

WORKERS'



tubeworker

LIBERTY

a regular bulletin by tubeworkers for tube workers ♦♦♦ 26 october 2002

IT'S NOT SAFE TO WORK WITHOUT FIRE COVER

♦ Stand up for health and safety at work, help the firefighters ♦

THE RMT has put out a circular saying that members should refuse to work during the fire service strikes where they consider it unsafe. The union will back up any members who face threats or harassment from management as a result of standing up for their own and passengers' safety.

ASLEF has issued a similar briefing.

Below is the model memo that RMT has put out for members to fill in when we refuse to work.

You should add to this model memo the name of your workplace, and the specific hazard that you believe exists there. For example, at a Section 12 station, non-availability of the fire service to respond to activation of the fire control panel. For train drivers, non-availability of the fire service to attend any derailment, crash, or trackside or tunnel fire.

"The current fire fighters' dispute means that fully-trained fire fighters with specialist equipment are not available to provide cover in the event of fire or other emergency affecting my place of work. I reasonably believe that this lack of cover puts me in a position of serious and imminent danger.

"I request that I be allowed to move to a safe place of work with immediate effect. If this request is not met, I reserve the right to take appropriate steps (including leaving my place of work) to protect myself and/or others".

The FBU is striking for 48 hours from 9am on Tuesday 29 October, and has planned a further 34 days of strike action if the Government does not agree to negotiate seriously.

A strong stand for safety will also be a stand in solidarity with the firefighters, and with all the public service workers who will be much better-placed to get a decent wage rise if the firefighters win.

If any number of strategic workplaces, like the Underground, are shut down during the fire service strikes, that will greatly

increase the impact of the firefighters' action. It will also break the taboo on trade-union solidarity action which has operated ever since the Tory anti-union laws of the 1980s became bedded in.

Solidarity is the backbone of trade unionism. And industry or trade solidarity is enough only for smaller disputes. For larger disputes we need wider cross-union solidarity. The lack of that wider solidarity has hobbled the trade union movement for many years now. A movement which has successfully deployed effective solidarity for the firefighters will be far stronger for future disputes.

It is good that our union leaders have put out the circulars. What's bad is that they left it so late, and that they haven't been touring the depots and the stations together with FBU activists to explain the issues and deal with questions face-to-face.

PAY, PPP, AND THE FUTURE

The RMT Executive Committee has decided to suspend our most successful industrial action to date in return for a promise from Ken Livingstone of a decent pay rise next year, backdated to April 2002.

How many more times will we see the hard work of activists and reps sold out by Head Office? Remember the shorter working week, pensions, privs — and let's not forget Livingstone's empty threats against the PPP.

Now we have to wait until next year, yet again, for a few crumbs from the directors' table at Broadway. Meanwhile it appears that Unity House is not considering any future strike action over PPP, despite the widely-held opinion at a recent member for LUL reps and activists that our safety concerns should be right up there alongside pay and conditions.

What is going on? Surely the Executive can't have changed its mind over the PPP.

What about the engineering workers who are poised to be handed over to the privateers in the next couple of weeks? Does Bob Crow believe that it will be all right in the big scheme of things if the PPP goes ahead and private consortia eventually go bankrupt and we're all back to square one again. But we won't be. If it goes ahead, the PPP will result in the deaths of workers and passengers, maybe a friend or a member of your family.

The Executive does appear to be spearheading support for the Public Sector Alliance, in which activists from the unions within London's public services have combined to stand together against Tony Blair's PFI mantra.

Crucial now are the upcoming strikes by the FBU and their claim for a living wage, especially in London. The unions in LUL should be urging members to contribute financially to the FBU strike funds, and branches should be inviting speakers from local fire stations.

But we must not lose sight of why we are in this rearguard position over all our recent demands: privatisation of the Underground and our public services. This is a programme started by the Tories in the 1980s, and continued now by Blair and Brown. For them it achieves a lighter tax burden, smashed and depleted trade unions, and capitalists queuing up to receive government grants worth billions without any contractual obligation to modernise public services by any great amount.

