

TRANSPORT WORKER NETWORK

A Strategy For the Bus Industry

Since deregulation, bus workers, whatever company we work for, be it one with a near monopoly or a small coach company, are faced with an increasingly rough deal as a result of fierce competition and ineffectual trade unions, (if in one at all).

Those of us with better wages and conditions are more often in what were once part of the National Bus Company. This is no thanks to these company's workers being virtually 100% trade union members, but due to these companies having had and largely retained complete dominance in their area due to size and an ability to suffer and balance losses on certain routes in order to maintain their dominance.

Many of the bosses of these outfits have seen their profits threatened. Accordingly they are looking for and implementing further ways of cutting our pay, shaving running costs (often at the cost of safety standards in engineering and elsewhere), and attacking our working conditions. For those of us working for the smaller companies this has always been the case, as our bosses operate with the lowest running costs and wages possible in order to make inroads on larger companies and/or get ahead of similarly small coaching outfits.

Wherever we work, and whatever the company's size, the past few years have seen our pay drop further behind, increasing stress and less and less likelihood of this process being turned around. The trade unions continue to become more distant from us and closer to the mentality of the bosses. Whilst we do the work, they get fat off the wealth we create.

What's Wrong With the Unions

The TGWU's attempts to unionise workforces of bus companies more often than not involves them approaching management as a first step rather than the workers themselves, leaving little doubt as to who they regard as the most important party! So much for putting the workers' first.

The 'Link-Up' recruitment drive by the TGWU gives little cause for optimism. Rather than attempting to organise bus workers in order to unite us across company divides and remedy our being played off against each other by bosses squeezing the maximum of profits from our work, the TGWU and RMT try to sell the merits of their credit services to workers on low pay! No wonder we're not buying!

The only way we can improve our lot is by organising and uniting as workers. That after all is what the boss class do - they would never have us fleeced if they hadn't.

A trade union with the philosophy of working hand in glove with management in terms of seeing their relationship as a partnership has at best nothing to offer workforces confronted with bosses determined to fleece us for every penny of profit they can get. The bosses themselves are without delusions as to what the relationship is - class war, they are in business for themselves alone, as far as they are concerned it's their cake and they'll be damned if they're going to share it, nevermind hand it over to those who's work

created it. The only give and take in any so-called partnership is the pittance and grief we get from management, and the unions taking the biscuit.

'A trade union is it's membership'? Not if run by full-time officials accountable to no-one, deciding all the practicalities of policy without even occasional reference to the workers who make up it's membership. Out is any pretence of workers' organisations controlled from below, with full involvement. In are long and unknown agreements, with complicated safeguards against alteration by workers' action, increasingly against any action at all. Bosses are given full freedom to make redundancies as and when they please, but we have no freedom to withdraw our labour as and for whatever reasons we choose.

Without so much collaboration we could more often than not win much by simple shows of strength through direct action and solidarity. The sheer weight of binding, often incomprehensible union - management agreements, trade union bureaucracy and remoteness (nevermind corruption), all serves a purpose much to the bosses advantage - alienating us, with a total lack of control over our own affairs and being policed by those who claim our best interests at heart.

The realities of our economic problems cannot be separated from political matters, all the same the unions do all they can to keep them apart. When faced with pay offers that are eaten up by inflation the moment we get them, or faced with taking a pay cut so the bosses can further under-cut a rival and boost their profits, all union officials ever offer us as remedy is "wait for the next election and a Labour victory", which is little better than offering us an aspirin for a broken leg.

A Fresh Approach

Set out here are proposed aims, guidelines and broad methods of practice to set about creating a transport workers' organisation based on action, rather than retreat and compromise, that will enable us to organise as workers to pursue our interests in the most effective, democratic and clear-sighted manner. Crucial to achieving gains in the here and now, and in the long term our industry run for our benefit and that of communities and the majority.

Day to day tactics and practicalities are not gone into here. They will be determined by the bus workers involved on the basis of local and wider realities, and ongoing discussion and analysis of what is most effective.

Now is the time for those of us who recognise the severe limitations of our present lame trade unions to come together and build an alternative to their monopoly of control with a forward-looking and fighting alternative. For years the bosses and governments have done all the running, it's high time we set our own agenda.

Our present situation is that we are being played off bus worker against bus worker. We need to reverse this state of affairs, (it has been brought about by the bosses for their own benefit, and theirs alone). By organising together across

all bus companies throughout our industry, uniting in order to guarantee and further our own interests.

