Solidarity magazine

Spring 2000
PILOT ISSUE

A Publication Dedicated to Solidarity, Workers' Control and Industrial Unionism

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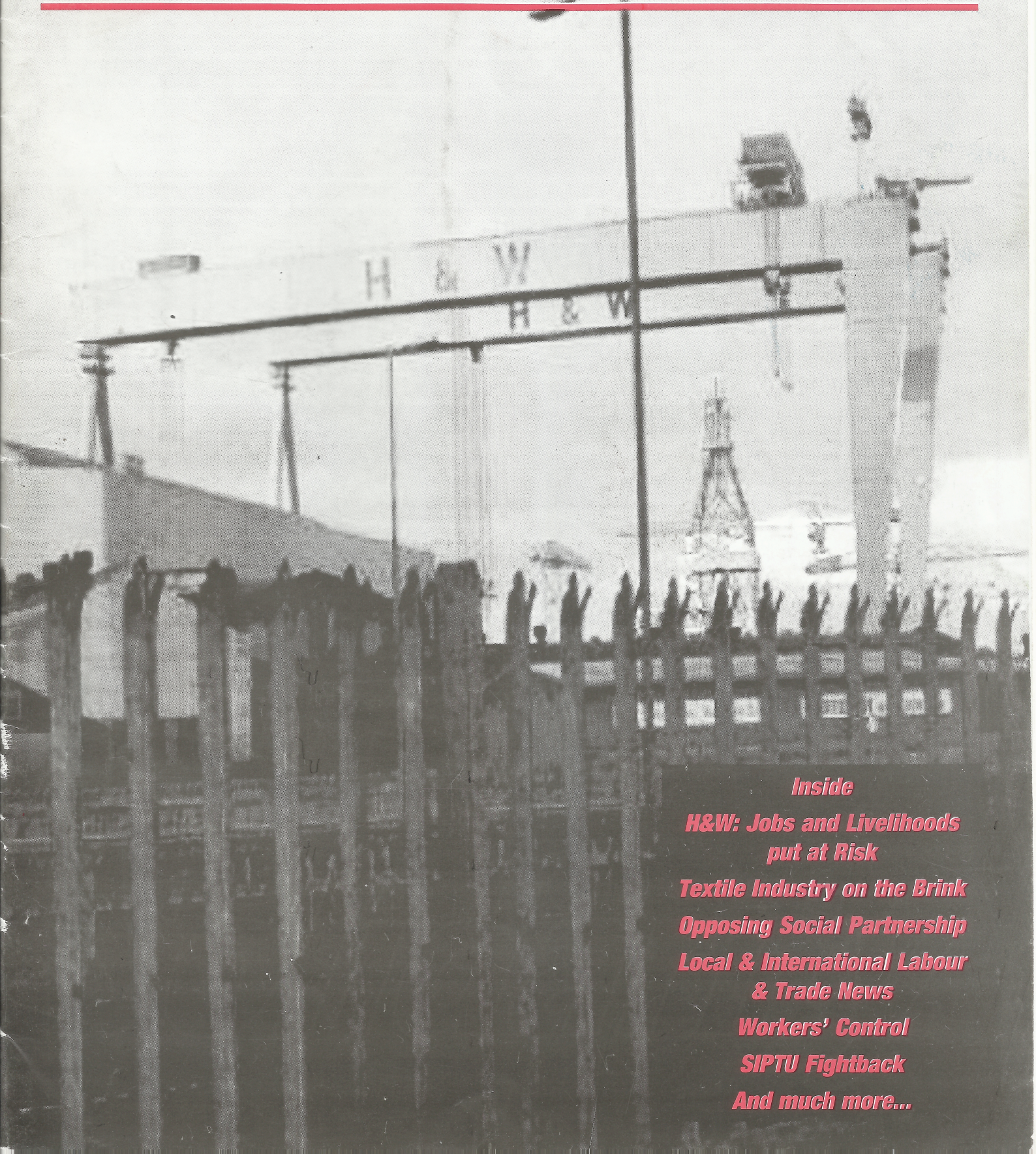

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Opposing Social Partnership

Local & International Labour & Trade News

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SIPTU Fightback

And much more...

Solidarity Magazine is edited, and typeset by the Solidarity Magazine Editorial Collective.

The views stated within these pages are not necessarily those of the editorial collective. We welcome contributions from any and all workers in struggle, these articles will only be personally credited on the instruction of the author. Contributions are welcomed in the form of opinions, additional information or letters responding to articles or raising issues of interest. If you think this is a worthwhile project and want to help out with Solidarity Magazine contact us.

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Contributions

If you want to contribute more than brief opinions or short letters, of around 500 words, we suggest you send articles (between 500 and 1500 words if possible) in hardcopy and on disc in Microsoft Publisher 98 format, or e-mail us at
Sldrtymgzn@tinyonline.co.uk
Failing that any decent typewritten script will do, or even neat handwriting. Articles can only be returned if a request and an SAE are enclosed.

A Word About Money

This publication is financed solely from voluntary donations, this pilot issue received enough in total for us to cover (just about) production, printing, and posting costs. The next issue depends on the same financial support. Go on, if you want to see another issue of Solidarity Magazine dig deep. Give a tenner in solidarity money, £35 and win yourself our eternal gratitude or be a real working class hero and bung us a £100! Donations Received to date include;

£5 G. D., Ballymoney,
£115 BWCG, Belfast,
£45 J. B., Belfast,
£140 M. R., Belfast,
£25 Ralph, Sheffield,
£22 anonymous donations.

"The editorial collective and Solidarity Magazine are not intended to incite illegal activity of any sort"

Welcome to Solidarity

Welcome to the first issue of Solidarity magazine. This magazine is produced by workers for workers, all our labour is voluntary, all money involved in production and distribution has been raised by people such as yourselves.

We hope you'll find the material here informative and useful. It is directed primarily at shop stewards and trade unionists and might even be read by un-represented workers.

The situation that the rank and file member of the labour movement finds her/his self in is that of a lobster placed in a pot of cold water getting warmer. And warmer. Of course the chef hasn't told us he's planning to boil us alive. He's just put us in a pot of water, and smiles a lot while slowly turning up the heat. By the time the lobster realises what's happening it's too late.

At least that would be the plan. In the interests of ruining a good lobster dinner for the heads of industry, government and big business we've dedicated this pilot issue to the topic of the Blair Government's friendly smile policy of encouraging business and trade union "partnership". We also have a round up of trade union news, a picture feature, some editorials examining issues such as when is industrial action necessary, and a historical article reprinted here to capture some of the taste and flavour of the rowdy good old days.

We hope to follow up this pilot issue with another issue at some indefinite point in the future, depending on financial and journalistic contributions to the project. So by all means get involved. If you think this magazine is worthwhile then help us put out the next issue.

We would like to provide more than just good journalism about the local economy and the issues that effect you, your workplace and your life. It's time that the opinions that matter on these issues, your opinions, began to circulate. To that end, we would like to put a special emphasis on letters and contributions from readers, making this magazine a forum where rank and file members of the trade union and working class labour movement can get their opinions out.

To that end contact us at: Solidarity magazine

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Because this magazine could fall into the hands of your employer, who could get a little annoyed by the content, it is perfectly appropriate to publish your letter under an assumed name. But please supply your real name, an accurate contact address and phone number, so that we can verify before we print.

So enjoy this magazine, read it, pass it on to your friends, talk about it in your workplace. Often by talking with our co-workers we realise that many of our difficulties at work are not ours alone, but are shared by everyone. Shared communication helps us confront and improve our workplace problems.

Finally, like any good project, this magazine needs written contributions, volunteer editors, and money. Get involved. Today you're a reader. Tomorrow a writer.

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E-mail Solidarity magazine at: Sldrtymgzn@tinyonline.co.uk

Getting Their Priorities Right Up At Stormont Castle

At long last we have it! Devolved government. Real control over government policy because that policy will be decided by the people we elected, not imposed by Westminster. The beginning of meaningful change in the lives of ordinary people here in the north, because now power lies in the hands of locally elected representatives.

No longer will the issues faced by working people here be ignored by an unaccountable bureaucracy. Our social and economic problems (job losses, low pay, crime, anti-social behaviour, soaring house prices, unemployment, inadequate welfare, deprivation, alcoholism, drug addition, poverty, sectarianism, harassment at work, the under-funding of health, public transport and other key industries, and much more) can all now be addressed by people who fully appreciate our situation because they live among us.

Amid dire warnings from Mandelson about 'default', collapse of the Agreement and the re-imposition of direct rule the new Assembly, our MLA's (Members of the Legislative Assembly), got down to the first item of business.

For a small percentage of the population social and economic ills were alleviated quite successfully. Any financial difficulties and hardships facing 108 members of our population simply disappeared when our generous MLA's voted through a massive 30% pay rise – for themselves.

Under proposals approved during Stormont's first debate since devolution the 108 MLA's are at least £9,000 (they have awarded themselves a pay rise equivalent to many peoples gross incomes) a year better off, with ordinary members on a basic annual salary of £38,036.

Junior Ministers are on £55,341, Ministers, and the Speaker, are on £71,396 and the First and Deputy First Ministers £102,344 each. Of course the First and Deputy First Ministers will only be drawing about a third of their salaries as the are already handsomely paid Members of Parliament at Westminster.

I seem to remember that ALL our new Ministers stated to the press shortly after they took up their portfolios that they had little knowledge of the jobs they had taken on.

It is of course a very good means of securing peace and progress. On that sort of money 'default' and the return of direct rule would be an unsavoury experience indeed hitting our leaders where it would hurt them most, in the pocket.

On the other hand maybe they really do have the best interests of the working man and woman at heart and are leading by example. Next April lets all lodge 30% pay claims with our employers. Hard to see how government could oppose it on the basis of being outside their economic 'guidelines'.

Besides, most of us know how to do our jobs.

"Shipbuilders To The World..."

3,400 Jobs Threatened At Belfast Shipyard In Wrangle Over £133.2 Million Bill

Harland and Wolff shipyard in Belfast has existed for nearly 150 years. In the past it was the worlds largest shipyard, providing jobs for over 20,000 people and was the industrial heart of Belfast, a city tied into the industrial triangle that was Belfast, Liverpool and Glasgow. These days the shipyard employs only around 3,400 workers. 3,400 workers who have had their jobs, their livelihoods, put in severe jeopardy in recent months because of managerial incompetence and financial wrangling.

Whenever workers take, or even threaten, industrial action, management, politicians and the media are quick to complain about the damage being done to the company and to future investment. In the case of Harland and Wolff and Global Marine the same comments were not heard from the media while their row over money went on endangering 3,400 jobs here in Belfast.

The dispute became public on October 21st. Barely a month after the razzmatazz of an official naming ceremony for the first of two £200 million drill ships commissioned for Global Marine at the yard. Harland and Wolff confirmed it was submitting a bill for £133.2 million to Global Marine for additional work.

Crisis talks began with the very future of the shipyard at stake. Global Marines senior executives said they were baffled by demands for extra money while shipyard bosses claimed that the original costs spiralled because of modifications requested by Global Marine.

Talks focused on the short term funding needs to complete the two ships and deliver them to Global Marine, while the continuing crisis set nerves on edge among the dockers. The 1,800 full-time workers and 1,600 contract workers at the yard downed tools for several hours on Tuesday 9th of November.

Jackie Nicholl, MSF, asked how H&W had allowed a bill of £133.2 million to build up.

"How was a debt of this size allowed to grow? Why was it not nipped in the bud earlier, and sorted out with Global Marine when the extra costs began to mount up?" he asked.

The yard claimed that within a month of the contract being signed, February 1998, they were alerting Global Marine to the fact that additional costs were being incurred.

Despite Fred Olsen meeting with David Trimble and Economy Minister John McFall the government made it clear that it was leaving the fate of the yard to cold commercial reality. The livelihoods of thousands, the well-being of families were to be left to the harsh realities of what our government calls 'market forces' to decide.

On Wednesday 17th November the senior shop stewards committee at H&W again expressed concern that a solution had not yet been reached.

Bobby Moore, committee chairman, issued an open letter as workers waited anxiously for an expected statement from management. The letter demanded that any deal must contain a commitment that H&W would continue to operate as a viable shipbuilding entity;

"We will not accept an agreement that only guarantees the completion of the contract with Global Marine for the two drill ships".

Unions vowed to oppose any attempts to move the vessels from Belfast without such an agreement having been reached.

"In such circumstances we would seek the support of the people of Northern Ireland to ensure that the contracts would be finished in Belfast by Harland and Wolff."

It was approaching midnight on Wednesday 17th November, in the Tower Suite of the Belfast Hilton, when the bosses finally shook hands on a deal.

Global Marine secured the guarantees it wanted, that the two drillships would be completed and delivered by next summer. Harland and Wolff got a breathing space in which to step up its efforts to secure the new orders vital to the yards long-term future, and vital to those employed in the industry.

The news of the agreement was given direct to the workforce at the start of the next dayshift. Senior shop stewards and full-time union officials called a meeting of several hundred manual workers in the yard's fabrication shop at 8 am and broke the news.

The reaction was one of relief rather than euphoria, the announcement was greeted by a round of applause but without any signs of jubilation.

Only then was the joint Global Marine – Harland and Wolff press release faxed to the media, announcing agreement over interim payments for the drill ships.

