

Catalyst

Freesheet of the Solidarity Federation - International Workers' Association

FEBRUARY 2001 #3

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"WE WILL NOT PRIVATISE THE POST OFFICE" LYING BASTARDS

THE TORIES STARTED THE POST OFFICE PRIVATISATION, BUT GOT SHIT SCARED OF THE PUBLIC REACTION AND GAVE UP. NOW, NEW LABOUR ARE BOLDLY GOING AHEAD. IT SEEMS THEY HAVE LEARNED NOTHING FROM THE TRAGIC RESULTS OF RAIL PRIVATISATION, WITH PROFITEERING LEADING TO KILLING. BLIND TO LOGIC AND REASON, DRIVEN BY THATCHERITE DOGMA, THEY ARE PUSHING ON REGARDLESS.

New Labour make promises they can't or won't ever keep. Tory slogan? Alas yes but (also alas) it is true. Since New Labour came to power, they have presided over a Post Office preparing for privatisation. With the recent announcement that the Post office is to become a public limited company on March 26th, this is now a step closer.

To underline the seriousness of their intent, The Post Office Group will be known as 'Consignia' - which means "left luggage" in Spanish...! Nearly two million pounds of the wealth we have created has been blown on coming up with a new name which can be found in no dictionary and a new logo which would look better on a toilet cleaning product. Quite simply, it is money down the pan.

Apparently "This is an important opportunity for us all - and one which we must grasp". Two million quid would have presented many smaller delivery offices with an opportunity to upgrade catering facilities beyond sweet machines and enable hot food to be offered to staff. It might have been used to provide waterproof coats which actually keep the rain out. It could have given everyone a few extra pounds in our wage packets, or it could have gone towards the long promised five day week for those



Post Office: people for sale

staff who still do not have one.

In any event, when the news broke, it must have brought a sigh of relief from the bosses of the privatised railway network. At least briefly, the focus of public ridicule was no longer them. That the Post Office chose to engage in the 're-branding' of the name, shows how out of date those in authority are. Re-branding is a legacy of 1980's Thatcherite yuppie culture and is seen by the public as such. It has become a byword in 'tarting up' asset stripped, failing public utilities such as the Gas Board, the Railway,

the bus companies, none of which has exactly gone up in public esteem as a result of the name change. The Post Office Group no doubt imagine the name change somehow brings them into the present century. The very fact that thousands of us are still working over forty hours a week and six days a week should bring that idea crashing to the ground.

Whatever name the Post Office would like to be called, those who work for it will continue to have plenty of names of their own for an employer which has never given up treating it's employees in a manner a Victorian mill owner would have recognised.

New image? We don't think so!



The new Post Office (Consignia) logo: Looks uncannily like £2m going down the plughole...

POSTAL WORKERS - TAKING NO SHIT

In 2000, over half the strike days in Britain were in the Post Office. Most were unofficial. The run-up to the New Year saw plenty of direct action, with royal mail workers walking out across Britain. In particular, Mersyside postal workers weren't afraid to show their anger at management tactics. Bootle were out, which spread to Liverpool, while Frodsham (30 staff) came out in November. Then West Derby in Liverpool (70 staff) were out between Christmas and New Year.

But feelings are running high nationwide over management attacks, as the new Labour drive towards back-door privatisation continues (see elsewhere in this issue). The following strikes have taken place in the past few weeks: Coventry, Luton, SE1, SE28, Bridgewater, Oxford, Cardiff, Edinburgh, Belfast, Swindon, Bristol, Blackpool, Bradford, Keighley, Guildford, Fife and the Lothians. Romford were on a work to rule, counters were out in East London, Bromley and Dartford, and Parcelforce had sit-ins at Liverpool and Oldham offices.

On 12th January, a worker was suspended at Liverpool's Copperas Hill Mail Centre and staff immediately walked out in support. The worker was accused of swearing at a manager who himself swore.

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By the middle of the following week, all delivery offices in the Liverpool postcode area had gone on strike.

