

# Catalyst

Freesheet of the Solidarity Federation - International Workers' Association

DECEMBER 2001 #5

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## A CAPITALIST CRIME AGAINST HUMANITY

**ARE YOU ONE OF THE 1 IN 7 DESTINED TO SUFFER OR DIE FROM THIS EPIDEMIC OF CAPITALIST KILLING?**

**THREE THOUSAND PEOPLE MURDERED IN A YEAR ACROSS THE UK. A QUARTER OF A MILLION WILL DIE BEFORE 2020 ACROSS EUROPE. MEANWHILE, MILLIONS OF PEOPLE ARE BEING KILLED ACROSS THE WORLD.**

**S**urely, this needs a global response from a US-led multi-billion dollar action with full mass-media coverage. Surely, Tony Blair and George Bush should declare war on the 'terrorists' who are causing this. Not a chance.

What kind of terrorist could keep up this murder rate? What sort of killer virus can be responsible? The mass murderer is capitalism, the killing machine is operated by the multi-national corporations, and the weapon they are using is asbestos.

It has been well-known for a century that asbestos kills. The first proven 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.

Although asbestos is banned across Europe, it is still widely used. Even though it is well-known to be a mass killer, multi-national corporations are actively promoting and forcing workers to produce and use it across the developing world. This is simply a cold collective decision by capitalist bosses to murder people and make profit from their deaths.

With 60 people a week dying of asbestos-related disease every week in Britain alone, the figures are stark. But once you add in the facts it gets much more stark. It is preventable. Its ongoing effects are caused by capitalist greed. Far from attempting to sort out the problem, capitalists have consistently done all they can to deny, disguise and lie about it. Wherever they think they can get away with it, they continue to



claim that asbestos poses no danger. Wherever they can, they still force workers to work with asbestos.

Given the number of people dying each year, the term 'crime against humanity' springs to mind, especially when you consider that the number of people dying and disabled will never be accurately known. The extent to which asbestos has damaged people's health was recently exposed at a conference in Berlin. A Belgian study based on post-mortem examinations in the period 1998-2000 found evidence of asbestos damage to the lungs in 14% of the population - that is 1 in 7 people! Asbestos is linked to numerous respiratory diseases which either go unrecorded, or are not linked to the true cause.

Recently, there has been some apparently good news on the asbestos front. Turner and Newall, the biggest asbestos producers in Britain, who employed 25,000 workers at one point, has now been wound up by its parent company in the US.

But good news is not always what it seems. The company has only been put into liquidation as a blatant means of avoiding current and future claims by those dying and the families they leave

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## SCHOOL'S IN

Merrywood School in Bristol closed back in September. Despite the huge local opposition, the council expected people to accept its authority in riding roughshod over the local community. But no-one was about to let them get away with it.

The buildings have now been occupied by local community groups, determined to keep it for the community. Various initiatives have been set up, with decisions being made collectively. Amongst the activities are 'Community Construction', a group of builders, a timber recycling group, and various self-run courses and social activities for children. There are plans for free playschemes to provide childcare for working parents, a young mothers' group for 13-18-year-olds and activities for people with learning difficulties. The idea is to integrate and positively include all sections of the community.

The council had planned to make some quick and easy money from selling the school on to greedy developers to build posh housing on. It is going to be neither quick nor easy to defeat local residents now.

To get active - contact  
Catalyst, PO Box 29 SW PDO,  
Manchester M15 5HW.  
Tel. 07984 675 281  
solfed@solfed.org.uk

## STEAMING TURD AWARD

National Temporary Workers' Week was thought up by the 'Recruitment and Employment Confederation' bosses' club, supposedly 'to recognise the value of the UK's temporary and flexible workforce', but actually to get their faces in the paper and some free advertising.

Well, here's some free advertising. Workers in Bristol marked the end of National Temporary Workers' Week by presenting corporate giant Manpower with a pile of shit. Bristol Against Casualisation Campaign (BACC) entered the company's plush city centre office to hand over the prestigious 'golden turd' award, presented to capitalists for crimes against the working class. Arch scumbags Manpower made £1500 million in profits off the back of our labour last year, and with job insecurity and poverty pay spreading like a bad case of impetigo, they were well overdue a visit.

Reaction in the office to the award ceremony ranged from mild amusement to wild panic with one unfortunate woman even thinking she was under attack by Afghan terrorists (the pile of shit being an incendiary device). No bosses were available or willing to accept the special award from the workers, which proves that capitalists really can't handle any shit.

