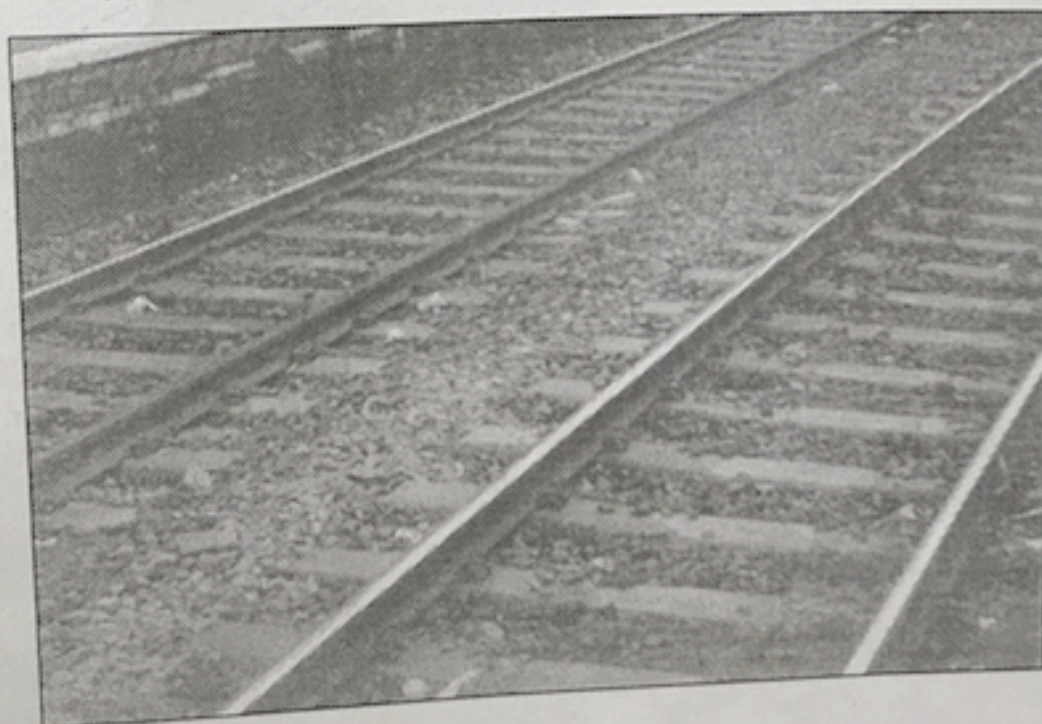


For the workers, against the bosses, bureaucrats and left-wing posers



In August 1998 over 100 railway workers walked out in defence of Steve Hedley, a railway militant based at Euston Station.

*What happened next* was the subject of a fierce debate a year later.



£1



## COULD STEVE HEDLEY HAVE KEPT HIS JOB?

With the exception of the final two pieces the articles which appear are reproduced with the kind permission of 'The Weekly Worker.' Thanks to them.

Some readers may ask themselves why bother reproducing something now largely forgotten. The answer is simple - the future workers victories lie in learning from the past.

The strike by railway workers in August 1998 was to be defeated, Steve Hedley did not get his job back. These are facts. What remains in dispute is whether the outcome could have been different. Could the strike have been successful? The views of, at least two people active in the dispute is yes. Others, including Steve Hedley say no. Readers can make their own minds up.

### Contents

#### Articles

#### Pages -

- 1- 9 Could Steve Hedley have kept his job? By Mark Metcalf
- 10 - 12 Metcalf's Infantile Disorder By Steve Hedley
- 12 - 16 Disappointed sectarian By Dot Gibson
- 17 - 19 Letters from Mark Metcalf, Brian Higgins, Jon Tait and Brian Higgins
- 19 - 20 Unpublished article by Graham Smith, ex Hackney Community Defence Association
- 20 - 22 Some final points - Mark Metcalf

Please note - in order to aid the reader photographs, graphics and newspaper cuttings have been added to the original texts which appeared in 'The Weekly Worker' produced by the Communist Party of Great Britain. [The paper is available weekly from CPGB, BCM Box 928, London WC1N 3XX Phone number 020 8 965 0659]



## Could Steve Hedley have kept his job?

August 26th 1999 by Mark Metcalf

The decision in June 1999 of Steve Hedley to accept a full-time development officer's job with the building workers' union Ucat must have marked the end of the campaign to force GTRM to reinstate him to his track maintenance job from which he was dismissed in July 1998.

To all intents and purposes the struggle ended on Monday August 3 at the height of a strike by over 100 maintenance workers when Hedley, RMT (Rail Maritime Transport) shop steward at Euston station and the RMT Harlesden branch secretary, preferred to rely on the bureaucracy of the RMT and its acolytes in 'the British left' rather than rank and file railworkers who he had already inspired to take action. By doing so Steve Hedley turned his back on his closest supporters and now he has clearly decided that 'if you can't beat them [the bureaucracy] then join them'.

Until July 1998 Steve Hedley was employed by GTRM (GEC-Tarmac Rail Maintenance) and had worked on the railway for 10 years. He was dismissed in the middle of a national pay dispute. One year later he was appointed to a full-time development officer's post in Ucat. He is now a part of the trade union bureaucracy he once recognised as a barrier to workers' struggles: "Rank and file workers who are prepared to act independently of trade union bureaucracies can take on their employers and win" (S Hedley *A case for trade union rank and file resistance* Colin Roach Centre, 1995, p46).

It will be no surprise to anyone who has studied the history of the trade union movement that Steve Hedley has taken such a job. There are numerous examples of militants who have been critical of the trade union bureaucracy, but sooner or later become a part of it. As a result of their personal improvements in pay, working conditions and status they cut themselves off from the people they once represented.

Steve Hedley had recognised this: "The history of so-called leftwingers being elected and then moving rightwards is such a long one that the policy of so-called broad lefts must finally be scrapped" (Harlesden RMT branch leaflet, 1995).

In Steve Hedley's case because of his sacking it could and probably will be argued that he has 'no other place to go'; or 'who else would give him a job?' Others will argue that he 'fought a good fight' and should not be blamed for looking after his personal interests. Certainly Steve Hedley has much greater standing than most people, but nevertheless he is not perfect and it is my view that he did have 'some other place to go'. It is the aim of this article to demonstrate that this was the case and that GTRM could have been forced to 'give him back his job'.

I argue this after having had the privilege of working with Steve Hedley between 1995 and 1998 with the aim of defending and improving the pay and working conditions of railworkers which, it was recognised, required raising political consciousness. I did this through our joint involvement in the Colin Roach Centre, based in Hackney. Despite the ongoing capitalist offensive continuing to destroy workers' pay, conditions and rights, it was still possible in this period to carry out activities which were incredibly successful. These helped to increase the self-confidence of some railworkers to challenge management's plans to restructure their industry. Steve was the key man in this.



These actions included opposing arrogant managers, some of whom were quickly moved to different jobs, organising unofficial walk-outs in defence of threatened workers and secretly working with papers such as *The Mirror*, resulting in two major articles on rail track safety which forced debates in the House of Commons and statements from government ministers. There were also attempts made to establish a Railworkers Rank and File Group which floundered.

## DANGER DOSSIER

### Old points thin end of wedge

A Mirror's safety report found old points had been dangerously wedged with up to five "packing pieces" to keep them in place when only one would normally be used.

And the metal plates inserted had been thinned down so that if the poorly maintained track vibrated they could jump out, leaving tracks to widen and derailling trains.

Expert Mr Rayner said: "Maintenance instructions stipulate only one packing piece of up to 3.5mm wide

Welcome to Euston

This station is owned and managed by

**RAILTRACK**

Train services are provided by

**INTERCITY West Coast**

**NORTH LONDON RAILWAYS**

**ROTRAIL**

should be used at a time and then only in an emergency.

"In this case there are five such bars placed in one set of points when I have never seen more than two used before.

"I have also never seen thinned down packing pieces used.

"With more than one piece in place and a poorly maintained vibrating track there is a risk that one piece will become loose and others will follow.

"In such circumstances there is a real chance a derailment will take place."

## SINKING INTO THE MUD

THE damning report revealed that with ballast to stop the line the whole line outside Euston is subsiding.

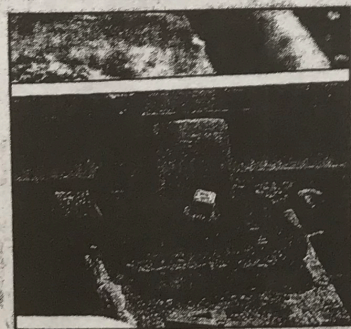
One technician told Mr Rayner: "There are literally holes under the track that are supposed to be filled

going on so long that the total repair bill now would run into millions of pounds."

### Missing bolts derail threat

CONCERNED technicians who approached the Mirror and presented evidence to Mr Rayner complained that vital keys and bolts to keep rails in place are missing on miles of track.