Postmen and women were joined by catering and clerical staff. Colin Churchill, Area Manager took every opportunity to state Royal Mail's case on local TV and radio broadcasts. His favourite word seemed to be 'unlawful' and he repeated this word with the regularity of a demented parrot.

A writ was issued naming local union officials in an attempt to intimidate staff into ending the dispute. In response, the strikers escalated their demands, while Rail Terminal staff in Warrington, Scotland and London began refusing to handle Liverpool mail.

Crewe office refused to unload scab mail from Liverpool. The next day, four Crewe workers were suspended and over 350 staff walked out, followed by staff at Congleton. Staff across Cheshire were instructed by the union (CWU) to keep working. By the 20th, managers began moving mail from Crewe to other offices in Cheshire and parts of Merseyside. Two days later, staff at Warrington, Altrincham, Runcorn, Lymm, Frodsham, Winsford and Tarporley decided not to handle the scab mail. Staff were asked to leave the premises and were told that pay would be stopped. Bosses told staff that the action was 'unlawful'. One local rep enquired "Whose law? Not ours."

With Cheshire showing solidarity with workers at Crewe and Liverpool offices, management were forced to concede defeat. The sacked worker was reinstated and bosses agreed to an independent inquiry into the much-hated conduct code. This was a spectacular victory - it may even be the beginning of the end for the hated 'Way Forward Agreement' which has given bullying managers the green light to victimise anyone they take a personal dislike to. We might have acted unlawfully, who cares. Morally we were right all along.

Contact the Communication Workers Network for the latest info. or to get involved. CWN, c/o PO Box 29, SW PDO, Manchester M15 5HW. solfed@solfed.org.uk

SUPPORT THE CSL3!

→ THE CSL3 - SACKED FOR DEFENDING OUR SERVICES

Three CSL workers were sacked before xmas, for whistle-blowing. They had the cheek to expose their employer's inefficiency and poor level of service in its privatised housing benefits operations.

THE BACKGROUND

CSL is a wholly owned subsidiary of Deloitte Touche Tohmatsu - the privatised housing benefits company. London Borough of Newham contracted out most of its Housing Benefit (HB) service to CSL in June 1999.

Housing Benefit is paid to the poorest and most vulnerable in our community to help with housing costs. It is a complex benefit to administer and the council publicly admitted 'teething troubles' with the company. The combination of performance targets, cost-cutting, a backlog of work and 'private sector management methods' have had an impact on service delivery. In a recent radio interview about the problems the company was having in its numerous HB contracts, CSL spokesperson Ian Scotter admitted; "we were naive in estimating the work involved (in administering housing benefits)".

THE VICTIMISATION

Staff have dared to speak out in defence of a service and the welfare of workers at CSL, and have been sacked for it. Such is the working atmosphere, and the treatment that they are receiving, that staff are leaving on an almost daily basis. They are not being replaced, which increases the workload for those left. Now, elected staff representatives have been sacked for taking up these issues with CSL on behalf of the rest of the staff.

THE UPDATE

Some local authorities have admitted that "outsourcing" (privatising) housing benefits has not worked. CSL seem fearful of public scrutiny of the service. The implications of what has happened are wide ranging. If it continues, people applying for benefit will receive a poorer service. New Labour plan to roll-out privatisation across the country and CSL management are scared that if their tactics are exposed it may affect their chances of getting more lucrative contracts like Newham. If you claim Housing Benefit, work for a local authority, have concerns about housing issues, or have an interest in services in the public sector, you owe it yourself - help stop CSL and their likes.

Solidarity pickets have been taking place in support of the sacked workers. In Sheffield, where CSL are also dealing with privatised housing services, there is widespread sympathy with the sacked workers. Several workers at the CSL housing office offered support for the campaign.

Meanwhile, the legal process for the CSL3 continues. The Interim Industrial Tribunal could have recognised that the sacking could have been due to union activity. This would have ensured that the CSL3 would get wages until the full tribunal. However, UNISON sabotaged the Interim IT by failing to inform it of the case. As a result they have now been victimised by the bosses and trampled on by UNISON. With families to feed, they remain sacked without pay for doing what any decent people could be expected to do.

