

Solidarity Bulletin

No. 7

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FREE

Staffing Solutions stuffed!

Solidarity Federation wins victory for workers at Norfolk veg plant

Several months of campaign work by the Norfolk & Norwich branch of the Solidarity Federation putting pressure on "employment agency" Staffing Solutions forced management of both WH Knights veg processing plant in Gooderstone, Norfolk and Staffing Solutions to agree to stop illegally charging workers £15 for ear protectors.

The Solidarity Federation's (SF) campaign for workers' basic rights at a number of employment agencies, particularly Staffing Solutions and SRA / CR Asker, began as a result of numerous workers requesting help. Since then weekly, sometimes daily, workers are contacting SF at the Solidarity Centre with complaints of illegal practices and victimisation.

Rip-off's

Just some of the "rip-offs" that Staffing Solutions and SRA / CR Asker are running:

- Charges for ear protectors, overalls & hats. Under the Noise at Work Act charges for the former are illegal, charges for the latter are unheard of, even by those in industry for a lifetime.

- "Administration" charges. The hourly rate paid to workers employed by agencies is of course only a fraction of what the agency gets, this is how they make their profits, cover admin and other costs. Staffing Solutions and SRA not only do this but deduct a *second time* from workers wages! In the past a few workers with both some confidence and knowledge of the system have challenged this and had the charges dropped immediately. For the less fortunate these "admin charges" continue.

- Travel charges; for most workers being bussed to workcosts maybe £1.50 a day. For non-English speaking

workers these charges are increased to sometimes £8 a day. - Payment irregularities; the more observant workers quickly come to realise that most if not all their weekly wage payments are short. One Staffing Solutions worker came to us with a comprehensive collection of payslips and a personal record of hours worked, the two never agreed, the discrepancy sometimes over £30 in a week. Many who leave during or after their first week are be paid nothing.

Countless other attacks on workers' pay, conditions and dignity all add up to a systematic rip-off scam operating under a thin layer of legality and respectable suits. Systematic because the above and many other rip-offs are done to every worker, because complaints are met by rounds of buck-passing - "its the plant's fault / mistake / responsibility", "it's the agencies' fault / mistake / responsibility". As a last resort they use intimidation. It is run by and with the full blessing of management.

Fighting back

We aim to end these rip-offs by any means at our disposal. Decent pay and conditions are the right of all workers in these sectors - agencies such as Staffing Solutions make their large profits not by work, but by being parasites on those who really create the wealth, working in the fields and processing plants.

Whilst the law favours bosses in their grab for profits, we must rely on our own organisation to get what is rightfully ours. Alone we can do little, but as we have already shown together we can win better health & safety, working conditions and pay. This is why unions were created 100 years ago, whilst the big trade unions run by men in distant offices might have forgotten this, we haven't.

Castle Mall - Sick Building Syndrome

Increasing evidence is emerging of major flaws in the Castle Mall in Norwich city centre. Built only three years ago and presented as little less than the "jewel in Norwich's crown".

Doctors attempting to treat workers from the Mall for nausea, frequent headaches, dizziness, eye, nose and throat problems are now referring to Sick Building Syndrome at the Mall as being the cause.

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SOLIDARITY BULLETIN

Published by the Norfolk & Norwich branch of the
Solidarity Federation:

*affiliated to the International Workers Association
for Anarcho Syndicalism:*

a different kind of union - run by workers for workers

* support & resources

* action for workplace organisation, better pay and
conditions

* resistance to boss dictatorship

* organising nationally by industry & locally across all
sectors

for

workers self-management of industry & direct community
control,

production for need not profit,

a world without bosses, politicians and wage-slavery,

from each according to their ability, to each according to
their need.

SOLIDARITY - DIRECT ACTION - ORGANISATION

*Solidarity Centre - Room 13, Muspole Workshops,
Muspole Street (off Duke Street), Norwich*

Tel. 01603 611072.

Open: every Saturday 12-4pm

1st & 3rd Tuesdays of month 7-9pm

Postal address: PO Box 73, Norwich NR3 1QD.

SOLIDARITY CENTRE NEWS...

Welcome to Solidarity Bulletin No. 7

The Solidarity Bulletin has a regular print run of
1,500 distributed across Norwich and the county.
The months since the last Solidarity Bulletin
(September '95) have been both full and
successful.

