

FIGHTING TO WIN

Fighting to Win - Revolutions Per Minute - number 7

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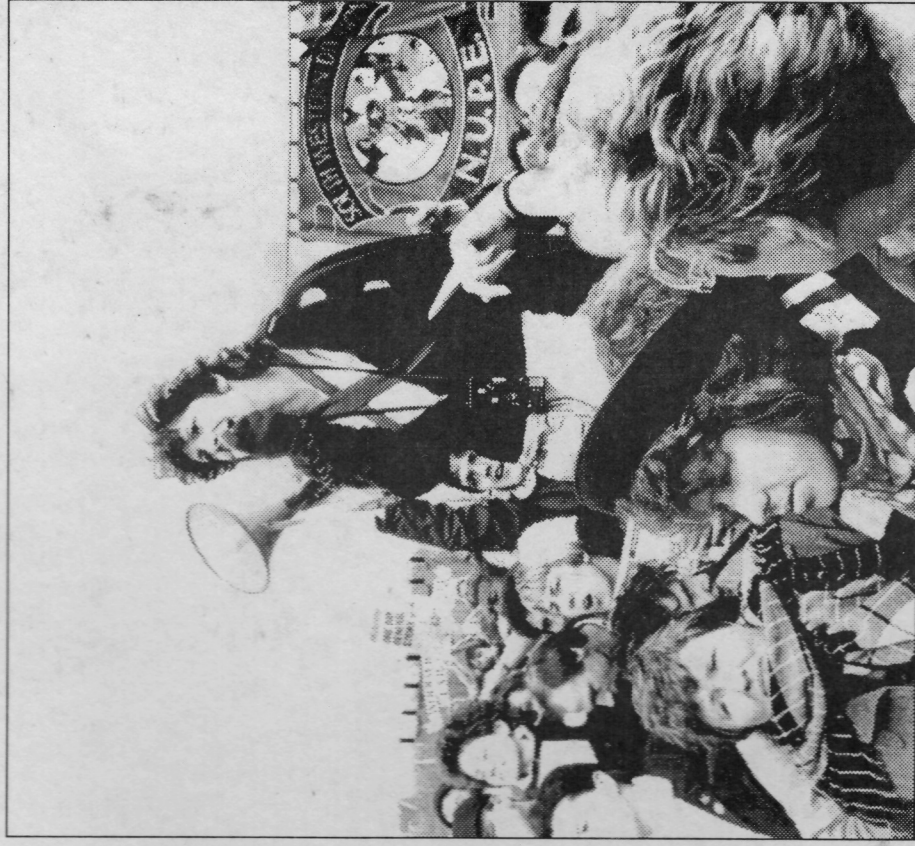
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With strike action at an all-time low and trade union membership continuing to decline what can be done to smash the employers attacks on wages and conditions? RPM issue 7, with assistance from the Building Worker Group, tries to offer some solutions. Read, discuss and use!

Revolutions Per Minute - Number 7

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FIGHTING TO WIN RPM Number 7

Terry French

This pamphlet is dedicated to the memory of Terry French, a Kent Miner sacked and imprisoned during the 1984-5 Miners Strike. His death in 1999 was a sad day.

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FIGHTING TO WIN

Welcome to issue 7 of RPM which looks at a small number of strikes so that workers forced to take strike action can develop an understanding of the forces they are facing if they are to wage a successful struggle. This is important as the industrial climate is worse for workers than it has been in the last 100 years.

The work also uses two articles from the newspaper of the longest running and most successful Rank and File group in Britain, the Building Worker Group, to give some ideas for organising at work.

In the author's view the forces ranged against the workers consist of the employers, the state and the mass media, all full-time trade union officials and the trade union bureaucracy, the British Labour Party and all the British revolutionary left organisations which are moving to the right in the wake of 'New Labour'.

However, as shown in the articles workers can and do win their struggles with the employers, giving encouragement to others. In recent times Electricians on the Jubilee Line and some Postal Workers have won when they have acted independently of their full time officials.

However, winning strikes have become the exception rather than the rule. Despite many courageous and lengthy struggles far too many workers are being defeated. These defeats lead others to conclude that strike action is ineffective and in 1999 the second lowest number of strikes ever was recorded with only 242,000 days lost to workers taking action in defence of pay, jobs, conditions and union recognition.

Turning this tide will not be easy and this pamphlet, and others also being published by RPM, are intended to play a part in ensuring that the lessons learned from the past and present lay the ground for workers victories in the [near] future.

The employers can be defeated, but only if workers resilience and courage is matched by their organisation and an understanding of 'how to win'.

Mark Metcalf

THE P&O SEAFARERS STRIKE 1988-89

In March 1987 the ferry 'Herald of Free Enterprise' overturned in the Belgium Port of Zeebrugge and 191 passengers and crew members lost their lives. The owners, P&O plc, expressed regret but pushed on with trying to maximise their profits by cutting jobs, lengthening the remaining workers hours and cutting their pay.

In December 1987 the company told the workers' trade union, the National Union of Seamen (NUS), that they intended to reduce the annual wage bill of £35 million by £6 million by cutting 500 out of 2,300 jobs and reducing earnings by an average of £25 a week. Furthermore they would make seafarers work an extra one month a year and impose, in some cases, a work rota where some people would be working for 72 hours continuously.

The 2,300 seafarers refused to accept these ultimatums, voted to strike and stopped work on 6 February 1988; many felt betrayed by a company to which some family members and friends had literally given their lives. Some workers also asked why a company which had just announced record profits, including £51.7 million from its European Ferries Group, needed to act in such a fashion. Sadly they missed the point. P&O, as a capitalist enterprise, needed to maximise its' profits in order to prevent being taken over and in order to take over other companies. This mad rush for profits is essential for capitalism, it is capitalism!

It was thus ironic to find P&O seafarers continuously selling T-shirts during the strike with the slogan: 'Beware P&O: Profit before PEOPLE', as if other capitalist ferry companies would actually put people before profits!