Unusually, the statement acknowledged the role played by the unions, with both companies paying tribute to the Confederation of Shipbuilding and Engineering Unions and the H&W Senior Shop Stewards Committee.

District Secretary

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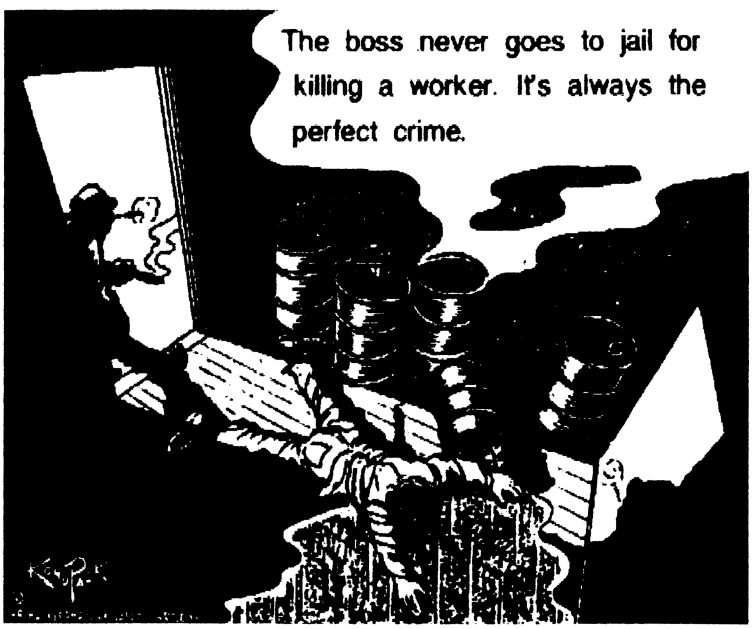
WHAT PRICE A WORKERS LIFE?

Murder is wrong; it is also illegal, the full force of the law is used to pursue murderers and long custodial sentences are handed out to those who have taken the lives of others.

That is unless the legal system is in reality designed to protect you no matter what your crime. And the current legal system is, without a doubt, designed to protect employers from justice.



How else can the lack of custodial sentences for corporate maiming and murder be explained? Since the introduction to Northern Ireland of 'The Health & Safety at Work (N.I.) Order 1978' there have been no custodial sentences for employers whose neglect has caused serious injury or death to their workers or members of the public. This is despite the fact that Northern Ireland has about the worst Health & Safety at work record in the UK.

In the last thirty years only two custodial sentences have been successfully prosecuted for corporate manslaughter. Large corporations and companies are effectively immune from prosecution. Large companies can dodge the blame, individual managers and board members hide behind the 'board' claiming that no one individual was aware at all, or to great enough extent, that the business or operation was unsafe. The blame spread no specific guilty party can be identified – so they get off the hook.

When they do in fact get prosecuted paltry fines are the order of the day. Two years ago S. C. Graham of Lisburn were fined a mere £850 for breaking health and safety laws which resulted in the death of 58 year old worker Stephen Clarke.

Workers forced to work in unsafe conditions are not so fortunate. Many have ended up carrying the can for unsafe company practices, especially when the company has encouraged the eroding of acceptable safety standards.

All workers can really do is ensure, that even in bad conditions, they work to the highest standards of safety. Take control of the situation in as far as is possible, it could mean the difference between life or death. Yours, a fellow workers or a member of the public.

Remember the facts, employers don't pay for murder, a worker can end up dead or in jail if they can pin the blame on them!

CHEAP LABOUR FOR SALE

That's the offer made by the Industrial Development Board. The Northern Irish working class have been advertised to 'potential investors' around the world as cheap labour. The fact sheet reads;

"Labour costs in Northern Ireland are lower than the rest of Britain and Ireland, and are among the lowest in Europe. The total average hourly cost (including overtime and social costs) for manual workers is 14% lower than the UK, 52% lower than Germany and 22% lower than the US."

They go on to assure foreign bosses that;

"here are no government restrictions on work hours for adults over 18 years of age in factories. Workers in Northern Ireland are happy to accommodate a variety of shift patterns. There are no government restrictions on overtime."

According to the Department of Economic Development average male manual earnings, in manufacturing in Northern Ireland, are £263 a week, while the average earnings of a woman in the same industry are £171 a week. That's 14% lower for women and 16% lower for men than in Britain.

ITS GOOD TO 'WALK'

300 BT workers at the Belfast Call Centre and Enniskillen Telephone Exchange took part recently in the first nation wide strike to hit the company in 13 years.

Thousands of workers in BT's 37 Call Centres took part in the one day stoppage on Monday 22nd of November as part of the Communication Workers Unions "Better Life" campaign. Support locally was solid, about 95% of the grades affected came out.

The action

Continued on page 8

"Time To Fight Poverty Time To Fight For Workers Rights"

More than 350 people joined the 'Time to Fight Poverty – Time to Fight for Workers Rights' march in Belfast on Saturday October 23rd. They came from all across the north, as well as some from the Republic of Ireland, to oppose the continued attacks from Tony Blair's government and bring class issues to centre stage

The Fire Brigade Union was strongest delegation, with over seventy uniformed Fire Fighters following their banner, in the march from the Art College gardens to the City Hall.

We've printed some pictures from the day.

Setting out for City Hall from the Art College Gardens. The best humorous caption for the above photo, submitted in time for our second issue, will win a lifetimes subscription to Solidarity Magazine.

The march, headed up by the Fire Brigade Union and 'Time to Fight Poverty – Time for Workers Rights' banner makes its way along Royal Avenue.

A Section of the crowd gathered, at the Art College Gardens, Belfast, on Saturday 23rd October for 'Time to Fight Poverty – Time for Workers Rights' rally and march. Speaking from the platform is a striking nurse from the Republic of Ireland, with Colin Brice of the Ad-Hoc Organising Committee which organised the day's events.

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was taken in a move to force management to treat employees with "dignity and respect." High levels of stress among staff, a bullying management style and the widespread use of agency workers are concerns which prompted the action.

CWU Northern Ireland branch secretary, David Bell, has accused BT of employing a "management style borrowed from the previous century", he has also pointed out that BT have the potential to create "21st century sweatshops", which no doubt will happen if workers do not take action, as they have, to challenge them. BT's excessive and long term use of agency staff has been highlighted, as have insufficient staffing levels and workers inability, due to tight targets imposed by management, to effectively deal with customers. David went on "our members ability to take leave is limited, their attendance patterns are too rigid and they are subject to performance levels which are designed to intimidate them."

Workers at BT have taken a stand which should be applauded. They have demonstrated that industrial action need not be limited to pay disputes. That, indeed, the quality of our lives are directly affected by our jobs, and that quality of life, inside and outside work, is worth fighting for.

Postal Shop Steward Loses Appeal

Gerry Gormley, a long-standing CWU shop steward at Royal Mail in Tomb Street, Belfast, has lost his appeal against dismissal.

He was sacked in September last year following a "covert probe" by internal Post Office investigators, who found that he had run up a huge bill in phone calls to America. The calls were made from a phone in the CWU offices inside Tomb Street, on what Gerry had believed was a union phone.

Gerry was suspended from duty for illegal use of a company phone, pending further enquiries. The CWU shop steward was then hauled before a disciplinary hearing and sacked for 'gross misconduct'.

STUDENT PROTEST AGAINST HARDSHIP AND POVERTY

Thousands of students marched through Belfast on the 17th of November 1999 to protest against the abolition of student grants and the introduction of tuition fees.

Organised by the NUS-USI Northern Ireland Student Centre, the rally at Belfast City Hall heard speakers from the student and trade union movements slam the Government for increasing student hardship.

Shane Whelehan, NUS-USI Northern Ireland Convenor pointed out that;
"In opposition the Labour Party promised to end student poverty, yet its policies on tuition fees have increased hardship and deterred mature students and lone parents from entering higher education."

Support for the students, and opposition to government policy has been voiced by the Irish National Teachers Organisation, NATFHE, the Association of University Teachers, SIPTU and other unions.

As Des Garaghty of SIPTU stated;
"As we enter the new millennium, it is disgraceful that students are required to graduate already in debt. The introduction of student loans instead of grants is a barrier to people of all ages seeking access to further education."

People of all ages indeed, but money is no option to those who have it. New Labour clearly want to pick up where the Tories left off and are seeking to deny access to further education to anyone who is working class.

In the meantime students have vowed to continue that campaign and shop stewards could do worse than to urge their branches, and their unions, to support this campaign.

BREAKING WITH SOCIAL PARTNERSHIP

At the TUC Congress in Brighton in September 1999, Sir Ken Jackson General Secretary of the AEEU told the TUC it should abandon its annual conference and, in the spirit of partnership so beloved of Blair called instead for a joint gathering with the bosses union – the CBI! Luckily Sir Ken, who claims that "workers want to work not strike", was given a clear alternative message by his members.

The very next day AEEU members at Fords held a 24 hour strike, while a week later engineers working on the Millennium Dome, Royal Opera House and London Underground's Jubilee extension struck for a 50% increase in wages over two years. Ken described the strikers as "bloody stupid". Seems like it's about time Sir Ken took his seat in the House of Lords and the AEEU (now in merger talks) got a General Secretary who actually listened to his or her members.

Unity Is Strength

Cornerstone

A labour movement, to protect its members and their families, must base its strength on solidarity on unity. That solidarity means protecting every member of the union.

Liberty, Equality & Solidarity

Any union movement, concerned with liberty, equality and solidarity, cannot, and should not, exclude on the grounds of creed, colour, sex or sexuality. By the same token religious sectarianism, racism, sexism or homophobia have no place in any progressive labour movement.

Concrete Reality

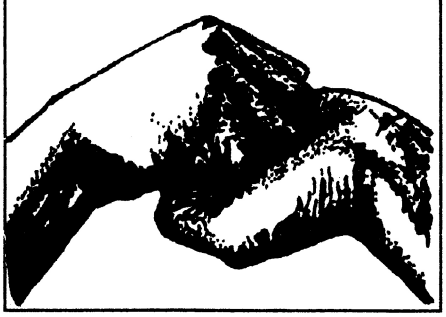
This is not based on middle class political correctness or some liberal idealism but on the very concrete reality that we must by necessity stand as one in opposition to the bosses.

Strengthening The Boss

Any group which excludes workers on the basis of any of the above or discriminates in other ways is not a union, it is a club. It will also prove ineffective in the class struggle as divisions among workers only serves to strengthen the bosses position. Our only real strength lies in our numbers and in our ability to do, or refuse to do, our jobs.

Exceptions To Prove The Rule

Unions cannot be about exclusion, although there must be some exceptions which prove the rule. The only people who should – and must be excluded from our union are bosses and management, politicians and scabs!



Strikes Hit All Time Low

In 1998 there were 166 work stoppages - the lowest number since records began in 1891. Now you might reasonably have expected the boss's union, the CBI, to herald this news, but who was it popping up on telly and the radio but John Monks, head of the TUC. Monks claims that the figures show that a "partnership mood" has over taken the workplace.

We here at Solidarity Magazine are, of course, delighted that the class war is over, however we are a little bit worried that the bosses might have won it. This short article, including the following reports about work were lifted out of a wee English bulletin, put out by the @TU Network, called 'Bread and Roses'.

- According to ICM Research "workers are being driven to drink and illness by overwork, tougher targets and deadlines" Almost half of those in work work 12 or more hours a day.
- The Royal College of Psychiatrists report that stress and pressure of work is helping to tip a third of all employees into depression or other forms of mental illness each year,
- The Joseph Rowntree Foundation has found "health, family relationships and the long-term future of the economy are all at risk as staff are forced to work harder and fear that they will pay the price of the constant search to improve competitiveness".

Doesn't sound much like a mood of partnership sweeping our workplaces to us - more like old fashioned exploitation. The workers work longer hours. The bosses get more profits. Tesco workers have found what partnership really means. The partnership deal that was signed there resulted in an end of Sunday premium rates. If this is partnership we reckon it's time to separate and start divorce proceedings!

"Shipbuilders To The World?"

Continued from page 4

of the Senior Shop Stewards' Committee, Peter Williamson, said the unions were committed to playing a role in helping to secure the future of those employed in the shipyard and the future of the yard for "future generations".

Despite the securing of this agreement one important issue remains unresolved. It's the question which sparked the crisis to begin with – who is to foot the bill for the overspend of £133.2 million?

The joint statement admitted that this matter had not been addressed, it added: "This issue will be resolved by separate negotiation, or ultimately arbitration."

Both companies will be anxious to avoid arbitration, a process which could take between one and two years to conclude.

A world wide search for new business for H&W is being intensified as the company seeks to secure the long-term future of the yard. Despite the deal with Global it is vital that fresh orders are found for the yard if further crisis is to be averted. H&W and the unions accept that the settlement simply affords the yard breathing space.

At present the yard is on the short-list for two MOD ships and an offshore oil production vessel for Shell. However, the row between the two companies may well have endangered an already unstable industry, and shipyard workers jobs, in the long-term.

Workers Control
Whats It All About?

In N. Ireland over last 30 years politicians of all hues have been happy to "talk about talks" while workers paid the price in terms of jobs, injuries, bereavements and lives.

There have also been countless lives wasted in prisons, lives of those unfortunate enough to have been sucked into one side or the other of sectarian conflict and recrimination.

