

# TRADE UNIONISM IN CRISIS

## BUILDING AN ANARCHO SYNDICALIST ALTERNATIVE

*A Dayschool for Trade Unionists to discuss workplace organisation and plan a way forward*

What future for reformist trade unionism?

Anarcho syndicalist unions - organising for a fighting alternative.

Guest speaker from the CNT (Spanish anarcho syndicalist union)

Workshops on organising Industrial Networks

# SATURDAY 30th OCTOBER

## 12 NOON

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**Organised by TRANSPORT WORKERS NETWORK,  
EDUCATION WORKERS NETWORK & PUBLIC SERVICE  
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# TRANSPORT WORKER

By Transport Workers - For Transport Workers

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FREE

## Change or bust?

People may have noticed the disappearance of Norman Willis from the TV screens and his replacement by another man in a suit who has never done a honest day's work in his life, let alone organised a strike. John Monks graduated from university and did 2 years as a management trainee before disappearing into the murky underworld of the well-paid TUC bureaucracy.

This change has failed to attract much media attention let alone excite ordinary trade union members which is hardly surprising given the TUC's ever-increasing irrelevance. This irrelevance is entirely of its own making. From its failure to support one group of workers after another the TUC has proved itself incapable of defending our class and is treated by workers and management alike as little more than a joke.

The TUC strategy of "do nothing now and pray for a Labour government" has led us to the present situation of an enfeebled trade union movement which accepts that there is no alternative to a capitalist system and whose strategy is to wait for the economic crisis to sort itself out. As workers we must realise that the so-called "golden era" of the post-war boom with full employment has gone for good and is never likely to return. We are now returning to what has been the normal state of affairs for capitalism for the previous 200 years with a mass pool of unemployment; widespread poverty and low pay. With these massive problems facing working class people, the TUC and the Labour Party have got neither a clue nor a future.

Unable to pose an alternative to the present crisis, the leaders of the trade unions are turning in on themselves, fighting over who controls a Labour Party that is so bankrupt of ideas that the only hope it holds out for working people is a paler shade of Tory policies. With all the problems facing us, it is utterly scandalous that trade union leaders can find little better to do than argue over how many votes they will wield at the Labour Party conference.

As if this is not bad enough behind the scenes we have

the T&G and GMB leaders using the debate to jockey for position as to who is going to lead a new super-union. This is a reflection of a trade union movement that is totally out of touch with the realities faced by ordinary members.

Working class organisation was built through the struggle and sacrifices of millions of ordinary people against a vicious capitalist system. Those early militants knew that the only way forward was to smash capitalism and that the only way to do it was to take control of society and end wage-slavery forever. This is a lesson that must be re-learned and it must be clear by now that the shambles that is the TUC and Labour Party are not about to mount that challenge.

To meet this situation, workers must begin to form organisations that are both capable of defending and improving our day to day living conditions and in the long term going on the offensive against capitalism. We believe that anarchosyndicalism, through its use of revolutionary unions based on strong workplace and community organisation and a strategy of workers' control, is the way forward.

As part of the process of building such organisations, the Transport Worker Network, along with other industrial networks, is hosting a one-day conference aimed at discussing the problems faced by trade unionists and posing the alternative of revolutionary unions (for details see the advert on page 8). We urge all those who are interested in seeing an end to the current paralysis of the trade unions to attend.

## PRIVATISATION

**The slow, remorseless drive towards privatisation grinds on with the rail unions seemingly powerless to stop or even intervene to try to prevent the process they now appear to accept as inevitable.**

The BRB, having now admitted that the 150 million spent on OFQ (Organisation For Quality) was money wasted, plan yet another re-organisation due to commence next April, which in all but name will be the first stage of privatisation. They plan to set up Railtrack as a separate

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## PRIVATISATION-cont.from pg.1

"shadow company"; set up the first 7 "shadow franchises", including the whole of Scotrail; and transfer S & T (Signals and Telecommunications) to British Telecom. In short, they will introduce a scheme outlined in the white paper on privatisation into practice while still under state ownership. This will allow the Tories to test their plans and iron out any problems well away from the public gaze because the whole thing will still be under overall British Rail control.