Mass picketing by the seafarers, and some supporters (mainly ex-miners led by the late Terry French - seen in picture on the right with flat cap and arm raised) initially had some success and a number of lorries booked on rival ferry operator Sealink were 'turned back.'

However, the deployment of very large numbers of police soon assisted the scab lorry and bus drivers to break the lines. The Transport and General Workers Union, who do have a large number of lorry drivers as members, did not call upon them to respect the seafarers picket lines.



No attempts were made by the NUS officials to organise the pickets into a militant disciplined grouping who could have defended themselves against the police attacks and it is likely that any 'outside' attempts to do this would have been strongly resisted by the pickets themselves.

The NUS also later disassociated themselves from the small teams who moved away from the police on the picket line and began stoning and brickbating P&O Ferry-master lorries on the major roads to and from Dover.

The picketing did stop people going to work and for almost 2 months P&O ferries lay idle. They only sailed after an elaborate operation involving the flying of scabs to the continent, a brief training programme for new crew members, and the sailing of ferries with a skeleton crew.

It was to be some considerable time before the strike breakers felt confident enough to walk past the pickets. The NUS estimated that the financial damage caused to the company by the dispute was over £40 million. It was a sum that P&O Chairman and personal friend of Margaret Thatcher, Sir Jeffrey Sterling, was willing to spend in breaking the seafarers organisation and working class resistance.

Two bosses are sitting on a bench. One says - "Do you know there are hundreds of ways of making a profit, but only one honest one?"
"What's that one?"
"How should I know!"

Key moments

During the strike there were 2 key moments, the first when a proposed ballot of the NUS's 21,000 members was cancelled in the wake of a court injunction threatening sequestration of the union's funds. This climbdown, in the face of the Tories anti-trade union laws, signalled a determination by the NUS leadership/bureaucracy of Sam McCluskie to remain within the law.

SEA PICKET

NO.1 MAY 21st

SUPPORT GROUPS

Seafarers from the P&O shipping company have been on strike since the 6th of February, 1988.

The NUS members took action against the company's plans to make 500 redundancies and to bring in new working practices. These include a system of 7 day working - 7 days on the ship and 7 days off.

The company want members to work 16 'payed' hours in every 24 hours. This would mean that the men and women of the NUS would be on board the ship for 56 hours of the week with no pay. The 8 hours that the members are not on standby.

*standards on the day 10 as

Below are a list of support groups which are supporting the seafarers. If there is a group in your area, please send the address to us and we will publish it.

Tower Hamlets Support Group - Meet 7pm Tues, St Georges Hall, Cable St, Stepney E.1.

Hackney Support Group - 489 Kingsland Rd, Hackney E.8.

Enfield Strike Support Group - 324a High St, Ponders End, Enfield EN3 4HF.

Leicester Support Group - 138 Charles St, Leicester.

Southwark T.U.S.U. - 42 Breganza St, SE.1.

Oxford Support Group - 2 Allin Close, Blackbird Leys, Oxford.

Brixton Strike Support Group - 121 Raiton Rd, Brixton SE24.

Manchester Support Group - C/O 188 Wilmslow

The forces opposed to such a strategy were weak and unorganised, few felt strong or confident enough during the strike to openly challenge McCluskie. Those that did tended to be those influenced by activists who had set up P&O Support Groups throughout the country.

Then at Easter 1988 the company announced that it had de-recognised the NUS and was pulling out of the Industry's National Maritime Board agreements. Sealink NUS members in Dover, recognising that this was an attack on the union in general and the rights of seafarers to defend themselves, decided not to cross the P&O picket lines.

It was thus Sealink management who took the NUS to court for secondary picketing as NUS Sealink members across the country escalated their actions and all Sealink ships came to a standstill. The key now was to stay out and get others out. Flying pickets were needed to take the message to all ports throughout the country.

The courts ordered the sequestration of the NUS assets, its' offices were seized, staff pay was stopped and investment funds frozen. At first, with his members supporting him, McCluskie threatened defiance and the potential for mass defiance of the anti-trade union laws opened up.

But after just 9 days, and only 3 days after a 2,000 strong supporters' march in Dover, the union purged its contempt and ordered Sealink workers back to work. Sealink workers reluctantly agreed, leaving P&O workers on strike on their own. The workers were not prepared or able to disobey their union leadership. (Incidentally the union did not, at this point, get its assets and funds back as the injunction by Sealink was lifted, only to be replaced by one from P&O itself.)

Ultimately this was the key point in the strike, a threat to all ferry operators in Britain became replaced by a dispute between an increasingly isolated workforce and a confident anti-union international employer supported by the Government, Police, Media and Courts.

Strikers continued picketing, money continued to be raised for families and to maintain the support kitchens operating in the Dover area, speakers continued to raise the issues at meetings and demonstrations. Yet the strategy to win the dispute remained absent, indeed many strikers seemed reluctant to even ask 'how to win?' as the dispute dragged on until it was formally abandoned by the NUS after 16 months.

SEA PICKET

NO. 9

JULY 30th

July 25th

What a major surprise! The man with the funny wig tells Sam that he hasn't got big enough holes in his trousers yet. 'Be a good boy and perhaps you might get your money back in three weeks. Oh and by the way I will take £25,000 from you. Now go and tell those violent pickets that they have to remove all their NUS badges. If I see one leaflet with NUS on it over the next few weeks then you can say goodbye to all your money.' Sam reacted with the usual 'very disappointed.' Last time this was because the pubs were shut. Can't understand the reasons for this. "disappointed" "not" "the 6th of" "bers(not" "of Ju" "no"

Some lessons

- ♦ Trade Union Officials are not prepared to organise and defy the anti-trade union laws
- ♦ The key to winning disputes is organising flying pickets and going directly to workers in their workplace
- ♦ Workers in struggle [and preferably before it] need to adopt a policy of organisation and action independent of the full-time officials
- ♦ Where workers are not prepared to break the anti-trade union laws when used against them then they are defeated.
- ♦ There must be established a network of rank and file workers organisations, in this case amongst seafarers, which can and will operate independently of the full-time officials.
- ♦ The defence of the picket-line from Police attacks is vital and proper stewarding is needed, legal monitoring needs arranging and sympathetic solicitors need to be 'on hand' to help anyone arrested.