The politicians have proved, time and again, that they are incapable of finding a solution to sectarian division. Workers suffer, it is we, as workers, who must sort things out for ourselves.

'Solidarity magazine' is dedicated to **"Solidarity, Workers Control and Industrial Unionism"**. Here's an article about just one of these.

Those of us who actually do something about our standard of living, our terms and conditions, and about making the employers treat us with some modicum of dignity and respect, must begin to work together more effectively. We need to build trust, links and communication across the barriers which beset traditional Trades Unions, in order to effectively take the fight back to the bosses.

'Workers control', has a lot to offer those workplace activists who are putting some of the fight back into the labour movement.

Workers control means we run our unions, our workplaces and our communities. The first step in running our own workplaces is making sure we run our own unions. As it stands, often distant, full-time officials run our unions and make important decisions, often the wrong ones, over our heads. Workers control puts control of the union back where it should be – directly in the hands of the membership.

No Unofficial Action

Members in their respective industries would decide on the appropriate action to be taken, and it would automatically be supported by their fellow workers across the union movement. If we are to make any headway it must go hand in hand with, and be dependent upon, building maximum solidarity throughout the labour movement. Membership control of disputes also means that no action can be unofficial – every dispute entered into by a group of workers demands our support.

We can, as workers, control our own struggles. Industrial action is not entered into lightly. It is at times a necessity, and who but the workers involved are best placed to decide when and how to strike?

What's, more given the right form of organisation, workers control taken to its logical conclusion holds that we as workers can run our own industries and communities.

Helping Ourselves

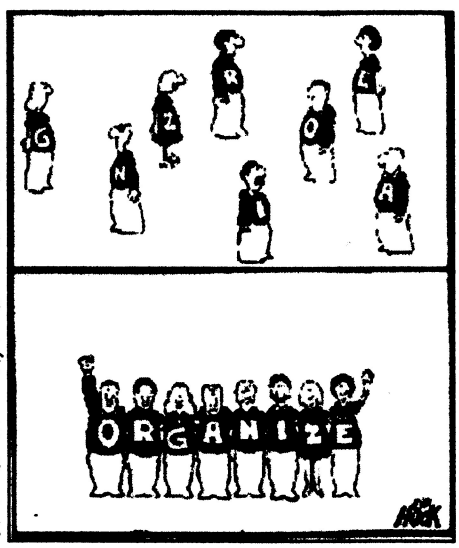
Distant managing directors, accountants, politicians, know nothing about our work and precious little about our lives, and yet, because they control the purse strings they make all the decisions!

Remember it is our labour that put the money in the purse in the first place!

We can have no faith in politicians, petitions and lobbying or waiting on European "social law" to help us out. In the meantime we can help ourselves.

Independence From All Political Parties

This is not about left-wing party politics, its not about party politics at all, but about seeing the glaring inequalities in our society and the current inadequacies of the Trades Unions, and working together to do something about it. Only workers themselves can represent workers and we must strive to do this on the economic, the industrial, front. Any labour movement which seeks to build on the foundation of solidarity and workers control must assert from the outset an aggressive independence from all political parties.



We can and should accept support which is genuine and sincerely offered, however, outright opposition can be the only response to those political parties whose ideology, policies, interests or shenanigan's place them in opposition to the interests of workers.

Workers control is about using tactics which will get results, and about not being afraid to use them. It is no coincidence that the most effective weapons available to workers have been made illegal. They have been made 'illegal' because they work. This is not just about winning "reforms", important though they are, it is about the basic truth that we and our employers have nothing in common.

Why Workers Control?

So, why workers control? Simply because we, as workers, are best placed to run our industries for our benefit and the benefit of society.

It stands to reason that the people who know their work and the needs of their own communities can reach realistic and sensible decisions about them. Decisions which have people, and the safe and efficient running of industry, as opposed to profit, at heart.

The Right To A Home Denied

The basic right to a decent home is being denied to many people in Derry. The provision of public housing in the city is in crisis with no sign of the situation getting any better.

Single parents are having to wait 18 months to two years for housing while married couples are being forced to wait for as long as 5 years for a home.

With no solutions being handed down from on high Derry's working class have a great tradition of sorting the housing problem out for themselves. No housing and empty property all around – solution occupy vacant housing.

Killing The Health Service - Killing You

Many local politicians, such as Ken Magennis, Martin Magennis, Eddie McGrady and many more, have spoken in the past at mass demonstrations in Downpatrick, Dungannon and elsewhere, railing against hospital closures, mergers and specialisation – swearing they'd fight any such proposals.

Now they are in power we can expect them to direct public money to ensure no hospitals are closed, new hospitals are built and that ALL hospitals have maternity units, fracture units, A&E, children's wards etc., to ensure they specialise in all the needs of local communities health-wise. Can't we?

It seems not. Already we have a decision from Health Minister Barbre de Brun, of Sinn Fein, to save maternity in the RVH (on the predominantly Catholic Falls road) at the expense on the Jubilee at Belfast City Hospital (in the predominantly Protestant Donegal Road/Village area), against the advice of her department (which of course contains unionist politicians). This amounts to no more than health planning and strategy development on sectarian grounds. The working class residents of both areas and from across the city suffer not only due to health cutbacks but also at the hands of sectarian politics, which in the interests of crass point scoring, is heightening resentment and tension between those who are already going to suffer most due to these attacks. Neither unit should be closed, we should always avoid to get drawn into the frame of argument set by government of it being an either or situation, maternity units have existed at both hospitals for many, many years. Both should be maintained.

The idea that if you have a heart attack in Newry you are going to have to be ambulanced all the way to Craigavon before you receive proper treatment is not only horrific – it could in effect amount to murder. Murder at the hands of state financiers cutting back on our health care while squandering public money on an ever growing bureaucracy with its attendant perks and privileges.

Staff Left In Dark Over Closure Of Belfast Bakery

In 1998 over 250 jobs were lost when Kennedy's bakery went into liquidation and O'Hara's bakery went into receivership.
Both companies blamed increased competition from the multiples, such as Tescos, for their demise.
Last year their former employees were joined on the dole by redundant Mothers Pride and McErleans staff. It seems, at least in the case of McErleans, that bad management (is there any other sort?) and mounting debts as opposed to increased competition lay at the heart of the closure. Growing labour costs were certainly not an issue, apart from a tuppence halfpenny rise in the year of closure, workers had gone ten years without a pay rise. Taking inflation into account and that is in effect a pay cut year after year for ten years.
Whatever mess the management and owner of McErleans were getting the company into, the workforce was given no hints about what was going on.
The Glen Road based bakery had a workforce of about 100, with a chain of seven bakeries across the city.
In August last year letters went up on the walls to say the bakery was looking for a buyer. Between then and October 30th management told the workforce nothing.
Barbara, a dispatch worker who had been with McErleans for two years, was one of those unaware of their impending situation. On Saturday 30th of October the dispatch manager gave Barbara a lift home. Barbara mentioned that she had the orders ready for the start of the following week, and said as she went to get out of the car "see you on Monday".
Rather embarrassed the manager explained that actually she wouldn't see him on Monday, as there would be no work to go too, and thanked her for all her work over the years!
That night the same dispatch manager delivered letters to staff explaining the bakeries closure. Some of the workforce never received these letters and for some the first they knew about not having a job was when they turned up for work early on the Monday morning and had to phone round to find out work was not open.
John Mulvenna, a baker at McErleans for seven years, turned up to start his 3.30 am shift;
"All that was on was a security light. I was given no notice. Although I wasn't working on Saturday apparently one of the managers distributed letters to the ones he could get hold of.
"But I'm sure he knew quite well on Friday before we left what was happening".
Staff had been kept in the dark for months. The manner in which they were notified shows how little management thought of their workers.
Boss, Brendan McMahon, consulted the dissolvency firm Moore Stephens who forwarded forms to workers about claims for losses of pay incurred. They also advised them to consult Citizens Advice and legal aid. As payment of redundancy money and claims for pay in lieu of notice etc., are now being handled by the government workers could be waiting months if not years for any sort of settlement.

TUC Congress 1999: Partnership the Theme

Fairness At Work?

Proclaimed at Congress as **"the most significant step in rolling back 18 years of attacks on workers' rights"** [1] the Employment Relations Act is to become law next year.

At an early stage the Trade Union establishment gave the **"Fairness at Work"** legislation, a warm welcome. TUC General Secretary John Monks described it as the **"biggest advance in employee rights in a generation"**.

John Edmonds, GMB General Secretary, was beside himself, describing it as **"pure gold"** and **"an enormous step forward"**.

Ken Jackson, General Secretary of the AEEU, said: **"The government is leading industry into a new era of partnership. If unions miss this opportunity to spread partnership throughout industry we will only have ourselves to blame"**.

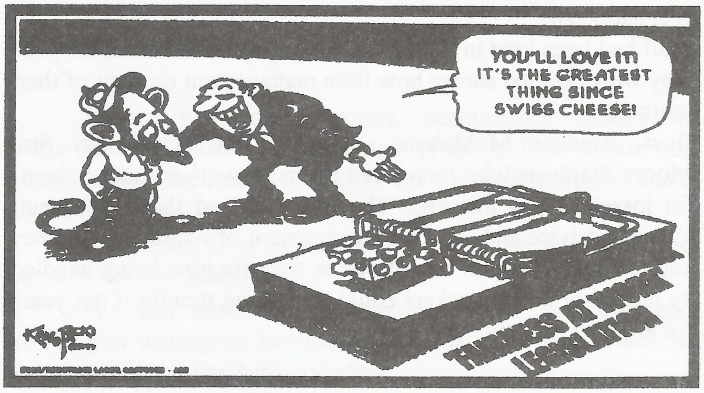
"mob rule"

Darlings of right wing journalism the Daily Mail warned of a return to **"mob rule"** and the **"bad old days"** of union power, claiming New Labour have given **"union barons the go ahead to start rebuilding their power bases in offices and factories"**.

Tories 'Improved' Employment Relations

The truth is this legislation falls well within the framework of Tory anti-union legislation, the White Paper preceding the Bill stated that legislation introduced by the Tories had improved **"employment relations"**.

The New Labour government must be living on another planet if they believe this. Half way through their first parliament Tony Blair [2] has claimed **"fewer days lost in strike action than any of the 18 years of Tory Government"**. He would be very wrong to cite this as proof of any improvement in industrial relations. Any such decline is due, not to a new era of co-operation in our workplaces having been heralded in by the Tories, but to the fact that they made solidarity action (one of the labour movements strongest weapons) illegal and that any legal industrial action has to make its way through so much red tape and so many delaying processes as to significantly reduce its effectiveness. The use of high unemployment to frighten and discipline workers is also a factor, as is the meek compliance and acceptance of attack after attack and the lack of any will to fight emanating from the 'leadership' of the Trade Union movement.



Social Partnership

It is clear that this bill does not represent the 'rolling back' of the Thatcherite anti-union legislation, whatever the right-wing press would have its readers believe. The basis of the legislation is 'social partnership'. Introducing the White Paper Tony Blair stated that this legislation was **"part of the governments programme to replace the notion of conflict between employers and employees with the promotion of partnership"**.

Rights and Duties

This is not about giving workers back 'rights' the Tories eroded, it is about being given some 'rights' in return for 'duties'. **"The new legislative steps the government is proposing... will include a wide range of new rights at work. But in offering the new rights we will *demand* that employees accept their responsibilities to co-operate with employers."** Duties to co-operate with the bosses, bosses the government feels, on the whole, treat us fairly.

What exactly do we get for our co-operation? What does this bill offer workers?

What Do We Get?

It is certainly not the **"fair and balanced package"** claimed by Stephen Byers, the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry. It isn't fair or balanced for millions of workers excluded because they work for companies with less than twenty employees. Nor is it fair or balanced for those of us unfairly dismissed within the first year of employment. Yes, the government may have reduced the qualifying period from two years to one, but unfair dismissal is unfair dismissal, no matter when it happens. Nothing has been introduced to force the bosses to implement the ruling of a Tribunal where they have found workers have been unfairly dismissed and have called for reinstatement!

Some of the proposals to our advantage are:

- **Power for the Secretary of State to make regulations prohibiting blacklisting (making regulations will be meaningless in the absence of thorough enforcement or the will to enforce)**
- **The ending of the burden of unions having to provide the employers with lists of members to be balloted**

TUC Congress 1999: Partnership the Theme

•The right for all workers to be accompanied by a union representative at disciplinary or grievance hearings
•The limit for Industrial Tribunal awards up to £50,000
•Increased maternity leave to 18 weeks, bringing the UK in line with the EU
•The bill also contains 'family friendly' proposals, including the right to (unpaid) time off for domestic emergencies, and three months unpaid parental leave for both parents. It is of course unlikely that many of us will be unable to afford to take the government up on such generosity.

Protection for Striking Workers?

The eight weeks protection against dismissal for workers taking part in 'legal' industrial action in the Bill is only just short of meaningless. According to the Labour Party briefing;
"Dismissal thereafter will only be fair if the employer has taken all reasonable procedural steps to resolve the dispute."
"Reasonable" is not defined. Workers can be sacked for taking lawful industrial action as long as bosses show that they followed **"an appropriate procedure for resolution of the dispute"**. Who decides what is appropriate? If it isn't accepted by the workers in dispute then it obviously wasn't appropriate in our opinion. But then our opinion, like those of workers everywhere, doesn't count for much next to the opinions of boss or politician.
Employers are not beyond presenting 'settlements' they know striking workers are unlikely to accept. The eight week boundary will, as Bill Morris himself pointed out, encourage many companies to sit out a strike beyond the deadline, so the little protection given simply evaporates.