For further information, contact BACC at c/o Box 43, 82 Colston Street, Bristol, BS1 5BB. E-mail: [bristolacc@hotmail.com](mailto:bristolacc@hotmail.com). Meanwhile, the International Workers' Association, the anarcho-syndicalist global association, has started a global campaign against casual labour. A round of simultaneous demonstrations against temporary work agencies is scheduled for the new year. Contact Catalyst for details or look out for them on the SolFed website: [www.solfed.org.uk](http://www.solfed.org.uk) (email [solfed@solfed.org.uk](mailto:solfed@solfed.org.uk)).



# CONSIGNIA YOURSELF ALRIGHT!

**N**ews that Consignia (Royal Mail) is to shed one in ten of the workforce came as no surprise to anyone who has been watching the signs over the past twelve months. Rumours have persisted that second deliveries are to be abolished for years now. In fact, it was only the insistence of the Department of Trade and Industry during the Tory years of the 1980s and 1990's which prevented the Post Office Board from doing the dirty deed before now.

The last few years have seen the amount of mail taken out on first deliveries grow as Royal Mail has deliberately depleted the mail which was once set aside for second deliveries and forwarded it onto already overloaded early morning rounds.

Many staff have helped bring about this situation by arriving for work before the official starting time and performing what can only be termed as unpaid overtime. There is an insistence by these people that they use their own private cars to convey themselves and their mail out to their respective delivery areas rather than use Royal Mail vans. Hence, driving duties are done away with which has the knock-on effect of reducing overall jobs in delivery offices.

If the C.W.U. had any bottle, it would have pushed for a car ban years ago in order to protect existing jobs and create new ones. It never has and is unlikely to insist on one now. The unofficial early morning starters and car users have masked the problem of overloaded rounds for years as well as saving Royal Mail hundreds of thousands of pounds in real overtime payments and new jobs.

Royal Mail claim they are broke. They are going to make the workforce pay for years of

miss-management and massive golden handshakes to bullshitters who have managed to persuade the Post Office Board they have some talent to offer as businessmen. No such golden handshakes will be on offer to the rank and file who will bear the brunt of the job cuts. It won't simply be a case of 'last in, first out' as many old hands suppose. The current use of automatic warnings for sick absence and conduct issues, condemned in the recent Sawyer report, will continue apace. One London C.W.U. Area Rep. reckons to be dealing with three dismissal cases every day and even at local level Office Reps will be dealing with two or three cases a week where at one time it would have been two or three a month. Managers are no longer prepared to listen to extenuating circumstances such as hospitalisation or absence due to accident on duty. It is quite clear their minds are made up before the hearings, which have now become nothing more than window dressing. This is how Royal Mail will cut 20,000 jobs within the next eighteen months.

The next big changes will probably involve privatising the road fleet and introducing one big delivery later on in the day. There is already talk of a fifty pound per year charge to customers who wish to receive their mail at the more traditional early morning time. If you are waiting for your Giro, tough! Pay up or wait. And thanks to the business brains who wasted a fortune on a ridiculous name change, plenty of former Post Office employees will be waiting for theirs in the near future.

The Post Office (Consignia) logo: Still looks uncannily like everything's going down the plughole...



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behind. Such claims have not only come from workers and ex-workers – in fact, the first successful claim against T&N was brought by a resident who was unlucky enough to live near one of their sites.

Lawyers working for claimants were dismayed at the ease with which T&N were allowed by that workers' friend, the Labour government, to secure liquidation as a means of avoiding ongoing damage claims. As if this wasn't bad enough, following the liquidation announcement it came to light that T&N had no insurance cover. It has been illegal not to have such cover under Health and Safety legislation dating back to 1979.

The killing extends beyond both asbestos plant workers and nearby residents. As many as 1.5 million work-places in Britain contain asbestos in some form or another, including all sorts of buildings - offices, warehouses, shops, etc. Every time a floor board is lifted, an

alteration is made, or the heating/air conditioning is switched on, asbestos fibres could be disturbed and get into people's lungs. 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 the law. Anyway, even when they knowingly expose workers, typical fines are as low as £1,000.

Given the number of people affected by asbestos, this is a truly terrorist act against workers. If you are waiting for war to be declared by governments or other business chums on such acts of corporate terrorism, forget it. This is a war we can only win by taking on capitalism ourselves.

**Whether in a union or not, you have the right to be consulted by management regarding health and safety. Remember what is at stake, asbestos kills - make sure you are not its next victim. For advice/info, contact Catalyst.**

# PROBLEMS AT WORK No.4

## HOW AND WHY COULD I START TO RAISE HEALTH AND SAFETY ISSUES AT WORK?

The amount of Health and Safety legislation in Britain has increased over the last 20 years (much of it coming from the European Union). However, it is largely unenforced, so bosses can ignore it. The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) is the government's official enforcement body and has a history of letting bosses off lightly. Even so, its own figures show that many accidents at work go unreported and the vast majority are avoidable.

Although the government and bosses clearly do not care much about our health and safety, the fact that the legislation exists means we have a chance to use it ourselves in order to improve our own health and safety, not to mention getting right up and tickling management noses in the process.

