



# ON THE BUSES

by PENNY FAIR, Solidarity Pamphlet 53, 30p



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# ON THE BUSES

One of the things which most impressed me when I started to work on the buses, was the gap between reality and the public's conception of the job. While everyone who has travelled by bus is aware of the physical conditions in which conductors and drivers have to work, most people have very little idea of the way buses are run, the shift-work system, what goes on in the garages or the rules and regulations under which crews are meant to work.

Chiswick was my introduction to the rulebook side of things.

## TRAINING

My reasons for joining L.T. were very similar to those of a lot of the younger bus conductors; escape from the monotony of a 9-5 job, the imagined independence of life out on the road, meeting a constant variety of people, instead of being cooped up in a building and being part of a tightly controlled hierarchy with boss, foreman, manageress etc., breathing down your neck, "good money"\* (as a woman the attraction of equal pay, before the Equal Pay Act) and the possibility of being trained as a driver, after 6 months on the back of a bus.

I know that when I turned up at L.T.'s training centre at Chiswick I wondered what on earth we were going to spend 2 weeks learning in order to be initiated into the art of bus-conductoring. There were 25 of us in the class; 3 women (a young Jamaican girl, me, an older Irish woman) and 22 men aged between 18 and 50 (2 Indians, an African, 4 West Indians, 10 English, 2 Scottish and 3 Irish).

The emphasis of the first day was on L.T.'s corporate image. First of all Uniform Issue and our duty as 'public servants' to look tidy and be hardworking and polite at all times to maintain the 'good relationship between L.T. and the public'! Then a series of talks from officials of various ranks welcoming us to

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\* Basic rate £45.31(-£47.84) with receipt bonuses and other allowances including London Weighting and unsocial-hours payments, the average rostered earnings for a 40-hour week are between £57.50 and £67.50. August 1975.

the beginning of a life-long career in transport, the benefits to all areas of life in working for the company; free travel, holiday homes for the sick, retirement schemes, sports facilities, family outings, etc.

Then we were shepherded into a hall for recruitment to the Union (TGWU - dues to be deducted on payroll automatically) where we were offered yet more goodies in the form of insurances to cover sickness, accidents and death, and were assured by the T.U. official rep. that there was no need to worry because the union was 'not political or a trouble-maker'. Shades of things to come...

Next day, awkward and sheepish-looking in our cardboard-stiff new uniforms we reported (minus 3) for 2 days training before being sent out to our garages for a week's road work. From the security on the gates to the shouting style of pounding information into us, the emphasis on order, parrot-learning and the blackboard, the officials obviously model Chiswick on a cross between the army and a victorian board school.

The main practical things we learnt before going to our garages were:

- (1) How to make out a way bill: the record of tickets sold out of the machine which you are issued with for your day's work. At the end of each journey the number of tickets of each denomination must be entered together with a total on the way bill, and at the end of the day the grand total must be worked out (the sum of so many tickets sold at 8p., so many tickets sold at 4p. etc.) and correspond with the actual money taken by the conductor during the shift. If you're not quick at simple arithmetic you can get yourself in a right mess, and over the weeks waste hours of your own time as L.T. only allow 10 minutes for making out way bill and paying in at the end of the day.
- (2) How to read a fare chart.
- (3) How to fill in a log card: the card which each bus carries made out by the first conductor of the day with its registration number, running order no., route no., garage, and on which each successive conductor who takes over the bus must record name and no. of driver and conductor, machine no., and times of arrival and departure at each end of journey (in continental time) together with details of any unscheduled stops, changes of bus for mechanical reasons etc.

and perhaps most basic -

- (4) How to work a Gibson Machine: from putting on the harness to

ringing up different price tickets, while taking money and giving change. Also how to work old type of ding-ing clipper machine.... just in case the Gibson Machine breaks down. (All eventualities are catered for by an L.T. rule, which you soon discover when you're set to learn the small blue volume of them, which must be carried at all times by crews on duty).

On Thursday we had to report to our various garages for training. I was lucky, my instructor (contrary to Chiswick-inspired fears) turned out to be a friendly woman (Hallo love, I'm Rose and this is Albert my driver) who had worked on the buses for years and on the trolleys before that; an old-style conductress who called out all the stops, farestages and places of interest on the route, but with none of the cringing servility towards the public which had sickened us all at the school (yes sir, no sir, 3 bags full sir).