SEA PICKET

No 14

Sept 17th

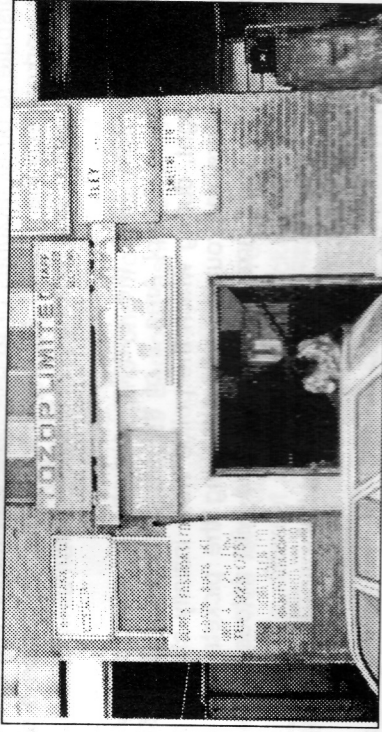
TUC Conference

The T.U.C. conference did little to encourage anybody about the future struggle needed to beat the Tories and their allies. The usual mixture of fudging and compromising left many feeling more than a little despairing.

The E.E.T.P.U. were finally expelled, no doubt ensuring Hammond of his future place in the House of Lords. Having stolen 5,000 printworkers jobs at Wapping whilst still in the T.U.C. there should be worse to come now they are outside of it. Perhaps the scabs working for P-O could be one of their targets?

It was interesting to see that Brenda Dean seconded the motion concerning the Seafarers. This basically called for financial support and a boycott campaign. This was exactly the same tactics that led to the defeat of the printworkers. Financial support and boycott campaigns help but only industrial support wins disputes such as this one.

Bacton Fashions itself was located in an industrial unit along with other clothing sweatshops. Workers from the different firms used the same entrance to go to work.



It became traditional at the end of the working day for workers from all the firms to join with the strikers and jeer and handclap the boss and his managerial team as he left work. There was no violence, although tensions were clearly running high and up to 400 people were involved in this daily humiliation of the boss and managers.

GENERAL WORKERS & TEXTILE WORKERS TRADE GROUP D. WARING, Regional Officer

Dear Sirs,

RE: BACTON FASHIONS LIMITED - HACKNEY E8.

In furtherance of our telephone conversation on Wednesday, 14 March, I now wish to formally advise that the Industrial Dispute with the above Company does not have the official sanction of the Transport and General Workers' Union, and never has received such sanction.

I must therefore inform you that you do not have the authority of the Union or the permission of myself to use official Transport and General Workers' Union headed paper which bears my name for the purpose of circulating information regarding this matter. Furthermore, it is also very concerning as to the manner in which you have obtained this headed paper.

Finally, I am also bringing to your attention, Rule 21 of the Union, which refers to the raising of funds for whatever purpose. The Rule explains that no member, Branch or Committee shall be permitted to use the name of the Union in connection with any appeal for funds, unless official sanction has been obtained.

I trust that you will cease forthwith any further activity of this kind which may implicate the Transport and General Workers' Union.

Demands from union branch members for the TGWU to make the strike official were refused, requests for strike pay was therefore ignored and strikers were instructed that they couldn't even make financial appeals on TGWU headed notepaper.

BACTON FASHIONS - 1990

Bacton Fashions in Hackney was a relatively large clothing sweatshop employing up to 90 workers. Most workers were Turkish or Kurdish, had been living in Britain for less than a couple of years and were waiting for a Home Office decision on their rights to remain.

Within the factory there were some members of the one-year-old Transport and General Workers Union [TGWU] 1/1312 textile workers branch. The branch, formed at the initiative of the political organisation, the Union of Turkish Workers, with the assistance of Hackney Trade Union Support Unit and Service Workers Advisory Project [SWAAP] had recruited almost 600 workers locally.

A series of small-scale strikes had led to a union recognition agreement being signed at Dizzi Limited. There were regular leafleting sessions of factories and meetings on workers rights at community centres.

The workers at Bacton Fashions had many complaints - low pay, long hours, terrible health and safety conditions, no holiday or sick pay, victimisation, continuous lay offs without pay and a management prepared to act dictatorially.

The workers themselves were not completely defenceless as they included some that had brought revolutionary traditions from the cities and villages of Turkey and Kurdistan. The previous year [1989] over 4,500 refugees had come to Hackney fleeing the war in Kurdistan. They joined, at least, another twenty to thirty thousand Turkish speaking workers in east London. Almost none of these workers were unionised and no major union had thought to change this. For example, none had ever appointed a Turkish speaking official.

When eight workers at Bacton Fashions refused to accept being 'laid off' they began picketing. Appeals to other workers to respect their picket line were met sympathetically but little else. The employer, Mustafa Dill, was sufficiently embarrassed to re-employ the workers and to agree to lay off pay during slack periods.

However, he kept breaking his word and there were almost daily walkouts over the next few weeks, as agreements were reached then broken once again.

There was no attempt by the union official, Brian Theobald, to spread the dispute to other factories or to use what was happening to recruit other workers into the TGWU. He came to the picket line on a small number of occasions and took no part in strike meetings.

On February 26th 1990 the evening picket was attacked by the Territorial Support Group [Area 2 of the Metropolitan Police. There was a fierce fight, during which the police were initially chased from the scene, before re-grouping and attacking the pickets and their supporters. Four were arrested and charged with riotous behaviour and actual bodily harm.