The unions' response to the break-up of the system and back-door privatisation has been to enter into talks. Instead of rejecting the board's plans and starting to campaign against them they actually met management! By even discussing the proposals the unions give them legitimacy. What do the leadership hope to gain? Do they expect to win better conditions for members by meekly accepting privatisation? To expect this of a management which has systematically destroyed bargaining procedures to such an extent that the unions are virtually no longer recognised at any level defies belief. This, taken with ASLEF's recent history, leads us to ask to what extent they now function at national level as a union. It must also be asked what RMT leaders are even doing talking to a management which has just ended payroll deduction of dues in a bid to destroy the union.

This near-disastrous state the unions find themselves in has not come about by accident, but is the direct result of a failed strategy. The unions decided from the beginning that they would not mobilise the workforce to take strike action against privatisation because it would mean breaking the law. Fear of the law has been so great that they have hardly raised the issue in the workplace.

The failure to confront privatisation head-on has led to the inability to respond to management's attempts to break collective bargaining in the run-up to the sell-off. Instead of linking each attack together with privatisation into a general fight-back, the unions sought to fight issue by issue on a piecemeal basis. Hence, we have seen the failure to link the scrapping of the negotiating machinery; the imposition of individual contracts; the never-ending reorganisations and the ending of payroll deduction with privatisation. Even the strikes against compulsory redundancies were not linked to privatisation - how can you fight compulsory redundancies without fighting privatisation?

Even at this late stage, with disaster almost upon us, the union leaders refuse to alter their failed strategy. At this year's RMT conference, on a motion calling for strike action against privatisation, Knapp made it clear he would never back action on this issue. He argued that the way forward was to campaign for BR's right to bid for franchises and to mobilise action against individual

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attacks on pay and conditions. We can only wonder where he has been the last few years. Fortunately this was not the mood of the conference and the notion was passed with speakers arguing for an all-out campaign against the sell-off of the railways.

Privatisation is almost upon us. If it is not stopped it will mean the loss of thousands of jobs; massive cuts in pay and conditions and the destruction of the industry as we know it. This is not a matter that splits along political lines; it is not a question of "left" and "right" but an issue that will affect every railworker. What is needed now is a massive campaign, by those who oppose Knapp's position, to try to mobilise support even at this late hour for strike action.

We must also begin to question how, as rail unions, we got into such a mess and just how do we begin to get out of it. Surely, this is not only a question for railworkers but also for the whole of the trade union movement.

## PICCADILLY 4

**The Piccadilly 4 industrial tribunal, due to start on July 14th, has been postponed.** This was due to the fact that Jimmy Knapp was unable to appear owing to illness. It was thought that the case could be heard without him but the 4 decided that as the case was too important, not just for them but for every LDC rep, that it would be best to wait until Brother Knapp was able to attend. This was not an easy decision as the sacking has been hanging over the 4 for over a year and they were desperate to have the matter resolved.

Their morale has been boosted by the various decisions taken at the RMT conference in June. The conference passed motions overturning the "majority" NEC decision to obey the court ruling and call off the strike. A motion condemning the leadership for not carrying out a campaign in support of the 4 was also passed. The 4 feel that ordinary members of the union have now vindicated their stance which goes a long way towards making up for the terrible way some members of the RMT leadership have treated our sacked brothers.

The conference also passed a motion instructing the union to pay compensation should the case fail at the tribunal. This is the least the union could do as it is highly unlikely that they will ever work again given their sackings for trade union activities. Ordinary members should continue their tremendous support by ensuring that the union stands by the conference decision and they receive full compensation.

