

# Solidarity

## 'Workmates' Victory

Full time and agency workers at a West London tube depot have knocked back attempts by privatised management to impose new working practices.

In February the 'Workmates Collective' began organising along anarcho-syndicalist lines by forming a council consisting of a recallable delegate from each gang (see *Solidarity* #3). Since then they have been privatised, along with all other engineers on London Underground. Workers have been sold like chattels to the private consortia *Metronet* and *Tubelines* (including *Balfour Beatty* and *Bombardier*).

### Staff culture

Predictably, it wasn't long before local management began to act like new overlords (a 'business strategy plan' had been planned months in advance!), by attempting to impose new working practices. The first 'bullet to be bitten' was tackling the so called 'staff

canteen and track culture' by ending "job and knock" ("knocking off" when the "job" is finished) for tube track workers.

### Inhuman conditions

Track workers in the tube system endure some of the worst conditions imaginable: confined spaces, heat, dust, filth, vermin, deafening plant, diseased water, asbestos contamination; and hard, heavy, sweaty, often dangerous work. "Job and knock" has always been tacitly allowed. The last 2½ hours of the shift were dead working time anyway, due to track current being recharged for trains to run in the morning.

However, workers going home when the job was done was no longer acceptable after privati-

sation with its de-humanising ethos. At the beginning of August it was relayed to workers by management that from that Monday night, all workers would have to come back to the depot and sit in the canteen until the end of the shift.

### 'Workmates' resist

During an impromptu mass assembly of Workmates in the canteen the following shift, consensus was reached and 'working to rule' began immediately in a sporadic fashion across various worksites on the LUL system. Normally it is also tacitly understood that most of the 'unworkable bureaucratic type' health and safety rules are only 'legal cosmetics'. The newly formed 'Workmates Council' met on Wednesday to bring these actions together by seeking a definitive mandate from the gangs. However, by the Thursday that week, as the delegates were returning to the council with their gangs' wishes, management caved in - announcing that it was suspending until October its instruction to return to the depot every morning.

### Management climbdown

Since then, it has been decided by management that a 'modified' position will be followed from October - only the chargehands will briefly return to base to give a report before they go home.

It is worth noting here that with only sporadic actions over 2 nights, production fell to 85% and management threw the towel in before the Workmates even got up fully on their feet and the work to rule began to really bite!

Management tried to show who was in charge, the Workmates reminded them who does the work!

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

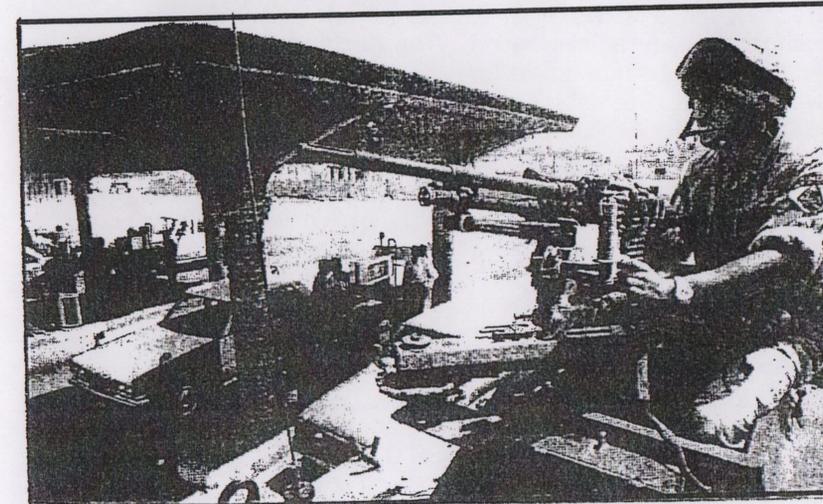
We seek to replace capitalism with a stateless society based on the principle of from each according to their ability, to each according to their needs. We support working class struggles towards these ends. We recognise that not all oppression is economic, but can be based on gender, race, sexuality,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

# Solidarity

for anarcho-syndicalism

## The corporate invasion of Iraq



War – what is it good for? Answer: Business.