● The picket outside Bacton Fashions before Monday's incident.

Police hurt during factory picket

FOUR policemen were injured in a scuffle outside Bacton Fashions clothing factory in Stoke Newington Road at about 7.30 on Monday night. They were among 20 officers from Bow's Territorial Support Group policing a picket outside the factory. "Workers have been on strike for weeks over a dispute over a 16-year-old youth from Hackney appeared before a magistrates on Tuesday."

A community based campaign later helped to secure 'not guilty' Court verdicts and much later one, Tekin Kartel received a five figure sum in damages for what had happened to him.

The next morning [27.02.1990] no one from any of the factories located in the same building as Bacton Fashions crossed the picket line.

The company was forced to close, only to re-open under a different name and at a different location later. Picketing and a refusal by workers to work there led to its closure.

While the workers lost their poorly paid jobs they achieved a degree of success showing the employers that they could not do everything they wanted and needed to take the workers needs into account when making decisions. The workers established a pride in fighting back; they closed down the factory and demonstrated they had the power to not only damage the employers profits but get rid of it!

Negatively, the strike was not well supported by the local trade union movement and the TGWU's conduct didn't impress the workers in local clothing outfits. Branch membership fell dramatically and recruitment became much more difficult.

Some lessons

- ◆ Many of the same points raised at the end of the section on the P&O strike can be made, including the defence of the picket-line against police attack and the need for rank and file organisations to be built.

Dahl Jenson 1999

On Wednesday July 7th 1999 immigrant workers demonstrated their willingness, when asked, to support British workers in struggle. By doing so they brought about a magnificent victory by 300 building workers employed by different sub-contracting firms.

The week before Mechanical Installers and Pipe Fitters working for Dahl Jenson found that cheques for the last three weeks work had bounced. With massive amounts of overtime being worked some workers had lost as much as £2,000, although these figures were the exception as the workers calculated that the £55,000 in total owed was split between almost 100 workers.

Meanwhile Dahl Jenson had disappeared from the site next to Waterloo Station, where a building was being refurbished under the Government's Private Finance Initiative to turn it into a teaching college for student nurses. Responsibility for ensuring the work got completed on time was with Bouynges, a French construction giant.

Workers employed by other firms on the site continued to work normally. The ex-Dahl Jenson workers did not ask them for support, even when standing outside the site entrance on Monday and Tuesday the 5th and 6th of July 1999 seeking their wages.

The workers' had approached the Joint Sites Committee [JSC] for assistance, this could best be described as 'broad left' and the building workers union, UCATT had been informed. Two officials from the union turned up on July 7th and generally played a positive role throughout the day.

The JSC produced a leaflet for the day stating 'no work will take place on this site until all the building workers are paid the money they have worked for'. Considering what had gone before this was a brave forecast, particularly as only one member of the JSC turned out in the first hour on July 7th.

Amongst those working for the other firms on the site were members of a range of ethnic groups. These included Kosovan's, Albanian's, Latvian's, Russian's, Portuguese and French. There were also individuals from Poland, Croatia, Italy and Denmark. Add this to the English, Welsh, Irish and Scottish lads employed by Dahl Jenson and you had quite a mix!

With the national and local news crammed full of scare stories about immigrants and asylum seekers it was unsurprising to find some suspicion and a degree of hostility amongst British workers towards the workers from other countries. We were told as a group of what turned out to be Kosovan's approached "it's no use speaking to them, they don't speak English". One worker said there been "a lot of nicking" on the site and implied "it's the Albanian's" as "they're working for nowt". Not quite, but at £3 an hour not far off the mark!

As it turned out some did speak English but, not unnaturally, there was an unwillingness not to go to work. "We need the money". It was explained that some British workers supported the rights of Kosovans to be in the country but obviously with rights come responsibilities and one of these was not to cross picket lines or be used to undercut other workers rates of pay. This did the trick, they agreed and joined the picket-line.

It took a lot less time to persuade the French, some of whom were absolutely delighted to see "the English doing something". By this time 'the English' had dumped some of their prejudices and begun communicating to other workers from around the World.

Workers from Russia and Latvia, rates of pay £7.50 an hour, were under immense pressure from their employer to cross but they resisted and joined the growing number of pickets. Yes, they'd had unions in the Soviet Union but 'no' they weren't any good. Their spokesperson, Valeri, eight years in London had also "never seen the union" in that time. Nevertheless they knew where their class interests lay!



By 8.30am there were 300 pickets on the gate, no work was taking place, deliveries were being turned away and machinery due to be picked up and moved elsewhere remained idle.

On a beautiful, in more ways than one, sunny day officials from UCATT were sent inside with a couple of workers to see Bouynes management. Before they did so it was agreed that the demands would be extended from getting all back pay to no victimisation of those workers refusing to cross the picket-line with no loss of pay.

Apparently Bouynes management were not too keen claiming that the wages were owed by the sub-contractors. Perhaps, but as the job was now stopped it was difficult to say it had nothing to do with them.



WORKING TIME DIRECTIVE

Outside there was tremendous interest in joining UCATT, and in the Working Time Directive, which limits the maximum number of hours to 48 a week and gave workers, for the first time, a legal minimum holiday entitlement of 15 days a year – [in November 1999 this increased to 20.]

Emerging from the meeting UCATT officials said that whilst Bouynes were reluctant they had asked for a list of those owed money along with the amounts. Meanwhile they had said they would be contacting their Head Office in France.

There was a scramble to make sure the list was correct, at the same time a lad from Middlesbrough could be overheard telling a latecomer that the "foreigners are bloody marvellous".

A couple of hours later, and following speeches which urged workers to stick together, handshakes and thanks all round, the officials went back in and emerged to let workers know that Bouynes had agreed to pay workers two weeks wages and consider them for any jobs on the site. Those owed £2,000 got just over £1,000, not a complete victory but not bad. Most were pleased.