We can deal with LUL management easily enough. The real fight is a political one, and is against the state and the whole capitalist set-up. It remains to be seen if any of the newly elected left union General Secretaries will have the stomach for a long-drawn-out political fight; but getting involved in the FBU dispute and the London Public Sector Alliance, combining across different industries, can only make us stronger.

DEFEND LEIGHTON EVANS

Leighton Evans, a stations rep on the Hammersmith and City Line and chair of Hammersmith and City RMT branch, has been sacked on trumped-up charges. Leighton had an angry exchange with a manager, put in a complaint about the manager — and got the sack as his response.

A union which cannot defend its reps and branch officials cannot even begin to defend its members.

The RMT should send in its top guns to deal with Leighton's appeal, and start proceedings now for a strike ballot to win his reinstatement if LUL do not back down on appeal.

VOTE PHIL BOSTON

The President of the RMT should be someone who leads from the front, and who champions rank-and-file members, stopping the bureaucracy getting too carried away with itself. Sadly, the current incumbent — one John Cogger — does not fit that description. More of an office- (or pub-) bound pen-pusher, serving time rather than serving the members.

The good news is that RMT members have a chance to kick him out and replace him with someone much better. Phil Boston has a track record of standing up for union democracy, and when we go on strike, Phil comes to our picket lines.

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.

FUNNY PHONE CALLS

Caller: Hello. Is this the right number for

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“COURAGE TO REFUSE”

Rami Kaplan and Yaniv Litzkovits, two of the hundreds of Israeli soldiers who have refused to serve in the Occupied Territories and served jail terms as a result, speak at a Solidarity/Workers' Liberty forum on Tuesday 29 October, 7.30pm at Room 3D, University of London Union, Malet St, London.

reporting strike-related harassment?

Voice: Yes, yes. How can I help you?

Caller: I am being harassed because of the strike.

Voice: That's terrible. Tell me all about it. We have to put a stop to this dreadful bullying.

Caller: Well it was my manager ...

Voice: Your manager? No, sorry. You've got the wrong number.

Caller: But this is the phone line for reporting harassment, right? And my manager threatened me that if I went on strike, he would ...

Voice: This line is for reporting harassment by union bully-boys. What information can you give me about that?

Caller: Er, none. There hasn't been any. Now I'd like to report my manager ...

Voice: Sorry, wrong number ...

Caller: So what is the number for reporting bullying managers?

Voice: There isn't one. Goodbye.

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.

It appears that in New Labour's world,

they are so convinced of their mantra 'private good, public bad', that even companies with a pretty damning track record get the chance to mess up again and again.

BLACK Advisors — Black Tube workers' rank-and-file group
AGM Friday 8 November 18:00hrs,
Somers Town Coffee House, Chalton Street (Euston)
Ska music social after AGM with DJ Mr Tommy Diamond

FBU STRIKE DATES

0900 Tuesday 29 October to 0900 Thursday 31 October (48 hours)
0900 Saturday 2 November to 0900 Monday 4 November (48 hours)
0900 Wednesday 6 November to 0900 Thursday 14 November (8 days)
0900 Friday 22nd November to 0900 Saturday 30 November (8 days)
0900 Wednesday 4 December to 0900 Thursday 12 December (8 days)
0900 Monday 16 December to 0900 Tuesday 24 December (8 days)

FBU WARNS ON SAFETY

The Fire Brigades Union is circulating this letter to managers with responsibility for health and safety in every workplace.

“Emergency fire cover will be provided by the armed services. The Government has admitted that this fire cover will be wholly inadequate. There will be insufficient, poorly trained personnel. They will be using restricted antiquated equipment. They will be geographically sparsely spread, using fire appliances mostly built in 1948!

“Assessments that may require review include activities with risks of fire, road traffic accidents, or from persons becoming trapped in machinery, under collapsed structures, at height or in confined spaces.

“Further advice, information and the Fire Safety Checklist is available on the internet at <http://www.fbu.org.uk>”.

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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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