At the end of the last century a group of right-wing politicians and business people got together to found the Project for the New American Century. They set out to map how the United States and its corporations could profit from its sole superpower status. Amongst its plans were "regime change" in Iraq. When George W. Bush became President many of the "Neo-Conservatives" who had set up PNAC became part of the administration – including Donald Rumsfeld (Defence Secretary), Dick Cheney (Vice President) and Paul Wolfowitz (Deputy Defence Secretary).

Iraq was seen as a prize because it has the world's second largest oil reserves – more than 10% of the world's existing stock. Kellogg, Brown & Root (KB&R), a subsidiary of the US energy company Halliburton has won a \$600M contract for initial repairs to Iraq's oil-fields and a further \$600M contract for the pumping of oil. Vice President Dick Cheney is a former Chief Executive of Halliburton. KB&R also has the contract for running military camps in Iraq – part of a 10 year deal with the US military that has already netted \$830m for the company. Iraq's national oil company has been put in charge of Philip J. Carroll, the former chief executive of Shell Oil,

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## London waiting

Council workers are currently balloting over the London Weighting dispute. It is now 2 years since the £4,000 claim was submitted. Last year there were a number of one-day all-out strikes. Since then there have been "rolling" one-week selective strikes in most London councils. In April 2003 the bosses offered an increase of £201 only to workers on the lowest grade, and to no other workers. Clearly the current industrial action campaign is inadequate, as we argued in *Solidarity* #2.

UNISON wants a "Yes" vote for "effective industrial action" However, the proposed action is more of the same: a one-day strike by all members and a programme of selective strikes. The only all-out strike is merely to "facilitate" attendance at a demonstration. This is because union leaders see industrial action only as a means of influencing government policy, not as a means of beating the bosses.

NALGO (now part of UNISON) won a National pay increase with no strings in 1989 by rolling one- two- and three-day all-out strikes in consecutive weeks, and **indefinite** selective action. We need a return to effective action, not campaigns every bit as fake as the "improvements" in our services claimed by management.

**The corporate invasion of Iraq**

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USA. The three biggest oil companies ExxonMob, Shell and BP earned almost \$16Bn (£10Bn) in the first three months of this year as the drive to war pushed oil prices up to \$35 a barrel. Exxon reported the biggest quarterly corporate profits in history at \$7Bn. Shell, BP & ChevronTexaco, also notorious for its close links to the Bush administration, are now shipping oil out of Iraq. Recently anti-war protestors blockaded the port of Oakland, California when the first shipment of Iraqi crude since the war arrived in the USA.

ChevronTexaco's profits have quadrupled over the last three-month period to \$1.6 billion dollars as a result of war-inflated oil prices. Presidential Executive Order 13303, passed by Bush earlier this summer, exempts U.S. oil companies from

any liability for environmental, human rights or other abuses related to their handling of Iraqi oil.

The other main beneficiary has been Bechtel, one of six US companies privately invited to bid for the reconstruction of Iraq. They won a contract worth initially \$680M, but estimated to rise to as high as \$100Bn.



Bechtel has a series of links with the Bush administration and those pressing hardest for war within it. Bechtel's Chairman and Chief Executive Riley Bechtel was recently appointed to President Bush's export council. Jack Sheehan, a senior Vice-President of Bechtel, is a member of the Defence Policy Board, the Pentagon advisory council that lobbied hard for war. George Shultz, a for-

mer US Secretary of State and another Bechtel board member, was chairman of the Committee to Liberate Iraq, a fiercely pro-war group with close ties to the White House. Bechtel has been put in charge of repairing power and water systems in Iraq – worrying since the company is one of the top water privatisation companies in the world. In Bolivia Bechtel was forced to quit the country after a massive hike in water prices caused unrest.