No Automatic Recognition

The original White Paper appeared to give automatic union recognition where membership exceeded 50%. However the CBI and the Labour government have allowed the CAC [3] to refuse automatic recognition even where a majority exists.
Three criteria have been laid down:

1 CAC can to order a ballot where **"it would be in the interests of good industrial relation"**. There is no definition of **"good industrial relations"**. The rhetorical question is good for who? Workers or management?
2 A ballot can be imposed where there is more than 50% membership but a 'significant' number of members don't want the union to conduct collective bargaining on their behalf. There is no definition of "significant". This requirement leaves huge scope for the deliberate undermining of unions by management.
3 A ballot can be imposed where **"membership evidence is produced which leads the CAC to conclude that there are doubts that a significant number of union members within a bargaining unit want the union or unions to conduct collective bargaining on their behalf"**. The evidence is defined as:

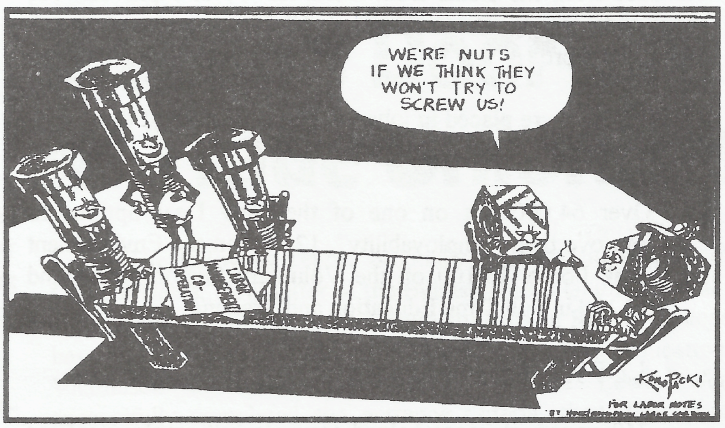
- **"evidence about the circumstances in which union members became members"**
- **"evidence about the length of time for which union members have been members, in a case where CAC is satisfied that such evidence should be taken into account".**

This again gives scope for the deliberate undermining of any form of organised labour by employers. It is a green light to play one section of workers off against the other. Nothing new perhaps but now there is greater, legally sanctioned, benefit to those seeking to undermine the solidarity upon which any union must be built.

De-Recognition

Employers have been granted the right to apply for a de-recognition ballot. This applies when union membership falls below 50% or they can show 10% favour de-recognition with 'evidence' that a majority are likely to want de-recognition.
This right is also extended to individual workers – giving scabs a golden opportunity to cause problems for any recognised union. Employers will not be slow in manipulating compliant workers towards applying for a de-recognition ballot while giving the impression that they remain independent of the dispute.

'Social Partnership', Who's Kidding Who?



The whole range of repressive legislation remains in place. Bill Morris feels we **"have some unfinished business because our task cannot be completed until we see the repeal of all anti-trade union laws"**. [4]
This legislation cannot be seen as a 'repeal' of Tory anti-union laws. Trade Unionists everywhere must oppose the underlying concept of 'social partnership' which is at the root of this legislation. It represents a very dangerous development for unions. A development that threatens their independence from the bosses. We have unfinished business, our task cannot be completed until we see unions represent the interests of their members independent of the opposed interests of the bosses.

[1] Bill Morris, President ATGWU, addressing TUC Congress 1999, on Employment Law.
[2] Tony Blair MP, Prime Minister and leader of the Labour Party, addressing the Labour Party's 100th conference, Bournemouth, 28th September 1999.
[3] CAC: the Central Arbitration Committee the body established to oversee the implementation of the 'Fairness at Work' legislation.

NEW LABOUR AND THE MYTH OF THE UNDESERVING POOR

In his pre-budget report to the House of Commons on 9th November 1999, Chancellor Gordon Brown announced the extension of 'New Deal'. 'New Deal 25+' is to be extended on a national basis from April 2001, "building on the principles of the New Deal for under 25s, bringing rights and responsibilities for the 25+ into line with those for young people" .

An "enhanced package" for 'New Deal for Lone Parents', implementation of the 'New Deal 50+' nation-wide in April 2000 and the launching of pilot schemes for 'New Deal for the Disabled', were also announced.

Singing the praises of 'New Deal' the Chancellor claimed, "youth unemployment is down by over 60% and long term unemployment is down by over 50%." Of the 350,000 young people who have started on the 'New Deal' under half have been put into jobs of which nearly 15% are subsidised. The long term unemployed have been harder for the government to put into jobs, of 175,000 started on 'New Deal 25+', only a seventh of them have been put into jobs.

Statistics from the DfEE from April 1st '98 to April 1st '99, show that among claimants aged 18-24 unemployed for 6 months or more;

- 69,440 were placed in jobs, with over 13,000 of those jobs being subsidised by government.
- Over 64,000 put on one of the New Deal options to improve their "employability", 12,400 on the Environment Task Force, 13,100 on the Voluntary Sector option and 39,100 in Full Time Education and Training.
- 8,710 young disabled people put to work.
- 740 young claimant helped towards self-employment, of these 108 have taken up independent trading.

Over this period 10,800 young people have had sanctions, in the form of cuts to benefit, applied under 'New Deal'. Compulsion is the basis of New Deal. As the government has continually made clear, there is no fifth option. Any failure to comply with placements under New Deal will result in benefit cuts.

To aid this attack on the unemployed New Labour use the myth of the 'undeserving poor'.

Those who fall into line are of course the grateful and deserving poor who have been helped by the 'New Deal', those who don't or can't are the 'undeserving poor'.

Alastair Darling, New Labour's Social Security Minister has told us **"Living on benefits should not be seen as a career in itself."** Who would want a career that pays just £30.95 to £51.40 per week? Because that, Mr Darling, is what the unemployed are expected to survive on in this country. The systematic harassment of claimants underpins these attacks. Claimants are tested to ensure that they are 'deserving' as opposed to 'undeserving', those who do not pass the tests are punished with benefit cuts.

The government talk about crackdowns, get tough policies and zero tolerance towards the 'loafers' on our dole queues. New Deal is the United Kingdoms first fully fledged workfare scheme. Those who won't knuckle under can starve.

We live in a society where, according to the Child Poverty Action Group, 23% live in poverty. Poverty and insecurity are on the rise. Head of the Bank of England, Eddie George, has stated that an increase in unemployment in the north east of England may be a necessary price to pay for low inflation. This illustrates New Labour's recognition that a low wage economy needs an army of unemployed to hold down wages. The New Deal is designed to make sure that the unemployed do what they are supposed to, take low paid jobs.

The New Deal represents an attack on the most vulnerable members of our society. These attacks are a continuation of those initiated by the Tories, indeed New Labour have such a majority in the Commons that they are confident enough to attack the unemployed in ways the Tories only dreamt of.

The goal is straight forward enough. New Deal is about creating a model, acquiescent workforce who accept low pay. This will undermine the position of those already in employment. All jobs are less secure as a result of New Deal.

Half N. Ireland Unemployed Long-term

International Labour Organisation figures released in January 2000 show that 46% of those out-of-work in N. Ireland are long-term unemployed.
The current unemployment rate is shown as 6.7%, a 0.9% decrease on last years figure. According to the ILO, however, government schemes, such as New Deal, are having little to no effect on the long-term unemployed. There have been no results in terms of getting people off the dole and into real work, the long-term unemployment figure has not changed from January last year.

Bare Minimum Wage

Entering a the new millennium much has been made of the governments introduction of a legal minimum wage.

Many Rates set at £3.60 an hour, and £3.00 an hour for under 21's derisory.

On the higher rate a 39 hour week gives a gross pay of £140.40, on 37 hour week it gives £133.20 before tax.

This falls well below the amount which can be earned and still entitle a worker to Family Credit. How can a wage which, the government itself recognises, needs supplemented in this way be "decent"?

At present we support the claim put forward by many of a £5.00 an hour minimum wage but what in fact is a decent wage? Consider that it is the workers who produce the profits. Consider that employers usually get their investment money, to start or but a new business, from the profits made by the work of their previous employees. Workers produce all the profits in the new workplace, but somehow, in the elusive accounting process, it is the employer who determines what small amount of money should be provided to the employee in recompense for the employer being provided with a large amount of money. Suddenly the term "decent wage" seems very ironic indeed.

The cost of living rises every year. What is a "decent" or acceptable wage one year may not be the next. How do we go about getting a "decent" wage?

We must fight for improved pay and conditions. Achieving a "decent" level of wages is surely not going to be done through petitions, lobbying or waiting on politicians.

Blair, our 'Labour' supremo, has stated that the days of annual pay rises are over. Meanwhile no-one has told the Stock Market that they should stop expecting an annual increase on their returns. So he's set a minimum wage, unlikely to be increased and not even guaranteed to be kept in line with inflation rates each April. Perhaps we should ask him to keep down the cost of living for us instead.

This shows the inadequacies, the folly, of expecting the powers that be to sort things out for us. This is as true of Westminster, Brussels, or any new Assembly we may see at Stormont. If we want real improvements in pay and conditions, if we want any meaningful change, we have to take them for ourselves. This means combining collectively to take direct action against our employers. It means workers deciding what wage they need to survive on and fighting for it, if this means industrial action so be it. We can no longer be prepared to shy away from the struggle.

Sacked For Knocking A Door

Two Unison stewards in Glasgow City Council have been sacked for chapping (knocking) on a door. Twenty seven other members have been given final written warnings despite being given permission to use their own time to show support to Social Work Convenor Roddy Slorach at his disciplinary hearing.

Unison have blocked any strike action in support despite a successful ballot. Meanwhile Unison have suspended Slorach from his post as Convenor. If only Unison could fight the employers with the enthusiasm they have to attack activists!

Wildcat Strikes

Much respect to Scottish postal workers and workers at Ford Dagenham's who took unofficial action during October. In the case of the Scottish posties their successful action was in defence of a sacked union convenor. Maybe it is a bit too early, then, to consign wildcat strikes to the Museum of Labour History!

Labour Shuts Ruskin's Door On NI Trade Unionists

The following report originally appeared in issue 6 of Council News, Newsletter of the Belfast Trades Union Council.

Funding for Northern Ireland students to Ruskin College has been withdrawn by the Department of Education. Victimised Mackies shop steward, Ronnie Lewis who successfully completed the entrance criteria, then discovered that funding for N. Ireland students had been removed.

There was no debate, no discussion from central government. The decision was so clandestine that Ruskin College in Oxford did not realise that funding had been withdrawn!

Why is it that an active trade unionist from the North of Ireland is treated differently from a trade unionist from the North of England? This decision turns New Labour's idea of 'life long learning' on its head.

Its unlikely that Ronnie Lewis will be able to get to Ruskin this year or next. A bureaucratic pen has taken away the right to a second chance in education for many working class people.

We need to raise this issue in our workplaces and our trade union branches. We need to actively campaign to reverse the government's decision.

One Industry One Union You Know It Makes Sense

ITGWU badge displays the OBU motif, showing the influence of the Industrial Unionism of the American Industrial Workers of the World on its formation – OBU stands for One Big Union.

"Is Industrial Unionism the Future?" was the question posed on the cover of the June 1999 edition of Labour Research magazine.

The idea of 'One Industry One Union' appears to be gaining ground within the Trades Union movement. None other than John Monks has called for "radical restructuring" so that each key industrial sector would be covered by one "industry union". This translates as a call from the TUC for more union amalgamations.

Industrial unionism is not a new concept, it informed many earlier unions. Unions which acknowledged that in order to gain maximum strength as a movement maximum solidarity was a necessity. The ideal was the organisation of workers into the One Big Union.

Strike meeting at Queen's Square, Belfast, during the 1907 Dock strike. The fall out from the strike was to lead James Larkin and others to set up the ITGWU, a union heavily influenced by the ideas of

It is a method of organising central to the strong syndicalist movement of the early 20th century. The term syndicalist comes from the French word syndicate, which simply means union, in the English speaking world syndicalism is associated not only with industrial organisation but also with a more militant, more revolutionary, brand of unionism.

Powerful syndicalist unions existed across the world prior to the second world war such as the CNT in Spain, the IWW in the USA, Canada and Australia (James Larkin's brother Peter was an IWW organiser in Australia), the Swedish SAC, the FORA of Argentina. Some of these unions still exist. Syndicalism strongly influenced the early ITGWU – SIPTU's predecessor.

Unions are a relatively modern development, a product of industrial society. The idea is a simple, but important one – namely that the workers must organise collectively to battle that powerful minority, the bosses. The individual worker is almost powerless in a non-union workplace, with the choice of obeying the boss or quitting the job for another one.

Unions upset this state of affairs. When these individual workers banded together against the boss they had considerable strength indeed. The right to collective bargaining has been hard won by workers, with a lot of blood spilt, as the employers sought to protect their privilege, power and profits.

Given that this right has been paid for so dearly why then is it that a state of affairs exists which divides our potential forces, sets worker against worker and promotes sectional interests above the demand for effective action and solidarity. Surely any good union man or woman realises that the best form of organisation possible should be strove for in order that we can more effectively advance our situation.

