

Solidarity

Action needed on Tube safety

RMT leaders are attempting to sabotage plans for Tube workers to take direct action for better health and safety, but workers can take more effective action if they now take things into their own hands.

Tube workers are increasingly alarmed at the mounting number of accidents on the Underground. In April 2003 major parts of the Tube system's engineering infrastructure - signals, tracks, escalators, etc. - were sold off to the highest bidder. Both in the run-up to this date, and afterwards, staffing has been cut and essential safety work, such as patrols and checks on tracks, has been reduced. There have now been five derailments on the Tube in the 13 months up to October 2003. And the rest of the Tube - the stations and the trains - are now also being run down in preparation for privatisation, with the prospect of more accidents.

There is a massive groundswell of opinion by both Tube workers and passengers that



something must be done to force the Government and Tube bosses to stop privatisation, put some money into it

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

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

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

and carry out decent health and safety procedures. In November, an NOP poll showed that more than 80% of "the public" said they supported the right of Tube workers to take action over safety fears.

So what has been the response of the tube workers, and their union the RMT? In November last year RMT members working for London Underground Limited (LUL) and the already-privatised infrastructure companies voted to take action in support of the following demands:

- Return all of the railway maintenance to LUL
- Reinstatement of 24-hour health and safety patrols on tracks.
- Speed restrictions to be put on when necessary
- No change to engineering safety standards without union agreement

80% vote for action

80% voted in favour of action "short of strike action" and 55% in favour of strike action. The proposed action "short of strike action" was potentially the most powerful. Drivers would drive at 15 mph, which under the "rule book" is a perfectly legitimate response to the lack of health and safety cover on the Tube at present. The go-slows would quickly lead to station closures due to overcrowding. This work-to-rule would effectively bring the whole network to a halt without one worker having to breach contract or lose an hour's pay. Perfect!

The negotiating meetings following the ballot clearly showed Tube bosses taking a belligerent and uncompromising attitude, making no concessions. But, instead of walking out and starting the action, RMT leaders agreed to a half-

(Continued on page 3)

Solidarity

for anarcho-syndicalism

Residents Defeat Housing Privatisation



Residents of the Tollington Park council estate in Islington have won a magnificent victory in a struggle against the transfer of their homes to a Housing Association.

In November residents voted against the proposed transfer to North British Housing (NBH).

This transfer would have meant:

- Many social homes being demolished to make way for high rent housing for middle class professionals, and tenants rehoused in smaller properties.
- Green space being reduced to make way for these new homes.
- Residents facing 8-10 years of living on a building site while all this was taking place.

It is more costly for Housing Associations demolishing homes to sell off land for private housing. A group of residents willing to volunteer their spare time for the higher rents and a poorer quality service. The extra costs are met by Housing Associations (TAP). They organised and

Contents

Page 2... Welcome to Paradise!

Page 3... Council workers' pay

Page 4... Tube workers to take action over safety?

worked relentlessly to counter attack all of the propaganda put out by NBH, Islington Council and others including our own Tenants' Association. In the evenings and weekends leaflets were delivered around all of Tollington Estate. Many a door was knocked upon to ask residents their views, public meetings were organised and a Defend Council Housing/TAP stall was set up outside a Tenants' Association/NBH meeting.

The only help we had was from Islington Union who printed the leaflets. NBH had consultants and solicitors, glossy colour pamphlets, video and family away days to try and sway the residents. They also plastered the estate with huge banners proclaiming a new start and a better future with NBH.

Blackmail

NBH promised new bathrooms and kitchens for some, new security locks, CCTV surveillance and a crack-down on anti-social behaviour. NBH must have thought they had it in the bag but the majority of people that voted had more sense than they were given credit for and gave a massive "no" to privatisation. The question this campaign raises is why can't money for estate improvements be given to tenants that want to stay with the council? Why is the government trying to blackmail people into privatisation?

(Continued on page 2)

Residents' victory

(Continued from page 1)

But this battle for our homes is a long way from over. Islington Council still insist that they have not got enough money to carry out repairs, so are hitting us with phase two which is the Arms Length Management Organisation (ALMO). An ALMO means transferring all a council's housing to a company that is supposedly going to be wholly owned by the council. However senior figures in the civil service and housing industry are already talking about ALMOs being taken over by the private sector. An ALMO was approved for Islington in a ballot that excluded the residents of the Tollington Park Estate and in which pro-ALMO propaganda was sent out with the ballot papers.