## BUS NEWS

### WALSALL WORKERS WIN REINSTATEMENT FOR SACKED REP

The series of one day strikes by bus drivers mentioned in bulletin no. 5 have won reinstatement for the shop steward sacked for revealing details of an "off the record" management meeting. He is also being paid 5000 in compensation. An industrial tribunal had decided the rep should be reinstated, but management refused. It was two further one day strikes that changed their minds - actions speak louder than words! Congratulations!

### GLASGOW - STRATHCLYDE WIN 3.5% RISE THROUGH DETERMINATION

As also reported in the last Transport Worker bulletin, Strathclyde bus workers having originally rejected a 1.7% pay offer, then 2% (both of which were recommended by the TGWU), planned a one day strike then all out, which got them a further offer of 3.5%. The company has been bought out by workers and management, but the system, as ever, remains the same.

### YOUR NEWS in - Transport Worker - bulletin.

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.

## TRADE UNIONISM IN CRISIS BUILDING AN ANARCHO SYNDICALIST ALTERNATIVE

The dayschool to be held on October 30th, '93, as advertised on the back page of this bulletin, is open to all workers both in transport and other industries who recognise, as we do, that effective solidarity, fighting organisation, workers control and building permanent resistance to bosses and politicians will not come from anywhere but the working class itself.

We hope it will be a success in consolidating the efforts both of ourselves, and the Education and Public Service Workers Networks in building a movement based in workplaces capable of playing a part in turning the tide of

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attacks on our working lives and living standards we have been facing for too long.

Importantly for those of us who are either isolated in our workplaces or from fellow militants by distance will be the opportunity to meet others from our industries or area, to create further networks in other industries, and make the contacts that will enable us to support one another locally in our efforts. In tandem with industrial organisation, local organisation has an equally vital role in supporting strikes, building support across industries, responding to local circumstances and establishing the strong links that can prevent us being picked off individually or demoralised.

Attend the dayschool on October 30th. For further information and/or to distribute publicity in your area, contact the TWN at P.O. Box 73, Norwich. NR1 2EB.

## RMT AGM

The RMT AGM has agreed to hold a special general meeting (SGM) to consider a number of issues relating to finance. As well as the officers' redundancy package (see separate article) other issues include moves towards a part-time NEC and charging a percentage of compensation for legal aid in legal cases which are successful. Both these issues should be opposed. A part-time NEC would only weaken the state of ordinary members - NEC members are at least elected from the workplace with recent experience of working in the industry with many returning to work after their 3-year period on the NEC. It would also hand over the union to full-timers, many of whom have not seen a workplace in years. The idea that members should pay for legal assistance is a disgrace and no doubt comes from the union solicitors, Pattinson and Brewer, who have a stake in such a move. It would turn the union into a money-making organisation on the "ambulance-chasing" American lawyer model.

To regularly bring out further bulletins and hold regional open meetings in the coming months, we badly need financial support.

Each bulletin costs around £450 to print and mail out. This bulletin (4,000 copies printed) very nearly didn't happen.

Unfortunately we don't have any secret or wealthy backers, just what transport workers raise. We hope you can send us a donation to guarantee 'Transport Workers' continued appearance.

Cheques payable to 'Transport Worker Network'.

Thank you.



# THE MOVEMENT FOR WORKERS' CONTROL

*The second part of railwayworkers history - continued from 'How to be your own boss' in TW no.4. Send an SAE for a copy if you missed it.*

**The dominance of liberalism in the trade unions set the scene for a political crisis at the turn of the century.** Real wages declined in value between 1900 and 1913 by 3 to 5 %, while productivity per head had risen 7% in the same period. In 1908 the number of days lost through strikes quadrupled and between 1910 and 1913 it never dropped below 10 million per year, reaching a high point of 38 million days in 1912. By 1910 with the growth in union organisation and industrial militancy many workers, in particular the syndicalists, began to make a political challenge to Liberalism/Labourism.

