

WORKERS'



LIBERTY

tubeworker

a regular bulletin by tubeworkers for tubeworkers ♦♦♦ 18 november 2002

TUBE WORKERS REFUSE TO WORK WITHOUT FIRE COVER

No-one has been disciplined and no-one has lost pay. Stand firm, and we can keep it that way.

TUBE workers — mainly drivers — have taken a firm stand for safety during the Fire Brigades Union dispute, with disruption on nearly every line.

Top marks go to drivers on the Piccadilly line, where only ten out of 64 trains ran, with only a shuttle service west of Acton. More than half of Northern line trains were cancelled, and a clear majority of Edgware Road H&C drivers refused to drive, causing big delays and several station closures. The Waterloo & City closed completely.

The action was best when rank-and-file reps and activists got our act together to organise and prepare. The advice from union head offices was not clear enough to be effective on its own: the work had to be done at a local level. The postponement of the initial FBU strikes also slowed down our momentum, but that can pick up again now.

Track workers forced management into accepting strict rules that will make work run slowly — no hot work, one member of each gang to wait on the platform, no heavy equipment moved because escalators not used. It may be that P-way workers can force a total stoppage on safety grounds, but until then, their limited action will at least make track maintenance fall behind, which will affect the service as the strike goes on.

On stations, some staff refused to work. Although it was mainly limited to union reps and activists, we can spread this action if we stand firm and prepare well for the next 8-day FBU strike.

No-one has been disciplined and no-one has lost pay. Some local managers may have tried to bully people, but in general, we have not been punished for the principled stand we have taken. LUL says that it respects our right to refuse to work on safety grounds, so let's hold them to their word. They know that they are vulnerable on safety issues.

Management know that they can not discipline over a hundred workers because they would not be able to run a railway. And they can not discipline some but not others. In any case, we have our unions' promise that if management lay a finger on any member, we will take industrial action to defend them.

Management's claims that the job is safe are spurious. They have not even done workplace risk assessments for specific stations! They can produce all the statistics they like about the percentage increase in risk during strikes, but the fact remains: the entire fire safety system on London Underground depends on the availability of the fire service. No fire service: no safe railway.

Ask yourself: In all conscience, can you take a trainload of passengers into the pipe with no fire service available? If you work on a station, can you direct passengers towards the trains knowing they are less safe than they should be? We think not.

Stand firm. We owe it to ourselves, our colleagues, the passengers and the firefighters.

WHY WE SHOULD SUPPORT THE FIRE-FIGHTERS

THEY turn out for us every time there is smoke in a tunnel, every time the panel goes off. They lost a comrade in the King's Cross fire. We can only work safely because the fire service is there.

Firefighters fully deserve the £30k they are claiming. When the press slammed us for our pay strikes this year, they said that other public sector workers — such as firefighters — were more deserving. We said: pay all public servants a decent wage!

Well, guess what? Now the FBU is actual-



ly taking strike action for their claim, the press has turned against them too. Firefighters are no longer prepared to accept the role of victim, of object of sympathy — and quite right too.

That old chestnut has come out that apparently the country 'can not afford' the FBU's pay claim. Funny, then, that it can afford 40% pay rises for MPs (and chief fire officers), handouts to the privatised nuclear industry, and any war that George W Bush wants Britain's backing for.

The Government has upped the stakes in this strike, allegedly blocking a 16% offer from the employers, and now talking of sending soldiers across picket lines to get the fire engines out, and even banning strikes. Blair has spelt out to us that this is a fight for the whole trade union movement. If he succeeds in beating the FBU, we will all suffer.

We should all rally to the support of the striking firefighters.

Visit your local picket line. Get your union branch to 'twin' with the FBU at the local fire station. Collect money at work and donate it to the strike fund. Do whatever you can to help the firefighters win.

REFUSAL TO WORK WHEN UNSAFE: WE'VE DONE IT BEFORE

Although not on this scale, Tube workers have used our right to refuse to work to successfully protect our safety before.

- Last year, H&C managers cut the frequency of tripcock testing during engineering works. A driver refused to take his train out, and management backed down.