While Rose rang the bell, I spent the day just trying to come to terms with the machine and money and in the rush hour getting in complete confusion, swapping all the wrong tickets I had rung up. (Rule 93... conductor must withdraw ticket issued in error, see that passenger is provided with a correct ticket and make appropriate cash adjustment. He must hand in the withdrawn ticket together with a report of the mistake and the name and address of the passenger concerned. Conductors will be credited with the amount involved provided that this rule is complied with).

Running around all day I never noticed my legs aching, but the machine felt like a lead weight round my neck (it weighs  $3\frac{1}{2}$  lbs) and muscles in my left hand were aching. During the next few days I progressed gradually until I more or less knew where we were on the road, usually remembered to ring the bell at stops and not too often at traffic lights, and was working the bus on my own. During our meal breaks and on the bus, Rose and Albert taught me a whole lot of 'wrinkles' about the job, which rules are important, which are more or less impossible to follow and bear no relation to how the job can be worked ("Most of these rules are a load of cobblers but you'll find that behind them all there's one reason - to protect the company from liability if there's an accident, so you remember girl, look after number one, because no one else will look out for you").

Back to Chiswick for 2 days of almost relentless boredom. An afternoon looking at the 40 different travel passes issued by L.T. half of which you may never see again, but each of which has different conditions of use. (This person must be charged a child-fare up to 12.00 on Sat. morning only, that person may not

travel in peak hours, the other may travel from point A to B to C, but not between A and C and not at weekends, etc.). The remaining time was filled with a talk about your liabilities under the law, for L.T. takes no legal responsibility for you when you're out on the road, another about what to do according to the rulebook in the most unlikely eventualities, how to fill in numerous sorts of reports, all this interspersed with friendly anecdotes of the 'we had a conductor once... he didn't do this/that... we soon got rid of him ' variety.

Then the final exam (everyone passes - they've already spent £100 training you) and after a last talk from some high-ranking official we were sent off, officially prepared for life on the buses.

I've spent rather a long time describing this training period at Chiswick, because although it is only a tiny part of most people's working life in the buses, it's here that you are first confronted with the official vision of how things are meant to be; a sort of General's dream-world where nothing is left to chance or individual initiative, but where every aspect of each rank's

daily work is governed by a regulation so that everything will run smoothly. The fact that if people worked according to rule things would scarcely run at all, is conveniently ignored, and while everyone knows that drivers and conductors spend a considerable amount of energy and imagination getting round these rules, this only serves to reinforce the official view that these controls are necessary; part of the (losing) battle against 'human nature'; justification for the ever-growing ranks of the supervisory grades: Road inspectors, Spots (plain-clothes), Jumpers (ticket inspectors),



and those who report on their reports, in what is already a notoriously top-heavy industry. (In ten years bus mileage has dropped by 21% and numbers of administrative staff has risen by 17%).

## STARTING WORK

Everyone has his/her funny, horrific story of the chaos of their first day out "in charge" of a bus. Thrown into the middle of rush hour, 12 standing inside, "watch out for me bunions" and 6 on the top deck, "put me off at the Pigeon and Blanket, love", spectres of 'jumpers' waiting to book you at each bus stop (it's the clippie rather than the passenger who gets done for 'over-riders' or non-payment of fares and can lose P.S.V. licence for a surplus of standers). "3 and a half and a dog to the Bingo," "where the fuck have you been? Down the pub?" "I've been waiting here 10 minutes/ $\frac{1}{4}$  hour/40 minutes/hour and a half." "Something ought to be done." "It's the government/the wogs/all those tea-breaks."

With L.T. you start life in service as a Spare; part of a pool of fill-ins for absent drivers/conductors, working a different job or route, with a different driver each day, only knowing the evening before what your work will be the next day, the first few months down a garage are probably the most tiring, a sort of survival test. Four months after Chiswick I found that only 3 of our original 25 were still on the buses and apparently the average length of service for new recruits is less than 11 weeks. During this time, any outside friendships, interests and commitments don't get much of a look in, they don't stand a chance against the continually changing hours and general exhaustion and, even after a few months when you team up with a regular mate and are put on the rota, it is the shift work which continues to dominate life outside and inside the garage.