## INDUSTRIAL UNIONISM

The argument for workers' control was linked with the movement for industrial unions. A syndicalist union for railway workers, the General Railway Workers' Union had been established in 1890 in the Manchester area. Charlie Cramp of the ASRS and Tom Lowth of the GRWU were both inspired by 'the Wobblies', the Industrial Workers of the World who propagandised for 'One Big Union' of the working class. Cramp who became Industrial General Secretary of the NUR in 1920 wrote:

"The conception of industrial unionism held by the NUR is that the nature of the product in any industry determines the definition of the industry insofar as it applies to the organised workers who are employed in any capacity in or about the undertaking. The railway, providing transport as it does, must be regarded as an industry. All those whose labours in any way contribute to the carrying on of this industry are either railwaymen or railwaywomen, and thus being part of the industry their conditions are ultimately governed by the facts and prosperity of the carrying concern which does produce transport as its chief commodity for sale".

In 1906 a rank and file campaign, the "All Grades Movement", sought to improve wages and reduce working

hours as well as unify the unions, it resulted in a doubling on union membership. In 1907 members of the ASRS voted by a large majority to strike until union recognition had been achieved, a strike was averted only when Lloyd George, with the help of union leaders, persuaded the railway companies to accept the Railway Conciliation Scheme, which replaced the union recognition with conciliation boards on which workers representatives could sit whether union members or not, and which further divided workers by grade. By 1911 the average weekly wage of railworkers was a penny less than in 1907 at a time of rising food prices, thousands of railway workers were working over sixty hours a week, then as now.

Many railway workers were in contact with industrial unionist ideas through working alongside dock workers and seamen. Merseyside railworkers witnessed the successful seamen's strike of June 1911, organised by Tom Mann and the new Transport Workers' Federation, while July saw dockers striking for an advance on their last wage rise, the "docker's tanner" of 1889. A wave of unofficial strikes followed on the railways. With a quarter of the workforce out, and more every day, the executives of the railway unions called a joint meeting and agreed unanimously to call a national strike for full union recognition. As Bagwell puts it "the leaders had to race to get up level with the men".

## THE SYNDICALIST REVOLT

On the 18th-19th August 1911 railworkers of all grades struck in a well organised blow against intolerable working conditions. There was a general fear that the military would be used to shoot strikers. An anarchist "Don't shoot!" leaflet was widely distributed to soldiers and a railway worker named Fred Crowsley had 3000 copies printed at his own expense, was arrested at Aldershot for distributing to soldiers and sent to prison for 4 months. Guy Bowman, the editor of "The Industrial Syndicalist" was prosecuted and imprisoned for 9 months, and the printers for 6 months. Tom Mann was imprisoned for reading out the leaflet at a meeting in Manchester, and sentenced to six months in Strangeways.

During this period, a journal, the *Syndicalist Railwayman* was printed, arguing for a restructuring of the industry under workers' control, rather than the liberal tradition of nationalisation. Workers, it declared "...have little reason for placing any degree of confidence in the State as

employer. As the conflict 'twixt capital and labour becomes keener, the workers are having impressed on them the real character and functions of the existing State... the state is essentially a ruling class organisation and its functions are chiefly coercive".

Despite the immense achievement of uniting half a million railway workers under the banner of the NUR by 1920, and a ten year struggle which had seen two national strikes, punctuated by a world war, the leadership ended up with another conciliation scheme such as had been offered to the ASRS by Lloyd George in 1907.

The lesson that the railway companies could now be beaten through strike action was mis-used by the leaders of the union who were more concerned to get a 'fair hearing' from the employers and to establish a negotiating machinery which would guarantee their future role in the industry. Politically, the leadership of the NUR was dominated by the same class collaboration as had run the ASRS and more and more employers were seeing the advantages offered by such leaders as J.H. Thomas

## BREL NEWS

As highlighted in Transport Worker 5 ("BREL Looks Black") the threat of redundancies hanging over workers at ABB Transportation (BREL before it was sold off) have become a reality. The company announced that 900 of its 6,134 staff were to be made redundant. They also warned that 3,500 more jobs were at risk because of a shortage in orders.