Where to start? This depends upon what level of health and safety there is on your workplace. If you are in a union-recognised workplace, there is much wider scope for raising health and safety issues. If it is anti-union/non-unionised, you can still challenge and force management to comply with basic legislation.

All workplaces should have completed a risk assessment of all activities which take place there. Basically, this means management should have examined all work activities, highlighted the associated hazards, and looked for ways to eradicate the risks to workers. Protective clothing and the like should only be used as a last resort – wherever possible, hazards should be removed at source.

Risk assessments must be recorded in writing in any workplace of more than 5 workers. Furthermore, far from being locked away in a filing cabinet, these should form the basis of safe working practices on a daily basis.

You could do your own risk assessment. Go around your workplace, and try to identify hazards. A hazard is a situation where harm could be caused (whereas a risk is the likelihood or chance of the harm occurring). For example, in an office, hazards might typically include exposed computer cables, uneven floor surfaces or loose carpets, poor lighting, heating and/or ventilation, stressful environments, or unsafe equipment (all equipment should be checked regularly and verified as safe).

Workstations – desk/chair/terminal arrangements – are dealt with specifically, and require specific risk assessment. One hazard is repetitive strain injury, caused by repeated movements, such as

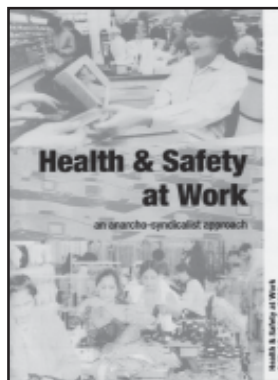
operating a computer mouse. Another is back injury caused by incorrectly configured or old desk/chair arrangements, or incorrect height of monitors. Another is eye strain caused by malfunctioning monitors or poor sitting, or lack of breaks away from the workstation. Such work should be varied, it should be made to fit the workers rather than the other way around, and hourly breaks should be provided. Eye tests should be provided free as well as glasses where required.

Obviously, workplaces vary enormously, and things would be different in a factory, warehouse, fast food outlet, building site, or whatever. But doing your own risk assessment is not rocket science. Consider other workers as well as your tasks, and think about long term hazards as well as daily ones. What about other shifts – would cleaners or security staff be exposed to other hazards?

Having highlighted hazards, you could take the information to a union safety rep. if there is one, or approach management directly and inquire about what they will do about problems you have identified. If a hazard poses a 'major' risk, such as putting workers in immediate danger, you can point this out and if management fail to act, contact the HSE or local council, who should send a safety officer. Alternatively, you can refuse to work until the hazard has been dealt with. If you lack a union and the confidence to act directly, then you can contact the authorities anonymously. Remember, ultimately, health and safety depends upon workers coming together and forcing management to act – so always encourage your workmates to act collectively. This can be done by starting to discuss health and safety with your workmates, and by networking with other people in other similar workplaces.

The Solidarity Federation has networks in various industries. For further info. and free, unconditional and confidential advice, contact *Catalyst*.

For a copy of "Health and Safety at Work", a 36-page booklet with tips on using health and safety in DIY activism in your workplace, send £1.50 to *Catalyst* at the address below.



## NAZI NO-BRAINS

Lancs and Manchester Solidarity Federation groups and Burnley anti-fascists have been taking on the fascists, especially in Burnley and Oldham. More details and analysis will follow in the next issue of DA. Meanwhile, to get involved, contact Lancs SF, PO Box 469, Preston PR1 8XF.

(lancshiresolfed@blueyonder.co.uk). Also, "Clarets United Against Racism and Fascism" is a group of Burnley supporters committed to fighting racism, xenophobia, nationalism, etc. on the football scene.

They are at CUARAF, c/o PO Box 469, Preston PR1 8XF. claretsunited.cjb.net.



## LOSE THE LEVY

What with New Year drinks to be bought, any chance to save some money is welcome. So why not save yourself some cash by completing and sending the form below to your Union HQ - and don't forget to 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 & branch:.....

WRITE TO CATALYST FOR A FULL & FRANK ANSWER TO A PROBLEM AT WORK, OR CONTACT THE ANSAPHONE HELPLINE FOR ADVICE - 07984 675 281  
 CATALYST, SF, PO Box 29, SW PDO, MANCHESTER M15 5HW. solfed@solfed.org.uk

## CSL3 TRIBUNAL UPDATE

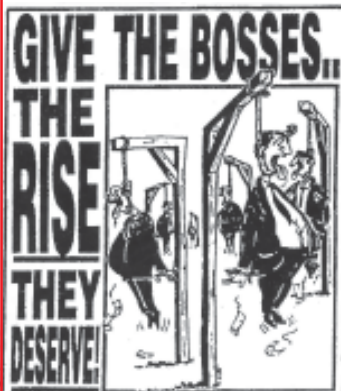
The CSL3 were shop-stewards in London Borough of Newham's privatised Housing Benefits section. They were sacked for allegedly leaking information about CSL's terrible record to the disastrous nature of the organisation's activities to "Inside Housing" magazine, but the real reason was that they were doing their job well and CSL wanted rid of them (see February issue of Catalyst).