There are four main groups of shift on the buses:

- (1) Early; signing on before 07.00hrs.
- (2) Middle; signing off before 21.00hrs.
- (3) Late; signing off after 21.00hrs.
- (4) Spread-Over Turn; a type of split shift of 8 hours work spread over 12 hours, which gives L.T. the chance to cover both rush hours with one crew, at the expense of that crews whole day - 07.00-19.00hrs approx.

In fact people are signing on for jobs at intervals throughout the day from 04.00hrs until about 17.00hrs (with a concentration around rush hours) and signing off from about 11.00 till 00.45 or later depending on the garage/route.

Being Spare had some bonuses. Working with a different driver each day is tiring but means you get to know lots of different people in the garage, and the way each driver works, before

choosing a mate. Once on rota, I found it disconcerting that because of shifting hours and shifting rest days, there would often be gaps of several weeks between seeing friends at work. This isolation tends to make communication within each garage quite difficult or random\*, and also has the effect, while weakening collaboration between crews, to strengthen the bonds between driver and conductor who, because of the nature of their work, the shared responsibility for the safety of passengers getting on and off the bus, are necessarily very dependent on each other.

Your mate is the only other person in the garage to share the same hours with you, and this lack of communality encourages the sort of individualism which can lead to some crews being just out for themselves\*, scratching about and punching up other crews (catching up with the bus in front and leaving a double load for the bus behind). This sort of thing is obviously detrimental to the job, giving management the perfect excuse to cut a bus out, and needlessly antagonising the public who take it out on the nearest conductor and in future see all bunching as caused by skivers rather than by traffic conditions or bus cuts (ironically the main cause of bunching now). It also leaves the conductor wanting to thump someone and knowing the particular cause of this frustration is 10 minutes down the road and out of reach.

However, the behaviour of this minority is a secondary problem, a by-product of bad conditions rather than a primary cause. It is scarcely surprising that other bus workers are unable to prevent this sort of behaviour given that we have at present little or no control over basic conditions on the road. For the moment the real harm these crews do is that they are one visible cause for a bad service, for passengers to latch onto, when so many of the causes are invisible or deliberately disguised by management and a government with no clear commitment to a public transport service at all.

## 'INVISIBLE' PROBLEMS

Take the 253 Route, for instance, one of the busiest North East London routes. A days work for a crew on this road normally

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\*Side by side with this there is also a lot of individual cooperation between crews and a solidarity based on the fact that we're all doing the same job for the same pay in the same conditions regardless of seniority or sex. As one of 23 women among 255 men in my first garage, this practical 'comradeship' on the road made the 'All boys together' atmosphere plus page 3 of the Sun ritual of the canteen easier to deal with.



consists of 3 rounders from Aldgate to Warren Street and back via Bethnal Green, Hackney, Stamford Hill, Finsbury Park and Camden Town. Half a rounder is scheduled to take an hour, with the possibility of a four-minute tea break at Aldgate. In this journey there are 30 compulsory stops, 30 request stops, 48 traffic lights and 30 zebra crossings. An incident at one end of the journey affects passengers at the other, without their knowing why, and apart from any consideration for the numbers of passengers getting on or off near any of the 5 secondary schools, 4 bingo halls, 4 major shopping centres and the market, today's traffic conditions make it often impossible and always a real strain to run to time. Everyone suffers in today's speed-up, the driver (with stomach ulcers) rushing between stops, the conductor, finger on the bell, eye on her watch increasingly brusque with everyone, and the passengers themselves herded on and off the bus, the older and slower ones finding it particularly difficult to cope with the pace.

This question of pensioners, sometimes referred to as "bleeding card-carrying wombles" brings into the open a really basic problem, the equivocal position of conductors in between the public and management.

Pensioners provide L.T. with a substantial source of income (£13.1 million in '75) in a G.L.C. subsidy and use buses at a time of day when they used to be quiet. (We should have no illusions about altruism; in Dundee where massive cuts in services were introduced 9 months before London, it has now been found necessary to stop renewal of pensioners passes due to all available places on buses being filled by fare-paying passengers). Old people naturally take advantage of this opportunity to travel about freely, go out and meet friends etc... besides it's often warmer on a bus than at home in winter. But for the bus-worker 'wombles' not only travel free (a threat to a conductor's job), but provide a second rush hour, or rather a hobble and stumble. Management has been happy to take the money, but unwilling to make allowances for age. So buses must run to old schedule times, which when many old people take minutes getting on and off a bus leads to drivers rushing between stops and increased worry for the conductor who knows that if anyone's hurt s/he's legally liable till proven innocent. Bus workers under pressure from inspectors to work to time, all too often take anger out on pensioners; each stumbling old person means added strain and less chance of a cup of tea at the end of the journey.