It had been agreed that there would be no victimisation of those who had stayed out and they would be paid. A hundred had joined UCATT, some had volunteered to become union stewards and union officials had promised to go and see their bosses about holidays with pay.

What was needed next was a mass meeting of workers shortly afterwards and a stewards committee established. This would have meant workers could get support from the officials but act independently of them when they needed to. This did not happen.

Some lessons

- ◆ That the organising of proper picketing remains the most important element of winning any strike
- ◆ That solidarity between workers of different nationalities can be forged through struggle
- ◆ The threat of the anti-trade union laws can be defied, and must be if workers are to win
- ◆ That workers can win
- ◆ New laws on Working Time Directives should be utilised
- ◆ Anti-racism is not an academic exercise but part of a life and death struggle

Meanwhile some 'organising points' can be drawn:-

- ✓ Get leaflets translated into relevant languages
- ✓ Get to the picket-line on time and make a positive start i.e. make sure that people know you're mounting a picket line, have posters that say it's one! UCATT didn't.
- ✓ Do not allow the full-time officials to take control
- ✓ Never assume that people don't understand English
- ✓ Challenge racism

- ✓ If photograph's are being taken remember that workers may 'be signing on' or may be 'illegal immigrants' and it would not be a good thing for them to have their pictures taken
- ✓ Talk to workers who've been picketed out about their problems - in this case it was holiday pay for some workers and low rates of pay for others
- ✓ Be honest what the union can do and should do!
- ✓ Once the job has stopped then send in officials [if they are there] along with workers reps
- ✓ One of the demands should be that those prevented from going to work get paid
- ✓ If people come from other workplaces to support then this should be communicated to strikers
- ✓ Someone must keep letting people know what's happening - a speech every 30 or minutes should do this - get this translated into different languages
- ✓ Apart from handing out application forms a contact sheet may be a good idea especially for those workers who are 'illegal'

This article from 'The Building Worker Group' can be used by any group of workers seeking to organise their workplace. If you need any help or further advice phone 07967 886257

HOW TO ORGANISE YOUR SITE/WORKPLACE

Despite improved European safety legislation in recent years, building workers are still being killed and injured at an appalling rate in so-called site accidents. With almost 100 workers dead and tens of thousands injured every year, and the employers continuing to ignore safety in their greed for increased profit, many sites are literally death traps.

At a time when there is a serious skills shortage in the building industry and where trades, at least, can command decent wages in many areas, there has never been a better time to get sites organised and unionised. This is the only way in which building workers can win decent and safe working conditions and guaranteed wages to match, on a site by site basis. Most building workers will ask how this can be done - especially given the risks attached to organising a union on site.

The following is a set of basic guidelines that could be of help in organising your site while keeping the risks as low as possible. They may also help to improve things if your site is partially or poorly organised.

a) There are always problems with wages, facilities, safety or working conditions on site which some workers feel quite strongly about. Identify the problems and start talking with these workers. To start the ball rolling it is essential for two or three of these workers, more if possible of course, to join one of the construction unions. UCATT is the main union for building workers but the TGWU and GMB also have construction sections. Electricians and plumbers should join their own union, either AEEU or EPIU. Try to find out which union is strongest in your area before joining. When a few have joined, approach others on site you feel would be more inclined to join in the initial stages.

b) You would be advised not to let any members of site management know anyone is joining a union in the early stages.

c) You can join a union confidentially by writing to or phoning the Regional Office of the union and asking for membership forms to be sent to your

home address. You don't have to tell them where you are working. Or you could ask someone you know is a member to get you some forms or to take you along to a union meeting to join and get some forms for your site.

UCATT's General Office is: UCATT House, 177 Abbeville Road, London SW4 9RL. Tel: 020 7 622 2442.

They will give you the phone number of your local region.

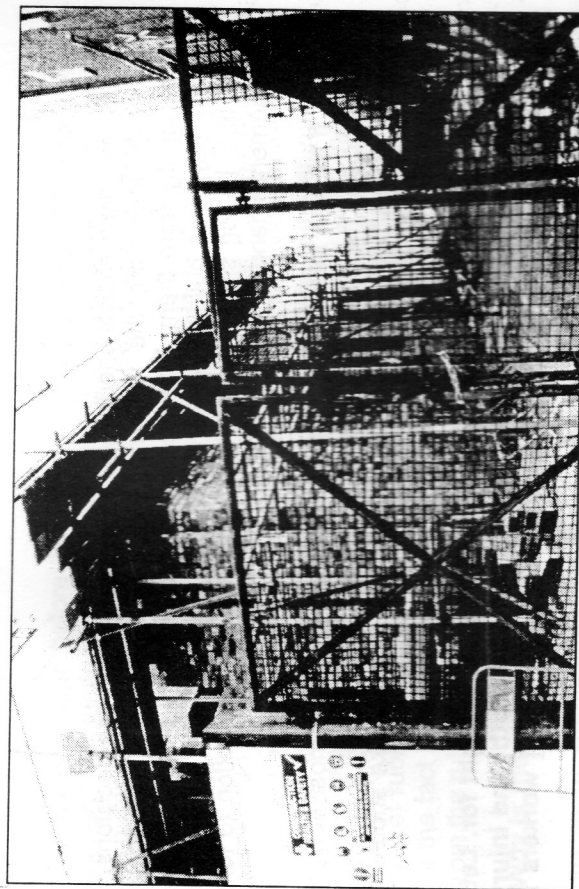
d) Once there are a few members on site, then you should 'go public' and hold a meeting to ELECT a shop steward of your choice for your trade or section. You could call in a full-time official. If you need to move more quickly then you can elect a steward and send off to the regional secretary of the union for steward's credentials. They'll send you a regional official down with them.

Once you elect a steward or stewards, you need to move as quickly as possible to recruit as many as possible into the unions as this is where your only real strength lies. Have no truck whatsoever with management-appointed (and union-approved) shop stewards. They are stooges of the lowest order and will always do management's bidding.