Support the CSL3 - discuss it in your workplace and alert your union - offer support. Contact us - we aim to raise the profile of this scandal, and we need your help to do this. Question your local privatised council services - see if the same or similar is happening in your area.

Why was I sacked?

CSL have never denied that the workers were right. Their response has been to victimise three of the workers' spokespeople. We were sacked for gross misconduct on November 20th. The main charge was "causing grave embarrassment" to the company.

The basis of the case against us is that we deliberately sought, through flyposting, handouts and correspondence, to bring CSL into disrepute. The idea is that this would damage current and future business, cause embarrassment to existing clients, and a rift between Clients and CSL. The letter sacking us was five pages long.

So CSL have sacked three people and, in so doing, put their families through misery, just for voicing the workers' concerns. Ignored by the union, UNISON, CSL workers, friends and relatives of the victimised people, have decided to set up a support group. Together with members of the Solidarity Federation, they are carrying out leafleting and picketing of the company.

Urgent support is needed to save our jobs. We feel also that this is a national issue, and joint action is needed for change. CSL are not interested in providing a good service for benefit claimants and now they're victimising and bullying the workers who dare to speak out against this situation. Who will be next?

Sacked CSL Worker

Write to any of the following and register your concern:
Kim Mason, Contract Manager, CSL Group Limited, Broadway Chambers, 2 The Broadway, Stratford, London E15 4QS.
Brian Reece, CSL Chief Executive, 1st Floor Ashton House, Silbury Boulevard, Milton Keynes MK9 2HG. Tel 01908 830 900 Fax 01908 848 110
John Connolly, Chief Executive Deloitte&Touche, Stonecutter Court, 1 Stonecutter Street, London EC4A 4TR. Tel 0207 9936 3000 Fax 0207 583 1198
Newham Council Leader-Sir Robin Wales, Members' Post Room, East Ham Town Hall, London E6.
The CSL3 need money for their campaign - send donations (cheques to "S. Stone"). For more information and a list of Deloitte & Touche offices, contact; CSL3 Support Group, PO Box 1681, London N8 7LE. Email; housingbenefit@hotmail.com

PROBLEMS AT WORK No.2

ASBESTOS - THE UNDISCRIMINATING KILLER.

Asbestos now kills a staggering 3,000 people a year in Britain – worldwide, the death toll can only be guessed at. The first clear case of death due to asbestos appeared in the medical literature in 1924. Since then, capitalism has done all it can to hide the truth from workers. First we were told asbestos was safe, then that only blue asbestos posed a danger, then that while all asbestos is dangerous, it is only when you are exposed to large amounts. Only recently, have they finally admitted that asbestos kills and that there is no safe level of asbestos dust in the atmosphere.

The truth may be out, but the corporate campaign to deceive continues. It is now clear that companies and a scientist lied about the dangers of asbestos in a similar manner to how they lied about tobacco, but on a bigger scale. Asbestos is treated more like disease than a preventable industrial injury. It helps that the victims tend to be older and up to a quarter are ex-building workers. No media glamour stories there. Just working class males struggling to breathe, getting by on welfare or state pensions.

The threat posed by asbestos has not gone away. As many as 1.5 million work places in Britain contain asbestos in some form or another. Yet the danger posed by it is rarely mentioned. Legally, every employer should have carried out a risk assessment, which includes assessing the asbestos risks. In reality, they often ignore health and safety law. After all, it is the cheapest option. Even when they knowingly expose workers, typical fines are as low as £1,000.



Clearly, appealing to managers is futile. The only way of avoiding the danger of asbestos is for workers to take matters into their own hands. Whether in a union or not, you have the right to be consulted by management regarding health and safety. Raise the matter with your safety rep. If you do not have a safety representative, discuss it with people at work and ask management for copies of the building risk assessment. See if the building has been checked for asbestos. If not, request that a survey be carried out. New laws will soon come out which will compel management to find out whether asbestos is present in the workplace. Make sure management abide by them.

