



# FIRST FOR PROFIT

**“First Drivers in South Yorkshire are making a stand for a decent working wage in an industry that fails to keep its employees due to poor working hours, abusive customers and a fat cat profiteering company that’s raking it in on its monopoly control on most of South Yorkshires services.” – Striking First Group bus driver**

Eight hundred bus drivers throughout South Yorkshire are on their third week of indefinite strike in their fight for more pay.

The drivers reckon their demands will cost First Group, the countries biggest bus company just £368,000 - hardly a dent in its annual profit of over £160 million. Instead First Group want drivers to lose the first 3 days of sick pay and two bank holidays and not back date the pay rise they promised in April.

The strikers also want a quicker increase in pay for new drivers, who currently have to wait three and a half years to earn more than £5.85 an hour - just £1.35 an hour more than the national minimum wage! With picket lines across the region, none of the companies 307 buses have left their depots and the strike is staying strong with one of the union organisers saying “We are in for the long haul”.

One striking driver who has worked for the company for more than 20 years said “They offered us an ‘improved’ three-year deal, but with so many conditions they were giving with one hand and taking away with the other.” Another driver added “All I can say is sorry to the public for this action drivers have been forced to take but I believe I have earned the right for more money this year; after First made millions we are only after 30p an hour.”

Not surprisingly First Group has a major recruitment problem with a 30 percent turnover of drivers. Many of the drivers working for First today were the people who worked in the coal mines or steel industry. As one driver said, “There are people that have worked on the buses for 20 years and have seen the damage that privatisation has done.

## MAGIC BUS

Buses were ‘de-regulated’ (that’s privatised) in 1986 when the National Bus Company was broken into 70 chunks and sold for £1 billion. The Conservatives said it would bring in more choice and cheaper journeys but within ten years of deregulation prices had soared, there were less routes and twenty five per cent fewer customers with companies fighting over the most profitable routes. And after the initial rush of bus companies competing the industry is now dominated by five big players.

In the fact over the past 25 years, bus fares have risen by 80 per cent while total motoring costs have remained flat. In places like South Yorkshire a brilliant bus service that was as “cheap as chips” was been systematically destroyed and workers pay and conditions worsened.

When Neo Labour came to power Deputy Prime Minister John Prescott championed the bus as the future ‘thoroughbred’ of public transport. He subsidised more rural buses, and encouraged operators and local authorities to work closely together. Passenger numbers are even rising in some areas, such as Leeds, Brighton, Glasgow and Bath - and of course London where buses are still regulated.

Taxpayers subsidise the nation’s bus services to the tune of £1.2 billion a year. But just like the Private Finance Initiative (PFI) Neo Labour refuse to believe that private companies running our public services aren’t the answer and instead reckon Maggie knew best. But if they are viewing PFI through rose-tinted spectacles, god knows what they’re wearing to see that bus de-regulation works.

## CRITICAL MASSIMO

A new book by Massimo Florio ‘The Great Divestiture’ smashes some of those Thatcher myths. Studying the impact of Britain’s privatisations between 1979 and 1997 Florio takes many of the supposed truths about privatisation and demolishes them one by one.

The sell-offs halted the over-manning that was crippling the nationalised industries. Not true.

The belief that private sector dynamism boosted productivity in the state owned monsters? Er, nope, no real evidence for that.

So what about the paying customer? Well guess what, Florio’s research found that privatisation benefited the rich at the expense of the poor. Just take British Telecom. Before privatisation, BT was not short of money to invest in the future and was spending more on research and development. State ownership also meant that there were safeguards for the less well off. After privatisation this all changed, and the big gains went to business and users of international calls. In fact

**Reclaim The Beach**  
Radio 4A are having a beach party from 9pm onwards on the Brighton seafront (outside Gemini bar) this Sat (7<sup>th</sup>) after Gay Pride. Bring a radio tuned into 101.4fm. Plus catch Radio 4A all the following weekend in Brighton.

## CRAP ARREST OF THE WEEK

**For wanting more freedom**

Elitsa, a 20-year-old Bulgarian anarchist, has become the latest victim in the Bulgarian government’s attempts to criminalize dissent and label protesters as threats to “national security”. She has been charged with “crimes against the Republic of Bulgaria” for spreading “fascist ideology and terrorism”. Police thought that she really shouldn’t be selling back issues of the Bulgarian anarchist journal Svoboden Misl (Free Thought). She was also nicked for handing out and flyposting leaflets calling for more freedom, equality and people’s autonomy. Now any “literature” she intends to distribute must first be approved by a police inspector.

the biggest beneficiaries of privatisation were the wealthiest 10%-20% of the population; those who bore the costs were the poorest 10%-20%, who for many years had to pay increased tariffs or fixed charges for some essential public services; while some lost their jobs or faced greater job insecurity. As Florio puts it “Privatisation was an integral part of a series of policies that created a social rift unequalled anywhere in Europe”.

