described below to take part in the industrial action:

[Description of membership, grade, location, etc. "all of whom pay subscriptions via DOCAS"
If any members pay subscriptions by any other means they should be identified by name]

The industrial action will be continuous/discontinuous

Continuous : the intended date for employees to begin to take part in action
is.....

Discontinuous : the intended dates for employees to take part in action are:
.....
.....

Yours Sincerely,

Appendix V

Anatomy of a Small Strike

The Friday Before

Management has kindly consented to listen to our proposals to break the deadlock - though they don't seem very interested in coming up with any of their own. I'm beginning to suspect they actually want the strike to go ahead: it would show how macho they are and besides, we might fall flat on our faces.

They begin by asking for the result of the ballot (3-1 in a slightly disappointing turnout, actually) but I say we'll tell them at the end of the meeting. This doesn't go down well and the next two hours are taken up with elaborate shadow-boxing. Eventually, I give them the envelope and they promise to cost our proposals and let us know before Tuesday. Will we suspend our action on this basis? No, we won't.

Saturday/Sunday

Worry. Draw up lists of things to do. Worry a bit more. The problem is, if I do too much now, they'll accept one of our proposals and - if the members do as well - the strike will be off. If I don't do anything until Tuesday (the last Members' Meeting before the strike is due on Friday) it'll go ahead and everything will have to be done in two days.

Monday

Nothing - but lots of other work to do, a curse and a blessing. Press Release, letter to members, letter to other unions not involved in the strike and details of next weeks' Work to Rule typed up but not printed out. A trawl round the office reveals that (a) someone's gone off with the Branch banner and (b) we've got no pickets'

armbands or instructions. Add these to my rapidly-increasing lists.

Tuesday

A fax arrives from the management - what a let-down! They've obviously decided we won't be able to carry it off and have only offered a pathetic crumb or two. The Steward and I see the Personnel Manager before our Members' Meeting: we tell him an insulting offer can be worse than no offer at all. He shrugs his shoulders.

The meeting is encouragingly packed - members have been waiting for their pay-rise for ten months, only to be told they won't get it (or the next one either) unless they accept the shredding of long-standing conditions of service. They are silent as the Steward and I explain the "offer" and only two or three speak up against it. I'm getting worried, until we have a show of hands and everyone votes against.

Then I'm barnstorming: getting them going, stressing the need to get everyone out on Friday - non-union as well - the picket-lines from 8 am, the rally in the car park at lunchtime. By the end of the meeting, their fear is melting and prospective pickets come forward thick and fast. This will be the first time most of them have been on strike. They've voted to become The Enemy Within.

Back to the office and it's all systems go! Get the letters printed out, fax off the Press Releases, ring round to locate a replacement banner and a megaphone, book an alternative venue for the strike rally, in case it pours. Go home exhausted and make more lists.

Wednesday

Long-arranged all-day session representing a member - very bad timing. Fortunately, it's over a bit early and I'm off to deliver the various letters for the Steward to

distribute, discuss a million queries and arrangements, collect the banner and the megaphone and try to locate some armbands and picketing instructions. In the end, I have to settle for ordinary Stewards' armbands and printing out my own instructions-strikes are obviously rare in these days of the New Trade Unionism...

Thursday

Rising panic - I've never been entirely responsible for a strike before and offers of help are noticeable by their almost complete absence. Amazingly (or not?) the union doesn't produce any sort of Idiot's Guide to Strike Organising, so it'll be sink or swim. Place your bets now.

Responses to the Press Releases start to come in and there's a reasonable article in the local paper - pity the journalist I carefully cultivated a month or two ago is on holiday. Oh, well. Can I do an interview on the radio? Off to the studio, where I'm met by someone who looks about fifteen. I go through everything clearly and confidently and we're both happy, until she finds the microphone wasn't switched on and I have to do it all again. Of course, it's all ums and ers the second time.

The BBC ask to do a joint interview with management tomorrow morning, at 8.15 am, and I agree unenthusiastically. I'm really not a morning person. not at 8.15 am, anyway. They ask for my home number "in case there's a change of schedule". I reluctantly give it.

Friday

Up early, though not very bright - I need to be on the picket line by 8 am. As I'm having my breakfast, the phone rings. It's the BBC: "Sorry, there's been a murder, we'll have to cancel the interview" - urgh! As the paper hasn't arrived yet, I've got no reason to dally and it's off to cries of "Good Luck!" and "I'll be thinking of you!"