The public transport industry in Northern Ireland provides as good an example as any of the problems we need to overcome. One company, Translink, covers Ulsterbus, Citybus and Northern Ireland Railways. One company and yet no union organisation cutting across the three component parts. Worse still workers are further sectionalised within each part of the company.

On the buses the two largest unions are the GMB and ATGWU, which both represent drivers. There are other unions again for different grades.

In NIR the AEEU, represents drivers and sparks, the GMB and SIPTU, represent grades such as track walkers, porters, foremen, shunters, conductors, signalmen, etc., the ATGWU, MSF and TSSA also have recognition.

This is not organisation, it is organised chaos.

All employers are adept at playing one section of workers off against the other. On top of this workers all too often find themselves divided by the movement that is meant to give them strength.

The call from the TUC for more amalgamations is nothing new, in 1988 a special review body was set up to deal with a growing membership crisis. It recommended mergers to improve services and attract new members. Moves towards bigger unions through amalgamation have little to do with the strengthening of the members position, more with the pay packets of the full-time bureaucracy.

Amalgamations are the Trade Unions answer to dwindling numbers and the threat of inter-union competition. The following quote from Labour Research is an example of what they saw as industrial logic ignored;

"...the post office managers' union, the CMA, declined to follow industrial logic and join the Communication Workers' Union.."

It hardly bolsters our industrial strength to have our managers, our bosses after all, in the same union!

The real problem here lies in the unaccountability of the trade union leadership, the lack of control we have over our unions, and the servile acceptance of the notion of social partnership at the leaderships core.

Yes industrial unionism offers us a more effective method of organising in our struggle against our employers. It would have the potential to maximise solidarity and make any action we may take much more effective. It is an offer which I am afraid would be wholly wasted on the current trade union leadership, an offer, a potential, which they would be too afraid to let translate into positive action..

Lets not get caught up in waiting for great developments from above. Instead let us as shop stewards and workplace activists take on the task of building the much needed links, throughout our industries, in order that they can better stand up against management and employers.

Espionage!

L. H. Draw writes about a tangled web of double dealing and industrial espionage at a Portsmouth printing press some years back.

The Sunday Correspondent some may remember, it only lasted 8 weeks, strangled by the big players. It was a Sunday tabloid with a broad-sheet mindset, it was also 'left' enough to be worth reading.

The Correspondent published in London and printed at three sites in the UK. In Portsmouth it paid a heavy fee for two presses, one to run, one to make ready and stand by in case of trouble in the other press rooms.

The local management in Portsmouth decided to steal some of this payment. They offered the 'standby' crew 2 hours pay (to ruin a Saturday night). Obviously this was rejected and the managers crewed it themselves, and likely pocketed what they could.

In the 5th week a press broke down and the publishers duly called on the standby to meet the shortfall. It didn't. The managers had gone – the other crewed up press transferred and took three hours to get running. They produced copy that missed the distribution network of trains etc., adding to the half strangled Sunday Correspondents death throws – no newspapers in the shops!

Someone phoned the publishers and explained what had happened, their money being taken with false promise! Fan and shit time in Portsmouth.

The FOC (shop steward in the print industry see note) was accused of making the call. He was suspended and warned that files would be given to the police and eight years in gaol could be the result under industrial espionage laws.

Fortunately in the newspaper trade instant action can have effect. All overtime was refused and a work to strict rule took place. This means newspapers do not go out on time or in enough quantity. After two days the management phoned the FOC at home and said that they knew he did it but didn't want to cause any more "ill will". So, reinstated the FOC went back to work, after a few days he was of course 'sick with stress'.

The moral is clear, if your shop steward is 'got at', never leave it to law, regulations or rules to sort out, hit hard, protect that position regardless of the individual. If you play by the rule of law, and now even the union rules, sacked workers are hardly ever saved. If you hit hard and immediately you get those victims saved and you get a great boost to dignity and fairness at work.

Note: FOC, Father or Mother of Chapel. Those in the printing industry know this term but how many know why it came about or why its still used?

The answer is in our history. In the days when the print unions formed the local business owner had the local magistrate send in the militia to bayonet – truthfully – any group of four or more workers, wherever they met, if they were intent on forming a trade union.

The only way to have a gathering was to have a church, a congregation, a father or mother of chapel. The whole union was formed as such to circumnavigate these deadly laws.

To honour and remember these people this title is used today in print unions. We think we have it tough now, we fight for our rights and may loose our homes and holidays! Our forebearers died to get us this far.

It may be a bit strong, but if you get 85% support in a group of workers go in with this in mind when you fight for whatever you feel is due.

"We will shut this place down if we don't get our fair share and rights". The battle, if it is not endless, is ongoing and barely begun.

I finish this article with a question – what interesting legal ways have you seen employed to bring a bad management to your way of thinking? The juicier the better. Oh and a final point, don't rely too much on your own union hierarchy, its hands and funds are often tied up. Use other methods, and write in with them, this information will help others and amuse us all too.

Councilling With The Bosses

A survey of 481 British businesses and organisations of all sizes and from a range of sectors revealed that:

- 36% of employers support compulsory works councils for firms of 50 or more (28% think it's a bad idea and 36% are undecided)
- Only 17% oppose compulsory works councils for 250+ employee firms (56% in favour and 28% undecided)
- Of those respondents who had already established works councils (76% of the survey base), 60% said they had made a 'positive contribution to the business', with only 7% regarding works councils as a negative feature of business.

Management generally is increasingly embracing Works Councils, UK legislation on European Works Councils is on the way, and an EU Directive making them compulsory in all member states is a distinct possibility.

So why are Works Councils so right for the bosses and wrong for you – quite simply, they provide a new role for unions in sidetracking them into supporting bosses instead of workers.

If you want to know more about Works Councils, how they operate, how they hgave been received in France, and a real alternative get – "Out of the Frying Pan: A critical look at Works Councils" £1.50 from SolFed, PO Box 29, SW PDO, Manchester M15 5HW.

Workers Doing It For Themselves - Global Solidarity

Russia: Armed Police Attacks And Occupies Open-Pit Chernigovsky

On the night of the 21/12/99, on the orders of Regional Governor Tuleev the open pit "Chernigovsky", in the town of Berezovsky, was stormed and occupied by a large force of armed police. The chairman of the pit's union local Sergei Burdei suffered a heart attack during the police action. His request for hospitalisation was turned down. "If you did not mess with us you would not have health problems," the cops told him.

The workers' collective has been trying to make "Chernigovsky," one of the largest mines in this mining region, a "people's enterprise." The police attack was organised by the top brass of the regional police. All the workers who where in the administrative building at the time of the attack remain trapped by the police. The police also surrounded the mine's press centre, with two journalists presently in it. The Prosecutor's office officials also entered the mine and presently are interrogating members of the workers' committee. The attackers refuse to identify themselves and to present a court order. All work in the pit has been stopped. The workers' collective is ready to begin an indefinite strike, which would leave the town of Berezovsky without heat, if the attackers do not leave the pit.

Russia: Thugs Seize Factory

Several dozen uniformed thugs stormed and seized the administration building of Vyborg Pulp and Paper Mill, in Russia, on July 9th. Workers took control of the plant in the town in Sovetskii over 18 months ago, resumed full production at one of the most advanced paper producing plants in the world. After many years of hunger and poverty the mill workers began getting paid their wages regularly.

However, this state of affairs was not to the liking of those who lost their control over this valuable property, and a judge decided to return the mill to the predators from Nikamor Company. Alcem, linked to some of the most corrupt and criminal sections of Russian business, then bought the mill and set about evicting the workers. Hundreds of workers fought Alcem thugs for control of the factory, ultimately forcing them to flee. But workers expect further attacks in the weeks to come.

Bosses Locked In

Union members occupied the offices of Telecommunications Services of Trinidad and Tobago on May 21st, refusing to let managers leave until they agreed to a new contract. The union is demanding that workers be paid a third of the company's profits.

Workers Walk Out

Meanwhile, workers at Iowa Beef in Pasco, Washington, took unofficial 'wildcat' strike action in mid-June after management sped up the production line to unbearable speeds and fired workers who protested. Workers began to file out of the plant, and management quickly locked the remaining workers in. Police were called to the scene and opened the doors. Most of the 1,300 workers then walked out.

Five days after the walk-out began, Teamsters local 556 (which "represented" the workers) "authorised" the strike and began manoeuvring to end it. National Teamsters officials finally intervened to settle the dispute by eliminating workers' pension plan in exchange for pay hikes. The contract, which was approved on a 276-258 vote, does not address speed-up and safety issues. The union officials who negotiated the deal were booed and fled the union hall under police escort. The International promptly "trusteed" the local, cancelling elections which would have ousted the officials who sold the workers out.

Spanish Shipyard Workers Fight Layoffs

With new threats to the continued operation of the shipyards in the Bay of Cadiz, the Puerto Real branch of the CNT-AIT is at the forefront of the workers struggle.

On May 8th shipyard workers blockaded the bridge connecting Puerto Real to the city of Cadiz across the bay, for 6 hours. The traffic jam lasted from 12 in the morning to 7 in the evening, with a 25km tailback.

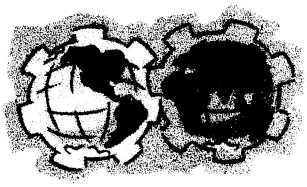
In the morning before putting up barricades workers held a mass meeting in the company offices. The CNT decided to hold workers assemblies twice a week in the town square until the dispute is over. On May 12th Spain's Minister of Industry, Joseph Pique travelled to Cadiz but could not get into the city because roads were again blocked by the shipyard workers. He had to be flown in later by helicopter!

Swedish Union Offices Bombed by Fascists

In October 1999 a powerful explosion rocked the town of Gävle, Sweden.

The Swedish syndicalist union, SAC syndikaliisterna's local offices were the target. The building housed not only the Local Federations and Industry Secretary's offices but was also the birthplace of the well-known syndicalist agitator, Joe Hill. Joe Hill left Sweden and immigrated to the United States where he earned a name for himself within the ranks of American syndicalist union the IWW-Industrial Workers of the World.

The explosion coincided with demonstrations across Sweden and Europe against fascist violence called in response to murder of SAC member, Björn Söderberg, at the hands of three nazis on 12 October. Such fascist aggression has stirred the hearts and minds of the Swedish working class, as well as that of unions, organisations and groups across the globe.



Global Women's Strike 8 March 2000

A global women's strike is being called for 8 March for a millennium which values all women's work and all women's lives. In most industrial countries including Britain women only earn a fraction of what men do. World wide in Africa women grow 80% of food consumed, in Asia many women spend up to five hours every day gathering fire wood. In Latin America 25% of the population have no access to clean drinking water. The campaign is calling for, amongst other things, pay equity, affordable and accessible housing and transportation, wages for caring work, paid maternity leave, breast-feeding and other benefits "that recognise women's biological work rather than penalise us for being women".

Contact:

International Wages for House Work Campaign,
Crossroads Women's Centre P.O. Box 287,
London, NW6 5QU, Tel:0171 4822496
email: crossroadswomencentre@compuserve.com.

Immigration And Asylum Bill

The Black Women's Rape Action Project and Women Against Rape are seeking union support for their campaign against New Labour's racist Asylum Bill. The new Bill will make it harder for all immigrants to enter this country including rape victims. The campaign has worked with women from Cote D'Ivoire, Kenya, Lithuania, Turkey, Uganda and other countries who have been raped, often by police and soldiers in gangs. Many women are too traumatised on arrival in this country to give details of the rape and torture they have suffered. Many of these women's claims have been treated as 'bogus' by the Home Office. A number of unions are supporting the campaign including ASLEF, MSF and the ATGWU ,along with a large number of local union branches and other organisations. If your union has not signed up raise it, as a matter of priority, at your next branch meeting.

Information and support to:

Crossroads Women's Centre, 230A Kentish Town Road, London, NW5 2AB, Tel: 0171 482 2496 email: bwrap@dircon.co.uk

The campaign against the deportation of immigrants can be contacted at:

National Coalition of Anti-deportation Campaigns, 101VillaRoad, Birmingham, B19 1NH.

Strike Wave Hits India

India has been rocked by a massive strike wave across the country. Power workers have plunged one state (Uttar Pradesh) into darkness in their battle against privatisation and the response of the government has been to sack workers, arrest union leaders and send in troops. Meanwhile 100,000 port workers have effectively shut down India's shipping industry and government workers, doctors and others have joined in the strikes.

This is a huge setback to the government's plans for "reform" -- meaning compliance with the World Bank/IMF/ WTO 'neo-liberal agenda'.

Longest Sit-In Strike In Korean History

The Sammi Speciality Steel Workers Union, the SSSWU, have been engaged in the longest sit-in strike in Korea: 1099 days as of December 29, 1999. The dispute arose following the take over of Sammi Speciality Steel by the notoriously anti-union POSCO (Pohang Steel Company). A take-over which resulted in the dismissal of 185 union activists and the effective de-recognition of the union.

Colombian Union Leader's Murder Prompts Strike

18,000 banana workers and other members of the Agricultural Workers Union (Sintrainagro) in Colombia began a 48-hour strike on December 14 1999 to protest the murder of union leader Cesar Johny Herrera Torreglosa. Herrera was general secretary of Sintrainagro, one of the strongest agricultural unions in Latin America. He was dead on December 13 1999 by unidentified assailants at the union offices in Cienaga. Herrera had been on a list of 15 union leaders threatened with death and with no government protection.

