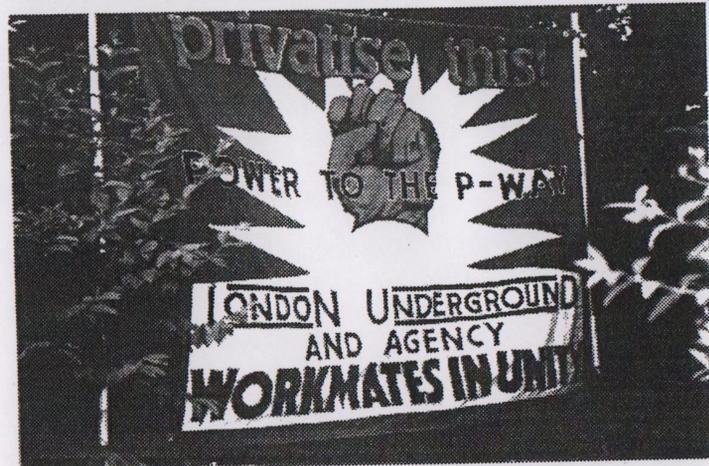


Solidarity

New workers' organisation on Tube



Tube workers at a West London depot have moved from grassroots trades unionism to workers' control over their own organisation. On Thursday 13th February, a meeting of the *Workmates Collective*, attended by 150 or so workers, unanimously carried a proposal to set up a council composed of recallable delegates from each gang. The *Collective* has been transformed from a handful of RMT workplace reps into the *Workmates' Council*, moving towards a libertarian formation on anarcho-syndicalist lines instead.

Produced by the **North & East London** local group of the anarcho-syndicalist **Solidarity Federation**.

We seek to replace capitalism with a stateless society based on the principle of from each according to their ability, to each according to their needs. We support working class struggles towards these ends. We recognise that not all oppression is economic, but can be based on gender, race, sexuality, or anything our rulers find useful.

Our activities are based on Direct Action — action by workers ourselves not through intermediaries like politicians and union officials. Our decisions are made through participation of the membership. We welcome anyone who agrees with our aims and principles. We also welcome comments on this newsletter, and donations towards the cost of future issues (cheques payable to NELSF).
See Page 3 for contact details

Workmates' history

Workers from various London Underground Ltd. (LUL) engineering departments formed the *Collective*. These included Track Installers (P-Way), Track Welders, Crossing Makers, Carpenters, Ultrasonic Rail Testers, Track Vent Cleaning Gangs, along with lorry drivers. Some of these departments work alongside large numbers of barely unionised subcontracted labour, comprising over 120 agency workers in total.

More than 250 workers formed the *Collective* initially centred on the fight against the privatisation of London Underground through the Public-Private Partnership. Over the last five years of this struggle agency workers have shown utmost loyalty to their LUL workmates during a number of strikes. This was established early on by agency Track Installers and Track Welders, some of whom had been Yorkshire and Kent miners, and has been maintained ever since.

This solidarity has also been maintained in dealing with Health & Safety issues affecting agency and LUL workers alike. When necessary, this has resulted in "refusals to work on the grounds of Health & Safety".

On track

At the time of writing, the various gangs have been going through the process of nominating their delegates. Initial delegates' meetings have been held to form the Council. A number of gangs have already nominated a delegate, and everything is said to look "on track"!

We extend fraternal greetings and solidarity to the *Workmates' Collective*.

Solidarity

for anarcho-syndicalism

Direct Action against War



The occupation of Iraq is not about liberation. The Anglo-American invasion is a part of a plan to build a new world order based around the interests of western multi-national corporations. War against Iraq will be followed by other wars. Marches and rallies are important but they are not enough to stop this cycle of destruction. Direct action is needed.

Action must have a global perspective because the oppression that capitalism creates touches the lives of all of us. It exploits and subjugates both the oppressed peoples of the poor nations and the working class of the developed nations. Capitalism divides us along national lines using patriotism to recruit us into armies to murder each other.

Of course there are big differences in the situations faced by the working class in different countries. British people find it hard to imagine the ordeal the Iraqis face as they are shot at checkpoints and subjected to arbitrary arrest and detention. But we have much in common with the people of Iraq. They don't live in a free society, and neither do we.

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Burning with anger

Firefighters have rejected a deal recommended by the FBU Executive Council and voted for further strike action. On offer was a 4% pay rise in return for the removal of all national conditions of service. Local fire authorities would also get the power to reduce staff levels, reduce fire cover and close fire stations without the need to consult the public or the union.

This was no better than the original "offer" previously rejected by the union's membership. In spite of this the FBU leadership called off industrial action for five weeks to allow 'serious and meaningful' negotiations to take place. One of the reasons given by Andy Gilchrist for considering the "offer" was the implications of the War in Iraq for the dispute.

Class war

Both "moral" pressure to support "our boys" and threats by John Prescott of emergency legislation to ban strikes are being used by the state in an attempt to break the dispute. In fact, firefighters' strikes will have greater impact as troops used to scab on them are needed for the occupation of Iraq.