Here is a clear example of crews taking out on passengers frustrations about work, due to our inability to take control of our working lives, at the same time as we are subjected to insults and attacks from the public taking out on us their frustration

about fares and the worsening service. As fares increase and cuts become more prevalent our position in the front line, implementing decisions taken above our heads and detrimental to both public and bus workers is bound to become worse day by day. Which side will we choose to be on as the public service versus profit-making battle becomes clearer?

## THE SQUEEZE

One thing should be stated clearly: the present economic situation has not forced the executive to change their policy, it just provided the perfect excuse to hasten a process which they have been pushing for years. The introduction of the primary and secondary schedules is a logical innovation, seen within the history of steadily deteriorating working conditions and services on London's buses since the late 30's, (well documented by Bob Potter in 'Busmen, What Next', Solidarity Pamphlet No. 16). A 7-hour day increased to 8½ hours, scheduled running times cut by vital minutes, good jobs on the rota disappearing, a greater and greater reliance by management on restday and overtime working to keep a steadily decreasing number of buses on the road, while incidentally contributing to the disease of dependency on overtime among crews, which hampers their bargaining powers. Older bus workers talk resignedly of reduced summer schedules (agreed by the union) being introduced each year, not taken down in the autumn, and next year replaced by new reduced summer schedules... and so on. There are no flies on L.T... but what about the union?

I have scarcely mentioned the T.G.W.U. before, mainly because in day to day life at the garage it plays a hidden role. All bus workers are members of T.G.W.U. (since 26 May of this year a closed shop) and their dues are automatically deducted, but hardly anyone goes to meetings (almost no black workers or women bother to break in to this predominantly white male reserve). While local officials complain of general apathy, the whole structure of meetings seems designed to promote boredom. Everyone knows that the real decisions take place over drinks at the 'Ivanhoe', at Central Committee level and bear more relation to the present needs of the T.U.C. than the needs of bus workers (don't knock the Labour Government, just the workers). How can an organisation funded by money conveniently deducted from wages by management computer, officials working and paid for in management's time, pretend to maintain any autonomy? Instead it had consistently worked as a mediator between its members and the bosses, selling out over conditions for minimal wage increases. What happened over the introduction of primary and supplementary schedules is just one more example of Central Committee-Management collusion and our inability to cope with it.

## THE "LESS FREQUENT BUT MORE RELIABLE" BUS SERVICE CON

In late April this year, many Londoners must have been relieved to read in their evening papers about new 'On Time' bus services due to be introduced initially on 34 bus routes. Garages from which these routes ran would be given new "Primary" schedules which would get priority in the allocation of staff and buses. Also there would be "Supplementary" schedules which would be 'operated to the extent that resources are available'. An L.T. spokesman said, 'Our aim is to begin to restore the confidence of our passengers that the bus they set out to catch will be running'. Gaps between buses on the Primary would be larger but in theory they would arrive on time. Almost as an after-thought L.T. admitted there could still be delays due to sickness and traffic hold-ups. The same article in the Evening Standard mentioned that L.T. had 24,000 bus drivers and conductors working on 300 routes, and we were assured by County Hall that the other big problem of having up to 1,000 buses off the road due to mechanical failure had been reduced to fewer than 400 unserviceable buses.

Information about staff levels was badly out of date, for in September 1975 L.T.B. announced that due to financial restraints imposed by reductions of over £36 million in the G.L.C. and Government support grants, they would have to make do with existing levels of approximately 20,800 drivers and conductors, i.e. over 3,000 below requirements to run a full service. Any recruitment since then has been just to maintain this level. It is here the real problem lies. With unemployment at high levels L.T. and the G.L.C. have no excuse to talk about staff 'availability', but unfortunately they have always found that having a staff shortage creates a short-term gain (L.T. saved £10m. during the genuine shortage of 1974). After all, every bus cut means one crew doing their own work plus someone else's, on the same pay. (the bus which follows the gap, clobbered with two sets of passengers, minus the ones who got fed up and walked)\* While receipts to L.T. at the end of the day are well up, they don't show the mounting frustration, anger and suffering of people who have been waiting up to an hour for a bus which they expected to come in 8 minutes. No amount of dressing up of timetables or half-truth press releases can cover up the fact that drivers, conductors and the public are bound to get a worse bus service if staff levels are kept deliberately low.