Trade union organisation is blatantly unable to recognise, let alone fight to end our fleecing by a self-interested and greedy minority - the bosses. Without a goal to aim for the trade unions are adrift and without genuine purpose. Now is the time to take charge of our own affairs and build a workers' organisation based on active involvement, solidarity, and direct action to secure gains. A workers' organisation that recognises that our and the bosses interests are anything but one and the same.

- For Workers' Organisation, Workplace Control and the Benefit of our Class

* A network of bus workers (engineers, cleaners and drivers to office staff; one industry - one union), of all firms across city and/or region to pool information on pay levels, pay offers, working conditions, health and safety. Also obtain and analyse company reports to evaluate each company's profits, and provide that information to all bus workers enabling us to make informed decisions on pay offers, breaking the monopoly of often management-biased union officials.

* To look at ways of reducing and preventing the management of companies playing us off worker against worker at pay rounds, with the threat of company X's workforce ready to take our routes any second - with both company's workforces united in one local union section not only will we not takke each others jobs, but be giving headaches to the bosses rather than each other.

* To promote amongst fellow bus workers a minimum wage (of benefit also to those on higher earnings in that the pressure faced by undercutting will be removed); of particular importance for the coaching sector. Subject to a minimum wage-rate being established, we promote and work to obtain by pressure across all companies a reduction in the working hours of a day (as recently achieved in the engineering sector). This being undertaken having been previously gained a minimum wage, without which we are forced to work unacceptably long hours.

Equal work - equal pay; work to closing wage differentials between bus workers, not by limiting increases for those on better pay, but by rejecting the notion of the "pot" that management make available at pay rounds. Equal and better pay must be gained at the expense of the inflated salaries of management, directors and parasite shareholders, all of whom contribute little if anything, whilst taking the lion's share of the wealth we create.

* The Transport Worker Network will promote action that is direct and effective. Not the narrow and misleading alternatives put forward by union officials: token marches, bed-pushes, two minute vigils, all giving management and politicians a laugh and acheive nothing, or strikes that allow the bosses to starve us back to work for lower pay, when for example, an occupation or good/free-work strike turns the tables leaving no risk of scabs being taken on. We don't need union negotiators to arrange compromises and deals, a workforce confident in it's own strength and involvement can act for itself and demand, not wheel and deal.

* The existence of a cross-company organisation of busworkers will reduce the tendency of identifying ourselves with our companies and strengthen solidarity as fellow workers. In dispute the practical benefits of this are apparent; the bosses will no longer have the threat (to subdue us with) of other bus workers doing our work. Only two years ago during a strike, one company's bosses request that another's run buses on their routes to break the strike.

* A Transport Worker Network cross-company organisation, would additionally engage in political action (local and national) on the basis of complete independence and hostility to all political parties. The goal of our political action is to establish direct control of the industry by the workforce itself. In turn we support and federate with workers in other industries working to the same end. We reject all political parties (right and left alike) - they serve only their own interests and reduce us to passive onlookers and wage-slaves.

* For the present TWN members in unionised workplaces, alongside promoting workers' control will continue to hold the trade unions accountable for their actions/inaction and put forward effective methods and action, push for the maximum level of control by the workforce over its own affairs, and attack the notion that any change whatsoever will ever come about by for ever waiting "for a Labour victory at the next election".

The TRANSPORT WORKER NETWORK by organising across companies, uniting all grades of worker, can provide which the TGWU, RMT, etc. cannot, despite their lawyers and millions in funds never do:

- * Resources open to all members and fellow workers,
- * Decision-making on the basis of every member's participation.
- * The workplace branch having independence in it's own affairs.
- * Solidarity - total opposition to any management victimisation, and support for all workers in struggle.
- * All TWN posts and tasks are fully accountable to membership, of limited term, and subject to recall.

NOT POSSIBLE! sceptics may say. Some may think that a revolutionary workplace-based union is a break with British tradition. Well it is a break with the TUC unions of today, but not without history in this country. In the early part of this century this kind of organisation flourished here. Revolutionary or anarcho syndicalist unions successfully functioning by these same principles exist in France, Spain, South America. During the last few years in London so did the Despatch Industry Workers Union, winning many disputes where the TGWU made no impact.

We are encouraged by the existence of similar networks of public sector workers and education workers.

Join the TRANSPORT WORKER NETWORK

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