If asbestos is discovered, do not accept the nonsense that it is somehow safe if not disturbed. Do not fall into the trap of thinking only manual workers can be affected. Office workers are as much at risk- when new computers are being installed or during office renovation, it is not only those doing the work who are exposed to the dust. Even without any works, air conditioning and other air circulation systems will spread any dust around. Remember what is at stake, asbestos kills - make sure you are not its next victim.

**WRITE TO CATALYST FOR A FULL & FRANK ANSWER TO A PROBLEM AT WORK,
OR CONTACT THE ANSAPHONE HELPLINE FOR ADVICE - 0161 232 7889**

CATALYST, 5F, PO Box 29, SW PDO, MANCHESTER M15 5HW. solfed@solfed.org.uk

LOSE THE LEVY

The idea of using Tory legislation might seem tasteless, but have you tasted Tony lately? This is a question of the lesser of two evils. Complete and send the form below to your Union HQ and copy it to your pay office for immediate relief.



Political Fund Exemption Notice

I hereby give notice that I object to contributing to the Political Fund of the union and am in consequence exempt, in the manner provided by Chapter 6 of the Trade Union and Labour Relations (consolidation) Act 1992, from contributing to that fund.

Signature.....

Name.....

Membership number..... Payroll No.....

Address.....

Date.....

Union and branch:.....

GENERAL PIMPS

The GMB has a new deal with the Bank of Scotland to create a new improved credit card. The union blurb to members boast that the GMB used its power to "negotiate a great deal". This at a time when debt in Britain is at an all time high and debt counsellors report that the number of people contacting them with debt problems has trebled since last year. Not so long ago, unions sought to improve workers lives - some even sought to overthrow capitalism. Now it seems, they have been reduced to pimping business on behalf of capitalism.

RACISM KILLS

Jermaine Lee, a postman in Birmingham, was just 26 when he hanged himself. He left a heartbreaking suicide note for his mother in which he described why he had been driven to take such a tragic step. His parents have won the right to a posthumous employment tribunal which will take place in April. They contend he had been "bullied and harrassed by a number of managers". Why? Because he was black.

No amount of re-branding and public image massage will do - capitalism and nationalism breed racism and bullying. To do away with both, we must first dispose of capitalism and realise the value of human life.

McFUTURES

Many people think anarchists have paranoid delusions about McDonald's. Well, maybe we haven't been paranoid enough. According to this bastion of the establishment, McDonald's have extended their well-known legal attacks against any business using "Mc" in their name. They sued a sausage stand in Denmark (McAlian's), a coffee shop in California (run by a woman named McCaughhey) and a British sandwich shop (named McMunchies). The worst so far was the health care company in Switzerland named McWellness. McDonald's say they might want to branch out into medical services, and see McWellness as copycats... Other McDonald's registered trademarks include "McTravel" and "McFuture"... The future suddenly seems tasteless.

**EVENTS, ACTIONS,
CAMPAIGNS...**

**March 2001:
Global Women's Strike**

On 8 March 2000, women in 64 countries went on strike! Prepare for 8th March 2001 - strike for a world which values all women's work & all women's lives, an end to no pay, low pay & too much work.

Called & co-ordinated by the International Wages for Housework Campaign, Crossroads Women's Centre, 230a Kentish Town Road, London NW5 2AB.
Tel: 020 7482 2496
Fax: 020 7209 4761 E-mail: womenstrike8m@server101.com
Website: <http://womenstrike8m.server101.com>

Justice for Mark Barnsley

Mark Barnsley is an activist, fitted up prisoner and victim of the state. He has refused to bow to the prison regime or admit to a crime he did not commit. As a result, he has refused parole and has recently been segregated - again. Contact the Justice for Mark Barnsley Campaign for details on how you can help with actions and solidarity.

Write to: Justice for Mark Barnsley - PO Box 381, Huddersfield HD13XX. www.appleonline.net/markbarnsley/mark.html Write to Mark directly at his new address: Mark Barnsley WA2897- HMP Frankland, Brasside, Durham DH1 5YD.