They say the whole of the decaying line - once the jewel in the rail network's crown - is suffering from lack of investment and needs a £1 billion cash injection.



Part of a larger article in 'The Daily Mirror' from January 8<sup>th</sup> 1996. Steve Hedley is to be commended for putting the safety of rail workers and passengers before his livelihood.

During the period 1995-98 the political profile of Steve Hedley himself was increased, giving him an important leadership role amongst railworkers, who would also have been aware of his expressed contempt for the RMT bureaucracy whose fear before the anti-trade union laws and the employers' powers can be demonstrated:

"If there's one thing that the recent catalogue of disasters have shown is that railworkers cannot rely on Aslef or RMT executives to fight the employers" (Harlesden RMT branch and Colin Roach Centre, joint leaflet, 1996).

As a result of the activities organised between 1995 and 1998 management clearly decided that Steve Hedley must be got rid of and there was a constant round of attacks on him for carrying out his functions as a shop steward and safety representative. All of these were defeated.

However, GTRM finally got its way when it sacked him on July 29 1998. The dismissal arose from an incident on the picket line at Euston station on July 2, when a contractor's van was driven at striking rail maintenance workers.

The picket was in support of a national pay dispute, taken after a ballot under the anti-trade union laws, and backed by the RMT. The fact that there was a strike at all cannot be solely attributed to Steve Hedley, as there were certainly major grievances amongst maintenance staff, but he was a major driving force in getting action to take place. It would not be stretching the issue to argue that his speech at a special conference in Doncaster in March 1998 won over reluctant activists to strike action, which was to involve coming out for two, three or four days at selected times and dates.

On July 3 1998, a contractor picked out Steve as the person who had damaged a wing mirror on the van which had been driven at pickets the day before. The contractor described the person who broke the mirror as wearing a bomber jacket, faded blue jeans and brown boots. Steve Hedley was able to provide photographic evidence, in the form of a colour picture from the



previous day's picket which had appeared in the *Newsline* daily paper. This showed him wearing a blue jumper, dark blue jeans and black shoes. He was not wearing a jacket. Management did not have a case.

At the disciplinary hearing on July 29 management ignored the evidence and in less than one hour he was sacked. With the police 'pursuing their inquiries' and the officer in charge on holiday for three weeks, management were asked to wait until the completion of any criminal case, but they refused. Subsequently Steve Hedley was to be charged, but the case against him was dismissed when it came to court. There are obvious parallels with the cases of hundreds of miners who lost their jobs during the 1984-5 dispute. Originally Steve Hedley had been suspended from work, but he was quickly reinstated when a large number of maintenance staff took strike action in sympathy. He was then suspended again despite promises that he could work at the Willesden depot whilst they made inquiries. Workers at his depot at Euston remained on strike, but others returned to work, leading Steve himself to suggest to Euston workers that they return to work and await the outcome of any disciplinary hearings before taking further action.

The RMT promised Steve "full support" in any fight to get his job back and the assistant general secretary Bob Crow agreed to represent him at any disciplinary hearings. What transpired, however, was very far from "full support". With Steve facing a possible criminal prosecution, he needed a solicitor, especially as management were intent on using the police investigation as an excuse to have him sacked. Furthermore, statements from witnesses needed collecting. In fact, it took the RMT three weeks to get Steve a lawyer. There never was the evidence to charge Steve with criminal damage. But the threat of a conviction gave management enough leverage to sack him. If the union had appointed a solicitor immediately it is likely that the police would not have pursued the matter.

With Bob Crow agreeing to represent

Steve Hedley, it appeared that he would get properly represented at any disciplinary hearings. Chance would be a fine thing. Bob Crow did not meet Steve to discuss the case in the two weeks after his suspension. He agreed to see him on the afternoon of July 28, one day before the disciplinary hearing. Witness statements which should have been taken were not. When Steve Hedley, in the company of Graham Smith, turned up, Bob Crow was in a meeting and, frustrated at being forced to wait, Steve Hedley knocked on the door to ask when it would be finished. He was told to "get out" and, desperate for assistance, he was taken to see a solicitor who gave him what advice he could. Only later did Bob Crow see him.

In the weeks between his suspension and dismissal the RMT made no attempt to get any press or TV coverage about the case. No press release was issued and the union did not, it would appear, send a circular to branch secretaries or stewards. The Colin Roach Centre did send out a press release which gained coverage in leftwing newspapers as well as a couple of local newspapers.

Throughout his period of suspension Steve was not inactive in pursuing the struggle for improved conditions for railworkers, and on the evening of July 25-26 he organised a picket at Hither Green in south London, where contractors employed by Balfour Beatty were breaking an overtime ban amongst rail maintenance staff. Although the local shop steward, a member of the revolutionary group which sells the *American Militant*, failed to honour her promise to turn up, this did not prevent the pickets from turning away all potential strikebreakers. This, in spite of a police presence! Jobs in and around the London Bridge area were cancelled. Balfour Beatty lost hundreds of thousands of pounds in penalties for lost work.

As a leaflet produced after the event said, "The lessons from this are clear - where waverers are confronted and talked to directly they can be convinced to stay on strike ... and the need for effective picketing



has never been more apparent: it is the key to winning this dispute." Steve Hedley was the co-author of the leaflet. As events were to prove, a more accurate statement could not have been made.

As it was expected that GTRM would sack Steve Hedley on July 29, a meeting was arranged for the following evening in Willesden to discuss what support railworkers could offer in any fight for reinstatement. Steve was joined on the platform by RMT executive members from the West Midlands and Scotland, as well as Brian Higgins from the Building Worker Group, with whom a close working relationship had been forged over a number of years and who was to give an inspiring speech about the need to fight the employers whilst not expecting the full-time officials of any union to do the same.

Mr Brian Higgins  
Secretary  
Northampton Branch UCATT  
2 Bitten Court  
Lumbertubs  
Northampton

Dear Sir,

RE: MR DOMINIC HEHIR

We act for Mr Dominic Hehir and write in relation to a letter from you which appeared in the edition of the Irish Post dated 5th October 1996. We are also writing concerning a pamphlet entitled "Rank and File or Board Left: Democracy v Bureaucracy" and two leaflets entitled "Building Worker" of which you were the author.

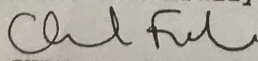
4 October 1996

The letter in the Irish Post and the other material contains highly damaging allegations against our client which are quite simply untrue. You allege that our client "steadfastly and resolutely refused to represent John Jones at an Industrial Tribunal or to test the case in a Court of Law". This is completely untrue as it was Mr Jones who decided that he was not prepared to be represented by Mr Hehir.

The allegation that Mr Hehir was not prepared to defend his members' interests and the further allegation that he was opportunistically appearing in a photograph in the newspaper to secure advantage in an election (which election did not in fact take place) are extremely damaging to our client's reputation as a well known and highly respected official of UCATT. The allegation in the Irish Post and the further allegations in the booklet and leaflets, which have been widely circulated, have caused considerable loss and damage to our client.

We are instructed that unless we receive from you an unconditional apology and retraction and an offer to pay substantial damages and legal costs within the next seven days, proceedings will be issued against you in the Queen's Bench Division of the High Court without further notice. We look forward to hearing from you or solicitors instructed on your behalf by return post.

Yours faithfully

  
**CHRISTIAN FISHER**

Brian Higgins is a Ucatt member who has been victimised and blacklisted by the building employers. He has also faced constant attacks from the officials of Ucatt, including the general secretary, George Brumwell.

It was Brumwell who effectively appointed Hedley to the development officer's post in Ucatt. This was a major slap in the face for Brian Higgins and the Building Worker Group, who have been passionately opposed for 25 years to the bureaucratisation of Ucatt, which includes appointment of officials rather than their election by members. Brian Higgins was, at the time of the meeting, being defended by trade unionists in Britain and overseas against an attack on him by Dominic Hehir, a full-time Ucatt official who had taken out a high court writ for libel against Higgins for daring to criticise him for refusing to support or represent Ucatt shop steward and safety representative John Jones.

**CHRISTIAN FISHER**

SOLICITORS

42 MUSEUM STREET BLOOMSBURY LONDON WC1A 1LY  
TELEPHONE: 0171-831 1750 FAX: 0171-831 1726  
DX 35737 BLOOMSBURY



Jones and plumber Terry Mason were sacked in October 1995 after refusing to accept a transfer from Southwark council's direct labour organisation to a private building contractor, Botes. When they mounted a picket line no DLO workers would cross and only after reaching an agreement that a mass meeting would take place was the picket lifted. This promise was broken and so the picket was reinstated. DLO workers still refused to cross but the intervention of Ucatt convenor steward Tony O'Brien helped force them across.