The fate of BREL workers is directly linked to the looming privatisation of the railways. If the sell-off goes ahead there is little doubt that a question mark will hang over the future of train-making in Britain due to line closures and the failure of private operators to replace worn-out stock. We only need to look at the situation which has already occurred with bus manufacturers which have all but collapsed in the aftermath of bus de-regulation.

Therefore the fight for BREL workers' jobs must be tied in with the fight to halt privatisation of the railways. BREL workers must join in the campaign for strike action against the sell-off which is the only sure way of securing their jobs.

## BOB'S JOB

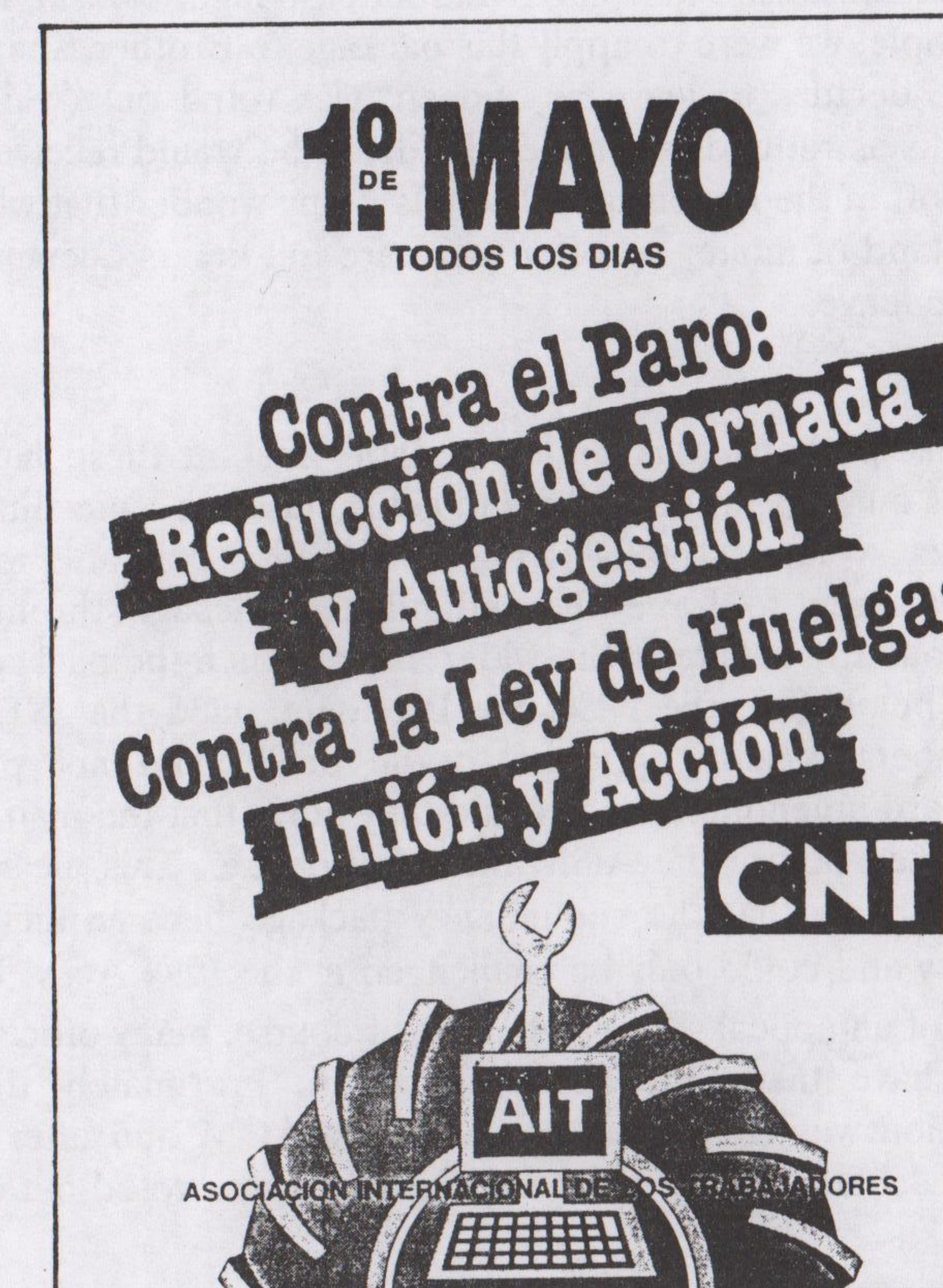
**Bob Horton**, former BP chief, now working 3 days a week on the break-up of BR for privatisation, has awarded himself a 300% pay rise. This took Mr Horton's pay from £28,640 per year to £120,000. This comes at a time when public sector workers are being told they must accept rises below 1.5% and is the latest in a long line of inflation-busting rises for management in newly privatised industries. Is it any wonder that BR management are working flat out for privatisation no matter what the social cost.

