

WORKERS'



LIBERTY

tubeworker

a regular bulletin by tubeworkers for tubeworkers ♦♦♦ 24 september 2002

ALL OUT!

♦ fight for pay and privs ♦ pay and PPP are linked ♦ build the rank-and-file ♦

SO HERE WE go again! Yet again, management have succeeded in creating a dispute out of our annual pay claim. And, as usual, it is now 5½ months after the date that the claim should be settled. Why is it that we are in this situation? On the rest of the railway system the average settlement for this year is about 5% – management know full well that this is the sort of offer that would come out of arbitration. Which, of course, is why they don't want to go to arbitration!

As usual, the *Standard* maintains its high level of accuracy and fairness. The editorial writers still consider us public enemy No.1. The claim is not just about the percentage increase anyway. Getting a priv for anyone who came on after '96 is at least as important. Over half of tubeworkers now don't have privs – you can't afford to move out of London, but you can't afford to buy *in* London. There's also the pensions issue: management are no more deserving of decent pensions than we who do the actual work.

It has been good to see the posters going up warning in advance not to expect any service during the strike. Of course, the reason for that is in large part because ASLEF and RMT are coming out together. This year has seen growing unity in action between the two unions. After unofficially backing the PPP safety strike, it is even better to see ASLEF balloting as well over pay. The small delay caused by waiting for the results was well worth it.

STOP THE DRIVE TOWARDS WAR!

IS SADDAM Hussein a threat? Yes – to people in Iraq: he rules them by terror. To Iraq's oppressed national minority, the Kurds: he has massacred them. To neighbouring peoples: in 1980, against Iran, and in 1990, against Kuwait, he went to war to make his state the regional "big power" in the Gulf. He is in not in a position to attempt a new war of expansion now, but given half a chance he would try again.

So Bush and Blair are right to want to eliminate that threat?

Saddam's regime is poisonous, but the antidote of US war is even more poisonous. The USA would replace Saddam by another Saddam, different only in that he would fit in more with US wishes.

But the USA's "other Saddam" might be less aggressive and dictatorial...

Perhaps, perhaps not. The USA has no fixed objections to dictatorship and aggression. But the possibility of the USA's "other Saddam" being milder lies on the other side of a war in which the US and UK will slaughter thousands of Iraqi civilians and conscripts. About that war we say: the USA has no right to kill people in pursuit of its self-ascribed role of "globocop".

Iraq may have chemical and biological weapons. US/UK war against Iraq is the thing most likely to trigger the use of those weapons! The USA's war could set the whole Middle East aflame, cost many lives outside Iraq, and breed new Al Qaedas.

What if Bush got UN approval for war?

UN approval just means that the governments of Russia (the butchers of Chechnya), China (the butchers of Tibet), and France (with blood on its hands from Rwanda) back Bush. However desirable a democratic world government might be, the UN is not it!

Why does the USA want to attack Iraq?

Oil. Key US policy-makers reckon that their easy victories in the Gulf (1991), Kosova (1999) and Afghanistan (2001) show they can now "tidy up" the Gulf, an unstable area but an ultra-strategic one because it holds over 50% of the world's oil reserves.

What can I do to stop war?

Our union leaders, RMT, ASLEF and TSSA, have so far taken a strong stand against war. Urge them to continue to do so, especially at Labour Party conference!

If war starts, there will probably be pressure by the Government and the media on the firefighters and other trade unionists to call off strikes because they might "harm the war effort". By resisting that pressure we can help dissuade the Government from going to war.

And we can join the big anti-war/Palestinian solidarity demonstration on **Sunday 28 September**, 12.30pm from the Embankment to Hyde Park.

On that demonstration, come and join Workers' Liberty supporters in the contingents stating that we oppose the USA's war drive *and* Saddam, and that we support the Palestinians' right to a state while at the same time recognising that Israeli Jews have the right to a state.

It is only unfortunate that we are not striking over pay and PPP safety at the same time. RMT's Regional Council had asked for this several times but it was turned down by the RMT executive, who obviously feel that they know better than the people in the front line. The way to take both fights over pay and PPP safety forward is by linking the issues together. It would be stupid and pointless to strike one day over one, then one day over the other. In fact, the reason that management have refused us a reasonable offer is because the Treasury are holding the purse strings in preparation for PPP.

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THERE is also the question of the firefighters' strike. Bob Crow was seen strongly supporting the firefighters at the TUC. Well done, Bob – a welcome change to the usual windbags. But why do we need to ballot over supporting the firefighters? We are already losing money over our dispute. If it isn't safe to run trains or open stations without proper fire cover, then we can all refuse to work on the grounds of safety. LUL have a procedure laid down covering this. We don't need to ballot or lose money, but to get this off the ground we would need a clear lead from union head offices and Health and Safety reps.

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TODAY should be the first step in a serious push to stop the PPP, *and* win our claim. If we are serious about doing both then we need to organise together across the unions, building local strike committees and cutting across the divisions that hamper us. Union head offices have let us down in the past. We are in a much better situation now, with Bob Crow, Pat Sikorski and Mick Rix, but the best guarantee we have is a strong and independent minded, organised rank-and-file.