The Socialist Workers Party publicly backed the convenor's scabbing and were chucked off the picket line after telling those on it it wasn't one! The group of Workers Revolutionary Party members based around *Workers Press*, now no longer in existence, then attacked Jones and Mason, even allowing O'Brien its middle two pages on December 9 to boast of "leading" the workers across the picket line. O'Brien then tried to get Ucatt to discipline Jones and Brian Higgins but failed.

Years later two separate industrial tribunals decided that both workers were unfairly dismissed and they received compensation; making a nonsense of those 'leftwingers' who have lined up with the bosses and the bureaucrats against them. Their actions then have obvious parallels with how they acted during the struggle against GTRM and the RMT bureaucracy during the defence of Steve Hedley.

Brian Higgins, in his struggle with Hehir, stated that he would go to jail rather than surrender the freedom to criticise trade union officials, when this was justified. Hehir had two choices - either take Brian to court or back off. In 1999 he backed down. Steve Hedley had been fully involved in the campaign to defend Brian Higgins and played a progressive role throughout that period. This makes it all the more disappointing that Steve Hedley has agreed to accept an appointed position within Ucatt. It is insulting, offensive and insensitive, to say the least.

At the meeting on July 29 it was agreed it would be foolish to wait until the RMT organised any action. (The RMT's official support centred on the claim that it would not resolve their pay dispute until Steve was reinstated. In fact if the pay claim had been resolved it would have been illegal for the RMT to continue to organise any action on behalf of Steve Hedley without a ballot.) The outcome of an appeal hearing or, worse, an industrial tribunal was many months away.

The RMT did not issue a press release or seek to publicise Steve Hedley's dismissal. Neither did any of the 'leftwing' members on the RMT executive committee - such as Pat Sikorski, Greg Tucker, Bob North or Bob Crow - ask to get involved in any actions which fell outside of the anti-trade union laws. They were not, at this stage willing to denounce workers who might break the law, but neither were they willing to personally involve themselves in organising such action.





At the meeting in Willesden it was agreed to build on the actions of Euston RMT members who had continually demonstrated a willingness to defend their union steward. The plan was to hold a picket at Euston station of maintenance workers on August 3, move quickly on to other maintenance workers at Willesden, then Stonebridge Park and up to Watford. If successful, over 100 maintenance workers would be on strike and then there would be a chance to expand on the numbers by organising flying pickets nationwide.

With the news, received later that week, that those signalworkers starting at 2pm at Euston station 'would not cross a picket line', there was a real chance to smash management's and the government's plans to make railworkers pay for the catastrophe of privatisation: whilst management can draft in scabs to replace maintenance workers, they have much more difficulty in replacing signalworkers, without whom no trains can move.

Armed with leaflets and a burning sense of injustice, pickets assembled at Euston station early on August 3 and, after making sure that no-one crossed, moved off quickly to Willesden Junction, where SWP member Billy Ashcroft was a shop steward. Ashcroft had been dismissed only weeks earlier, but a wildcat strike by other maintenance workers, organised by Steve Hedley and others from Euston, forced management to reinstate him.

Pickets were left at Willesden Junction. We had missed some of the early shift who had gone to work. It was later reported that of the workers represented by Ashcroft only one person had gone on strike. Whether Ashcroft was on strike is not clear: he was not at work, but he could have been on holiday as he was due to go the following day. When we arrived at Stonebridge Park, maintenance workers were just getting ready to go on the tracks and the management who were around tried to prevent us talking with them. A quick meeting, the distribution of the leaflets and the support of the shop steward produced a fantastic response and an immediate walkout.

Some of the strikers then joined with us and off we went to Watford, where our arrival was announced by the display of a large and impressive banner, stating 'Reinstate Steve Hedley'. We were joined by pickets from Euston and Willesden junction. It was clear that there was a reluctance to take any action, as the view was that the recent strikes had not resulted in any concessions from management. Some of the workers were on the track and not due back until much later. It was agreed to wait for them to return to the depot before asking them to go on strike. Pickets stood at the gate, just outside the main entrance to Watford station. The weather was not too pleasant, and some supporters because of work commitments drifted off.

It was a couple of hours before word got round to workers on the track that something was happening back at the depot, but when they did return a meeting was arranged. Steve was clearly under pressure from Billy Ashcroft to prevent either Terry Dunn, an ex-miner sacked and imprisoned during the 1984-5 national miners' strike, or myself from joining him in speaking to the workers. We allowed ourselves to be excluded. What was also becoming a problem was the length of time it was taking to persuade the men at the Watford depot to come out on strike. There was a real fear that we would miss the 2pm signalworkers at Euston station.

After what seemed forever the meeting ended with the great news that the workers had agreed to down tools, but - and it was a very big but - they had made clear that they would only agree to stay out on strike if they got official support from the RMT. It has never been possible to find out whether the workers had put forward this argument themselves or whether Ashcroft had put the idea forward first and the workers had latched on to this in desperation - or in the certainty that the union would not give such support, as was to be proved.

To make matters worse Ashcroft had set up a meeting at the RMT headquarters, Unity House, to 'get official support' at 2pm in the main hall, where we were told



members of the executive committee would meet strikers and their supporters. This was the very time when we were due to picket out the signalworkers at Euston - disaster, we still had the chance to go to see the signalworkers, but it was obvious that the strikers had been persuaded to look to the bureaucracy for direction, when, in fact, they had already shown they had the power to take on management. About 40 of the 120 on strike went to Unity House.

All the lessons learned at Hither Green and throughout August 3 were to be ignored. It should be recorded that history has shown that workers very rarely, if at all, make official support a condition of spontaneously downing tools. These questions always come up and are raised after such actions by the fainthearts and those of a bureaucratic persuasion looking for a way out.

No-one from the Watford depot came to Unity House, where strikers and a large body of supporters were met by North and Tucker. They made clear, at the very start, that they were not representing the executive committee. The best they could promise was to take the strikers' case to "the exec" when it met the following day, but - as they honestly put it - "don't hold your breath". The implication was clear: the union would not support unofficial action. The strikers, who had been persuaded by Ashcroft that they could only win the dispute by getting official support, sat almost silently and most looked thoroughly despondent. There were some who did attempt to argue with North and Tucker, but the pair had the typical argument of left bureaucrats that 'if it was up to them ...' But of course it wasn't!

When North and Tucker - a member of Socialist Outlook, which on paper professes to be a revolutionary socialist organisation - were asked what they would be prepared to do apart from putting the strikers' case to "the exec", there was an audible silence. It was put to them that they should be willing to come on the picket line and argue for workers to take unofficial action. Would they be willing to appeal to workers who elected them? Would they put their names to

leaflets calling for secondary action? Well, "if it was up to them", but, of course, they had to be bound by the democratic wishes of "the exec" who we already knew would not support the action taken, never mind sanction any more.

By their actions both showed that at periods when major events in the class struggle occur the subordination of the left wing of the trade union bureaucracy to the right wing is pronounced. As long as they have no practical obligations they can remain left and even use socialist rhetoric, but once the need for action arises these leftwing leaders concede leadership to the right wing or centre.

The argument was put to the strikers that they had been conned into coming to the meeting and plans should be organised for stepping up the picketing for the following day. In fact, the strikers drifted off to the pub. Morale and confidence had disappeared. Basically they had been persuaded to trust the bureaucracy, or rather the 'left' side of it, and now that they knew this trust was misplaced, they could not stomach much more. At this crucial point only Steve Hedley could possibly have repaired the damage already done, but he himself was not willing or able to put forward arguments for stepping up the picketing. When others did so he remained silent.

As events were to prove, the next morning was crucial. In fact, what happened was that the 20 strikers at Euston remained on strike, Jamie from Willesden stayed out, Stonebridge Park strikers were met by the police and management and forced back to work and at Watford the disarray had a demoralising effect - not least on Steve, who was unable to tell workers whether he was asking for strike action or not.

Some workers stopped their cars and asked, "Steve, what's up? Are we on strike?" He honestly did not know what to tell them. Billy Ashcroft went on two weeks holiday to Greece, thus leaving the man who had been responsible for him having the money in his pocket to go on holiday in the shit.



Meanwhile the RMT issued a statement repudiating the workers' actions of the previous day.

It was clear that Steve Hedley had lost his job and there was now no possibility of him getting it back. Steve himself said so to those closest to him. Statements by the RMT that their dispute over wages would not end until he was reinstated turned reality on its head. If management could sack the leading militant then which workers were going to be willing to put their heads on the chopping block and actually take part in action which would force management to concede to demands for proper wages and conditions? The answer was no-one. Steve proposed to the Euston strikers that they go back to work whilst attempts were made to try and get people back out at a future date. Sadly, we will all be dead before such a date arises.