A shop steward has negotiating rights for you on site and should be accompanied by another steward or worker at all times when he/she meets management on your behalf - otherwise management can say whatever they like and the steward may go along with it.

e) Ensure at all times that union officials, when they arrive on site, report to the steward [s] and/or workers before they go to management. The officials must never be allowed to go to management on their own, on your behalf. You must always ensure they are accompanied by a steward or worker.

All full time union officials are very prone to do deals and reach agreements without your knowledge and then present this as a fait accompli or on a take-it or hard-lines basis. There must never be secret negotiations between full time union officials and management. Shop stewards and workers they represent should be in on all negotiations.



f) When a few shop stewards are elected, then they should form a shop stewards committee. This Committee should elect a convenor steward who should be under the control of the stewards committee and accompanied by a steward or stewards when meeting management at all times. The convenor steward should have 100% facility time to carry out Trade Union duties if the site is big enough.

g) All stewards are elected by the members and they should be under their democratic control at all times. This means that the members have the democratic right to recall any of them and subject them to re-election if it is felt they are not doing a satisfactory job on the members behalf. They can be replaced at any time on this democratic basis.

h) Workers should also defend and protect their shop steward against management attacks and be prepared to take direct action, including strike, if they are victimised or sacked.

i) The mass meeting is the democratic voice of the workers on site and you should hold these as often as you feel this is necessary. Trade and section meetings should also be held on the same basis.

j) Full time union officials should also abide by majority site decisions. If they don't, then you, the workers, have the democratic right to act independently from them. You are the union. The only place you have any real power as building workers and trade unionists is at the point of production, i.e. on site. You may have to affect this production to force management's hand on occasions.

k) If all else fails, workers have the right to use their most powerful democratic and negotiating weapons - the strike reinforced by a picket on the site. If this does not move management, then the strike should be spread by the use of flying pickets to other sites.

In reality, workers only get what they are prepared to fight for. Let's get unionised and organised and fight to create a death- and injury-free environment and a decent, guaranteed wage for all workers in the construction industry.

SURELY, "IT IS BETTER TO LIVE ON YOUR FEET THAN DIE ON YOUR KNEES". Brian Higgins, Building Worker Secretary.

PREVENTING DEATHS ON BUILDING SITES

The following article comes from a Building Worker Group paper of 1996.

THE SLAUGHTER CONTINUES

In the Edinburgh Evening Newspaper on 7 May this year, [1996] it was reported that a 70ft high scaffold collapsed on a Morrison Construction site. One building worker was killed and another four seriously injured. The type of scaffold used by the employer was not adequate for such a high structure. How much longer will the building employers be allowed to get away with what amounts to murder?

How much longer before building workers say and decide enough is enough? A higher percentage of building workers are killed in relation to the number of workers employed in the industry than ever.

In the same paper of 7 May on page three there is an article entitled "High Speed Hard Hat Heroes Ease Roadways Misery". It then goes on "Superman construction workers are celebrating after slamming up a road bridge in half a day". Near the end it states "The joint venture team hit the headlines in March when another bridge they were demolishing over the A1 collapsed suddenly. Three workers escaped injury when the 30ft high Old Greenykes Bridge crumbled. The accident caused traffic chaos and tons of rubble were cleared from the road". No mention of or sympathy for the fact it could have been the three building workers they had to clear from the rubble and the road!

Why is the killing of building workers to socially acceptable?

We draw attention to the Edinburgh Evening Newspaper and these quotes because as well as showing the needless slaughter of building workers continues on UK construction sites, these more than adequately illustrate the utterly cynical and uninterested attitude of the media towards the lives and safety of construction workers. This attitude is reflected by the apathy of society in general towards death and injury in construction.

It's just another sensational story to read with your tea and then forget about it. There is never a follow-up; no mention of the appalling numbers of building workers regularly killed and seriously injured in the building industry all over Britain; no analysis of the reasons for this and what the solution might be.

All we are told, as is usual, is that the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) are investigating it. In fact, the HSE have got about as much intention of putting a stop to the killing and serious injury in the building industry as the building employers, who control the HSE in construction, have. They might as well send in the brownies. They'd probably be more effective.

False macho image - All the easier to kill you.

As already mentioned, page three in the Evening News then highlights the deliberate and false macho image construction workers are given by the media. TV reports construction in a manner similar to the press.

The article also implies and feeds the popular myth that construction work is unavoidably dangerous and therefore risks are attached and it is inevitable, and perfectly acceptable to society, some workers will be killed and seriously injured in the process! No mention of the fact that all building and construction work can be made completely safe.



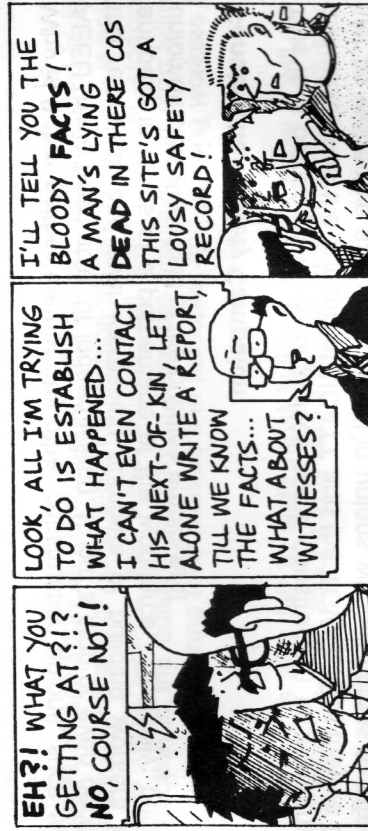
Just to illustrate their lack of interest and ignorance the article quite glibly reports on fast building processes and a target achieved and stated "Delighted managers described the whole operation as textbook".

That particular textbook is the employers' and could be entitled "How to murder construction workers and make even more profit!" Yes, safety costs money!