Colombia has the world's highest number of assassinations of labour leaders.

Telecommunication Workers On Strike in Gabon

An indefinite strike by the National Union of Posts and Telecommunications in Gabon got under way in early January in protest at the privatisation of the Board of Posts and Telecommunications.

Global Transport Workers Action

Thousands of bus and truck drivers in countries across the globe (Austria, Germany, Switzerland, Holland, France, Spain, Italy, UK, Argentina, Chile, Brazil, Paraguay, Honduras, Bolivia, Burkina Faso, Zimbabwe, Zambia, South Africa, Botswana and Mozambique, among others) joined together on 5th October '99 in a massive international protest against the excessive hours that many of them are forced to work.

Action ranged from leafleting at key transport arteries, mass rallies and demonstrations, to slow moving truck convoys and blockades of important ports.

The world-wide day of action was co-ordinated by international and European transport workers' organisations, as part of a long-term campaign to highlight the poor working conditions that the world's professional drivers endure, and in particular to drive home the message that "fatigue - brought on by working 60, 80 or even 100 hours a week – kills".

Partnership Comes Unstuck In Irish Republic

Following the Ansbacher revelations, the DIRT enquiry, payments to politicians Tribunals, and the exposure of Haughey, we can see that those who founded social partnership in the south and the captains of industry who set themselves up as the 'partners' of the workers there, were illegally ripping them off through salted away money, and ripping them off legally through social partnership in the 'celtic tiger'. While workers were being lectured on wage restraint hundreds of millions of pounds were being stashed away in 'offshore' accounts.

Top salaries and non-wage incomes have soared while wages have been held down. Those unrestricted by Partnership 2000 or who broke it got much more than the terms of the deal. SIPTU has had to back the nurses and CIE workers even though its union leaders were involved in negotiating the terms for P2000 (2.5% this year!).

Those same union leaders want southern workers to accept another partnership deal. It is time that all workers, nurses, busworkers, scaffolders, cranedrivers, north and south, had the freedom to seek substantial claims.

During the period of social partnership agreements, from 1987 to 1997 national wealth in the Republic of Ireland nearly doubled, increasing by £20 billion, corporate profits increased by 267%, self employed income by 169% and wages 104%. Over the same period labour's share of income has declined by over 13% while profits increased by 46% as a percentage of the national wealth. Tax cuts gave a single high earner 36.1% and a single low earner 18.8%. The UN ranks Ireland second in the industrialised world in the level of extreme poverty.

From 'A New Agenda for Economic Power Sharing', ATGWU, Dublin, 1999.

Letting Things Slip Through...

The brave banner raised at SIPTU's Ennis Conference was thrown away during the Ryanair dispute and dropped 15 floors from the High Level Group. The HGL report does not deliver trade union recognition, it gives Labour Court regulation without recognition, without organisation on the ground. It seeks strike restrictions. The National Minimum Wage is being delayed until April 2000, the Bill hasn't even been introduced into the Dail. The figure of £4.40 per hour is still constantly being used, although union members demanded £5.00 and the Commission recommended two-thirds the median wage – £4.40 in April 1997.

Building Workers Protest Across Dublin

150 Workers Dead Over 5 Years Due To Appalling Safety Standards

Protests over appalling safety conditions saw hundreds of building workers block O'Connell Bridge, on 3rd December 1999, causing traffic chaos in Dublin's city centre.

Mounted gardai arrived heightening tension at the demonstration which had blocked O'Connell Bridge and Bachelor's Walk due to the large numbers. The crowd was addressed and observed a minutes silence for 150 building workers killed in the past 5 years in the South. Building workers also occupied offices of the Minister of State for Labour Affairs, Mr Tom Kitt, to protest at government inaction on the issue.

This was one of 12 demonstrations which saw building workers walk off around 50 sites in the city. Developments affected included Parkwest, the Four Season's Hotel in Ballsbridge, the M50 extension, Dublin City University and the Grand Canal Quay site where 19 year old Mark Loughery fell to his death two weeks previously.

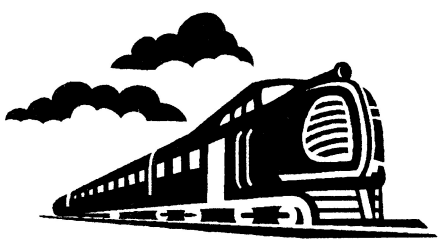
Fifteen construction workers have died so far this year.

Malcontents & Mavericks

As the stakes are raised in an ongoing recognition battle, Iarnrod Eireann have accused the Irish Locomotive Drivers' Association, a registered trade union representing over 100 locomotive drivers, of being "a malcontent, maverick group" intent on destabilising industrial relations in the company.

The ILDA split from SIPTU following the Railway Services Division biennial conference in Ennis two years ago. Both SIPTU and management are putting pressure on the ILDA, management are trying to claim damages for work stoppages carried out on Friday, July 9th, and Sunday, July 11th, and is claiming the union is not entitled to represent locomotive drivers in negotiations, or at disciplinaries.

In a joint statement last July SIPTU and the NBRU accused the ILDA of creating "anarchy and distrust" among loco drivers.



SIPTU Fightback

Alan MacSimoin, a SIPTU member, writes about an initiative to oppose, 'social partnership' deals in the south of Ireland, the bureaucracy of the union and to wrest control from the top into the hands of members on the shop floor.

SIPTU is the biggest union in Ireland. It is also one of the most bureaucratic and conservative. Its forerunners – ITGWU and FWUI – had inspiring early histories but that doesn't impact on Liberty Hall today. Instead we are fed a constant diet of 'partnership', moderation and restraint. Our union has become so cautious that it couldn't (or more accurately wouldn't) even sort out Ryanair when they denied recognition to our members.

We made it clear that we were not a front for any political party...

Two years ago three SIPTU members decided that something had to be done. We knew we weren't on our own, over one third of members consistently voted against the 'social partnership' agreements. But those who want a more militant and democratic union are isolated from each other. Very few know other activists from outside their own workplace or branch.

So instead of waiting for someone else to kick things off, we decided to do our bit. The first 'SIPTU Fightback' last year was posted out to about 100 people in the union whom we had addresses for and thought might be interested in what we were doing.

We made it clear that we were not a front for any political party, that we had no detailed platform or policy list. We want to help build a network of activists for change, a network of people with political affiliations and people with none. We do, however, have definite viewpoints, the core of which is opposition to 'social partnership'. "The bosses are not our partners" as we said on the cover of every bulletin).

We also said we wanted the anti-union laws repealed or drastically reformed; solidarity from throughout the union for sections in dispute; a fighting instead of a compliant and timid union; open access for all views, on national Programmes or whatever, in union literature; vigorous pursuit of a decent (not token) national minimum wage; and a recruitment campaign like the Nurses and Dunnes Stores rather than "watches and sweatshirts".

Strong organisation in the workplace is the key to changing our union, we want an end to decisions coming from the top (no matter who is making them). If the union really is the members, the members should feel a real sense of ownership and control.

If the union really is the members, the members should feel a real sense of ownership and control

With these ideas we have sent out nine issues of our bulletin. We covered news of fellow workers in struggle at Irish Life, the Three Lakes Hotel, Aer Lingus Catering, the building workers successful fight against sub-contracting, Ryanair and the Liverpool Dockers.

Inside the union we looked at the three elections, the proposed rule changes, the sexual harassment allegations at the Ennis conference (and how the bureaucracy reacted).

We also wrote about the High Level Group report on union recognition, the joint union –management AnUMAN conference, Haughey's role in 'partnership' deals, how the 26 county Finance Act encouraged wage cuts, the ICTU's EU funded propaganda for 'partnership', and how the Irish Independent fiddled the figures to prove that the Irish were the best paid in Europe with an average take home wage of £7 an hour!

Other topics covered ranged from the formation of a trade union group within the Anti-Racism Campaign to the Dublin Council of Trade Unions' minimum wage campaign. And our history spot told the stories of the laundry strike that won paid holidays, how the unemployed organised in the 1930's, the unofficial National Shop Stewards Federation of the 1970s, the Southern tax marches, and the women of Jacobs who stayed out longer than anyone else in 1913.

A lot of you seem to have liked it, our mailing list has jumped to about 450 people. And, amazingly, we have (just about) been able to finance it through small donations from readers and the proceeds of a pub quiz.

We were clear (amongst ourselves anyway) when we started this project that we were not going to provide a never-ending service for everyone else. Our hope is to work with other activists to improve our union – not to work for them. What we agreed to do was to "fly a flag and see who saluted". Enough of you "saluted", if we all get together with each other in some form of a network we can have far more of an impact inside SIPTU.

Now it's time to move on to the next step – getting more people involved in our bulletin and beginning the work of building that network of militants within our union.

Write and ask to be put on our mailing list.

SIPTU Fightback
22 Melrose Avenue, Fairview, Dublin 3.
Http://flag.blackened.net/revolt/siptu.html

See page 28 for a review of the 'SIPTU Fightback' bulletin.

Textiles Workers Take A Hammering

The local textile industry is taking a hammering, with job loses and closures wreaking havoc on the lives of hundreds of workers and their families across the north.

The textile industry makes up around 20% of Northern Irelands manufacturing industry, employing between 17,000 and 18,000 people. If cheaper global competition sees this industry, and these jobs, disappear the effects will be nothing short of devastating.

In early January 340 jobs were lost within 24 hours. One of the worst hit towns has been Newtownards. Lamont Holdings' carpet and yarns division in County Down, lost 265 jobs, affecting employees in Ballygowan, Killinchy and Newtownards, A further 75 jobs went at Regency Spinning Company in Newtownards. Lamont gave employees 90 days notice of redundancy. Within hours the Regency, a carpet yarn makers, announced that 60 job losses due to a shortage of orders. More than 80 jobs are under threat at Saville Row shirt company's plant in Coleraine while 160 jobs are to go at Hawkesbay Jeans factories in Newtownards and Derry.

Back in October 1999 Bairds clothing factories in Bangor and Newtownards closed making nearly 200 unemployed, after Marks and Spencer withdrew its contract.

When Is Industrial Action A Necessity?

"When such and such talks about industrial action I have to laugh. I can't afford to go on strike, I'm married with kids and a mortgage"

How often have you heard those sentiments expressed in your workplace? Have you agreed with them or expressed them yourself?

The truth of the matter is that if we sit back and let the bosses chip away at what little we have then we will hardly be in a position to do very much when push comes to shove. The only way to change management's attitude is with a bit of direct action.

Bosses and workers interests can never be the same, nor is there any happy medium to be reached. We are seen as a resource, like electricity, and like all other resources the bosses want the most use out of us for the least money – maximising their profit, minimising our wages.

This is the brutal logic of 'industrial relations'. When the façade drops (for those employers who bother with one) the only language the bosses understand is not 'partnership' or 'conciliation' but action. What we need is the will, and organisation, to fight.

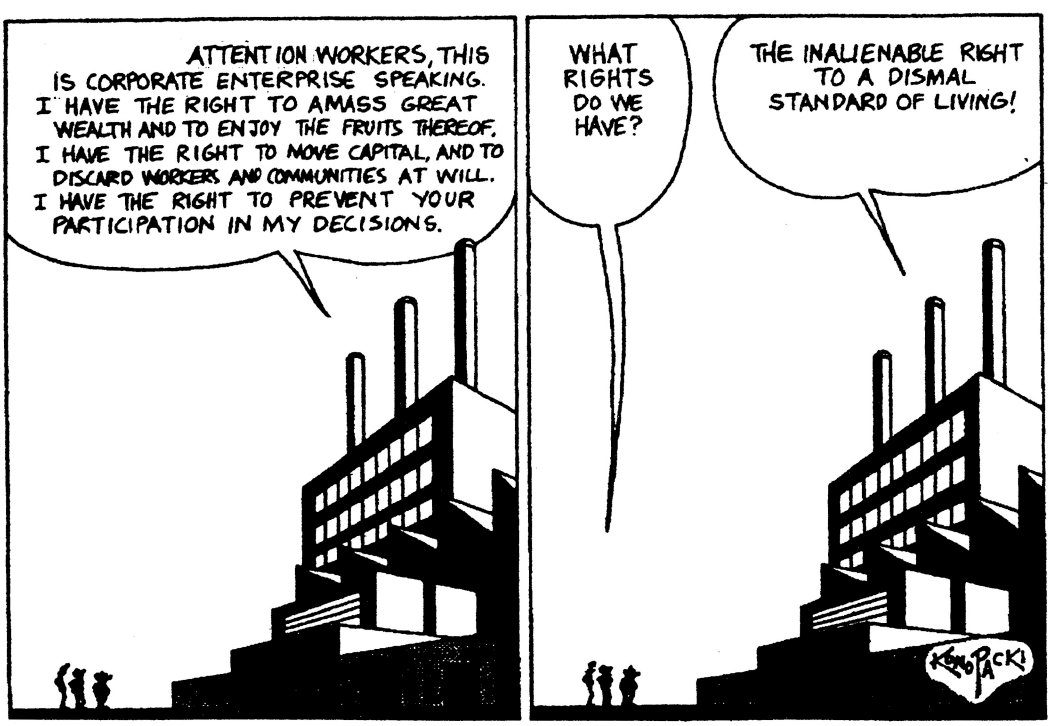
Negotiate by all means, but always from a position of strength, and our only strength is industrial strength – the ability to withdraw, or limit, our labour. Workers need to build links in the common struggle against the bosses, we must build solidarity and with it a determination to win.