In Camden 77% of residents rejected an ALMO in a ballot. Now council officials up and down the country are talking about the need to restrict tenants' right to decide on the future of their homes. If we are going to be denied our right to a fair ballot then there is only one answer. When there is no democracy direct action is the only road to go down.

We need to start preparing for rent strikes!



Welcome to Paradise

Since the early 90s, the anarchosyndicalist movement has confronted the "neoliberal" restructuring of the labour market. Restructuring means labour mobility, flexible timetables and more, but lower-paid, jobs. Europe, with its ageing population, needs new sources of labour. There has been a growth in agency work and of casual staff who don't get holiday or sick pay. Some of these agencies provide work abroad, cynically selling it as a chance for young people to learn a language. In Eastern European countries mafias promise workers a new paradise, but they end up accepting appalling conditions out of desperation.

All this has eroded workers' rights and represents a few steps back from the gains of the 20th century, which were achieved with a lot of effort and suffering. The Euro and the European economic zone are designed to make transactions easier, European capital more effective and Europe a new world power. However, free movement has become a privilege for highly skilled workers, with rich countries employing cheap labour from the poorest countries. This movement of labour challenges existing union structures since this new labour force has no knowledge of its rights or tradition of workers' organisation. They arrive here dreaming of a life they have been sold by the media, movies and education.

Britain, with its two-party system to which they tell us there is no alternative, now mirrors the brutal ideology of US capitalism. The legacy of colonialism and imperialism brings workers from Africa and Asia to Britain.

Many African workers, for example, have been educated under a British system, and dream of being part of the consumer society they aspire to. They may wear Nike trainers and have the latest phone, but they still live in a room let by the company that exploits them, paying them a much lower rate than British workers. The dream is a lie. European students come to Britain to improve their English and end up taking low-paid jobs. South American workers have it particularly bad, often in debt to gangsters, working for £2 per hour and taking buses to work because they can't afford tube tickets. Is this a civilised world?

Workers' solidarity

Anarchosyndicalists believe in workers' solidarity, regardless of ethnic origin. After all, European workers have also been sold this false dream. We have been told that we are privileged to find a job, even if we hate it. We have been told that we are all middle class now, and many have fallen for it even though they cannot afford decent accommodation or they struggle to pay a mortgage for the rest of their lives...

Reclaim our Cinema

The Universal Church of the Kingdom of God (UCKG), an organisation that played a controversial role in the case of child abuse victim Victoria Climbié, has failed in its plans to turn a Walthamstow cinema into a church. UCKG lost an appeal against a decision to refuse them planning permission. The Reclaim our Cinema group continues its campaign to get back their local cinema.

Contact: www.walthamstowcentral.co.uk/roc

Tube safety

(Continued from page 4)

baked "review" of patrols on tracks. This concession – a shocking and blatant betrayal of Tube workers is completely impractical and will inevitably result in patrols on tracks being undermined. Meanwhile, tracks remain not as fully checked as they should be and none of the other workers' demands are to be looked at. Predictably, union bosses are in danger of snatching defeat from the jaws of victory: Tube workers know that no matter how many enquiries and reviews management agree to, until the Government agree to run the tube service properly and provide the necessary funds the lives of workers and

passengers will always be at risk.

Taking action on the job

So what options are now open to the Tube workers? Well, firstly, the fact that union bosses have sold out and ignored their members' wishes makes things a lot more straightforward. After all, workers don't need union bosses to give them permission to take action which affects so many people's welfare and lives. The fact is that the very action that the ballot has sanctioned could be taken at any time to great effect and carried on as and when workers feel it is necessary to achieve their demands.

Taking action on the job, as opposed to walking out on

strike, is an under-used but highly-effective way of forcing management to concede to your demands. Go-slows, work-to-rules and sit-ins or occupations are often all far more sensible and effective ways of taking action because workers retain control of the workplace, preventing their replacement with scab labour.