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\*The long-term, negative effects of passenger fall-off, more cars on the road and loss of bus mileage, year by year are conveniently ignored. For information on behind-the-scenes machinations of the private motor lobby read 'Wheels within Wheels', Mick Harmer, Published by Friends of the Earth.

A fortnight before the new schedules were due to be implemented stormy and unusually full union meetings were held at the 9 garages initially affected by the scheme. By introducing the scheme in stages, the classical salami tactic, management had placed themselves in a strong position to quash potential resistance. 3 garages\* can be easily isolated when the majority of bus workers in the other 60 are for the moment unaffected and kept unaware of the basic facts. Despite this, and committee warnings about unofficial action taken in opposition to Fleet Policy, an overwhelming majority of members at 6 of the 9 garages voted to reject the schedules on principle.

Meanwhile an article in the May edition of the Record (official paper, T.G.W.U.), headlined 'Union and Management Agree! New Bus Schedules should help passengers' was echoing L.T.'s official line about staff co-operation over the changes. It emerged that delegates at the March Central Bus Conference (one representative from each garage) had accepted the schedules without reference back to their garages and after only a 10-minute adjournment to read 15 closely-typed pages of complicated details which many of them later admitted to not understanding. What could easily be seen by anyone was that yet again the executive were intent on solving their financial difficulties at the expense of the working conditions of bus crews. The one new feature of this scheme was the splitting up of existing crews and the creation of a sub-group in the garage: a pool of 'almost spares'. People in this group, the newly demoted supplementary staff, taken off the main rota, would be indefinitely available for any work, until the executive chose to recruit more staff and move everyone up a peg. Apart from the more obvious adverse effects the new schedules would have on working life, bus workers in the 9 garages, confronted by the actual details of the schedules were suspicious and worried about the hidden job loss implications. After all, L.T. had tried unsuccessfully to introduce the scheme at Conferences for the last 3 years, without the present excuse of the squeeze. Taking the number 52 bus as example, where there were 50 duties to cover before, there were now 40 primary and 10 supplementary ones. In theory no change, except that with the garage over 20% understaffed it was clear that it would be difficult to cover the primary let alone the supplementary. This would be an easy way of getting rid of 10 jobs over the period of a few months, by saying that since we had never worked the 10 duties anyway they were going to be cut permanently, leaving just a now nicely evenly spaced primary rota.

What happened in the various garages in the fortnight be-

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\*Chalk Farm, Middlerow, Norwood, Shepherd's Bush, Stockwell, Stonebridge, Victoria, Walworth, Willesden.)

fore the day the schedules were to be introduced is difficult to document. With the union Central Bus Committee determined that nothing should disturb their introduction, various pressures were brought to bear on local representatives and loyalties exploited. Given the nature of shift work and the lack of contact between crews the informal circulation of accurate information is always difficult: rumours fly about and it's hard for any individual to verify what they hear. While Local Branch autonomy was used as an excuse not to pass on information about what was happening in other branches, by officers who had easiest access to this information, disciplinary action was threatened against those 'trouble makers' who tried to break the wall of silence and make contact with workers in other garages. Even at Willesden Garage, the only one to actually come out on strike on May 15, some branch officials continued to try to prevent contact between Willesden crews and other garages when it was clear that co-ordinated support was needed, because "it might jeopardize local negotiations". After a mass meeting and out of desperation at committee inactivity 'Willesden Bus Crews' eventually produced two pamphlets: one 'Blame the Board not the Busmen' explaining their situation to the public, and another for distribution to other garages urging crews to join them. This latter one was circulated less openly by hand after union and management between them confiscated a large part of the 'first edition' taken round to the other eight new schedule garages.\* By the 18 May, 3 days later, the strike was over, the Board's eagerness that everything should get back to normal and fear of more widespread trouble, reflected in the fact that Willesden had secured a unified rota.

## SOME CONCLUSIONS

The aftermath of the Willesden strike was a temporary atmosphere of bitterness and recriminations in the garage where we knew we should have made a fight of it, and the day-to-day reality of primary and supplementary schedules which are proving every bit as bad as we expected.