Our current Trades Unions are not delivering, we need a new labour movement. We need Unions which are based in the workplace, with workers directly in control of their own struggles. We need Unions organised by industry rather than trade, avoiding division between workers in the same workplace. Unions which rely on direct democracy and direct action.

We need to ask the question; "When does it get to the stage where you can afford NOT to take industrial action?"

Until we are in a much better situation we cannot even consider taking less than the necessary action to pursue our interests.

Industrial action will be a necessity for a long time to come. Especially while we still have children to support, mortgages and bills to pay, and, for many of us, while we still



Letters-

Send your letters to:
Solidarity magazine
At P.O. Box 505,
Belfast,

Dear 'Solidarity magazine';

Wait 'til y'hear this contender for "Arsehole of the Year Award", which this publication should award anally (annually, or perhaps the first is better?).
Our boss! Neil Alexander, Production Manager for the 'News Letter' wants us to switch from weekly to monthly pay. Obviously he doesn't care, but in order to crawl that bit further up the poopshoot of whatever he crawls up, he has come up with this wonderful plan.
Elsewhere the savings this switch makes a company is kept – a tiny piece is shared out as a 'sweetener', a girl in an office looses a job etc., etc. Payments of £1,000 could be expected.
Our Neil proposes that everyone's name goes into a ballot – I'm serious – and the lucky winner gets £250. Thus turning terms and conditions into a f&*$ing game show. We asked if he could make an event of the draw, or could we 'phone a friend'! Amazingly however signed consent is still required, so there's no change as yet.
In a further move of compassion and understanding of a union worker the 3% pay increase awarded in June to all employees was withheld from production staff! Then after negotiations and threats of industrial action all but 6 people – named – were offered the 3%. We still do not accept and are at present balloting for action!
It is an indication of the times we work in that a manager would try all this on. It is also grist to the workers mill.
Organise and fight, or be treated like wee boys or girls is the message I'm left with. Fight not just for yourselves and families, but for the workplace we want to leave to our grandchildren – it is in our hands.
PS I know a great sculptor who has offered to donate a tasteful clay bum with the bottom half of a human disappearing up it. It is offered as the trophy, urm... do you know of a contender I wonder?
PPS Good luck with this publication, I hope all 'aware workers' and activists will support and enjoy it.

Yours;
Lip. H. Draw.

Next we have a letter printed under false pretences – it wasn't ever sent to us. It was spotted by one of our editors in the News Letter on Wednesday 19th of January.

After months of fraught negotiations between unions and NIR management, low-paid railway workers across the north thought they had come some little way towards addressing their situation.
As part of the three percent pay package (with more strings than Pinnochio) management had committed themselves to paying a "£5 per week non-enhanceable supplement paid to staff on a basic weekly wage of £189 or less" (prior to percentage increase being applied).
Every member of staff from conductor/ guards, foremen, to porters and permanent way staff fall into this low pay category.
These are staff in safety critical posts concerning the running of the railway, and who bear the brunt of customer dissatisfaction and anger at the poor condition of the rolling stock and the poor service provided throughout what is a run-down railway network.
Last week these low paid workers were to receive their £5 "non-enhanceable supplement".
Back paid from December to April, 37 weeks at £5 per week should have been £185 for each low-paid worker.
When people opened their pay packets they discovered something was amiss. Workers received £165, £94, £86 and other amounts.
The company had reneged on its offer, paying the supplement on an attendance basis – something which the unions did not negotiate on, nor is it what their members voted to accept.
There has been a lot of talk at the TUC and from the New Labour government lately about a new era of "social partnership" between employers and unions.
Translink/NIR management, through the contempt they have shown towards their staff, have shown all this talk to be a lie.

Signed;
Angry NIR employee

ATGWU Recruit Scabs

The ATGWU has recruited scab labour from the Port of Liverpool into its ranks. This comes on the heals of their recruitment of similar scab labour from Magnet Kitchens whose two year dispute ended in defeat when the workforce was replaced by anti-union, strike breaking labour.
Much of the scab labour is employed by the strike-breaking anti-union Drake International. Formal recognition agreements will mean the legitimisation of such outfits with the TUC and International Transport Federation.
The recruitment of scab labour in the Port of Liverpool is, writes Jimmy Nolan on behalf of the Merseyside Port Shop Stewards;
"not just an insult to the Liverpool Dockworkers, their families and supporters but to all trade unionists both nationally and internationally who have fought so hard against anti-union agencies being allowed into their places of work."
Merseyside Port Shop Stewards are calling upon members of the ATGWU to "directly refute the union's determination to recruit scab labour" and are requesting that their "International Colleagues express their concern and opposition to such developments".
Letters of protest are requested to be sent to:

Bill Morris, General Secretary, Transport and General Workers Union, 16 Palace Street, Victoria, London. SW1E 5JD.

Fax: ++ 44 (0) 171 630 5861
e-mail: tgwu@tgwu.org.uk

Dave McCall, Regional Secretary TGWU, Merchants Quay, Salford Quays, Salford. M5 2SG.

Fax: ++ 44 (0) 161 872 6068

David Cockcroft, General Secretary International Transport Federation, 49-60 Borough Road, London. SE1 1DS.

Fax: ++ 44 (0) 171 357 7871

Syndicalism and Shop Stewards

Written by Tom Brown – A Geordie Engineer

The following article, about the influence of Syndicalism on the shop stewards movement, was written by Tom Brown, and first appeared in the Sept/Oct 1962 issue of World Labour News. Tom was born and bred within sight and sound of the Tyneside shipyards, where he served his engineering apprenticeship and became involved in militant industrial activity. Much of his working life was spent as an active shop steward and factory floor activist.
His writings, of which this is only one example, did much to revive interest in both Syndicalism, which was also a powerful influence on local Trade Unionism in the early part of the century, and Workers' Control. Tom Brown was that rare example of a writer whose ideas had been tested and developed by his own experience in the hard school of working class struggle. They form part of a little known history of the labour movement, and are hopefully of interest and use to shop stewards reading today.

Syndicalists are often accused of wanting to form new industrial unions out of turn, even of wishing to wait until that event occurs before taking any action. A reading of British labour history during the past 70 years, by almost any author, will prove how false is this charge. We claim, certainly, that Syndicalist industrial unions offer a form of organisation superior to trades unionism and, when trades union branches are addressed on the subject, approval is almost unanimous. But when the workers, through lack of propaganda, do not understand or desire Syndicalism, it would serve them ill to form small, weak breakaway unions, where the existing unions or their members comprise the only defence of the working class, however inadequate that defence might be. Our watchword has always been Solidarity.

In fact, the only organisation ever to adopt a policy of forming micro-unions by artificial insemination is the Communist Party. During the late twenties and thirties this policy was forced on the C.P. in Britain by Moscow, despite the doubts of Pollitt and others. In 1929, the United Garment Workers' Union was formed as a breakaway from the Tailors' and Garment Workers' Union. The new union soon faded out.

Among seamen, the Minority Movement (a Communist front organisation) was making some progress, led by Fred Thompson, ex-dockers' organiser of the T&GWU. In this case something could have been said for a new union, as the Seamen's Union, under Havelock Wilson's rule, was little more than a company union. But the C.P. took control from the M.M. and on Tyneside, where the feeling against Wilson was most promising, declared a strike among Arab seamen in the most confused and clownish fashion, causing a riot between Whites and Asiatics and ensuring the stillbirth of the well-planned Red Seamen's Union.

Mining in Scotland held out the last chance for the C.P. to form a red union, and a breakaway from Lanark and Fife Miners' Unions was started under the title of the United Mineworkers' of Scotland (all breakaways are called "United"). Within a few years the total income of the red union was insufficient to pay the wages of the officials, as Willie Gallagher (later Communist MP for the district) wrote, and the union quietly died. Nothing but ill came from these attempts of the politicians to form unions of their own. When new unions are needed, it must be the workers of the industry concerned who themselves form them.

Syndicalism however, has had a great influence on the development of trade unionism. It is well, before going further, to point out that what the historians call "the Syndicalist tendency", as distinct from the formal Syndicalist organisation, should include the old Socialist Labour Party, especially in Scotland, who preached a revolutionary industrial unionism which I have never been able to distinguish from Syndicalism, also the I.W.W. in Britain.

Men inspired by Syndicalist thought were constantly calling for one union for each industry, instead of the thousand-odd which existed 40 years ago. It is generally agreed that it was this propaganda which made possible most of the amalgamations on industrial lines for the greater co-operation of men of different unions in one factory or industry. This may seem natural and commonplace now, but 50 years ago it seemed impossible in the face of sectional prejudice.

The strike methods peculiar to Syndicalism, many originated by the once Syndicalist C.G.T., have been used by trade unionists, as well as Syndicalists, in this country, usually with great success. When writing the pamphlet "Trade Unionism or Syndicalism?" in 1941, I included a short list of Syndicalist strike weapons, none of which had been used in this country, except by Syndicalists. Now, many are commonplace. The E.T.U. has tried them with success; busmen and railmen have since the war used the work-to-rule strike, previously used in Britain only by Syndicalist railmen in the North-East 40 years ago.

The practice of sympathetic industrial action, too, originated in Syndicalist propaganda. All this and much more is testified by writers of labour history of many shades of thought – capitalist, Socialist and even communist. But perhaps the greatest fruit of this revolutionary tendency has been the shop stewards and works committee movement.

The shop steward movement, as we know it, did not exist until shortly before the 1914 war. Shop stewards existed before that, but they were little more than card inspectors. It was the men of the Syndicalist tendency which changed that. Something to span the scores of unions in the engineering industry was needed and the new conception of a shop steward, and the works committee which soon followed, did just that, being a primary form of syndicate, embracing all sections, formed at the point of production and ready to combat the employing class on the spot.

With the outbreak of war the movement developed rapidly. Cloaked by patriotism the cost of living soared, wages were pegged, hours ranged from 60 to 80 a week. Soon unofficial strikes broke out in the big industrial centres,

principally the Clyde and the Tyne.

Alarmed, the Government called the union leaders to a conference in February, 1915, where all parties, except the miners, agreed to the abolition of the right to strike, to the dilution of skilled labour, to State fixing of wages and to "leaving certificates". Generally, in fact, to what the Webbs termed "virtually industrial conscription". With military conscription from 18 to 21 years, the effect was "the individual workman realised that the penalty for failure of implied obedience to the foreman might be instant relegation to the trenches" (Webb, History of Trade Unionism). Said the Herald (later the Daily Herald) of July 17, 1915: "The trade union lamb has laid down with the capitalist lion".

To this State slavery there could be but one defence – rapid extension of the shop steward and shop committee movement, for the trade unions were completely on the employers' side. Strikes and the threat of strikes followed, winning wage increases, especially piece work rates, and controlling workshop conditions. The Government, faced by threats, introduced food control and, forced by the Clyde factory committees, controlled house rents, which were soaring.

After the war the movement was there to stay, but was confused and bedevilled by the development of the Russian Revolution, the formation of the Communist Party and the vast funds it obtained from abroad. The union bureaucrats, too, saw that the shop steward was not going to vanish, so they tried to control him. They are still trying. The employers, after a long resistance in some cases, accepted his presence in the factory and, in very many cases, tried to corrupt him.

Neither of these, however, were worse than the activity of the Communists, concerned not with the winning of a straightforward class battle of the worker, but with the interest solely of "The Party" and with carrying out the latest twist or turn of the Comintern.

Granting the premise that a class workshop organisation is necessary for the protection and extension of the workers' livelihood, it follows that a party concerned only with the welfare of "The Party" and its conquest of power can only do harm to the workers' cause. Its measure of success is its measure of mischief.

The record of the C.P. since its entry into industry is proof enough of this thesis – its thirst for power, its splitting of the workers ranks, its slander of honest militants, the eagerness of its members to become foremen with the necessary double-dealing that goes with that ambition, the calling of "political prestige strikes" and the calling of them off, the twists and turns of Holy Mother Russia's policy now "down with the boss and strike everywhere" and next day "collaborate, form joint production committees, the striker is a traitor". All this had driven into apathy tens of thousands of good militants and confused and disillusioned millions.

It is true that there have been many Communist shop stewards who tried to be honest stewards and good party members at the same time, but these men are usually sorry creatures, trying to be two opposite things at once and unhappy with both. A practising bigamist leads a simpler life. To add to their split personality agonies, "The Party" is likely to court martial them or expel them. The men at Comintern headquarters had a proverb about the CPGB.: "The good Communists are bad trade unionists and the good trade unionists are bad Communists".

A good, honest-to-goodness shop steward is worth his weight in gold to the workers' movement – literally if we were still paid in sovereigns – but his is just about the most difficult of all jobs, even without the extra snags thrown in his path by the bosses, the union officials and the politicians.

Yet the stewards suffer from one more difficulty. The present movement lacks the revolutionary thought, doctrine and training of the first wave. The present-day shop steward, when he tries to be consistent, feels very much alone. Ideas are social products, movements are social movements and men will seek to identify themselves with people of like tendency. Now where can our sincere steward look? Leaving out the movement of which I have written, there is nothing for him. Little wonder, then, that so many are fooled by the politicians, grow tired or, in the case of the weaker brethren, are tempted by the boss.