## INTERNATIONAL NEWS

### WORKERS IN SPAIN JOIN REVOLUTIONARY UNION

Recently, as a result of sackings and generally poor working conditions in the Barcelona distribution company SEUR (akin to White Arrow and others), workers there have joined en masse the revolutionary union the CNT.

The CNT is a union which rejects class collaboration and seeks to resolve conflicts with boss class not through professional negotiators but through accountable delegates. At a recent national meeting of CNT SEUR delegates in Saragossa the Barcelona section stated its readiness to launch an indefinite strike if the conflict is not resolved soon.



Our Barcelona comrades can do this because it is they who control their union. They decide what is best for them and they carry it out without union bureaucrats and bosses. Just like the kind of union we've advocated here at Transport Worker and the kind of workers' union based on solidarity that we are building.

**Info: Solidaridad Obrera, CNT paper, Spain.**

(A speaker from the CNT union in Spain will be at the dayschool we are jointly organising in London on October 30th).



# UNION FULL TIMERS - Only In It For The Money?

It would now appear that full-time officers of the RMT have had enough and decided to get out while the going is good. They have sat down - with themselves - and negotiated a redundancy package - for themselves - that will ensure they do not leave empty-handed.

The deal they have worked out includes: £5,000 for those full-timers accepting voluntary redundancy, £5,000 for those over 40 years old (i.e. all of them); a month's pay for every year's service to the union and retention of their union-subsidised mortgages and union-bought cars. If, for example, we were to apply this package to Brother Knapp if he decides to leave or, indeed, was voted out (which counts as redundancy under the deal), he would receive a pay-off in the region of £100,000. Is it any wonder that with this kind of money on offer there are full-timers queuing up to leave.

Whilst perhaps it is understandable that in these hard times our officers should try to get themselves a nice little earner, what is totally wrong is the way that attempts were made to force the redundancy package through without any debate in the wider union. When the package was put before the NEC the President ruled that NEC members bitterly opposed to the deal could not put forward amendments nor could they move that the matter be taken before the AGM for a full debate. This meant, in practice, that the redundancy package became union policy and could only be challenged at the 1994 AGM by way of an appeal - by which time, of course, many officers will have taken the money and run. Fortunately this position was challenged at this year's AGM and after a long debate, during which the President was voted out of

the chair twice (surely a record), the leadership was forced to back down. The redundancy package will now form part of the debate on finances to take place at a special conference (SGM).

Here at Transport Worker we do not see the need for redundancies. With management virtually ignoring the unions it is the role of full-timers that has to change to one of organisers. They should be out in the workplace ensuring that new starters join the union and that membership is maintained. As organisers they would constantly campaign among the membership, arguing the union's case and the need to fight back. Their often sweet-heart relationship with management would also have to change to one of open hostility. Full-timers would be at the forefront of a union in open conflict with management, a union struggling on behalf of its membership. That was the role of full-timers when the unions were built - it is a role they should return to.