The article doesn't explain, and they don't give a damn anyway, that fast production processes and finishing targets, often involving piecework and bonuses which workers have to work doubly fast to achieve, are responsible for killing and maiming more building workers than any other single reason in the construction industry.

Reality is far from heroes or supermen.

The only heroic thing about working in the building industry is being able to survive it! The reality is that building workers are neither heroes or supermen. They are ordinary flesh and blood human beings and workers, who bleed when cut and sometimes die or are seriously injured when forced to work in dangerous conditions, or be sacked. That is always the alternative given for a refusal to work in dangerous conditions.



Why no public outcry?

Again, the general public and many other workers, including some building workers, have been so conditioned by the media myths and misleading information about building workers and the building industry, they don't even begin to see the killing of so many building workers as something to protest or demonstrate about.

Let's be honest - if the same number of workers as are killed in the construction industry were killed in any other single industry or profession, there would be a public and then media outcry. Countless questions would be asked in the Houses of Parliament, new safety laws would be introduced and, most importantly, they and existing ones would be enforced.

So what of the unions?

After all, unions were formed by working class men and women to look after their interests in a capitalist society which doesn't give a monkey's f... about working class people, their lives, safety, living or working conditions. All of these are considered imminently expendable by the system.

UCATT AND TGWU Officialdom

To name but two unions, who are the largest in the private sector of construction where almost all of the killing and maiming goes on, thus what they do in relation to safety and site organisation is very important and significant. Unfortunately and in fact, like the HSE, they have been proven to be less than useless.

Why is it that neither they or any other construction unions, such as the AEEU, have been able, or indeed willing, to put a stop or even decrease the relentless and ever increasing numbers of building workers killed annually in terms of a percentage of the workforce. Basically, because union officials are afraid of the building employers!

Construction Safety Campaign

This is a campaign which organises some construction union members and which has the support of UCATT and the TGWU. But they've been just as ineffective as the construction unions when it comes to affecting the continuing carnage in the industry.

In common with the construction unions, their main strategy is based on appealing to building employers to stop the killing and also in lobbying coroners courts when Inquests on building workers killed on site are held,

putting pressure on politicians and calling for the jailing of employers found guilty of the manslaughter of building workers.

No doubt the odd one or two building employers wouldn't mind spending a wee while in jail, such as a few weeks or even months, as long as they were all free to continue to make vast profits out of ignoring the safety and killing of building workers.

What this strategy fails to understand is that:

- (a) What is the use of appealing to the bastards who are so callous as to be responsible for killing building workers in the first place?

And

- (b) Building workers are not killed in coroners' courts, or in jails, or the Houses of Parliament. What they all fail to address is the fact that building workers are killed on building sites and it is only on site that building workers can, and have the power to, stop the killing.

How can the killings be stopped? By stopping production if they kill or maim building workers.

Workers on site know all full-time union officials are so shit scared of the anti-union laws and of out-and-out trade union militancy that there is not a dog in hell's chance that these officials will even consider stopping production in the building industry to force the employers to stop killing and seriously injuring their members in particular and building workers in general.

We think it is also fair to state most building workers know it will take strike action to bring about a truly safe and death and injury free industry.

Building Worker Safety Campaign.

Because the building employers obviously feel they have a right to continue killing building workers with impunity, also the fact none of the construction unions, or campaigns around at present, have any idea of how to stop the killing or maiming or indeed have no intention of doing so, the Building Worker Group (which has been in existence and campaigning

for the rights of building workers and for union democracy, particularly in UCATT, for 21 years) has taken a decision that we and all rank and file building workers must have and exercise the right to picket sites where death and/or serious injury has occurred.



It is painfully obvious the only language the building employers understand and are afraid of and will respond to is militant industrial action, whereby stopping production building workers hurt the employers where it hurts most - in the pocket; by seriously affecting the disgusting profiteering and exploitation.

Need for local, regional and national organisation based on picketing sites

We also realise the building industry will and can only be made truly safe and a decent one in which to work if it is organised and strongly unionised on site in every part of the UK and it will take a building workers strike of UK-wide proportions to achieve this. We need policies around which rank and file building workers can unite, agitate, organise and eventually mobilise.

We mention a few such policies here but will publish a full policy statement in a future Building Worker Safety Campaign literature.

- a) £10 per hour for a 35-hour week. [£12 in 2000]
- b) An end to all bonus and pricework schemes which divide and rule and force building workers to work at speeds which are extremely unsafe and often end in fatalities and injuries.
- c) Rank and file building workers on site to control all their union officials, including stewards, convenors and full-time officials, and not the other way round as happens at present!
- d) This can only be achieved if all union officials are daily accountable and are subject to recall and re-election by union members at all times. This is especially important for the control of all site officials.
- e) Absolutely no to the appointment of any union officials, on or off site.
- f) Pickets on sites where death and/or serious injury has occurred.
- g) Total defiance and for the repeal of all anti-union laws. No state interference in the democratic running of trade unions.

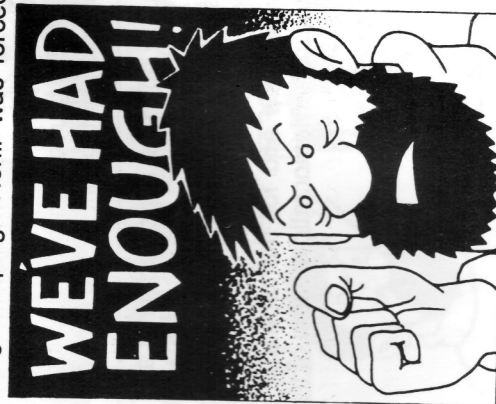
Don't wait. Picket now!

Of course, no one can afford to wait for a UK-wide rank and file union and site organisation. The killing is going on now and a UK-wide organisation will only be built on the basis of site location action and organisation.