So, privatisation did not result in the waving of a magic productivity wand, partly because the record of the nationalised industries was reasonably good, partly because the new managers proved less innovative than expected, and partly because the new owners didn’t really care so long as the profits and dividends kept rolling in. What was lost, according to Florio, was the sense of a public realm, which stemmed from the “incapacity or unwillingness of governments at the end of the 20th century” to assume certain social responsibilities. Despite this, this model of Neo Liberalism is being mimicked across the world and is used as a stick by the World Bank and International Monetary Fund to bash poorer countries into line.

Next up for privatisation in Britain is the Post Office, which is already facing massive redundancies, attacks on postie’s pay and conditions, post office closures and a sharp drop in service. SchNEWS reckons that we’ll end up with public services which aren’t public and don’t actually provide a service.

\* You can contribute to the strike fund by sending cheques payable to the TGWU, c/o Steve Clark, TGWU Regional Office, 55 Call Lane, Leeds LS1. Email messages of support to martin@tgw910.fsnet.co.uk

\* For more on the strike www.indymedia.org.uk/en/regions/sheffield/

## TOOLING UP

Not content with spending £4.4bn on invading Afghanistan and Iraq, Chancellor Gordon Brown recently announced the "biggest planned increase in defence spending for 20 years". Although the news has been full of stories about the closure of RAF bases, war spending will actually increase by almost £4bn to almost £34bn by 2007. According to the government's defence review, we're promised high-tech warfare, pre-emptive nuclear strikes and more spies than ever before.

A chunk of new cash has been allocated to develop "Network-centric" warfare. The idea is that politicians and their corporate backers will wage war, in the not too distant future, on big computer screens in comfortable offices. Spy satellites, aircraft and soldiers with laptops will all be wired together and easier to control (lets hope they won't be using Windows!) Although such a system is supposedly helpful in the fight against enemies who may be difficult to pin down (guess who?), ministers hooked on technology have chosen to ignore the less sexy fact that British squaddies in Iraq are still complaining about their boots not being suitable for wearing in the desert heat.

Nukes are still in favour too. The Atomic Weapons Establishment at Aldermaston is to develop a 'necessary' successor to Trident. These 'efficient' bombs will be complimented by a missile defence system, in the guise of Star Wars II, at RAF Fylingdales. Spies are also to be given extra 10%. By 2007, the annual budget for the security and intelligence agencies - MI5, MI6 and GCHQ - and what the government calls "civil protection" will total more than £2bn.

After 11th September shares in defence companies soared after more than a decade in the doldrums caused by the fall of the Berlin Wall. Whilst companies like Boeing and Lockheed Martin stand to make millions out of this new chunk of taxpayers' money, groups in Brighton have been acting to kick out local arms dealers EDO MBM. The company has publicly admitted that their products manufactured in Brighton have been used in Iraq and are probably being used in Israel as well. Actions have already taken place including the shutting down of the factory for a day with a roadblock and rooftop occupation.

A protest camp will be set up between Sunday 29th August to Thursday 2nd September as part of the ongoing campaign against the arms dealer and will start on the Monday with NVDA workshops. Lifts can be arranged from Aldermaston to Brighton. Bring tents and other camping gear. Email: thewallmustfall@hotmail.com

\* On Sept. 4 **The Iraq War Fat Cat Tour** will be exposing the British companies making a killing in Iraq Meet outside the Shell Centre (SE1 7NA, near Waterloo station). Email: www.voicesuk.org \* There's a **Switch Off Star Wars National demo** on Sept. 25 Noon - 4pm Fylingdales Star Wars base. www.yorkshirecnd.org.uk

## G8-CRASHERS

A Global Day Of Action has been called for Wednesday July 6th 2005, the opening day of the G8 Summit next year. The G8 (Group of eight most industrialised nations) will meet at Gleneagles Hotel in Perthshire, about 40 miles north of Edinburgh.

The Dissent! Network has sprung up around the UK to build a national network and converge on Scotland to disrupt the summit next year, and there is a call out for simultaneous actions to be organised in villages, towns and cities around the world.

\* The next Dissent! Gathering will take place in Edinburgh on 17-19th September. See www.dissent.org.uk

\* SchNEWS has made a high impact 30 second teaser trailer about the G8 Summit which is free to download at www.schnews.org.uk/schmovies

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## SchNEWS in brief

**Eviction Alert!** A recently established protest camp at **Two Mile Coppice, Weymouth** (SchNEWS 463) to stop the destruction of an ecologically rich habitat has been served its papers. The Eviction could happen anytime now. More committed activists are urgently needed to protect this ecologically sensitive site. They are also in urgent need of long wooden joists for treehouse building, planks, rope etc. 07800 760257 \*\* Workers at a **Wal-Mart** store in the Canadian province of Quebec have won the right to unionise in a landmark first for the world's largest retailer which employs 1.3m people in the United States alone. A new report from the University of California said taxpayers in California pay an annual \$86m in public assistance to workers at Wal-Mart because they earn such low wages relying on food care, public health insurance and subsidised housing. \*\* Next Tuesday (10) **Indymedia Cinema** will be showing two films about the **Kalahari Desert Bushmen**, plus speakers and short film from Survival International on the current situation of San Bushmen and other indigenous peoples. 8pm @ The Ritzy, Brixton, Coldharbour Lane, Brixton \*\* **Queer Mutiny North** is planning a DIY queer night in a squat on September 3rd. 07763754356 www.queermutiny-north.da.ru \*\* On July 21st, the day after the transport white paper was announced, a delegation of roads protesters went to the **Dept of Transport** to remind them what happened to the last roads programme... for pictures see www.roadalert.org.uk To read about what happened to the last roads programme go to www.leedsef.org.uk