- When the 'Inspector Sands' system failed at platform level at Oxford Circus, staff refused instructions to go down there with megaphones. Management had no choice but to fix the system.

- Earlier this year, P-way workers refused to work on a site on the southbound between Tottenham Hale and Blackhorse Road because of water ingress. Management had the water tested, and found e-coli in it.

- When LUL scrapped manual tipping out of trains before going into sidings, one Central line driver refused to comply with the new 'three PAs' rule and continued to tip out manually. Her actions were exonerated in tragic circumstances when a passenger was killed in the Liverpool Street sidings and the HMRI (better late than never) made LUL revert to the old system.

- When Supervisors at Elephant & Castle discovered that an engineer had reported suspected asbestos in the machine room, they shut the station. LUL — having ignored the issue for weeks — got it sorted overnight.

TERRORIST THREAT?

The Government has just announced that it has foiled a terrorist threat to the Tube. Who knows whether there may be more? So now, in addition to the ever-present threat of fires, we have the threat of a bomb or poison attack. All the more reason why it is nonsense to work without the fire service.

RMT BALLOT AND RANK AND FILE LINK-UP

RMT is balloting members for strike action after management failed to give assurances that no-one would be disciplined for refusing to work. It will be better if large

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.

HOW THEY WON A UNION IN MEXICO

By strike action, workers at the Kukdong/ Mexmode factory in Mexico, which makes goods for Nike and Reebok, have won recognition for their union. The struggle is a model of what can be done — against often heavy odds — to win rights for the world's millions of sweatshop workers. Two of the Kukdong/ Mexmode union activists are coming to England next weekend to speak at the No Sweat conference, Saturday 23 November, noon to 6pm at the School of Oriental and African Studies, Thornhaugh St, off Russell Square, WC1 (conference fee £5). The conference also includes many other sessions, workshops, debates on the fight against sweatshop labour worldwide. More details at www.nosweat.org.uk or from 07904 431 959.

enough numbers carry on refusing (and still getting paid!) that LUL does not dare to attempt disciplinary action, and we do not have to strike. But if LUL attack any one of us, then we may need to call everyone out. So vote Yes, to give the union the authority to call a strike if we need to.

Ballotting, giving notice of action, and then striking, is a long process, though. We should not rely on the ballot and action called by RMT head office. And what about ASLEF members, many of whom have refused unsafe work? There should be a rank-and-file co-ordinating committee, linking up activists from the different workplaces — and different unions — that are refusing to work.

NO WAR FOR OIL!

On 9 November, one million people marched in Florence, Italy, against the planned US/UK attack on Iraq. Left-wingers from across Europe who had come to Florence for the European Social Forum — a huge welter of conferences and discussions, from 7 to 10 November — joined Italian protesters. The red flags and banners of Rifondazione (Italy's "Party of Communist Refoundation") and of the CGIL (the largest of Italy's trade union federations) dominated.

Few on the demonstration had any time for the vile and aggressive dictatorship of Saddam Hussein. But all were opposed to a war in which US superpower will kill tens of thousands of Iraqi children, women and men in order to install another Saddam, different from the present one mainly in that he will act as a reliable junior partner to the USA in managing and controlling the oil reserves of the Gulf.

WET WET WET

A tip to LUL management. When you install flash new Ticket Office machines, do not position them under a leak in the roof. You might end up with a nasty bang and a useless machine — even more useless than the rest of them, even.

Still, if you (or your contractors) had fixed the roof at Elephant and Castle when it was first reported — several years ago — this embarrassing little incident might never have happened.

THE DATING GAME

Another tip. Make sure your new, flash ticket office equipment understands the concept of 'dates'.

Lots of ticket office staff are finding that their new TOMs are spitting out tickets printed with dates apparently generated at random. Some from earlier this year, others having ushered in New Year 2003 rather prematurely. Generally, pretty useless to the customers, tiresome to the staff.

Still, what would management care? It is not them who have to serve at the window or deal with the angry customer with the defective ticket. Oh yeah, that's us.

PASSPORT TO CHAOS

One final tip to management on the new ticket office equipment. Next time, try not to use the private company whose fantastic new technology caused all the chaos at the Passport Office a couple of years back, and which brought the Canadian Government to a standstill.

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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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