This still leaves the problem of union finances but this could easily be solved by paying officers of the union, including national leaders, the average pay of union members. Those officers who do not have the stomach for a fight should be allowed to leave, receiving the same redundancy terms on offer to the general membership. The union could signal the new fighting mood by employing the 4 sacked Piccadilly guards as full-timers showing management that the union was not about to stand by and allow its own destruction.

However, we really wonder whether the unions in their current sorry state are capable of such a revolutionary change.

# END OF RMT SUBS' CHECK OFF: Is this the end of 'good industrial relations'?

From 22nd July 1993, the British Railways Board ended the payment of union subscriptions to the RMT through the checkoff facility - ie deducting union subs at source. Does this mark the end of 'good industrial relations' in the railway industry? We hope so.

There is no doubt that the end of the checkoff is going to damage the RMT severely in the short term, there will be an immediate decline in membership more marked in some areas than others. It is likely that were the RMT is competing for members with other unions, ie amongst white collar staff and workshop staff, some members will take the opportunity to transfer their loyalty to TSSA or the Confed' unions (AEEU or TGWU). In other areas where there is weak branch organisation or where individual contracts have been brought in by management in recent years, it is possible that non-unionism may become more common.

This is what the bosses want. The RMT is being punished for not being a good boys' union and for striking against compulsory redundancies in April 1993. Above all it is being punished for being an industrial union at time when the industry is being decimated, salaamed and hived off into the private sector. The existence of an industry-wide union which organises workers not on the basis of whether they wear a suit and tie or a set of overalls, not because they sit at the front of a train rather than in a panel box, but because they work in an industry which produces a social benefit (public transport), is a direct threat to the politics of privatisation. The National Union of Railwaymen was first created in 1913 precisely to take on the private railway companies and to achieve national rates of pay and working conditions. As we have pointed out before in Transport Worker, the aim of privatising railways is to smash local and national agreements, to lower safety standards, to create more pay differentials - an industrial union is a constant threat to the privatisation strategy.