After this a support group for Steve Hedley was established which on paper had the aim of seeing him reinstated, although its actions almost exclusively concentrated on lobbies and protests outside various rail company and government buildings, leafleting and flyposting, the passing of resolutions at trade union branch meetings, collections and gaining press coverage. The support group would not, could not, did not commit themselves to organising those actions which had temporarily threatened management's 'right to manage', brought out over 100 workers in defiance of the anti-trade union laws and threatened to inspire thousands more, and caused such outright fear amongst the RMT bureaucracy that the union's executive committee had been forced to send a letter of repudiation to all the strikers and denounce them in public in order to protect themselves from being sued by the rail companies under the anti-trade union laws.

"However, the other side of the affair is the manner in which the Aslef executive, followed hours later by the RMT executive, capitulated to the courts. Rather than telling them to 'get stuffed' it was time to express disappointment and dismay. If the unions had been formed by the likes of such people,

there would never have been unions!" (S Hedley, RMT Harlesden branch and Colin Roach Centre, joint leaflet, 1995).

Despite the RMT executive demonstrating their treachery, the support group refused to bar members of them from the group, and members from a range of far left organisations waxed lyrical about the need to "put pressure on the bureaucracy" and of "forcing them to fight". Weeks later posters bearing the picture of Steve appeared in and around Euston. They had been put there by the SWP. Meanwhile Ashcroft remains a member of this organisation - no finer example of how it has degenerated could possibly be found. The SWP was not excluded from the support group even though the role of one of their members was a disgrace.

We now have the nauseating spectacle of the Steve Hedley Support Group establishing the Strike Support Group and a major article in *The Big Issue*, in which Steve as the spokesperson attacks those who "want to talk about dead Russians" - which, bearing in mind that those who set the group up are either self-expressed Stalinists or Trotskyists, is a little strange - and "sectarians", which I can only assume is a defensive reaction to anyone who may want to discuss the role of the bureaucracy in industrial disputes such as his own, as well as once self-proclaimed industrial militants who decide to join them.

There are many lessons which can be learned from the experiences I have described. Perhaps the most important are the following:

- Management attacks on trade union militants are continuing and increasing and are designed to reduce workers' ability to resist changes in working practices and cuts in pay.

- Management are willing to sack people and take a chance on losing an industrial tribunal, as it is a cheap way of getting rid of decent shop stewards.

- The key to winning any industrial dispute is organising flying pickets and going directly to workers in their workplaces. The



employers will attempt to prevent this by sending in the bureaucrats - sadly, so will 'the left' as well. It is my sincere belief that if, instead of going to Unity House on August 3, we had gone to the signal box at Euston we could have dealt a major blow not only to GTRM, but also to Railtrack and a whole host of private train companies. (It is ironic that privatisation has split the rail network into a whole host of small companies, many of whom are vulnerable to strikes.)

The following day it would have been possible to have moved on to Milton Keynes and Northampton and picket out workers there, with whom contacts had already been established. I have also discovered that workers in other parts of England and Scotland were waiting to take action. It is vital that pickets keep moving and do not lose momentum during any dispute. "We cannot expect the bureaucrats to link up the disputes across the country, as this will be illegal. But there is nothing to stop a rank and file organisation doing this, ignoring the bosses, courts and bureaucrats" - Steve in 1995.

☐ Workers in struggle (and before it preferably) need to adopt a policy of organisation and action independent of the full-time union officials.

☐ There is an urgent need to see established a rank and file railworkers' organisation which can and will operate independently of the full-time officials.

☐ When workers are on strike they need to ensure they have access to legal advice and, if arrested, sympathetic solicitors.

☐ The outlook of 'far left' organisations during trade union disputes is to spread illusions in trade union officials by directing those on strike into 'pressurising officials to act' rather than developing the workers' ability to act without reference to the officials.

☐ When major events in the class struggle occur, the subordination of the left wing of the trade union bureaucracy to the right wing is pronounced.

Amongst those being sent copies of this

article are Steve Hedley, Greg Tucker, Billy Ashcroft, the Strike Support Group and the Steve Hedley Support Group. It will also be made available to railworkers, as ultimately it is their views which are the most important. All five of those listed above and the organisations they represent are invited to defend themselves either in print and/or by engaging in public debate.

I would propose that any replies to this article are sent to the *Weekly Worker* for publication. Finally I would challenge Steve and the Strike Support Group to debate the contents of this article with myself and Brian Higgins of the Building Worker Group at a public meeting later this year.

Since this article was completed the following has taken place:

1. The RMT did not take Steve's case to an industrial tribunal on the basis that GTRM had a video of someone like Steve crossing the track without permission. This is a criminal offence. However, this was not the reason he was sacked, so the decision not to take the case to the tribunal cannot be justified.

2. The maintenance companies have made a pay offer and the RMT is recommending acceptance. Formally the union's position remains that until Steve and another steward are reinstated the dispute will continue.

3. The Strike Support Group has agreed to discuss the contents of this document and decide whether to reply in print and/or at a public meeting



## Informer Metcalf's infantile disorder

September 16 1999 - Steve Hedley

In an article in your paper, M Metcalf performs what is described by you as a "Steve Hedley autopsy". First let me use the obvious cliché that reports of my death are somewhat premature. Secondly I question the validity of publishing a personal attack from an individual (who has no party or group) which is fundamentally incorrect and contains sensitive information. Your paper has degenerated into a lefty gossip column.

In a long, rambling article virtually devoid of politics, Metcalf airs his hurt feelings and disappointment at the outcome of the strike following my dismissal from the rail infrastructure company, GTRM. He also criticises me for becoming a "bureaucrat". It is probably easier to deal with this concoction of lies and half-truths as they arise in his diatribe.

Firstly Metcalf claims: "It is no surprise to anyone that Steve Hedley has taken such a job to gain status and an improvement in personal conditions." Let me point out that in my previous job as a railworker the pay was £20,000 a year plus benefits, and I now receive £17,000 a year as a union official. Hardly an improvement in either salary or status! Further, after the infrastructure dispute a railworker's salary for my job has risen to £24,000 plus benefits. M Metcalf's reasoning does beg the question: what constitutes a union bureaucrat? Surely he does not mean anyone who works for a union, because he himself enjoyed appointed positions in the TUC as a lecturer, as a worker in the Trade Union Support Unit and in Newham Unison.

Perhaps he would like to point out any instance where I behaved in a bureaucratic manner. Indeed the evidence (such as victories in the Bouynes building workers' strike, which involved breaking anti-trade union laws) proves the exact opposite.

Next Metcalf attempts to finger me as a "key man" who was secretly working with the *Mirror* newspaper exposing health and

safety issues at Euston. If these allegations are true, Metcalf has degenerated into nothing more than a 'grass' who is alerting management to my alleged activities, even while he acknowledges that the union is still seeking my reinstatement.

Then Metcalf claims that George Brumwell (general secretary of Ucat) appointed me, when in fact I was appointed by the union's NEC, which did include Brumwell. My decision to accept this job was a political one. No serious communist is going to turn down the chance of organising thousands of building workers for fear of offending anyone.

Metcalf names Bob North as an RMT executive committee member. This is sadly typical of his article. There is in fact no Bob North. I think he is referring to Bob Law, who was on the executive at that time.

Not content with fictional characters, Metcalf claims that the signalworkers at Euston were prepared not to cross a picket line. This was a rumour spread by ourselves in order to panic management, as Metcalf is well aware. With reference to the Watford workers, after a long discussion they were persuaded to go on strike, but they insisted it was only for a day unless the union made it official.

At no time was Metcalf or Terry Dunn prevented from speaking to anyone. Terry will confirm this. It does however cast some light on Metcalf's psyche that he believes that a few wise words from him would have drastically altered the situation. Bear in mind that he was a complete stranger to these workers whom I had known for over 10 years. I believe this indicates that Metcalf is prone to delusions of grandeur bordering on megalomania.

Metcalf then turns his fire on to the "left bureaucrats". In fact Mick Atherton and Greg Tucker did attend unofficial picket lines and urged workers to come out in support of me.

Next he says that I remained silent on the issue of stepping up the picketing. In fact I organised the flying picket from Euston the next day. We went to Watford, where



workers walked straight across the picket line, as they had promised to do if the strike remained unofficial. Meanwhile people at Stonebridge had been intimidated back to work, leaving only 17 staff at Euston and Jamie from Stonebridge still on strike. The RMT meanwhile repudiated the unofficial action - a decision taken by Knapp and then defended publicly by Crow. This practically killed off any possibility to reignite the strike at the other depots. However, the Euston workers visited these depots pleading for support, but none was forthcoming.

We were now in a situation where a strike of over 100 people was reduced to 18 with no possibility of spreading it. As Metcalf knows, the leaders of an unofficial dispute can be singled out and sacked with no right to an industrial tribunal. With this in mind, and after a full discussion, the Euston staff agreed that they should end their unofficial dispute and have an official ballot. In fact none of these staff actually returned to work in the interim because they were all sick. Ballots at all the other depots were lost.