Our campaign for workers' rights against
employment agency rip-offs met its first success
in October, as a result of pressure we brought on
WH Knights' and Staffing Solutions. Their
management were forced at a meeting with our

BEWARE!

**Staffing
Solutions**

SRA

Parasite 'employment agencies' operating in this area

Known scams include:

Illegal 'administration' charges

Charging for ear protectors, overalls and hats

Enforcing quasi legal 'self-employed' status on their workers

Insulting rates of pay

Wage-slavery - living off others' labour

Don't Stand Alone

local Solidarity Federation (SF) delegates to stop
charging workers for ear protectors, despite their
initial attempts to claim that calling the workforce
"self-employed" somehow makes what they do
legal!

To add injury to insult the boss of Staffing
Solutions, a Mr Preston Andrews, is fond of
assaulting those who challenge his pathetic empire,
sometimes in person, sometimes by sending round
his goons with baseball bats. Even a West Norfolk
vicar has been at the receiving end of some
intimidation. Up to the present we have received
threats of legal action for libel and such-like from
SRA, WH Knights and Watton Produce, all very
upset at being called parasites. They will be pleased
to know that rubbish goes straight into the bin.

We continue to leaflet and poster every plant
these agencies supply labour too, and offer all
agency workers the benefits of organisation,
anonymity, protection (in every sense of the word),
and full and active support in bettering their pay
and conditions.

Our 2nd **Summer Fair** was held in August with
an intoxicating mix of games, BBQ food,
beverages, stalls, raffles, and live music from the
Proles / 1926 Committee. Lasting well into the
night, attendance was up on the first year and again
several hundred £'s were raised towards Solidarity
Centre campaigns and printing costs. Expect to see
the Fair again this August, only bigger and better!
For further details drop in to the Centre nearer the
time...

February 1996 saw the launch of an
unemployed section of Norfolk & Norwich SF. An
information leaflet has been produced addressing
the **Job Seekers Allowance (JSA)** that will take
effect in October. Several hundred leaflets have
now been distributed to claimants at the Job Centre
and DSS offices. The JSA basically means that
claimants must take the first low paid job offered
or lose all entitlement to benefits.

The JSA comes at a time when DSS workers
are having performance related pay schemes put on
them. Adding 2 & 2 we see that DSS workers will
be put into a position where they will only be able
to earn a living wage if they achieve high success
rates in implementing JSA. In a nutshell, getting
the maximum of claimants possible to take the
work nobody will touch at rates of £1-2 an hour.
With both workers and claimants sharing common
ground in opposing the JSA and its implications,
we are optimistic of developing contacts in order

to explore the possibilities for mutual support and joint action.

If you are unemployed, angry and want to do something about it, then get involved. Likewise any benefit agency / Job Centre / DSS workers reading this.

From January to the present, workers at Norwich's three **McDonalds** take-aways have on numerous occasions been visited by the Solidarity Federation members distributing a leaflet on legal rights regarding health and safety, as well as encouraging workplace organisation. This is part of a national campaign targetting **McDonalds** for their appalling workplace health and safety record and anti-union policy.

Should you or anyone you know be working for *McDonalds* or an agency such as *Staffing Solutions* or *SRA*, make sure you visit or ring the Solidarity Centre for our leaflets and to find out about the support we can provide.

DON'T LET THE BOSS GRIND YOU DOWN!

Solidarity Federation
a different kind of union

- run by workers, for workers
- full and active support, no matter how small your workplace
- all decision making by members, not distant bureaucrats
- determined and effective action
- working for change today, not promises tomorrow

HELP YOURSELF-JOIN

The recent cinema showing of the film **LAND & FREEDOM** both before and after the New Year at Cinema City involved us displaying our mobile exhibition of the social revolution in 1936 Spain in the cinema foyer and the prescence of a Solidarity Centre bookstall. The video showing the following week at the Centre was packed out.

Based on the experiences of a young Liverpool docker who travels to Spain to fight with the workers against the military coup, the film touches on the central role of the anarcho syndicalist union CNT. It was the CNT's membership of 2 million who firstly resisted Franco's

coup and then put into practice workers' control of industry, agriculture and the community - without bosses or government.