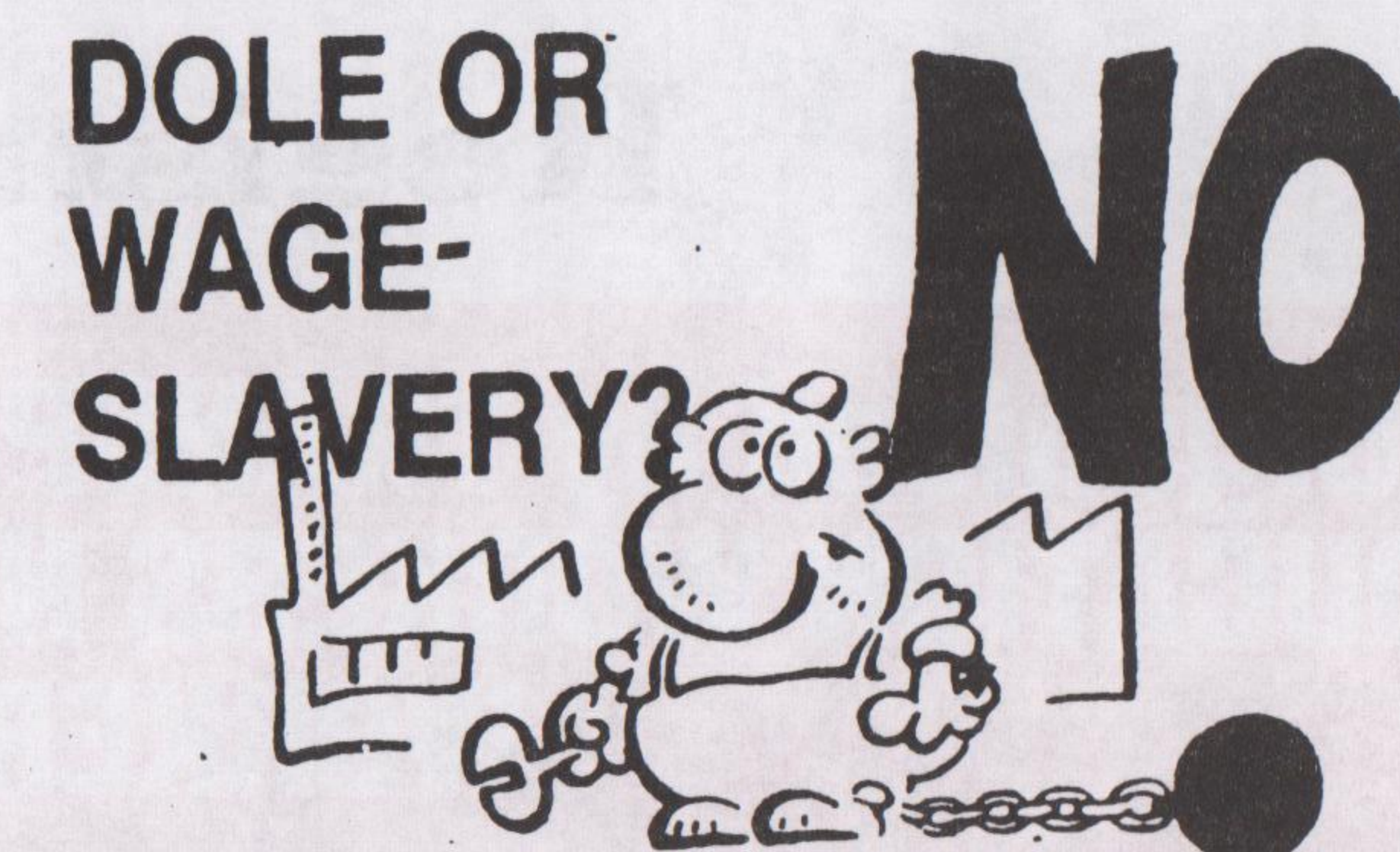
The decision to end the checkoff system takes us right back to the days before employers saw trade unions as useful partners in industrial relations. The issue for union members is not simply how to stay in benefit, it has become

an issue of derecognition of their union. The BRB are in the process of smashing the established unions in the railway industry. This should not have been a surprise to anyone who has seen the way the BRB introduced the new machinery of negotiation over the last two years. The checkoff facility has been held back by management as the final matter to be negotiated with the RMT - a very real threat to the likes of Knapp who are more concerned about the financial state of the union than the realities of industrial organisation. Given the catastrophic state of the unions finances under the Knapp regime, the BRB have obviously seen the possibility of finishing of the RMT for good by hitting the union in the pocket.

## WORKPLACE ORGANISATION

For union activists the immediate problem is how to maintain a level of organisation in the workplace. Due to the abduction of responsibility by the leadership clique around Knapp and Loughlin, branches have been left at the eleventh hour to deal with the urgent need to collect members' subscriptions. It appears now that over 80% of RMT members will not be paying by direct debit. In the long run any decent working class organisation can no more rely on banks than it can rely on the good will of management to allow it to survive; we succeed or fail by our own efforts and ingenuity.

The immediate future will see attempts by management to discipline and dismiss union activists who collect union subs on BR premises during working hours. Local union branches must be prepared to respond as soon as the first member is disciplined for collecting subs. The RMT's proposal to take such a case to an industrial tribunal will not exactly frighten management. The sacked Manchester Piccadilly LDC are still waiting for their industrial tribunal nearly one year on; many managers see a price well worth paying for getting rid of troublesome union activists. What is needed is for local branches to be prepared to respond directly to intimidation of activists by getting members to walk off the job. Nothing succeeds like direct action. This could then be the beginning of the rebuilding of real industrial organisation on the railways.



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

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Industry / workplace

Quantity

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