Metcalf then complains that we did not exclude all SWP members because he believed one of them to be a disgrace. This is truly the logic of a lunatic. In fact some SWPers were helpful in spreading propaganda and fly-posting, etc.

He then attacked my interview with *The Big Issue* on the Strike Support Group. The group's purpose is to give practical aid to workers in struggle and it forbids sectarian remarks between the groups that are involved, showing that we put the interests of the class before the interests of any groups. Something which Metcalf is unable to understand. In fact he did turn up to a recent meeting of the Strike Support Group where he aired his views in an emotional and somewhat incoherent way, but was quite free to do so, as we do not stifle debate.

Metcalf descends into complete fantasy-land when he claims to have discovered, after the event, that areas in England and Scotland were ready to come to our aid, and that we could have pushed on to Milton

Keynes and Northampton. In both Milton Keynes and Northampton whole depots were already scabbing on the national dispute and when I attended the RMT grade conference no one claimed that their depot had been ready to come to our aid.

Whilst Metcalf was demanding heroics from the Euston staff, he was ensconced in his management job in a creche in Kilburn. I have known him for four years and during this period he has never been on strike, either official or unofficial. Despite this he thinks he can parachute into every dispute and persuade a workforce to abide by his wishes. This is an anti-materialist view, which results in the likes of Metcalf becoming disappointed with workers: hence his year-long absence from politics during the dispute.

Hypocrisy can be added to his list of crimes, because he advised me, when I was sacked, to get an education or I would end up like Brian Higgins, whom he described as isolated in the union movement with no real base of support except the two other workers in the Building Workers Group, which claims to be a rank and file organisation. Nevertheless Metcalf is now trying to bring Higgins and co into this to give him some credibility with building workers.

I think it is the height of cynicism to condemn me for continuing to play a part in the workers' movement instead of opting for full-time education and a comfortable middle class lifestyle like Metcalf's.

If Metcalf is so interested in benefiting rail and building workers with his self-proclaimed organising abilities, then he should get a job on a site or a rail station. Of course this would mean leaving the cosy creche in Kilburn. However, I am challenging him to do this. Perhaps then his criticisms of those who are trying to organise these workers will have some validity.

Meanwhile could I recommend to him Lenin's *Leftwing communism, an infantile disorder*? This book shows how the correct method is always to be with the workers through their learning curve (brought about



mostly by experience and not leaflets and speeches) on the path to revolution.

Contrast this to Metcalf's method of working on hurt feelings, lashing out and falling into depressions when workers do not follow him. He is now a member of no group and is akin to a crazed individual, standing on a corner shouting 'bastard' to anyone who passes. I know which method I will endeavour to follow and it is certainly not his.

### Disappointed sectarian

September 23 1999 - Dot Gibson

Mark Metcalf makes the classic, false division between the working class and its trade unions, and sets Steve Hedley up as a scapegoat for the failure to win his own reinstatement. Metcalf tells us that "the aim" is to show that Steve Hedley "preferred to rely on the bureaucracy of the RMT and its acolytes in 'the British left' rather than the rank and file railworkers who he had already inspired to take action". "By doing so" he "turned his back on his closest supporters, and now he has clearly decided that 'if you can't beat them [the bureaucracy] then join them'."

This last point refers to the fact that Steve is now a development officer for Ucatt, recruiting and organising on the construction sites. Metcalf's childish view is that anyone who works for a trade union is automatically reactionary.

Regarding independence, they fail to mention that George Brumwell and C. Kelly, a sitting Executive Council member, were on the old executive which, along with the last General Secretary A. Williams, was accused and clearly guilty of orchestrating the ballot rigging and most of the corruption which was and is the main subject of The UCATT Inquiry and Hand Report. G. Brumwell and C. Kelly must have been subjects of the inquiry. Now they are clearly in a position to exercise quite a bit of control over the inquiry and its findings. Whose interests is this in, we ask?

### 'Corruption in UCATT'

Building Worker Group February 94

It is impossible to comment on his reference to the RMT's "acolytes in 'the British left'", because he does not name them. Likewise he does not tell us who he means when he says that Steve Hedley "turned his back on his closest supporters". This kind of phrasemongering is designed to develop an atmosphere of distrust.

There are many lies and distortions, and it is difficult not to suspect Metcalf's motives in distributing allegations which, if true, could place Steve Hedley in great difficulty. I also consider that if a socialist newspaper receives such a piece about an active (and victimised) trade unionist and fighter for socialism, the principled thing to do would be to speak to the victim before taking a decision to give it space. We are not playing games. A gullible reader of the *Weekly Worker* could take it into his/her head that Steve Hedley should be the target for open and even physical attack.

Nevertheless Metcalf's piece is worth commenting on because he is not the only one who rejects the Marxist world outlook, and reduces the problems of the working class to the abstract level of a single dispute, rank-and-fileism and even to a single leader upon whom he heaps blame for his own disappointment. Steve Hedley today, Tony O'Brien (Ucatt member and convenor of shop stewards on Southwark DLO) yesterday and somebody else tomorrow!

The trade union question is the most important question of working class policy. The unions have degenerated from organisations which raised the material and cultural level of the working class, and the extension of its political rights in the period of the rise and growth of capitalism, into the reactionary role they play today when capitalism for its survival is forced to attempt to take away all the gains of the working class. This is the central problem for the working class and for all socialists.

The trade union bureaucracies attack internal democracy, persecute the socialist militants and bend union rules to conform to bourgeois state laws designed to curtail the very reason for the existence of trade unions.



But this reality does not automatically galvanise workers into a fight against the bureaucracy. Bourgeois ideology has to be fought at all levels in the labour movement, and this is the task of socialists in the reconstruction of the workers' movement.

The turmoil in the trade unions, induced by state attacks and the break-up of traditional industries that accompanied the beginning of the end of the boom in 1972, produced the trial and imprisonment of the Shrewsbury building workers' pickets, and the imprisonment and release of the Pentonville Five dockworkers. From 1985 to 1989 the 'old guard' workers attempted and failed to hold on to their jobs and trade union rights in the miners', printworkers', seafarers' and dockers' strikes. Each one was a test of the unions' need to break the anti-trade union laws. Only the miners' and the seafarers' unions were willing to do so and they could not win on their own.

Subsequently the TUC was forced to expel the rightwing EEPTU for their scab role at News International (Wapping). Later OILC was formed by North Sea oil rig workers. Splitting with the TGWU, the AEU and other unions, skilled workers took a lead to organise the low paid domestic and cleaning workers on the rigs. The TUC would not recognise them, but did reinstate the EETPU, which then merged with the AEU to become the AEEU - an arch-reactionary union.

These events were, and are, signs of the break-up of old relations in the workers' movement. A split was covered over and delayed by both wings in the trade unions on the erroneous basis that when the Tories were defeated and a (reformist) Labour government took office the working class and its unions would have political representation to enable them to fight the bosses and bring in legislation to restore basic rights, end unemployment and put a stop to privatisation.

In May 1997 we saw the return of a Labour government with a massive majority. All its policies are directed to upholding the international rule of capital (imperialism),

developing the policies laid down at Maastricht. Together with the other social democratic governments in France and Germany, this government must attack all the gains of the working class, the unions, health, housing, all public and social services, education, rights at work, rights to asylum, etc.


Over the last 25 years exploitation of workers has enormously increased. Younger workers (even those in their 40s) who are lucky enough to have a skill and a job have experienced only privatisation, anti-trade union laws and the threat of unemployment. Communities have been broken up, most workers now have mortgages hanging over their heads and fear taking action they think will threaten the 'stability' of their families. Many are on individual contracts, and are not in trade unions. Millions of others have no skill, no job and no union. Class consciousness has suffered.

Metcalf makes no attempt to concretely reveal these problems and the isolation workers experience. The speed of the attacks by giant international companies on wages and conditions, the anti-trade union laws and the failure of the leadership to fight against them, the stream of defeated strikes of the 'big guns' in the working class (miners, steelworkers, dockers, printers) and the victimisation of militants have sapped the confidence of all workers. Now there is the shock of realising that the Labour government's adoption of these same laws, and its continuation of cuts and privatisation, face workers with the very big responsibility to build their own new socialist party.

Metcalf's conclusion ignores these central questions. His answer is not to understand where workers are coming from, to be with them and build their confidence and class consciousness, but to develop a kind of 'ginger group' to parachute in when workers are in dispute. He says that "the key to winning any industrial dispute is the organising of flying pickets and going directly to workers in their workplaces". Compare this with the rules and aims of the



Strike Support Group: "to give financial aid to workers in struggle; to give striking workers resources to print and publish their own leaflets, etc; to physically support pickets and other demonstrations of workers in struggle." The main thing is to respect and assist the actual organisation that has developed on the job.



**Strike Support Group**

**We meet every Monday at 7.30pm sharp!**

at the Cock Tavern, Phoenix Road, between Euston and Kings-X.