If there are parts of history that are kept secret then this is one of them. Here was a true social revolution that stood for freedom and control from below rather than state dictatorship. The CNT is part of the same international organisation -**International Workers Association (IWA)** - as the Solidarity Federation. The IWA is going from strength to strength as it expands from Europe, north and south America and Australia to include new organisations in Eastern Europe, Russia, Asia and Africa. Anarcho syndicalism is increasingly seen as the only alternative to the current system of multinational power elites and the increasing gulf between the super rich and the rest of us who are denied any meaningful control over any parts of our lives.

In the three years since establishing the Centre at Muspole Street we have gone from strength to strength; membership continues to grow, and our relevance is ever greater in a society where at work we are abandoned by directionless and weak-kneed unions whilst politicians compete in their efforts to make us the worlds' cheapest wage-slaves.

**HELP YOURSELF - JOIN the
SOLIDARITY FEDERATION**
visit the Solidarity Centre or write us for details.

NEWS

Sacked on Sunday at Wyvale Garden Centre



Whilst full-time workers are by law free not to work Sundays, Wyvale Garden Centres disagree in order to put profit first, second and third. Just as many national retailers were happy to break the old Sunday trading laws in their greed for profit, today they are showing that little has changed.

The scum at the top - management - are immediately sacking all and any workers who use their legal right to not work on Sundays. Wyvale management know that whilst these workers are able to get favourable decisions from Industrial Tribunals (IT's), these are toothless in that they cannot not force any employer to re-employ. Wyvale have acheived their goal regardless of the law; getting shot of those who won't work Sundays. Without a union even our legal rights are worthless.

Contd. overleaf.....

Wyvale Garden Centres make £3 million in profit every year, enough to exactly double the pay of every one of their workers...

With friends like these...

Nestle: following the unions' catalogue of failures in doing anything useful to oppose closure, all that remained was hope for decent redundancy (see *Solidarity Bulletin* #6). As if to confirm our criticisms, of the unions' so-called "leadership", another example of their remoteness from the membership resulted in a walk-out by all three shifts of engineers. Despite the unions entering redundancy negotiations as a joint team, the engineers' award on top of redundancy was half that of the others. The union response came quickly and was no different from management's, "they are breaking the law and should return to work...there is no more money on offer". When will union "leaders" like these do us a favour and just call themselves "Friends of the Bosses"?!

Startrite: a new pay structure cooked up by management and the union NUKFAT sparked a walk-out by 300 of the workforce. Whilst management and NUKFAT claimed workers were happy with the deal that left some workers £50 to £150 a week short, events spoke otherwise. Another example of how a union run not by its members but by cliques who spend more time with the bosses ends up being much the same.

Eastern Counties Newspapers

caring for Norwich & Norfolk, crapping on their workers

Whilst posing as publishers of caring, decent newspapers, some of the facts at ECN tell a different story

In pursuit of higher profits ECN, owned by the right-wing Colmans, firstly de-recognised the unions and have gone on to systematically attack the terms and conditions of the workforce, imposing longer hours, less pay and unfair treatment. Clearly the "do-gooding" Evening News and EDP do not think that charity starts at home.

ECN undermines its workforce by enforcing short-term contracts, in some cases for 6 months with only a weeks notice. This means no negotiation of pay, the inability to get loans or mortgages, and great insecurity. ECN makes millions of pounds of profit each year, but it decided that it wouldn't give the employees any of it - even the workers in the share bonus scheme were told that it wasn't enough for them to get a small part of the profits they had helped to create in the first place - what a scam!

ECN employ as few people as possible which means fewer employees have to do more work for no extra pay under more pressure from management. It has been suggested to employees that if they "can't do the numbers" and don't have the company ethos (!) then they should leave - as if there is a wealth of reasonably paid jobs in Norfolk!

ECN Head Office is at Prospect House - the prospect for ECN employees can only be bad if things aren't changed.

White Arrow Workers Survival Guide:



This recently produced pamphlet was put together by White Arrow workers in the Solidarity Federation's Transport Worker Network. It contains information on;

Counseling sessions - what are they for?

Discipline - How to avoid it

White Book agreement

Sickness scheme & your rights

Work Study, and finally...

T&G officers - who's side are they on?

- Order your copy from TWN, PO Box 73, Norwich, NR3 1QD. Enclose 2 x 1st class stamp to cover costs.

STOP PRESS...