**National Civil Rights
Movement**

Support for asylum seekers. Pickets of ASDA by Manchester Committee to Defend Asylum Seekers, c/o Immigration Aid Unit, 400 Cheetham Hill Rd, Manchester M8 9LE. Email: Markrantz@aol.com Nationally, contact NCRM, 14 featherstone Rd, Southall, Middx UB2 5AA. Tel. 020 8574 0818

Simon Jones Campaign

Simon Jones was killed within 2 hours of starting work as a casual dock labourer. Recently, the Simon Jones memorial campaign has won a landmark victory - they have forced the HSE to take the most unusual step - to prosecute his employers for corporate manslaughter. For the latest and how to help, see www.simonjones.org.uk. Stickers, posters and a campaign video are available for a donation; cheques should be sent to Simon Jones Memorial Campaign, PO Box 2600, Brighton BN2 2DX.



Casualisation Kills

Public Meeting, Saturday 10th February 7.30pm. Free entrance - discussion and video. Venue: Rutland Arms, 86 Brown St, Sheffield S1. For details of other meetings around the country, contact Catalyst.

FAILING THE DOORSTEP CHALLENGE

Election time is once again upon us. **Time for the politicians to polish up their ideas and parade before us in an attempt to convince us that they, and they alone, are best suited to rule over us for the next five years or so. This time around, the Marxist left in its many shades are united in their opposition to Labour. Last time, they were almost united in arguing that the Labour Party, as the mass party of the working class, should get our vote. Now, the all embracing Socialist Alliance has taken its place alongside the SLP and the Socialist Party, urging us to vote for them and kick out the Thatcherite ex-mass party of the working class.**

In a number of recent bye-elections the various "socialist alternatives" have had some success, gaining a credible share of the vote. At first sight, it is tempting to applaud the fact that the undoubted hard work but in by committed activists is paying off. Maybe there is the first sign of a revival of the left in Britain, after the bleak years since the defeat of the miners. This is a seductive argument, but it completely misses the real point. The moral demise of the Labour Party indicates the stark reality. It is the end of the political line for a set of ideas that held sway over the British labour movement for most of the 20th century.

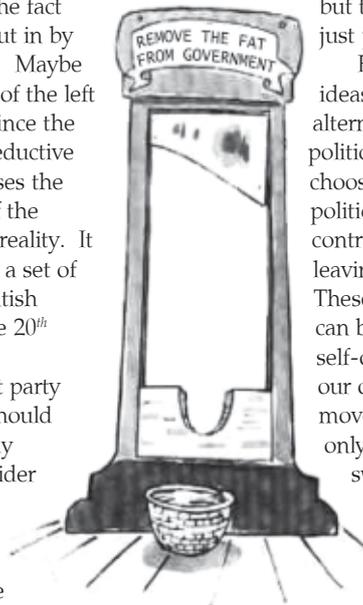
The central feature of the left party idea was that the trade unions should limit themselves to the day to day economic struggles, while the wider political struggle could be left in the safe hands of the politicians in the form of the party. The aim was to capture control of the

state, which would then be administered by the politicians on the workers' behalf. What we are being asked to believe now by the various socialist alternatives is that is not the idea that failed, but the Labour Party itself.

But, if it is just the Labour Party that was flawed, why did all the various Marxist parties, dating right back to the Communist Party from the Second World War onwards, spend decades urging us to vote Labour? The reality is that there is no difference between how the Labour Party was and how the new "socialist alternatives" are now. It was not the Labour Party that failed, but the ideas upon which the party was based. In requesting our vote, they are asking us to start again and build a new socialist party build on the very same set of ideas that culminated in Tony Blair. Do we really need another Tony Party? One

can be forgiven for making a mistake once, but to make the same mistake twice is just plain stupid.

Fortunately, there is a different set of ideas to those of the "socialist alternative". It involves forgetting about political parties. Instead, it means choosing direct action against electoral politics; for workers' control against state control; for self-organisation, against leaving power with politicians and bosses. These ideas reject the view that capitalism can be voted out of power. Only through self-organisation can we all start setting our own agenda for change. A vibrant movement of confident struggle is the only one which will be capable of sweeping away capitalism and creating a self-organised society, based on freedom and liberation rather than profit. This is the true alternative to Labour.



Sparks says:
**Let fly
or die**



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