We help workers in struggle and this year have helped rail, tube, bus, building workers, and more. We helped the Jubilee electricians and student occupations, we help the Sky Chef strikers .....and so on.

**Bus, tube and rail workers join with us every week - and meet each other.**

**ALL WELCOME**

Metcalf puts great emphasis on establishing "a policy of organisation and action independent of the full-time union officials". What does "a policy of organisation and action" mean? Metcalf does not explain. For him it is sufficient that this must be "independent of the full-time officials", because for him all full-time officials are traitors. However, there can be no substitute for patient recruitment, the development of organisation and the building of a socialist tendency to fight for *unions independent of the state, democracy in the unions*, and for the development of *internationalism* to combat the attacks of global companies.

Workers' loyalty to their union and respect for the leadership are not negative. Neither do most workers share Metcalf's view that all trade union organisers are reactionary. What is the point of a trade union without organisers? And what is the point of militant workers avoiding this responsibility? Like everyone else these organisers must be tested; what they do must come within the campaign for inner-union democracy.

Metcalf treats workers as though they have no opinion, as though their basic organisations mean nothing to them and they can and will simply and easily jump out of their loyalty to their unions when he and his like come along and tell them obvious truths about betrayals, etc. The trade unions have a proud, historic place in the making of the working class. That history does not belong to the bureaucracy. Defence of the right to organise in trade unions on the job is the first step to making the necessary changes.

It was for this reason and against this background that Steve Hedley was victimised to deny representation to an important section of workers. From the outset he was faced with the RMT leadership's refusal to defy the anti-trade union laws (the union conference decision, stating that such action could be taken, vaguely left it to the officials to decide when it was appropriate).

Therefore, when the Euston GTRM workers took unofficial action for his reinstatement, they were immediately weakened when they came into conflict with their union. General secretary Jimmy Knapp sent a letter of repudiation disowning the strike. This was later followed by the actions of some of the company reps (influenced by GTRM management) who insisted that Steve's reinstatement could not be part of the negotiations on the new contract.

Then his industrial tribunal was cancelled because his legal advisors considered that the company's CCTV footage contradicted some of his witness statements. After that the union's EC recommended acceptance of the deal without including in their circular to the branches the principle of Steve's reinstatement. By this time settlements had been reached on negotiations with all the other rail maintenance contractors, and the GTRM workers were getting fed up with the long drawn out negotiations. Many resented the fact that 14 days of strike had not resulted in a satisfactory settlement.

A number of key workers went off and got other jobs, and some RMT members left the union and joined the AEEU instead.





No 2 May 1999

Rank & File Transport Workers'

# UNITE!

Rail + Tube + Bus workers = the Triple Alliance

## We have the POWER

Greetings from  
**UNITE!**

London alone there are transport workers' unions of public transport workers. In order to win these struggles workers must allow themselves to be... and safety. For us workers it must mean constant conflict with the employers whose interests are in maintaining all these things. In order to win these struggles workers must allow themselves to be... with ourselves one of the most powerful direct action forces around. And then there's the millions of pensioners, who should all get immediate free public transport and pensioners, like the... already in

Whether Metcalf likes it or not, years of setbacks do not create a militant working class. There is hesitancy, individualism, fear of breaking the law, of moving against official leaders and mainly of losing jobs.

Metcalf shamefully pours scorn on Steve Hedley's real and not imaginary understanding of the GTRM workers, and his responsibility towards them. Under Steve's leadership two issues of the Support Group paper, *Unite!*, were published explaining the issues, together with an issue of *Unite!* written and prepared by a meeting of rail and bus workers. Thousands of leaflets were distributed. But by then he was out of the workplace, separated from the rest of the workers. The company knew full well the importance of such an attack on worker-leaders in its dealings with the rest of the workforce. (Look at the record of the three-year industrial tribunal of the victimised London dockers after the 1989 strike.)

Steve was charged with criminal damage. Management-inspired rumours gave credence to the charges, spreading confusion among some workers, especially when a group of rightwing reps backed up these stories. Steve was innocent. The police dropped the charges and the case was not brought to court. However, all this took up time, during which the rightwing reps were busy on the job with their campaign to separate Steve's reinstatement from the long-awaited wages and conditions settlement.

Continuation of the unofficial strike would no doubt have meant the sacking of the

workforce in the Euston depot, and a further rift with the union leadership, both of which the workers were not ready to handle. As Metcalf reports, the Watford depot workers would only agree to continue the strike if the union made it official.

However, Metcalf is supremely confident of his own ability, and that of Building Workers Group leader Brian Higgins, to convince workers against the advice of their union leadership. He considers that by sending round a group of "flying pickets" from outside, workers should and could sustain an unofficial action against the wishes of their trade union leaders.

Disappointed that the workers were not prepared to do so, Metcalf says: "It has never been possible to find out whether the workers had put forward this argument themselves or whether Ashcroft had put the idea forward first and the workers had latched on to this in desperation or in the certainty that the union would not give such support - as was to be proved!"

Nevertheless he has the answer: "It should be recorded that history has shown that workers very rarely, if at all, make official support a condition of spontaneously 'downing tools'. These questions always come up and are raised after such actions by the fainthearts and those of a bureaucratic persuasion looking for a way out!"

Metcalf tells us that *if* the flying picket had talked to signalworkers instead of going to the RMT headquarters, *if* Metcalf himself had spoken to the workers, *if* Billy Ashcroft



had not gone on holiday, etc, etc, "there was a real chance to smash management's and the government's plans to make railworkers pay for the catastrophe of privatisation".

This may seem to be true in Metcalf's imagination, placing an exaggerated gloss on the GTRM workers' wage and conditions dispute and the victimisation of one of their reps, but - in the real world - it is an oversimplified and romantic view of the situation. *To settle accounts with "the catastrophe of privatisation" requires a mass political campaign!*

It is a pity Metcalf and Higgins do not stop to consider why they remain so isolated; why, after Higgins "gave an inspiring speech about the need to fight the employers whilst not expecting the full-time officials of any union to do the same", the workers at that meeting in the railworkers' club in Willesden on July 29 1998 said they did not want him, an outsider, speaking in such vitriolic terms about the union, on their platform again.

Metcalf should think about why those same workers *did* want Bob Crow on their platform. They reasoned that since he had authority in their union and was responsible for the negotiations they could have a fruitful discussion with him and tell him their concerns. They considered that without the union's full backing they did not have the organisation in place to break the law by continuing the action. Workers are quite rightly wary of sectarian cheers and advice from the sidelines about going it alone without union backing, when they are the ones risking their jobs.

However, workers are concretely faced with fighting for the independence of their unions and the need for their own socialist party. To defend capital today the Blair government is on the attack. The working class will more and more come into conflict with the government and union leaderships which support and defend it. The split in the trade union movement is opened afresh in different circumstances.

How else can we view the decision of the three rail unions, led by the RMT, to oppose plans for the privatisation of London

Underground? How else can we understand the necessity for the Fire Brigades Union to come out against Labour's proposed laws to make a strike of its members illegal? But Metcalf abstractly warns workers that "when major events in the class struggle occur, the subordination of the left wing of the trade union bureaucracy to the right wing is pronounced".

Yes, left reformists subordinate themselves to capital, and it is necessary to study and speak out about the reactionary nature of reformism. However, even the slightest movement of a union against this government will open up opportunities for building the mass workers' movement. It is in the building of that movement that the GTRM workers and millions of others can shed their confusion, develop class consciousness and break their isolation.

At the time of writing the RMT leadership has not signed off the agreement with GTRM because the dispute continues over Steve's reinstatement. His union branch has called an open meeting with Steve and Bob Crow speaking, where these issues can be discussed. Quite rightly the rank and file leadership of that union branch is patiently working towards clarification of the situation the workers face and what kind of organised fight they must conduct.

The working class has lost many battles, but it has not lost the war!



## Letters

September 23 1999 - Mark Metcalf

It is a shame that Steve Hedley could not direct his anger towards the union bureaucrats and their supporters in 'the left' rather than someone who provided so much assistance to him in the period 1995-98. Instead he employs the best traditions of his hero, Mr Stalin, to indulge in a litany of smears, innuendoes and outright lies (*Weekly Worker* September 16).

I am not a boss. I work in a community centre which includes a creche. Last year, at 39, I earned just over what Steve Hedley currently earns. I do not have a middle class lifestyle. I live in an asbestos-ridden, one-bedroomed flat on an estate in Hackney. Steve Hedley knows this, as he stopped at my place on many occasions.

As regards claims that I am prone to "delusions of grandeur bordering on megalomania" or a "crazed individual", then clearly these are recent illnesses, because on July 6 I was asked by Steve Hedley to attend the picket line the following morning. He said, "It would be good if you came, as we need people with experience."

I did attend and Steve Hedley shook my hand and thanked me for coming. I will only be too pleased to work with him at any time, but I will not be willing to keep quiet if I have any criticisms to make. Incidentally I have been going to building workers' picket lines for 30 years, during disputes my dad was involved in.