Employment agency SRA / CR Asker have ceased to operate under these names. A new operation called Flexihire now exists run by some of those from SRA and the owner of Watton Produce.

for ALBERT MELTZER

Albert Meltzer has been a longtime member of the Solidarity Federation (belonging to a 'local' in London), and has been an inspiration to many of the current members. Sadly Albert died in May but we hope that this exceptionally brief view of his life and work introduces him to those who will never know him and can illustrate the strength of conviction it is possible to sustain in a lifetime for something that is as important as solidarity and freedom.

Albert was actively involved in working class struggle from the age of 15. He was an exception for his generation in that he was a convinced anarchist and syndicalist from the start without any family background in such activity.

His life story is inseparable from the development of Anarchism and syndicalism in both Britain and elsewhere, notably Spain.

From wartime anti-Nazi resistance, Anglo-Spanish co-operation in the anti-Franco resistance, fighting the Blackshirts and the battle of Cable Street to the printers' and miners' strikes, the so-called Angry Brigade, Anarchist Black Cross & Cairo Mutiny; Alberts' involvement and enthusiasm played it's part.

Through the 70's, 80's and 90's he played a central role in the publication of Black Flag and in the DAM and subsequently the Solidarity Federation.

His Auto-biography, "I couldn't Paint Golden Angels" appeared only this year. It is more than just an account of his life, it vividly illustrates working class struggle from the 1930's to today. It is a modest and at the same time impressive tribute to his full life. Albert was a man with endless energy, conviction and determination.

He is missed by all who knew him

Albert Meltzer Born 7th Jan 1920
Died 7th May 1996

Solidarity Federation **INDUSTRIAL NETWORKS:**

Education Workers Network (EWN), for teachers and lecturers, cleaners and technicians - the EWN is a national organisation for *all* workers in the education sector, from primary schools to higher education.

The EWN produces a regular free bulletin, *Education Worker*, the current issue (No 4) contains articles on PGCE, a sports boycott at Sheffield Hallam, the National Curriculum, crisis at universities, supply teaching, news from abroad...

Contact EWN by writing to PO Box 29, SW PDO, Manchester, M15 5HW

Transport Worker Network (TWN), has membership of railworkers, busworkers and at White Arrow. Over the past five years it has been very active in opposing rail privatisation, supporting railworkers victimised by BR management, and fighting both TGWU and RMT union leaders at BR, bus companies and White Arrow, as they increasingly side with management against the workforce and grass roots workers organisation.

The current issue of the TWN's free bulletin *TRANSPORT WORKER* (No 10), contains articles on the Labour Party, sackings of trade unionists by railway management, White Arrow, management greed and their "right to manage" and PCV laws.

For copies of the bulletin and to contact TWN, visit the Centre in Norwich or write to PO Box 73, Norwich NR3 1QD.

Public Service Worker Network (PSWN), members in local government and all the sectors funded by them (libraries, social services, etc) as well as in the health sector and at the DSS. The current issue of the PSWN bulletin *NETWORK*, covers library closures, NHS pay, info on part-time workers' rights, TUPE, Quality Assurance and demands decent pay not a minimum wage. For copies of the bulletin and further information write to PSWN, PO Box 1681, London N8 7LE.

Employment Agency Workers - contact N&N Solidarity Federation at the Solidarity Centre for details.

DYING FOR THE BOSS

Last year more than 50 people were killed at work and more than 25,000 were injured in accidents at work. The

chairman of the Health and Safety Commission, Frank Davies, said "These figures show employers are failing to take simple measures to reduce major injuries".

TUC LOGO LAUGH

One of the highlights of the TUC conference was the unveiling of the new £20,000 logo. Someone mentioned that it looked uncannily like a waffle, and we are inclined to agree. It seems they are stating the tools of their trade in graphic form now - waffle waffle waffle!



Britain & the World Economy

There was a time when Prime Ministers ran the country, at least with the nod of 'local' businessmen. But not today.

The shift from national economies to a single global economy is having the effect of undermining any pretence of democracy. Power is shifting into the hands of huge transnational corporations and away from national parliaments. Meanwhile, there is a new form of government structure emerging around these multinational corporations. A couple of years back the Financial Times described this as a "de facto world government", made up of the World Bank and the IMF, Gatt, the World Trade Organisation, the G7 Executive, and so on.

For multinational business concerns one distinct advantage of removing power from national parliaments is their being less "dangerous" - as there was always the small risk that they might fall partially under the influence of the "rabble".