President Bush has called for a "free trade area" in the Middle East, and it clear that US companies are leading the process. The Bush administration wants an Iraq not so much run by the US as obedient to its interests. By the time the Iraqi people have any say in choosing a government, their occupiers will have made the key economic decisions. The corporate invasion of Iraq has begun.

Sources: Guardian 3/5/03; Independent 24/5/03; www.actagainstar.org

## Arms find in Docklands

The Defense Systems & Equipment International exhibition (DSEI), held every two years in London, is Europe's largest arms fair. Subsidised by the Government and opened by Defence Minister Geoff Hoon this is a chance for arms companies from around the world to do business with various repressive regimes and countries involved in conflict.

This year, however, the fair was met by concerted action from anti-war and anti-capitalist protestors, who in spite of the presence of over 2,000 police, managed to disrupt 'business as usual' for the death merchants and highlight Britain's role in fanning the flames of conflict across the world.

Actions started with an occupation of the office of Spearhead, the private company that runs DSEI and a five hour blockade of the Excel centre as the exhibition was being set up. A demonstration in central London was followed by three

days of decentralised protest when DSEI opened on Tuesday 9<sup>th</sup> September. Tuesday was labelled 'fluffy DSEI' and involved NVDA and Wednesday was called "Destroy DSEI" and involved Reclaim The Streets type actions and a critical mass bike ride. The Docklands Light Railway was shut down for several hours after activists locked onto a train preventing arms traders from reaching the Excel centre. Gates to the centre were blockaded whilst a large party of protestors avoided the police pen by keeping on the move.

### Magic roundabout

A party briefly blocked the A13 and later a key roundabout at Canning Town. On Thursday two activists managed to get into the exhibition and unfurled a banner on a tank. In the evening protestors held a street party and handed out free food outside a central London hotel where a dinner was being held by the arms dealers.

Sources: www.caat.org www.schnews.org

## Our workplace strategy

Anarcho-syndicalists seek to create a militant opposition to the bosses and the state controlled by the workers themselves. What follows is an anarcho-syndicalist strategy for the workplace. This can apply equally to those in the official trade unions who wish to organise independently of the union bureaucracy and those who wish to set up other types of self-organisation.

### Rank and file control

Decisions should be made collectively. This means they are made by mass meetings not by officials in union offices. These mass meetings include all those in the workplace, regardless of union membership (other than managers and scabs).

Anyone we elect to negotiate with management should have a mandate from the workforce that gives them clear guidance on what is and is not acceptable. Mass meetings of workers need to be able to recall all those elected to any position in the union. In effect we should be electing **delegates** not **representatives** who can act as they see fit.

### Direct Action

Direct action at work means strikes, go-slows, working-to-rule, occupations and boycotts. We are opposed to 'partnership' with bosses. Workers can only win serious concessions when industrial action is used or when bosses fear it might be.

### Solidarity

Solidarity with other workers is the key to victory. Workers should support each other's disputes, despite the anti-trade union laws. We need to approach other workers directly

for their support. 'Don't Cross Picket Lines!'

### Control of funds

Strike funds need to be controlled by the workers themselves. Officials will refuse to fund unlawful solidarity action. Union bureaucrats use official backing and strike pay to turn action on and off like a tap.



DOWNING TOOLS: Pickets cheering workers walking out of the AMEC shipyard in Tyneside

Unions use their political funds on sponsoring Parliamentary candidates. Backing the Labour Party is not in the interests of workers. We should also not fall into the trap of backing so-called "socialist" candidates. The Parliamentary system is about working class people giving up power and control, not exercising it.

### Our aim

Our ultimate aim is a self-managed, stateless society based on the principle of from each according to their ability, to each according to their needs. It is a society where we are no longer just to be used as a means to an end by bosses wanting to make money from our labour.

For more information contact:

**NELSF, PO BOX 1681, LONDON, N8 7LE**  
or 020 8374 5027 [ansaphone]

Please send me future issues of Solidarity

Please send me further information about NELSF

Name .....

Address .....

Telephone ..... Donations welcome.