Unfortunately disaffection with the union is still coupled with a dependency on it to 'do something'. Alternative organisations just don't exist and instead of concentrating on alternative methods of struggle, many bus workers and former militants lapse into inactive cynicism, or spend a lot of energy trying to change the union, by changing the personnel in the hierarchy. Groups on the left, I.S. in particular, who produce the only bus paper, 'Platform', share the illusion that it's just a question of

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\*See text of these leaflets published after this article.

infiltration and change of leadership (or is this another cynical transitional demand ... to educate the workers) rather than a question of criticising and destroying that structure of so-called democratic representation and creating something new.

Certainly that will be a formidable task. The sort of confusion which reigned during the implementation of primary and supplementary schedules is obviously beneficial to L.T. who have no need for any special control mechanisms if the union can be relied on to keep its members in order. Two weeks after "Schedule Day", a closed shop agreement made this relationship official.

"The Agreement between the Executive and the Union also provides that in the event of unofficial action by individuals resulting in them withdrawing their labour or hampering the proper working of the Executive's services the union shall not afford them any support but shall use its best endeavours to induce such individuals to conform to agreed procedures. Any unofficial action shall be the subject of a joint enquiry with the Union at Headquarters level in order to establish the circumstances in each case and to consider whether any action should be taken in order to prevent a recurrence". Morgan, Chief Operating Manager, 26 May 1976.

Considerations of more radical methods of struggle, circulation of information and the building of horizontal links between workers in different garages, will need to be coupled to a serious discussion of our relationship to the public. At the moment no one counters L.T.'s jolly, optimistic publicity, implicit in which is the idea 'If there's a problem, it's the crew's fault'. And as passengers face the double insult of worse services and fares up by 26% (with Nov. '75's increase that makes almost 64% in less than a year), the antagonism the public feels towards conductors has intensified. While bus cuts and long waits are certainly responsible for much anger and even assaults (in view of which many crews feel that the £3.8 million - '75 prices - L.T. plans to spend on equipping the fleet with radios, supposedly to counter violence, actually to increase their control, would be better spent on buses), it is fares which are the main cause of resentment. This places conductors in a dubious position. Faced on the one hand with L.T.'s plans to eventually make them redundant with one-man buses, and on the other with daily insults over fares from people who have little idea about a conductor's other responsibilities, conductors usually put the first thing to the back of their minds and see 'the public' as a worse actual enemy.

In this climate it is difficult to think about the possibility of actions like Fare Strikes, which would certainly be more popular with passengers than other forms of industrial action like go-slows or actual strikes. Also, with free travel passes, when fares in-

crease, L.T. workers and their families are cushioned from the blow to other people of what amounts to a compulsory wage cut and don't even have their husband/wife moaning about rising fares when they get home. Meanwhile the Union continues to foster the illusion that jobs and wages are necessarily linked to a profitable fare system. So far, by placing us in a privileged but dependent position, management have effectively squashed resistance to fare rises by conductors, and the Union seems to have placed loyalty to the leadership above the adverse social consequences of running a worse and worse service for more and more money.

While Concorde flies 5 businessmen to Bahrain, hundreds of thousands of people in London wait at bus stops for buses which are full, or not on the road ... for after all, Public Transport "must be made to pay".

I sometimes think about this when I stagger in at the end of a day from a bus which has done about 2/3 of its scheduled mileage because of traffic, weighed down with £50 - £100 to pay in (when over half the passengers had pre-paid tickets).

Fare rises and bus cuts, worse hours, tighter schedules, over-loading and aggravation are all interlinked; effects of a policy which will continue while bus workers and passengers behave as though we're powerless to stop this downward spiral, and conductors act as a buffer between the public and the management. From both my own experience and 11 months of bus-talk in the garage and on the job, I don't believe that this was the way most bus workers saw their job when they joined up 50, 26, 7, 5 and even 1 year ago.

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## SOLIDARITY PAMPHLETS

GMWU : SCAB UNION by Mark Fore. A close look at one of Britain's biggest unions. Are the unions still working class organisations? 10p + postage

TRADE UNIONISM OR SOCIALISM by John Zerzan. A detailed documentation of how deeply, cynically and consciously the trade unions have become pillars of the established order and obstacles to social change. 10p + postage

# WHY WILLESDEN GARAGE STOPS WORK

## BLAME THE BOARD - NOT THE BUSMEN

On Saturday last Willesden Garage busmen stopped work. We regret having to do this. It will cause inconvenience to other workers. But don't blame us. Blame London Transport Board. They are worsening conditions for us and services for you - the users and the travelling public.