I will not indulge in smearing Steve Hedley's character. Indeed in my article I wrote, "Steve Hedley has much greater standing than most people" - an assessment I still stand by despite his attacks on me!

Steve is largely unable to challenge the main points in my article and when he does he presents a poor defence. For example, his claim that in regard to signalworkers at Euston it was only a "rumour spread by ourselves in order to panic management" about them taking strike action, then how come at a meeting on August 5 1998 he agreed to approach the signalworkers about taking action? Why didn't he say there was no chance of anything happening? How come at the Strike Support Group meeting I was invited to attend he said in front of 20 witnesses that "only two of the five" were prepared to take action? Incidentally, at the August 5 meeting Steve agreed that 'mistakes' had been made.

Minutes of special meeting held on Wednesday August 5th to discuss support for Steve Hedley and railworkers

Present - BH, PM, SH, E, MM, KI, JK.

There was a lengthy discussion prior to any decision making. Disgust at the actions of the Rmt to send a letter of repudiation to Monday's strikers was expressed by all. Fears about victimisation were voiced. Genuine concerns were expressed about the need to make sure that workers now know they need to take on the bureaucracy, right and left, of the union as well as the management. Opinions were expressed that mistakes had been made when trying to win workers to strike action and that some opportunities had been missed. It was agreed that all railworkers are in a difficult position.

Decisions recorded at meeting were as follows:-

1. A leaflet is to be written aimed at train drivers - this will concentrate on asking them not to take trains onto lines which have had no maintenance (JK)
2. The meeting on Tuesday August 11th will be used to urge strike action on Wednesday. Proposed to picket out Stonebridge and Watford on Wednesday and then go to Euston signalling box to ask for support. SH to find out which workers are on shift at Euston.

Minutes of meeting held on August 5<sup>th</sup>  
1998

SH is Steve Hedley, BH is Brian Higgins,  
MM is Mark Metcalf



Regarding my claim that I advised him to get an education when he was sacked. Pardon me, but he was already studying part-time at college for a degree! Good for him, I say: working class militants should utilise all opportunities to educate themselves, and my original advice was given because I feared he would get sacked and be permanently unemployed.

I did not bring Brian Higgins into anything - Steve asked him to speak at a meeting. Steve also asked for his advice when he was sacked and in the first few weeks after then. He largely ignored the advice.

September 30 1999 - **Brian Higgins**

I would not plumb the depths, the new political low, of Steve Hedley with the lurid and utterly shameful headline, 'Informer Metcalf's infantile disorder' (*Weekly Worker* September 16). Nor do I need to defend Mark against the worse slur and smear on the character of anyone involved in the workers' movement I have ever read in more than 25 years. He can quite adequately defend himself. Incidentally didn't a "dead Russian" coin the phrase, "infantile disorder"?

If Steve Hedley had written a political reply to a very political statement by Mark Metcalf - which clearly outlines the difference between a bureaucratic, broad left approach to industrial activity and organisation and a rank and file one - I would have written a political reply as my contribution to the debate. But I am not about to start swimming in the murky depths in which Hedley is trying to submerge the debate.

What I will reply to is his snide references to and dig at myself and the Building Workers Group of which I am proud to be secretary. It seems he is engaging in the "nano-sized" argument as a substitute for real political debate. On what authority does he base his assertion that there is only myself and "two other workers in the Building Workers Group"?

If we are so small and by inference have such little influence and impact, how come John Laings took out a high court injunction against us in 1986, which we successfully defied? How come full-time Ucat official Dominic Hehir took out a high court writ against me in 1996, with the tacit support of the general secretary and executive council, in another attempt to silence us? We saw this off as well. How did I manage to get 15% of the vote in a three-way contest against two broad left candidates officially backed by the union in a recent election to the executive council?

Recently in furtherance of a Ucat recruitment drive I visited dozens of sites and was very well received by literally hundreds of building workers in this process, to the extent of getting an enthusiastic round of applause in a canteen full of groundworkers on one particular site. None of whom were in the union, but quite a few joined. I will be visiting many more sites. Of course I will be delivering a rank and file as well as the official union message. Maybe not if Ucat general secretary Brumwell reads this!

No, I am not isolated from the only people who really matter. The union bureaucrats and their allies in the broad left have undoubtedly tried to put me in political isolation but have not quite succeeded. I am quite physically and geographically isolated by the building employers with my severe blacklisting but refuse to let it stop me agitating and organising.



## **Gramscian**

**Jon Tait - Lancaster**

September 30<sup>th</sup> 1999

Steve Hedley's appointment to a Ucat official's post, following his dismissal from rail work and, I can only presume, his leaving the RMT union, smacked of Gramscian theory on the nature of trade unions under capitalism, where 'A metalworker's official can pass on indifferently to the bricklayers, the bootmakers or the joiners. He is not obliged to know the real technical conditions of the industry, just the private regulations which regulate the conditions between entrepreneurs and the labour force.

Current pay scales under the construction industry joint agreement range from £4.55 an hour for a general building operative to the craft rate of £6.05 an hour. On average less than Steve Hedley's £17,000 warm office environment and comfortable job security.

Only by a return to the militant rank and file action used in pressing the building workers' charter in 1972 will the beaten, defeatist attitude prevalent on the sites for the past decade be lifted. Unfortunately, as I am sure Steve is aware, a sizeable number of construction workers in this country consider trade unions 'a waste of time'.

## **Words Altered**

**Brian Higgins - October 21 1999**

I want your readers to know the letter to which you attached my name in the Weekly Worker of September 16 1999 is not the one I sent you.

Some words have been altered - which on its own wouldn't be too bad, but important parts of the letter I sent were removed: for example, where I blame the Weekly Worker, as well as Steve Hedley, for smearing Mark Metcalf, as the headline 'Informer Metcalf's

infantile disorder' was your invention and most definitely not Steve Hedley's.

Such political censorship is surely the living proof the 'the dead hand of Stalin' is still very much at the helm in the new CPGB.

## **Unpublished letter**

Graham Smith is best known for his work in Hackney Community Defence Association which defended hundreds of the victims of Stoke Newington Police in the late 80's and early 90's. He wrote the following a few days after Steve Hedley's dismissal. It was sent to 'The Weekly Worker' one year later but they chose not to print it.

1] As soon as possible after Steve had been arrested someone should have taken statements from the pickets who were with him. This is standard procedure for anybody arrested.

2] Those statements, along with copies of the photographs of the pickets should have been made available to i] the solicitor representing Steve when he answered police bail and ii] the union official representing him at work.

3] This would have enabled the solicitor who represented Steve at the police station to warn the police that there was overwhelming evidence that Steve was not responsible for criminal damage. If this has happened it is likely that the police would have dropped the charges there and then. As a consequence, management would not then have had the excuse of the criminal investigation hanging over Steve to go ahead with disciplinary charges.

4.] This would have also enabled his union representative to construct a proper defence case at his disciplinary hearing. Firstly by cross examining management witnesses and showing them to be liars, Secondly, by calling witnesses to counter management



claims. The management may not have reached a different conclusion, but the evidence of wrongful dismissal would be apparent right from the outset. As matters stand, if pickets now come forward to say that Steve did not attack the van and driver, it will look as if people have come forward after he was sacked to try and win his reinstatement. From what I know of the case, his wrongful dismissal claim will be much weaker because of his omission. Even if Steve does win at industrial tribunal it is likely that he will be adjudged to have significantly contributed to his dismissal.

5.] I suggest that throughout the case all parties have relied on the threat of industrial action to ensure Steve was not sacked in the first instance, or to secure his reinstatement. This was unbelievably complacent by all involved. If management were convinced that Steve was responsible, and that the only evidence collected indicated Steve was responsible, there was no way they could be seen to give in to workers' threats where a criminal offence had been committed. It was crucial that Steve, his legal representative and RMT officials collected the necessary evidence to show that Steve had been fitted up. In the absence of such evidence they lost the argument.

6.] Now that Steve has been sacked it will be all too easy for the RMT to declare that there is no support for strike action to reinstate him. Thus they will not lose face with the membership and will continue to claim their militant credentials.

7.] Major responsibility for Steve's dismissal rests with RMT officials who, as far as I have been able to ascertain, did not take his situation seriously at any stage. I attended two meetings with RMT officials to give advice. On the first occasion I met four officials in a pub. They did not know what the legal situation was, or that Steve was not being represented by the union solicitors. They thought that all that was necessary was for Steve to speak to the union solicitors and everything would be sorted out. Despite attempts to raise other points of concern with them, they kept saying that they were not aware that he was not being represented by the union solicitors. Any attempts to discuss anything was futile.