So whilst John Major, Tony Blair and other politicians try to give the impression that they are or could run the country and its economy, they are in reality reduced to acting as labour brokers - a type of national temp agency - competing with every other country to sell their workforce (that's us) at the lowest price and on the most inviting terms to the likes of multinationals.

The logic of this process is taken as inevitable, even desirable, by the media and all politicians. But who ever stops, looks at the world and the living standards of the majority and asks for whose benefit all of this is? Clearly the only ones to benefit are the very powerful few and their yes-men who make it all run smoothly.

Recent examples that reached media attention in Britain are Timex shutting down its plant in Scotland when the workforce rejected the slashing of their wages and conditions - the plant's work then going over to much cheaper Pacific labour; and that of Hoover shutting a plant in France in order to have the benefits of tame trade unions and lower wage costs in the UK; coal imports from Colombia to the UK following the shutting down of nearly all our coal mines despite a national outcry...

To cut wages, you don't even have to move manufacturing though, you can just be able to threaten to do it. The threat alone is enough to lower wages and increase temporary rather than secure employment.

All politicians are keen to divert our attention from this trend that has now become a worldwide reality. Trade unions that for too long have been run without membership control and with pro-boss leanings are responding to world economic changes by selling workers' labour at lower and lower prices in competition with workforces overseas. Sadly this simply adds to a worldwide downward spiral in workers' pay and conditions.

Standing up to the suited and world-powerful bullies is to be applauded, as did the Timex workforce, but for victories not martyrs, a more farsighted and internationally-organised approach is called for, that substitutes collaboration with world capital with determined opposition. In this sphere lies the strength and potential of the International Workers Association with its emphasis on international workers' organisation and active solidarity. If we're to look for an alternative it won't be found with our parliaments and politicians.

Workplace Health & Safety: **a short one-off course**

General introduction to health & safety law and how to use it, plus

- The inadequacies of health & safety law.
- Basic principles and implementation in the workplace.
- As a "stick" to beat employers with.

Saturday 15 May, 1 - 4pm

Non-SF members welcome.

To register (free), please apply no later than Monday 10 May, tel Nch 611072.

SUBSCRIBE!

For further copies of this and future bulletins to distribute at work, to friends, etc. please fill in below and return to PO Box 73, Norwich NR3 1QD.

Please send a further copies, each issue

Name.....

Address.....

.....
.....

I would like further information about the Solidarity Federation and membership details _____ (please tick)

Subscribers outside Norfolk are requested to send 1st class stamp for each issue required.

Forthcoming events at the SOLIDARITY CENTRE:

PUBLIC MEETINGS

What does the SOLIDARITY FEDERATION do? What is anarcho-syndicalism?

An introduction to what we do, how and why we do it, our aims and an opportunity to put your questions and find out more...

Tuesday 25 June, 7.30pm

Anarcho syndicalism & community organisation

From the women-organised Barcelona rent strike to grass roots resistance in Norwich and across Britain by the thousands of community groups that defeated the Poll Tax, anarcho syndicalists have applied the same principles and methods of organisation that they promote in the workplace. How in practice have these been able to address education, local democracy, the environment and all the social issues in our lives?...

To what extent can anarcho syndicalism be said to have a relevance beyond the workplace?

Saturday 27 July, 2pm.

Castle Mall - Sick Building Syndrome - continued from front page

The fault is likely to lie with poor ventilation, low air movement and poorly maintained temperature and humidity control. Workers can only recollect the ventilation system being cleaned once in three years, complain of high humidity and the tap water being undrinkable. Working in the Mall also appears to result in high levels of lethargy, in some cases sinus problems and depression - all consistent with Sick Building Syndrome (SBS).

The individual symptoms of SBS alone might seem minor, but with many workers suffering several symptoms at once, health and quality of life can be very severely affected. Long term affects are not known. SBS equally affects new buildings as well as old.

There are numerous steps that can be taken to prevent or cure SBS. The inaction over SBS at Castle Mall makes it clear that the well-being of those who have to work in the Mall day after day is of little importance next to extracting the maximum of profit from rent. Increasingly Mall workers are concluding that their interests and health are not safe in the hands of their bosses - if anything will be done it will result from Mall workers organising and taking action themselves. All Mall workers keen to take action are encouraged to contact the Solidarity Federation. Read the Solidarity Bulletin for further news...