There's a strange man in a uniform at the entrance to the car park, but he ignores me as I drive in. The pickets have mostly arrived already and I nip from one picket-line to another to check, advise and encourage. Everybody's cheerful and spirits are high. Most drivers stop and sympathise, but tell us their union has instructed them to work normally. There's no sign of any scabbing members, or non-members for that matter. The postman arrives, stops to chat and backs his van out: "We don't cross picket-lines. This is going back to the Sorting Office!" The pickets cheer and clap.

The strange man from the car park suddenly appears next to me: "Are you with this lot?" I agree that it looks like it. "Well, you'll have to move your car, then." Catch on quick, these private security guards. I tell him I'll move it in a minute and turn my back on him. He wanders off.

Eventually, everything slows down and I suggest the pickets stand down until the rally at lunchtime, then it's back to the office to make sure everything's ready. In the middle, there's a phone call from the Personnel Manager: he understands we're intending to hold the rally in the car park. I confirm this, though he must have known for at least forty-eight hours. He's extremely sorry, but he's been instructed to inform me that as it's officially part of the premises, we can't set foot in it.

I argue that this is pointless and will simply wind people up, but he's adamant, presumably thinking it will spoil the focus of the day's action. I concede that he has the law on his side - after eighteen years of Tory Government, he's bound to - but make it clear that the rally will go on and that members will be left in no doubt about the reason for the change.

More work! Off to our "bad-weather" venue and prepare the hall, endless table and chair-shifting. The

banner won't stand up on its own, despite my best efforts, so I take the poles out and drape it over a table. I'm sweating like the proverbial pig, but after half an hour or so, it's coming together.

One o'clock. Grab a sandwich and dash round to see if anyone has arrived at the car park yet. Six or seven are there already; I tell them we will have to move the rally and ask if a couple can hang on after the starting time to direct late-comers. They aren't happy, but agree to come across in a group when the others arrive. I return to the hall to phone round the media about the change of plan, not that they're very interested.

Where is everyone? It's time to start and I'm sitting here on my own! Have they all gone off in a huff? Or are they fighting a pitched battle for the car park? There's nothing for it but to go and have a look - and actually, there's no-one in the car park, but a lot of disgruntled people milling about on the pavement.

The Steward tells me they want to have the meeting there, on the pavement if necessary. My heart sinks: I appreciate the sentiment, but (a) the traffic would drown any speeches, even with a megaphone, and (b) we'd all get arrested for obstruction - not a good idea. I argue fruitlessly with some of the most disgruntled, before grasping the bull by the horns in desperation. I take the Steward and a couple of activists aside and point out (a) and (b) forcibly: they eventually agree and I ask them to lead a march round to the hall, hoping the members will follow.

Crossing my fingers, I bellow above the traffic as the vanguard plods off up the road. The others immediately form an orderly crocodile behind them - aren't the British wonderful? A few minutes later, I am chairing the rally in a packed hall and everyone is clapping at the

moments and feeling that sense of solidarity that makes all strikes worthwhile, at least briefly.

An hour later, full of relief and satisfaction, I make my major blunder: do any of the strikers want to address the meeting? Somebody does. Unfortunately, he's one of those who really didn't want to abandon the car park and see management get their own way. "We should have let them call the police. I'm going back there now. Who's coming with me?"

Having just been enthused by a succession of speakers, including yours truly, the members shout "Y-e-e-s!" and dive for the door, stopping only to grab the banner and the placards with the nifty slogans (I could have gone into advertising, you know...). I watch with increasing alarm as the hall empties and the headlines flit through my mind: "Union Organiser Arrested", "TU Hooligans on the Rampage"...

After a judicious interval I follow on, to find a lively confrontation taking place between the main activists and the Personnel Manager. As I arrive, a placard reading "GIVE US OUR MONEY NOW!" is being thrust at him. "You give him that!" shout the members, while I lurk on the sidelines. "All right, I will", he says, to everyone's surprise. This effectively, if accidentally, disarms the situation and the members (and me) cheer as he takes the placard inside.

This enables me to rescue the banner, the rally breaks up in good humour and I retreat to the office for a well-earned ice-lolly. And that was that. Positives: good picket-lines, good turnout, good rally - in the end. Negatives: some work continued, not much media coverage, had to move the rally. Overall score? 3-2 to us, I think. Long-term effect? God knows: we'll have to see how the Work to Rule goes. But there's a new feeling of strength among the members and we'll do it better next time...