Months ago London Transport proposed changes in work schedules and time tables. The changes will mean bigger gaps between buses with intervals in some cases going from 20 minutes to half an hour. If a bus is missing it will mean waiting for a whole hour.

There will be more queueing and waiting, packed buses and worse conditions for drivers and conductors. On top of this another fare increase of 25% is planned for next month.

The worse the service becomes, the more angry the passengers become and let it out on us, often with assaults, injuries, robberies and even bus workers getting killed. No other section of workers have to face such problems.

### THEY HAVE TRIED TO CON US

The Board has tried a crafty one to force their scheme on us and you. The changes affect 9 garages out of 68 at present. Another 21 garages will be involved in 2 batches over the next 6 months. When the Board made its proposals to a Conference of delegates from garages it never told them which ones were to be affected.

Then when it got its agreement it trotted out its cuts and the names of the garages to be affected. The Board now claims that it is a "democratic" decision binding on all and seek to use one garage against another.

You, the public, know how over the years the services are getting worse and ever more costly. Hundreds of buses have been lying up in garages waiting for spare parts and repairs when they should be on the road taking people to wherever they want to go to.

We, the bus workers, want to give the public a good, reliable service. We do a hard, but essential job often starting work at 5.0.am, often doing "spreadovers" of 12 hours and often finishing



at 1.30 am. Our homes and family life get disrupted. YOU CAN HELP TO CHANGE THIS.

WE ASK YOU TO RAISE YOUR VOICE NOW.

Ring London Transport at 235-5432. Ring the Divisional Office at 452-4264. Ring Sir Reg Goodwin at the Greater London Council 633-5000.

DEMAND... PUT THE BUSES BACK ON THE ROAD. RESTORE THE PREVIOUS TIMETABLES. NEGOTIATE WITH LOCAL BUSMEN FOR IMPROVED SERVICES. CANCEL THE PROPOSED JUNE FARE INCREASES.

PLEASE PASS THIS LEAFLET ON ... (Issued by Willesden Bus Crews  
c/o Brent Trades Hall 375 High Road N.W.10)

17-5-'76

## CALLING ALL BUS CREWS!

You may or may not know much about the new system of primary and supplementary schedules.

This is a new system which will eventually affect all busmen. Longer headways, more mileage, less duties, equals worsened conditions, less money and more assaults.

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Then, when it got its agreement, it trotted out its cuts and the names of the garages to be affected. The Board now claims that it is a "democratic" decision binding on all and seek to use one garage against another to enforce it.

We at Willesden garage had a mass meeting on Monday 3rd May. The garage unanimously rejected the new schedules and rotas. On Tuesday 11th May the delegate conference had another vote to postpone the new primary and supplementary rota system. The vote was narrowly defeated.

On Thursday 13th May we at Willesden had 2 special meetings at which we again rejected this new system. We were prepared to work the present system while negotiations were proceeding but our offer was refused by management.

WHAT YOU CAN DO TO HELP

If you, like us, now feel that this new system will adversely affect your job we suggest:-

- \* You ask for 2 Special Meetings to be called by your branch. (One third of the membership can constitutionally demand this).
- \* Reject the new system. Support the stand taken by Willesden. Ask your representative to curtail services on your routes that overlap with Willesden's. (A number of garages are already doing this).

REMEMBER... 30 garages are faced with the new system this year. No garage will be safe after that. BY SUPPORTING US YOU ARE SAFEGUARDING YOUR OWN FUTURE.

17-5-'76

\*\*\* Please pass this leaflet on to fellow busmen. (Issued by Willesden Bus Crews c/o Brent Trades & Labour Hall 375 Willesden High Road N.W.10).

NEW PAMPHLETS

BUREAUCRATS AND WOMEN CLEANERS by Lynda Finn and Gavin Williams. How women cleaners took on Durham University and how this struggle was defused by the combined efforts of GMWU and TGWU bureaucrats. 10p + postage.

SOLIDARITY MOTOR BULLETIN No.5 : SPAIN - the struggle at SEAT, Barcelona. 10p. + postage

## POSTSCRIPT - DECEMBER 1978

Since writing this text there have been several new developments. As services have deteriorated the GLC and London Transport have been coming under attack from all sides. This reflects growing passenger frustration with long waits, bus bunching and an increasingly expensive and unreliable service. A private transport lobby, notably the 'Movement for London'\* has even proposed as a 'solution' that subsidies to public transport be cut, that private transport be 'given a chance' and that provision be made for 550,000 extra cars in London by 1985 (based on forecasts that there will be a 31% increase in car ownership).