Support the firefighters!

The average wage in London is about £34,000 a year. A firefighter, with all their skills, training, shifts and personal risk, receives a maximum of £21,500 a year.

It now looks likely that the Fire Brigades Union is moving towards a prolonged dispute with the Government over pay and conditions. RMT general secretary Bob Crow has already pledged his support for their struggle, and has urged RMT branches to liaise with FBU branches and officers to find how best to support their action. ASLEF has also supported the firefighters.

It is inevitable that if the FBU do take industrial action, then workers on the Tube will be obliged to shut down the Underground network on grounds of health and safety legislation introduced after the Kings Cross disaster.

This is a fantastic opportunity for reps, activists, and most of all ordinary members, to coordinate activity and strike action from below. It is really important to get to your branch meetings and get involved.

If you are unable to do that, then why not walk down to your local fire station and find out what's going on and what you can do to help out.

The Government is already under pressure over Iraq, and we have a real chance of getting something out of them, as well as benefitting greatly from solidarity action with activists from the FBU and hopefully workers in the CWU, GMB and Amicus.

Do you know how much a dinner lady earns? Answer: not enough, just like every other worker.

The only way we will improve our lot is by combining together to take on the Government and the bosses, who have had it easy for too long. The first task must be to coordinate strike action through grassroots strike committees.

***Tubeworker* is produced by Tube workers in the Alliance for Workers' Liberty, an organisation fighting in the unions, the Socialist Alliance and the Labour Party for a socialist alternative to both capitalism and Stalinism, based on common ownership and democracy. We want one democratic, fighting union for all railworkers. We reject artificial division between workers of different grades. We oppose racism, sexism, homophobia and all prejudice that divides us. Only our bosses benefit from a divided workforce.**

“Building on the rank and file revolt”

A trade-union day school organised by Solidarity and Workers' Liberty, with speakers including Mark Serwotka (general secretary, PCS) and Steve Godward (Birmingham firefighter), both in a personal capacity. Saturday 26 October, 11.30 to 5.30, University of London Union, Malet St, London WC1. To register to attend, please phone 020 7207 3997 or email office@workersliberty.org.

“Imperialism: what it is, how it has changed, how to fight it”

London Solidarity/ Workers' Liberty forum. Wednesday 16 October, 7.30pm. For details of venue please phone 07719 283 132.

“Imperialism and war”

South West London Solidarity/ Workers' Liberty forum. Wednesday 2 October, 7.30pm, Bread and Roses, Clapham Manor Street.

An FBU activist speaks to Tubeworker

The union is balloting its members from 27 September. The question on the ballot paper is: “Are you prepared to take discontinuous strike action?” I expect a very high yes vote.

Most people are expecting an injunction against the ballot, or some kind of move by the Government to ban strikes in emergency services on grounds of the war with Iraq. What I would argue in response to that is that if we can't take legal strike action, then we might as well just walk out of the door straight away.

The ballot finishes on 18 October. The union has to give seven days' notice of strike action, so that takes us up to the 25th. Action on the ballot mandate has to be started within 28 days. The key date for us is that our pay rise was due on 7 November. I would expect action around that date.

From the branches in my region, the Eastern Region, a number of resolutions are being pushed up to the union's Executive Committee (EC) about what sort of action we take. There's a call for the union to set up a national strike committee, so that the decision on action is not just left in the hands of the EC.

As in many other unions, there is no rank-and-file organisation in the FBU. I would like there to be a rank-and-file organisation. There isn't one yet, but one is developing, in embryonic form.. It needs to developed quite quickly in this dispute. Personally I think the Socialist Alliance has a role to play in this.

The argument about us being paid a “professional” wage, or being more important than other workers, comes from the right-wing press. I haven't heard it among the rank and file members. The union is fighting for pay parity for control staff. There has been a big debate in the union around firefighting being a dangerous job, so that firefighters should be paid more than control staff, but that argument has been had and isn't there any more. Firefighters are supporting pay parity for control staff.

Where I live, when UNISON were out in dispute over local government pay, a number of firefighters went in their fire engines down the picket lines in support of those workers. We explained what our claim was, and that we didn't think we were better than local government workers. We have our claim, and we support other workers in their claims.

It's a shame that UNISON gave in on their dispute, because there was a chance there to unify a number of workers. In the fire service, the non-uniform staff are UNISON members. In my brigade the FBU has approached UNISON; they are supporting the dispute 100%.

Elsewhere the health and safety issue raised by the rail unions is paramount. Workers should be saying to their bosses that there is a health and safety problem in the workplace if they do not have fire cover. That is a means of making sure that there is solidarity action. I think there's a case now for firefighters' support committees, in the same way that we had miners' support groups in the 1984-5 miners' strike.

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Got a story for *Tubeworker*? We welcome and will publish reports and comments from all Tube workers. Also, get in touch if you want to come to our regular readers' meetings, or to get involved in action about any of the issues we have covered.

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