The sacked workers have taken a Tribunal case against CSL, which was due to start in October. However, CSL requested and were granted an adjournment until the new year. Coincidentally, CSL have now lost their contract with Newham Borough over inefficiencies – exactly the issue the CSL3 were trying to bring to everyone's attention!

Meanwhile, the CSL3, Jane Cowan, Dave Radford and Steve Stone, would like to thank everyone who responded generously and positively to Catalyst's fundraising/solidarity campaign. Your continuing support is appreciated. For latest Tribunal info. etc, contact: CSL3, PO Box 1681.

London N8 7LE. Email: housingbenefit@hotmail.com Phone 020 7474 8367. Donation cheques to CSL Newham Three, or direct to:

Natwest branch 60-16-32, account 79549047.



Catalyst is produced for workers everywhere, by workers in the Solidarity Federation. To join SolFed, for more information, or for more copies of Catalyst or to send contributions, contact: 07984 675 281 Catalyst, SF, PO Box 29, SW PDO, Manchester M15 5HW. solfed@solfed.org.uk www.solfed.org.uk

# HACKED OFF IN HACKNEY

**H**ackney council sees itself as New Labour's laboratory for wholesale privatisation of local public services. Back in May, Catalyst reported on the attacks on council workers' pay and conditions in Hackney. Since then, in many ways, things have gone from bad to worse.

Over a quarter of nursery places are threatened with closure. In August, 350 council workers who refused to give up their existing contracts in favour of new worse ones were sacked. 90 community organisations had their budgets slashed. Hackney Law Centre received a 100% cut in funding, and now faces closure. The council is now about to sell off 120 community properties, including several ex-nurseries, as well as hundreds of council houses.

Union leaders continue to demand government intervention to stop the cuts - as if the government wasn't behind the drive to make the cuts and privatise Hackney in the first place. Such hollow words have provided nothing for the workers. However, fortunately, there has been grassroots resistance which has linked workers and residents together in the fight against job and service cuts. Strikes and other industrial action has been taken, by workers acting collectively without the need for (indeed, despite) union bureaucracy. As a result, over the late summer and autumn, there have been a wide range of actions by and in support of the workers.

For example, one group of concerned

residents squatted a council property and set up "Nelson Bakewell estate agents" in order to publicise the disturbing extent of the cuts and sell offs. Over 50 community properties were put on display, all of which are facing sale/privatisation (contact: [hackney4sale@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:hackney4sale@yahoo.co.uk) or telephone 07752 592 740 - Nelson Bakewell are

*the company who act as the Council's 'advisors' on possible sales and also stand to make huge amounts of money from these sell-offs. All complaints to: Max Caller at Hackney Council c/o 020 8356 3441.*

There is little doubt that the Labour government intends to extend the privatisation strategy being pioneered in Hackney to the rest of the public sector in London, and across the country. The state is set to become little more than the

provider of funds, to be channelled into private sector profit. Instead of pointlessly hoping that Labour will change its free market ways, as the TUC was doing before the war, it is clear that the example has been set by the grassroots resistance in Hackney. Only by continued direct action can we hope to reverse Labour's privatisation plans.

## HACKNEY - FOR SALE - this offer is not available to the poor!

Address: 15 Atherden Road, Lower Clapton, Hackney

Description: Formerly a nursery, but we got rid of the kids + their whining parents. We even fibbed in court, to get rid of the squatters who had reopened it as a community centre of all things. We told the master that we were not going to sell this building but, Ha! - It is now freed up to give lots of potential for profit as a yuppie wine bar or a private health club for city workers to unwind and spend lots of their hard earned dosh.

Price: Don't bother enquiring, you couldn't afford it. In fact why don't you just move to another borough so that we can speed up the process of gentrification here in Hackney. Once you go we could make even more money from the selling off of community assets.

## WINTER 2001-02: CLEARFUTURES

Direct Action is the SolFed Quarterly magazine. Many of the best bits are available free on the web. Just slip into your local cybercafe or switch on, and at the right moment, type:

<http://www.direct-action.org.uk>

IF YOU PREFER IT IN THE FLESH AND YOU WANT TO TRY BEFORE YOU BUY..

For a FREE COPY of the quarterly mag Direct Action, fill in your address and send this slip to: SF, PO Box 1681, London N8 7LE.

Name.....  
Address.....  
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