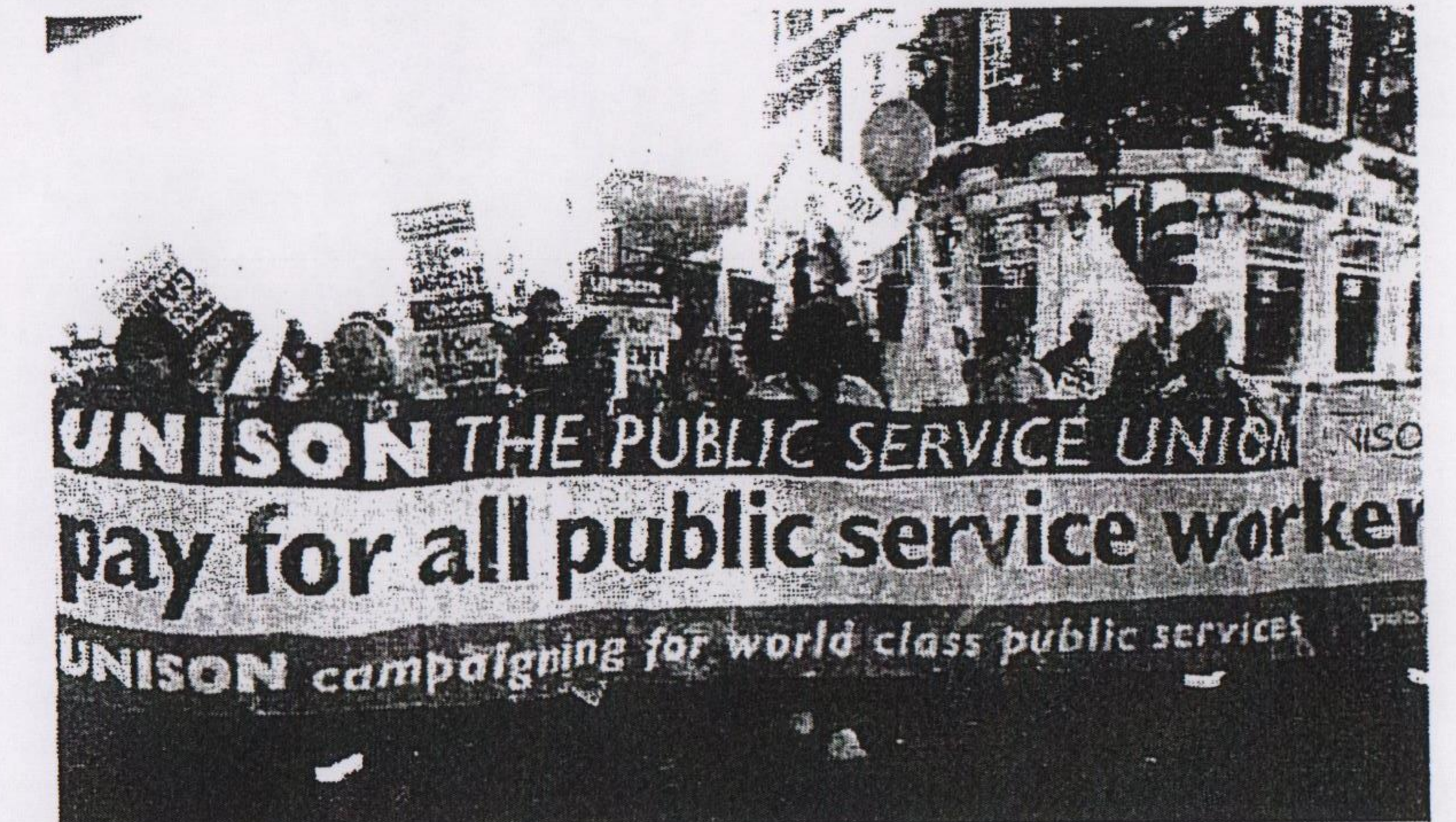
Often with a conventional "walk-out" strike the union officials have all the say as to when, where and how the action takes place. And they can choose to sell out when they want. In contrast, taking direct action at work makes the job of union officials completely redundant and puts the control of any dispute precisely where it should be – with those of us actually taking the action.

Council workers: time for unofficial action

For the last two years London local government workers have been fighting for a much-needed increase in London weighting. Employers have refused binding arbitration. They have said they are 'suspending' the Greater London Provincial Council, the joint union/employer negotiating body.

The London weighting dispute has been a mixture of sporadic key worker action and very occasional one-day all-out strikes.

Now employers are responding to the union's national pay claim with a 'hint' that 2% is all that can be afforded this year. If we are going to win disputes in the future, we need to go much further with our action. We need to start organising our disputes ourselves rather than waiting for top union officials to call us out. The ultimate aim must be unofficial all-out action.



For more information contact:

NELSF, PO BOX 1681, LONDON, N8 7LE

nelsfolfed@fsmail.net [email] or **020 8374 5027** [ansaphone]

Please send me future issues of Solidarity

Please send me further information about NELSF

Name

Address

Telephone Donations welcome.