8.] I also attended Unity House the day before Steve's disciplinary hearing to meet Bob Crow who was to represent Steve at his disciplinary hearing. He failed to appear after 40 minutes without giving an apology as to why he was late, so I took Steve to meet a solicitor who phoned management in an attempt to adjourn the disciplinary hearing, which he failed to do. Steve took notes as to how he should defend himself at his disciplinary tribunal.

9.] My impression is that the disciplinary hearing acted as a kangaroo court with management having diligently collected the evidence to sack Steve as a substitute for the lack of evidence to convict him of a criminal offence. Although the RMT may not have colluded with management in sacking Steve, their failure to prepare and their general complacency meant Steve went into his disciplinary hearing unrepresented.



## Some final points – March 10th 2000

It is now over six months since Dot Gibson and Steve Hedley responded to my original article in which I asked 'Could Steve Hedley have kept his job?'

It is not necessary to repeat all the arguments I outlined in this and the letter that was later printed. Neither is it necessary, because I agree with them, to go back over the points raised by Brian Higgins. It is up to the readers of this pamphlet to make up their own minds and I am confident in their abilities to see through Gibson's bluster and Steve Hedley's anger.

There are, however, a few very small points that do need answering and I will deal with these as briefly as possible.

The first is that I asked 'Could Steve Hedley have kept his job?' a point that neither Gibson nor Hedley address! They are unable to illustrate or argue what the workers needed to do to win the dispute – in fact, they don't even try. What they list is a whole load of reasons why he couldn't get his job back. There is nothing which new groups of workers considering taking action could use in future disputes. Except defeatism!

At least, I tried to say 'yes' Steve Hedley could have got his job back and this is how. If they don't believe that a militant such as Steve Hedley could have got his job back, with over 100 workers on strike on the first day, then what worker[s] [and in what objective circumstances] can defeat their employers when they are sacked? I am attacked for highlighting the role of flying pickets – Gibson and Hedley are silent on this indicating they don't see a role as this would mean workers challenging the anti-trade union laws.

What their arguments both come down to is that workers must wait for the bureaucrats to act – a view I dispute and one which has, will and will always lead to workers being defeated. There is, no longer, a single full-time trade union official prepared to organise and defy the anti-trade union laws; which are the most oppressive

in Europe and continue to restrict workers taking effective action

Of course, no-one advises workers to break the law and go on strike simply for the sake of it. Striking usually ends up costing workers money and time. It creates fear about the future and it can involve conflict with other state agencies such as the Police.

But it is the duty of any workers or political organisation interested in seeing workers win their struggles that they tell the truth and then allow the workers to make their own decisions based on the problems they see before them.

The truth is that a successful strike could very easily involve defying and then breaking the anti-trade union laws [workers risk the anti-union laws being used against them when taking action outside their parameters, and independent of their full time officials, but only break and defy them if an employer or employers take out an injunction and the workers carry on with their militant action the injunction and anti union laws are intended to stop!] by workers picketing out other workers and/or requesting other workers to boycott or black goods. Where workers are not prepared to break the law if used against them then they are defeated.

Mr Crow, who Gibson tells us the RMT rank and file want on their platforms rather than Brian Higgins [they would, he is a railway worker rather than a builder and we are talking rail platforms here] has recently bottled out when following a guards vote of 90% for strike action the employers were granted a High Court injunction. Crow, Jimmy Knapp [more like Krapp} and the RMT Executive called off the strike. It's Gibson that wants Crow on the platform not the workers – most probably want him under it - including a considerable number of people who are still in the RMT, a union which is losing members 'hand over fist' because of selling out members over wages and conditions and not fighting for the reinstatement of Steve Hedley.



It needs repeating that Brian Higgins involvement, and mine, during the GTRM dispute was at Steve Hedleys and his branches request. Brian Higgins was asked to speak at the meeting which followed Steve's dismissal. He was so successful that the workers were fired up and ready to go on strike. Hedley led them into the subsequent half day strike but had no plans to take it any further, leading to the defeat of this militant rank and file action and putting the jobs of the workers who answered his call at risk. As the recognised rank and file leader of these men he, and he alone, was responsible for whatever transpired arising out of his actions in refusing to take the militant strike action any further independent of the full time RMT officials.

Gibson treats the readers to a history lesson. Many of the points she makes can be agreed but she gets it wrong when she says that the between 1985 and 1989 only the miners and seafarers' unions were prepared to 'break the anti-trade laws'. The latter did not do so; if she is referring to the P&O strike they capitulated the moment Sealink took them to court - to make matters worse, NUS leader Sam McCluskie grovelled in front of the judges but still didn't get his assets back, or his car, or flat.

Significantly, she fails to recall one group of workers who did successfully defy and then break the anti-trade union laws. These were the Laings workers in 1986. This was where, led by the Building Worker Group, a group of Locked Out Workers including Brian Higgins defied a High Court injunction and sent flying pickets which stopped work at a number of Laings sites. I wonder why she missed that one?

Of course, all the analysis in the world, doesn't matter if you come to the wrong conclusions. Gibson looks at the situation, all those defeats, all the problems which workers face in order to win and basically concludes that the time isn't right for a successful struggle or strike. In her case the time will never be right. She has no intention of changing the world, she merely wishes to interpret it. She claims that I keep

come backing to asking; if only 'if. Well, I know one thing - if the likes of Gibson didn't exist the workers would be a lot better off!

It is interesting that Gibson suggests that by printing my work 'that Steve Hedley should [could] be the target for open and even physical attack'. As someone who stood alongside Steve Hedley on far more picket-lines than Gibson and who was the first across the road when he was attacked outside Newham Town Hall during an anti-fascist mobilisation in 1995 then it ill becomes an ex-leading member of the ridiculously named Workers Revolutionary Party, with its record of physical attacks and coercion, to fling stones!

As regards Steve Hedley's suggestion that I was endangering any possibility of him getting his job back and grassing him up. Well it was 14 months after he had been sacked that I mentioned that he had assisted 'The Daily Mirror' a year earlier in exposing unsafe practices at Euston. All I can say is that I deliberately waited until as long as possible before writing anything at all about this until it was clear that the public campaign to have him re-instated had ended. In fact, it never was a campaign to have him re-instated as there were no tactics devised which could have forced management to do so.

I have answered Steve Hedley's ridiculous accusations of being middle-class, but if I was would this make my writings any less worthwhile? Who were Marx and Engels? One was a kept man and the other a factory owner - should all their writings be chucked away and disparaged because of this?

I also did not demand heroics of the workers at Euston or anywhere else. Far from it, it was Hedley himself who did this but when they showed they were up for it he took tail and ran away. By his actions he put them in far greater danger of being sacked than anything I, Brian Higgins or any supporter did.

Did he think that all it required was for the workers to walk-out and management



would give him his job back in half-a-day or a day? Or was he convinced that whatever he did management wouldn't back down? If the latter is true then by leading the workers out of their yards he was putting them in danger of being sacked, for which he is to be roundly condemned as someone more concerned with his reputation than the workers' livelihoods.

Finally, readers should be aware that the pay dispute between the RMT and GTRM and the other maintenance companies has been resolved to the satisfaction of the employers with no real gains for the workers after all that time. The RMT officials are no longer even mentioning Steve Hedley's name and he has been consigned to the dustbin of official RMT history.

And what became of the open branch meeting which was being called 'with Steve and Bob Crow speaking' at which 'the rank and file leadership of that union branch' would be 'patiently working towards clarification of the situation the workers face and what kind of organised fight they must conduct'? Crow didn't turn up - the bird had flown!

**Please note** - my criticisms of Steve Hedley's actions are nothing compared to the others who I attacked in my original article, such as Billy Ashcroft and Bob Crow who I can only conclude agree with what was written about them. At least, Steve Hedley defended himself in print.

Readers who would like copies of any of the leaflets or booklets referred to should write to the box number enclosing a s.a.e. Please state which ones you require.

# RPM

No5

## REVOLUTIONS PER MINUTE

For the workers, against the  
bosses, bureaucrats and left-wing  
posers

Readers may be confused as to why this copy is number 5. The simple answer is that the first four issues were produced in the period 1995 - 1997 by members of the Colin Roach Centre and then Resistance. Both are, sadly, no longer. However, in tribute to the work carried out by ex-members the original name has been retained.

In the next few months readers can expect to see a huge range of materials published. There are also some projects which will not be ready for over a year.

Already, RPM has paid for a website on Labour Link's with Big Business. Because of the massive wealth of information it has taken longer than expected to assemble everything. However, throughout March, April and May you can expect to see an enormous amount of dirt, sorry investigative information on Blair's cronies - pardon, don't you mean defenders of the working class!

Keep an eye out for:-

<http://www.red-star-research.org.uk>

Also out for May Day is 'Up Against the Odds - an account of the JJ Fast Food Workers Strike in Tottenham 1995-96'.

Written by John McArthur, an active member of the JJ Workers Support Group, this invaluable piece of work takes a look at the problems of working within the current TUC structures, of police and state