The originals had the benefit of a revolutionary idea and fire, they had training to hand, speaking, industrial history and the study of such works a Mary Marcy's "Shop Talks on Economics". This training made them superior to most of their opponents on the other side of the boss's desk.

They had a social aim, too, making them a movement in their own right, not, an appendage of another movement. The Clyde Workers' Committee, the strongest union force in the country at that time, proclaimed among its objects:-

"...to obtain an ever-increasing control over workshop conditions, to regulate the terms upon which workers shall be employed, and to organise the workers upon a class basis and to maintain the class struggle until the overthrow of the wages system, the freedom of the workers and the establishment of industrial democracy have been attained".

In the wilder parts of the Lone Star State, Texans used to tell me that when they said "a man" they meant a man and his horse, for a man without a horse was only half a man. A shop steward without a social philosophy in tune with his workshop is only half a steward.

That brings me to what Allan Flanders of Oxford University terms "the popular Syndicalist slogan 'Workers' Control'". The desire to alter the Labour Party's "Clause 4" was based on an estimate of the discontent with nationalisation. The rebound which put it back is a sign that social ownership is looked on as a solution of the social problem. But socialisation cannot be reconciled to State control. If the sincere rank and file of the Labour Party and trade unions would look back to the early shop stewards movement, then look forward, their honesty and idealism would find a practical mechanism in workers' control, for the realisation of the social ownership and democratic control of the means of production. They would see, too, that the fashioning of the mechanism begins now, at the coalface, the bench and the lathe.

Reviews

SIPTU Fightback. A Newsletter for SIPTU Activists Seeking a Democratic and Fighting Union.

As a 'northern' member of SIPTU the first issue of 'SIPTU Fightback' I encountered was a welcome change from the usual, or more correctly, lack of the usual, union literature I was used to.

Very interesting and informative, it provided news and analysis of disputes which never seem to filter through 'official' union channels. My first issue was handed to me some time ago by a fellow worker from Dublin and proudly proclaimed **"The bosses are not our partners"**.

This was the December 1997 issue. It included articles on SIPTU's 1997 National Conference in Ennis, trouble at Aer Lingus, the Liverpool dockers who were then two years into their dispute, whistle blowing on sexual harassment in the union, various pieces revealing social partnership as the **"dangerous mythology"** it undoubtedly is, a damning review of a ICTU booklet promoting social partnership 'Partnership in the Workplace – Guidelines for Unions', and a historical piece on the National Federation of Shop Stewards and 'New Liberty' established in the south in the 1970's to oppose the no strike National Wage Agreements.

Since then this publication has went from strength to strength, always providing incisive and critical analysis and insights into the state of our union and the state of the society it exists in.

The current issue is a special edition produced for **"the various seminars and shop stewards meetings, being held in SIPTU... on the future of bargaining under Partnership 2000"**. The headline proclaims **"Social partnership – Let it die with the Millennium"**. Inside the various myths about the benefits of 'social partnership' are exploded, and lets not forget that it is a concept which has 'guided' employer, state and union (leadership) relations in the south for quite some time now – despite its new arrival on the 'UK' industrial scene. What SIPTU Fightback see as the alternative to yet another 'partnership programme' is spelt out. This includes resistance to 'rationalisation', a 35 hour week, decent childcare and pensions, solidarity with workers in struggle, abolition of contract and long-term 'temp' work and for the creation of strong shop stewards' committees, and specifically in SIPTU a recruitment 'crusade', open debate on social partnership, democracy in the union, and the revival and re-empowerment of Section and Branch Committees.

SIPTU Fightback does have a distinct southern bias, like the vast majority of other 'official' SIPTU material. This could reinforce the feeling of isolation, which in my experience exists among northern members, in relation to the very Dublin orientated 'centre' of our union.

To a large extent it must be up to SIPTU members in the north, and elsewhere outside Dublin, to break down that isolation and make links with our brothers and sisters in the south.

SIPTU Fightback is after all a **"newsletter for SIPTU activists seeking a democratic and fighting union"**. A worthwhile goal indeed. To get there its important that SIPTU activists make it happen. What better way of kicking things off than putting your name on SIPTU Fightback's contact list or even, heaven forbid, putting pen to paper and contributing.

If you're a SIPTU member and this is the publication for you, write to SIPTU Fightback if you'd like to receive a copy, a bundle of five can be sent if you want extra copies for friends/workmates.

Address: **SIPTU Fightback, 22 Melrose Avenue, Dublin 3, Eire.**

You can also visit their website at: **Http://flag.blackened.net/revolt/siptu.html**

Correspondence to SIPTU Fightback, 22 Melrose Avenue, Dublin 3

SIPTU Fightback

No.7 July 1998

A newsletter for SIPTU activists seeking a democratic & fighting union

The first blossoms of a revolt by rank & file workers have appeared in this summer of unpromising weather but reawakening industrial action

The Rank & File Revolt

It was inevitable that when workers began moving again, after depression and in the face of P2000, they'd come up against the dead-weight of an officialdom used to calling the shots.

It was also inevitable that some group of workers was going to rebel against the recurrent practice of union leaders calling off strikes at the last minute for new talks. The local authority and health board craft workers had already rejected offers and the craft workers saw the usual pattern emerging, of ballot after ballot until acceptance, of all resources going to the 'yes' side.

In the veals that came back the craft rebels also faced the now usual pattern of productivity for pay, of local bargaining as a door for restructuring, instead of the reinstatement of their relativity. So they pre-empted the usual drill and put pickets on, supported in many cases by SIPTU general workers.

Their action was consciously directed at the union leaders in the Crafts Group, ICTU and SIPTU. But the heat was turned up by union leaders calling them 'mavericks' and 'wildcats'. However, the action on the analogue claim was no isolated foray. One union, the TEEU, was officially opposed to the deal.

The Regional committees organised staggered strikes around the country; mass meetings of shop stewards convened to discuss policy and SIPTU members in many places declined the official advice to pass the pickets. Expression of no confidence in the national negotiators were made.

This is the shape of the rank and file movement that will come about in a far more sustained and coherent way to challenge the approach of Liberty Hall and Raglan Road, and offer alternative leadership to union members.

The craft leaders insisted the deal was a good one and campaigned for it in the ballot that continued after the rebels stilled their strikes. The media explained it was 20p or so short. yet the 'mavericks' were in the majority in the ballot and the negotiators went in (after deferring the strike yet again) and got an improved offer (see report elsewhere in this issue).

Unofficial or semi-official bodies like the BATU bricklayers and the national locomotive drivers committee are part of a rise in rank and file confidence. The Garda pay dispute is also, in a way, a rank and file revolt and its funny to see union leaders reversing the roles as pay police in that dispute.

With strike figures running high and disputes lining up (ambulance, courts, trains) more workers can be expected to collide with P2000 and union red tape.

RYANAIR UPDATE

After three months the Ryanair enquiry still hasn't reported. Since our last issue the *Sunday Tribune* reported that the enquiry might urge curbing of strike rights at Dublin Airport (what a backfire!), and another set of SIPTU members have been sacked!

The bosses are not our partners

Knowledge Is Power

While legislation is generally not there for the benefit of workers it is still of great importance that shop stewards are aware of as much industrial legislation, and its impact, as possible.

Workers may feel powerless when faced with any form of attack. These attacks are referred to as 'necessary change', and workers can be unaware that they may have some rights before the law – or recourse to claim compensation for such things as the cessation of perks, even those never formally agreed but established by 'custom and practice'. We are at a disadvantage in our workplaces when we do not know where we stand legally. Companies know and take advantage of this all the time, it is after all their 'right' to manage.

The value of keeping companies within the law, bringing them under the welcome scrutiny of the Health and Safety Executive, generally keeping one step ahead when it comes to industrial relations legislation cannot be underestimated. As they say - knowledge is power.

'Solidarity magazine' have printed the names and addresses of several agencies which will provide invaluable sources of information to any shop steward or supportive fellow worker. These agencies are not as independent as they sometimes make out but they are extremely useful nonetheless.

Getting nominated by your union branch as a delegate to your local Trades Council can also be invaluable. Giving you access to other shop stewards who you will be able to share your experiences and knowledge with. Make sure you are kept up to date by your branch of any upcoming ICTU courses and seminars for shop stewards, women members and the ordinary member alike. Although a lot of the content may be couched in the language of 'social partnership' these courses are valuable. Avoid those brainwashing seminars which are specifically for the purpose of promoting social partnership though.

Belfast Trades Council

102 High Street
Belfast BT1 2DL

Belfast Trades Council produce 'Council News' on a monthly basis. The Trades Council represents trade union branches from across Belfast and "transcends the sectarian divide". 'Council News' and more information available from the above address. To add your name to the 'Council News' circulation list fax: 01232 298653 or e-mail: tradescouncilnews@yahoo.com

Education and Training Officers

Northern Ireland Committee
Irish Congress of Trade Unions
3 Wellington Park
Belfast BT9 6DJ

For information on union courses, for shop stewards, women and lay members alike. Alternatively contact your own union offices.

Equal Opportunities Commission for Northern Ireland

Chamber of Commerce House,
22 Great Victoria Street, Belfast

For information on legislation relating to gender, discrimination.

Fair Employment Commission

Andras House, 60 Great Victoria Street
Belfast BT2

For problems regarding discrimination on the basis of religion or political affiliation.

Health and Safety Executive

83 Ladas Drive
Belfast BT6 9FR
Website: www.hse-ni.org.uk

Useful source of material on health and safety legislation for the shop steward, safety representative or interested party. Also responsible for enforcing legislation on employers.

Labour Relations Agency

2 Gordon Street
Belfast BT1

For a wide range of advice. Can answer queries on employment matters.

Labour Research and Documentation

78 Blackfriars Road
London SE1 8HF

Publish 'Labour Research', an excellent magazine detailing developments within and affecting the wider trade union movement. They also produce their own pamphlets which are a great resource for shop stewards, even though the legislation is not exactly identical in Northern Ireland and Britain.

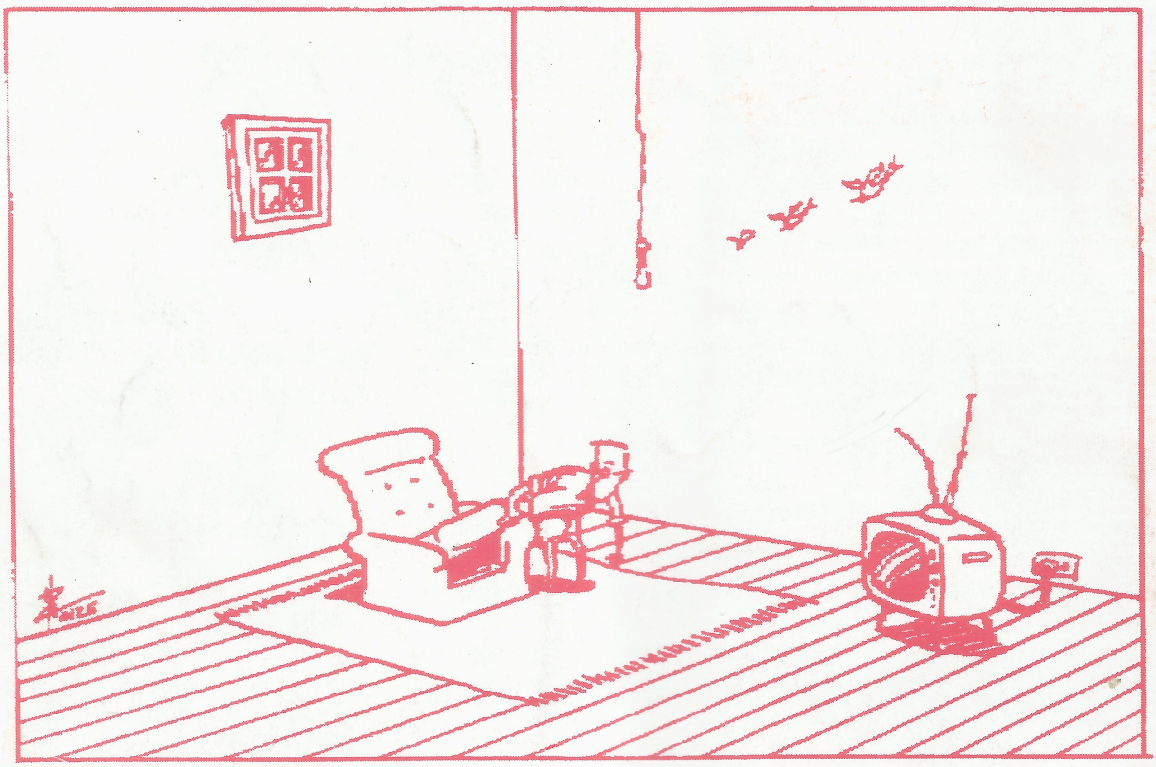
Law Centre (NI)

124 Donegall Street
Belfast
BT1 2GY

The Law Centre "promotes the enforcement and development of social welfare law" and produced the book "A Guide to Employment Rights and Industrial Tribunal Procedure in Northern Ireland" last revised 1997.

Office of Industrial Tribunals & Fair Employment Tribunal

20-24 Waring Street
Belfast



As a worker of the world Dan had nothing to lose.
Except, of course, those bloody chains...