Patriotism means working class people putting the bosses' interests before our own. We reject this.

Direct action against War

(Continued from page 1)

In Britain political parties are controlled by the rich donors that fund them and their policies are dictated by the big corporations that control the economy. At work we have no say in how things are run. We do not face anything like the physical threat that the Iraqis face but this does not mean we live in a real democracy.

One of the best ways of bringing together the struggles of the western working class and the oppressed peoples is by taking direct action against the war. This means blocking roads, school walkouts and industrial action.

The thousands of school students who left their classes in protest against the war have been the most effective part of the anti-war movement. But in

other areas better organisation will be needed when we face the wars of the future. This is especially true of the workplace where direct action against the Iraq war has had a lower profile.

One very effective exception to this was the action supported by 15 ASLEF drivers for the English Welsh Scottish Company (EWS) in Motherwell. In January they refused to move ammunition between Glasgow and the Glen Douglas weapons dump.

The refusal of the Fire Brigades Union conference to accept the pay deal recommended by the union leadership has also been important. Their dispute may have been called over a wage claim but it has meant that thousands of armed forces personnel have had to be kept back from the Gulf in case the government needs them to

take on fire-fighting duties.

We need to get to the point where we are organising ourselves and taking decisions ourselves. Union leaders always insist on following the letter of the law in industrial disputes and this blunts militancy. Union leaders do not support industrial action against war because they are not prepared to oppose the power of the state.

Industrial resistance

We need a new structure for industrial resistance. We must call workplace meetings where we can build support for unofficial action among our colleagues. Ultimately such action can lay the basis for a world without state power or exploitation in which resources are shared and ordinary people are no longer called on to slaughter each other for the benefit of the rich.

Agitators at work

Activities of North and East London Solidarity Federation

Anti-war activities

Train drivers and guards were leafletted at Kings X, St Pancras and Euston stations in support of the Motherwell action (see Page 1). SolFed members also distributed leaflets in Manchester, Bristol and Lancashire.

Teachers in Haringey, including NELSF members, helped organise a meeting to discuss spreading strike action on the day war broke out.

Protests on the day war broke out, including one where 300 people blocked Seven Sisters Road in Tottenham, were joined by NELSF members. In the evening a NELSF contingent joined protests in and around Parliament Square. We also leafletted the national demonstration on the Saturday after war broke out, urging mass direct action against the war.

BNP prevented from meeting

An attempt by the British National Party to hold a meeting in Hornsey was prevented by a coalition of local people, including local NELSF members. A couple of hundred people assembled in Crouch End at the nazis' publicised redirection point.

Justice for Roger Sylvester

NELSF members attended a picket of Tottenham Police Station to mark the 4th Anniversary of Roger's death in police custody. Eight officers involved in his death refused interviews with the Essex Police investigation. The Crown Prosecution Service has failed to bring charges against the officers. There has not yet been an inquest into Roger's death, and his family are still waiting for justice.

Strange victory



UNISON members have called off the strikes which closed all Hackney's Libraries on Saturdays for more than a year. All industrial action was halted in January after the Council made an acceptable offer. Saturday Enhanced Pay whose withdrawal caused the dispute was neither mentioned nor restored, however.

The Council tried to break the strike by stopping full-time workers from working Saturdays, hiring Saturday-only staff to open three of the Borough's seven Libraries. However, on the first day, when there was no strike action by UNISON, the Head of Library Services had to staff the counter at Shoreditch Library to keep it open. The next week Saturday-only UNISON members were on strike, closing Shoreditch Library.

Negotiations

On the Monday negotiations began on the instructions of the new Mayor of Hackney, Jules Pipe, as the Saturday closure made Hackney the worst Library Authority in Britain. So, what did workers get in return for calling off the industrial action if they didn't get what they struck for? They will be paid an additional salary point for studying for the European Computer Driving Licence, followed by a second point on

completion of the ECDL. The cost of this and the hiring of additional Saturday-only staff is much more than that of simply paying Saturday Enhanced Pay, a very high price for saving the face of Managing Director Max Caller, who had unilaterally withdrawn the payment. It also applies to all existing library workers (and

to all new ones while it lasts), including those who don't work Saturdays, and has been dubbed the "Hackney Factor" after the two additional salary points all Hackney Council "white collar" workers used to receive, but which were taken away by a previous regime.

Recently full-time staff have been asked to volunteer to work on Saturdays at overtime rates, so the Council's "solution" to workers demanding the rate for the job is obviously failing. It can only be a matter of time before the decision is made to change full-time workers' timetables back to working every second Saturday, which might also enable the Council to open all its Libraries, rather than just three of them.

Then Saturday Enhanced Pay will be an immediate issue again, and since the Council will want people to work, they will have to pay it to get them to. Workers' bargaining position will be stronger than during the strikes, but will owe that to those strikes. So, the lesson is direct action works, but sometimes it works in mysterious ways!

For more information, including monthly socials, contact:
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