As the wave of public criticism has grown, even 'our leaders' Jack Social-Contract Jones (of the TGWU), Sidney Weighell (of the NUR) and Jim Daly (Chairman of the GLC Transport Committee) have called for a joint campaign against fare rises and service cuts around the slogan S.O.S. : Save our Services. Ironically Larry Smith (National Secretary of the TGWU Passenger Group) writing in the November edition of the 'Record' assured members 'we will be mounting a campaign shortly which will step up the whole tenor of the debate about the future of public transport, building on the basis we have established in the past 12 months'. In view of the union's record described in this pamphlet, busworkers might well question what that basis really is.

Although attempts to bring passengers and transport workers together are welcome, this campaign is meaningless if it is waged in our name, at our expense,\*\* but not under our control. We should remember that the initiators of the 'campaign' have always opposed local/unofficial or rank-and-file attempts to make contacts with passenger groups, with other London Transport workers (for instance on the Tube) or even with other garages. The 'campaign' seems to be an attempt to channel discontent into safe, centrally-controlled territory, with the emphasis on endless letter-writing and the lobbying of MPs and Ministers.

Bus workers unwilling to entrust the future and quality of their jobs to these officials should seriously be considering other modes of action : things which any branch or part of a branch or group of workers can do.

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\* Members include the RAC, the AA, the British Road Federation, the Licensed Taxi Drivers Association and the Road Haulage Association.

\*\* The TGWU has called for a 50p subscription to its funds from all its London members!

The present mess is not just the consequence of the economic crisis and of the government's grovelling to the IMF. It is also a result of the continued mismanagement of our working lives by others. Whatever the future economic situation, both passengers and crews should rely on their own strength to fight the bureaucrats and not be content with token 'representation' on various committees.

Some steps towards this would be :

- 1) To strengthen existing unofficial links between garages, so as not to rely on official sources for information. The union structure is usually used effectively to isolate any of the 69 garages engaged in unofficial struggle. The issues often affect the whole fleet. The struggle described in this pamphlet is only one example of where this happened. (In this context 'Platform' sometimes publishes some interesting information - unfortunately it is the only bus paper.)
- 2) To make direct contact with Tube workers and challenge the ridiculous situation whereby workers doing fundamentally similar jobs for the same employer are divided by the union structures into two separate groups with different wage scales and conditions of employment. This has always been to management's advantage. With the help of union officials Transport management has traditionally played one group off against the other, with the aim of weakening both. The aim should be united action: garage with garage, and bus workers with Tube workers. Never again must one scab on the other.
- 3) A turn towards passengers. Their ignorance about the real situation of transport workers (and consequent hostility) is due to the fact that no one tells them what is really going on. Bus workers could usefully distribute their own information. Transport workers should consider their attitudes and relationships to such direct action passenger groups as Fare Fight (Flat 3, 76 Sidney St., London E.1. Tel.: 790-9965) who have been campaigning against increased Tube fares. 'This action in the main consists of buying a ticket for less than the full fare for a Tube journey and handing in a Deferred Payment slip for the rest of the fare ... Fare Fight has concentrated on this form of direct action, with no apology for fouling up the L.T. bureaucracy at 55 Broadway. The choice is between the temporary disruption of the bureaucracy organised by us and the permanent, and maybe irrevocable, disruption of public transport being wantonly organised by London Transport policies'. (Part of Fare Fight statement to 'Save our Services' meeting held at the ICA on 5/12/76.)

This type of resistance can work, particularly if supported by the workers involved. In Turin (Italy) the bus company put fares up, the passengers refused to pay them, the union printed bus passes and issued them at the old fares, and the bus company was forced to climb down.

- 4) Transport workers should begin to consider alternatives to straight strikes which hit the public indiscriminately. After all most of 'the public' are workers too. One option so far not tried in Britain - although quite common elsewhere - is the Fare Strike, where workers continue to run services normally but refuse to collect fares, either in whole or in part. This form of industrial action has the double advantage of hitting the boss hard, and of being very popular with passengers. It is moreover an expression of practical solidarity, and helps create the basis for joint action in the future.