## Inside SchNEWS

**The US Patriot Act, passed after 9/11, enshrines in law the Big Brother State like no other Act before it...** Sherman Austin felt its sting when he was sentenced to one year in prison and 3 years probation for creating an anarchist website, "Raise The Fist". Sherman has recently been released from prison to a halfway house, where he will stay until the end of the month. Upon release, he won't be able to use a mobile phone, computer or any other digital device unless approved by the State for the next three years! He is also forbidden contact with any "anarchist" groups. A doctors report on Sherman said he was "a mild-mannered man who's social idealism took on a violent tone when associating with such groups." Judge Wilson said "this is a case which has national and international overtones".

Raise the Fist is unavailable at the moment but you can find out more at www.freesherman.org Details on the Patriot Act www.epic.org/privacy/terrorism/hr3162.html

\* **Billy Cotterell**, arrested last March in connection with ongoing arson attacks on SUV dealers in California, is now facing the possibility of life in prison without parole. 23 year old Billy, maintains his innocence and this move by the FBI is regarded as a political attack on the eco direct action movement in the USA. Write to William Cottrell #29526112, Metropolitan Detention Center PO Box 1500 Los Angeles, CA 90053 www.freebillycottrell.org

\* **AHOY INMATEYS!!! Haven Book Distribution** have a brand spanking new catalogue out! Haven provide books and magazines for the price of a second class stamp to prisoners in any one of the 159 (and rising) prisons in the UK. Send a 2nd class stamp to Haven Distribution, 27 Old Gloucester Street, London, WC1N 3XX for a free catalogue.

## Positive SchNEWS

The idea is simple one. If you can't afford to pay - don't. And if you get caught - well, if you're a member of Planka.nu, they will pay your fine for you!

Set up in 2001 by some anarchist syndicalists in Stockholm, Sweden the idea has now spread to Gothenburg, and Helsinki in Finland.

"P-kassan" is your insurance for when you get caught bunking. You pay a small amount according to your income and days you want to travel to a fund and if you get caught your fine is paid. The idea of this is not new with students in the university cities running smaller schemes - the difference this time, is that the anarchists "have a greater goal than just helping each other to freeride. We want free public transportation, owned by us together and controlled by the workers in it."

A small tax rise on the richest could make public transport free. And how much would companies save if they got rid of all the ticket machines, inspectors and barriers? "Lots of money goes to these systems which leads to nothing but a bad mood in our common spaces."

"In the long run free public transportation would lead to other positive effects, like a better urban environment with less traffic jams. Today car traffic is prioritized at the expense of public transportation. Roads are financed by tax money and are free to use, but the public transportation is financed by fares. It is rather strange that the authorities punish those who choose the means of travel that suits the environment best." www.planka.nu

## BAD RECEPTION

Mobile phone masts have been a creeping feature on the landscape over recent years, but the health aspects of the masts rarely get transmitted, and the masts go up without interference. But last week in Donegal people decided that they'd rather have their health than O2 mobile coverage, and tore down a mast which had been put up locally. The company had planning permission for the mast refused twice because of health and environmental factors, but still put it up anyway. Soon after the erection, the mast was pulled down and blockaded.

To find out about the risks of mobile phone masts and opposition to them in Britain see www.mastsanity.org

## OLD BILL BILLED!

A hunt saboteur was awarded damages of £1450 in Oxford County Court on July 19th after a jury found in favour of her claim against Thames Valley Police for assault. The case arose from when she was punched whilst being arrested on suspicion of Aggravated Trespass at the Garth and South Berks Hunt on December 9th 2000. This particular Hunt has been a regular target for sabbing for years - involving numerous arrests and a large police operation - and in 2002 sabbing forced it into merger with the neighbouring Vale of Aylesbury Hunt. The hunters put the merger down to the laughable excuse of "too many golf courses". HSA Press Office 07815 313181 www.huntsabs.org.uk

## ...and finally...

Sniffing has been taken to a new level by Todd, a police sniffer dog of five years experience. After searching an abandoned car in a field for drugs he became ill and later died of a suspected amphetamine overdose. Perhaps because of the dog's insatiable habit, police were unable to find any drugs on the scene, but the dogs handler, Roger Moore (we can't make this stuff up), is understandably upset. Without a hint of irony Lancashire Police told reporters that Spaniel sniffer dogs tend to be "quite daft, but very very very keen".

## Disclaimer

SchNEWS warns all bus passengers - all's fare in love and class war. Honest!