We intend to put a picket on a site in London where death and/or serious injury has occurred. This will be the real start of the Building Worker Safety Campaign. We call on all building workers and construction trade unionists and all workers who read this to support the campaign and most especially any picket put on in the cause of safety and to put an end to the killing and maiming of construction workers. Also to put on your own pickets. After all, if we can't stop the building employers killing so many of us, what price anything else in construction? If we can't fight for our very lives and limbs, what is there to fight for?

SUPPORT THE BUILDING WORKER SAFETY CAMPAIGN SUPPORT ONE ANOTHER

Footnote – unfortunately, the Building Worker Group were unable to put into practice their aims because they were forced to spend time on defending the secretary, Brian Higgins, from an attack by UCATT Official Dominic Hehir who issued a writ for libel. As a small organisation it meant that this took up an enormous amount of time and energy. It is strange that this happened at a time when the group was about to mount a safety campaign in the building industry! It has never been revealed who was funding Hehir. After a long running campaign Hehir was forced into a humiliating climbdown.



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RPM is a radical publishing project which aims to help liberate the working class. This requires a revolution and the replacement of a system based on profit with one based on people's needs. RPM feels it can best contribute toward its aims by producing pamphlets and other materials, to aid discussion, debate and the distribution of ideas and information.

In time it is hoped that RPM may also be able to help fund struggles and help those who have suffered from taking part in them.

RPM is funded by standing orders from supporters, subscriptions, donations and sales. Any help with distribution and sales of publications would be welcomed.

If you have a piece of work that you would like RPM to consider publishing then please make contact.

In addition to 'Fighting to Win' the following are also available:-

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'Rank and File or Bureaucracy – a short history of the Building Worker Group' Written by Brian Higgins

This is an inspiring account of self-organisation among building workers which outlines the opposition the Building Worker Group has had to face from the bosses, the bureaucracy of the unions, and a left obsessed with voting in progressive union officials and Labour Governments. If you read anything on workers' struggles you should read this.

£2 a copy plus 50 pence postage or £20 for 10 copies post free.

Also out later this year 'The Anti-Nazi League' with contributions from Jim Kelly, Mark Metcalf and Larry O'Hara looking at the ANL mark one in the 1970's and its more recent past.

£1.50 a copy, out in September 2000.

Out in December 2000 will be a photographic record of 'People and Protest' covering the period from the Anti-Poll Tax riots to J18 in 1999. This promises to be a fascinating look at some of the major events over the last 10 years. £3 a copy, contact RPM for details.

Planned for 2001 are pamphlets on 'The Wapping Printworkers Strike' and the History of Hackney Community Defence Association plus others under discussion including a joke book [no its none of the above!] and something which isn't a joke 'Labour's Links with Big Business'. RPM will be using some of the mass of information on the web-site designed and paid for by RPM at <http://www.red-star-research.org.uk>. Many people are aware that Tony Blair and New Labour are very friendly with a large number of company bosses and rich people. The sheer scale of these connections will surprise most people – the extraordinary extent to which the "party of the people" has its nose in the corporate trough.

The website is the most comprehensive investigation that names the names and demonstrates the network of influence that fat cat business leaders and millionaires hold within the New Labour 'Project'. New Labour's shift of emphasis away from ideology to values, its move to the right and the crucial role that news management, spin and PR have played in creating their mutation of Socialism into the Third Way is followed and investigated.

The Red Star site is in 5 sections – Friends of Tony [New Labour's rich and powerful chums], taskforces [Blair's main line to the heart of big business], donors, special advisors [the unelected party political workforce] and data. [all the names and information from the rest of the site in a non-pictorial listing] Take a look, you'll be astonished.

The site should also have, by the time you're reading this a link to RPM's own site which is currently under construction. This site will include unpublished materials as well as articles from the Building Worker Group's present and past newspapers.

Meanwhile RPM has also had minted some first-class enamel badges. Currently available are James Connolly and Karl Marx at £5 each which includes a presentation box or £4.50 without. Postage free.

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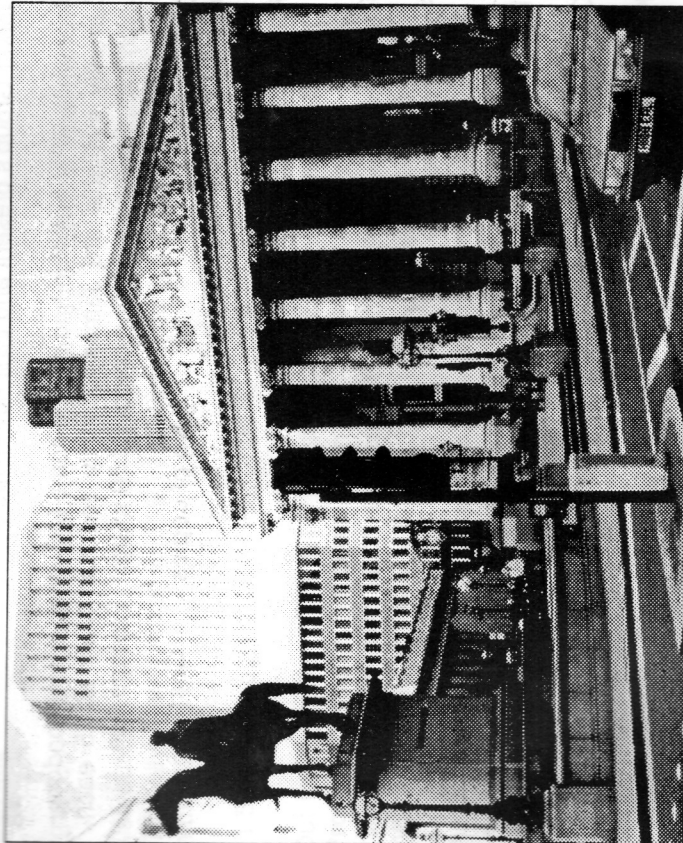
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