

Not fare

The famous "Fares Fair" scheme, by which some Labour members of the Greater London Council tried to ease London Transport's (L.T.) financial worries (and win some votes), pleased some people but enraged just as many more. Some complained that reduced fares were being paid for by higher rates while businesses claimed the increase would drive them to the wall and cause even more unemployment.

In the end the scheme was thrown out by the House of Lords and L.T. fares were doubled in March. This decision greatly pleased those other reformers, the Tories, but it did not solve L.T.'s financial problems - the consequence was a massive jump in fare-dodging.

This fare-dodging has been a long standing worry for L.T. but just recently it has come to a head because of several articles in the London evening newspaper, the *Standard*. Its August 10th article Find the Fare Fiddlers was all too reminiscent of similar headlines during the last two decades.

Back in January 1971 the Socialist Standard carried an article on this subject. At that time L.T. claimed to be losing only £1million yearly due to fare-dodging, but as the article in the Socialist Standard stated: "The signs are that London Transport's figure of £1 million will be shown to be hopelessly underestimated". In 1972 L.T. admitted that the losses were £5 million. By 1978 the figure was £12 million and in 1982 the loss is expected to be an astonishing £30 million - or over 5 per cent of L.T.'s total income.

In 1966 plans were made to install automatic ticket gates to control passenger entrance and exit. This was to have cost £10 million at 1966 prices but the rapidly escalating costs of the system have resulted in its partial introduction only. As most stations have no automatic gates many passengers simply pay the collector at the other end a fraction of the real cost of the journey.

In the past you could hand over a five penny piece and walk through the barrier with no trouble at all, but nowadays there is a marked change in the attitude of the collectors. They are much more zealous in their duties, not out of any new-found loyalty to L.T., but because many of them realise that the more they collect in excess fares the more they can keep for themselves. L.T. reckon that another £10 million is being lost to staff using this method, plus a variety of ingenious variations.

Not that Underground employees get all of this £10 million to themselves, for L.T.'s bus conductors also have ways of keeping part of what they collect. These include the use of Black and Decker drilling machines to wind back the counters on ticket machines and, according to the *Standard* newspaper article, more than 2,000 of L.T.'s 13,000 bus conductors have already been cautioned for fiddling fares.

This conflict between L.T. and its employees is actually part of the ceaseless struggle between employees and employers, whether the latter be private companies or state or municipal concerns. The main bone of contention is usually wages and conditions of work but workers will also claw back a bit of what they can't get legally. Rare indeed is the worker who never goes for a read or does a "homer" in the company's time, never uses the photocopier for his or her own purpose, never takes home the company's stationery or arrives late or leaves early. And it's the same with the army of fare-dodgers. True, they aren't employees of L.T. (no doubt many of them think L.T. belongs to them!) but hard-up workers will always try to supplement their earnings with a bit of free travel if they can.

VV

Socialist Standard October 1982