

ANARCHISTS VS TRANSIT AUTHORITY

"Fare fight - don't pay!"

By John Charny

Vancouver's transit authority didn't expect a "fare fight" when it recently hiked bus fares 40%.

But members of Vancouver's burgeoning anarchist community got themselves organized, and came out punching in a display of direct action that involved thousands of bus passengers fighting the increase for at least two weeks.

Weeks before the actual increase, members of about a dozen city-wide anarchist groups formed the anarchist Coalition Against Fare Increases (CAFI) and launched a propaganda campaign promoting the idea of direct action resistance.

Through a series of stickers, leaflets and parades of the transit authority news bulletin, passengers were encouraged to refuse to pay the increase when it came into effect.

DEFERRED PAYMENTS
"Deferred Payment Slips," a tactic borrowed from London's Fare Fight campaign of a few years ago, were introduced to increase the range of protest.

Tens of thousands of the slips were printed up and distributed by CAFI at a mass giveaway with the suggestion that bus riders could "Open a Credit Account with B.C. Hydro" (the transit authority). Instead of paying the increase people were encouraged to pay only what they could afford and to hand in their slip with a name and address, allowing Hydro to bill them for the balance.

When the slips were first introduced, buses throughout the city were tied up for hours, as protesting passengers argued with uncooperative drivers, transit supervisors, and police called in to try to intimidate people into paying the increase. Only one person was arrested and charges were eventually dropped.

POPULAR SUPPORT
Union members were instructed by the union to accept the IOU slips and many did, quietly aiding the revolt by destroying them later on their own, but others refused and policies protesting passengers mercilessly for the extra fare.

To further the resistance, CAFI "flying squads" of a half dozen people or more boarded buses randomly without paying to talk to passengers, hand out literature and encourage others to resist the increase.

Support from sympathetic passengers was widespread. According to one CAFI member:

"We received dozens of phone calls each day from people willing to help distribute our literature and the slips, or from others just telling us about their success or failure on the buses that day without the slips."

Old age pensioners and welfare recipients were especially supportive, commending us for our refusal to accept another



Fare rebels Simon Wild, Gerry Useless, and Eagle put bodies on the line.

increase in the cost of living. Secretaries offered to xerox material for us and distribute it in their offices. Students took material to their classes or organized to their own groups of resistors going to and from school. Local punk rockers played an important role in direct street action and stormed the BC Hydro building, leaving scattered leaflets and beleaguered bureaucrats in their wake."

Most encouraging was the

evidence from personal observations, phone calls, and talks with passengers and drivers - that literally thousands of ordinary people were taking their own initiative to fight back each time they boarded a bus, making up their own IOU slips, paying the old fare, or putting a lesser fare in pennies.

Many said they agreed with CAFI's statement: "We believe that the cost of the

transit system should be borne by the corporations that depend on public transit to bring their employees to work and their customers to the cash register.

SELF-REDUCTION

We believe that the people who ride and work on the buses should make the decisions about public transport - not the politicians and Hydro bureaucrats."

Yet the extent of popular

support and participation just wasn't enough to sustain the drawn out protest that was needed.

"Too many of us got too tired, too soon," said a CAFI member, "and couldn't carry on, the level of organizing required to keep the resistance up front. But there's no way really of ever knowing how many passengers carried on the protest individually as a result of our agitation. For folks in Vancouver, this was their first exposure to the idea and the practice of mass 'self-reduction' as a means of fighting back."

MASS PROTESTS

It may have been a first for Vancouver but direct action resistance to transit fare hikes has made headlines in numerous other cities for some time.

The latest fight was in Guatemala when angry workers staged a general strike, with massive protests in the streets, overturning and burning buses and exchanging gunfire with police after the government had raised fares 100%.

In Montreal, militant citizen groups organized a widespread campaign of civil

disobedience. Organized groups held open turnstiles along the Metro and allowed hundreds of passengers to board for free. Others boarded buses and covered the fareboxes with their hands ushering on passengers.

IN EUROPE

In London, tens of thousands of passengers participated in an organized fare fight and, with the cooperation of sympathetic London Transport workers, used deferred payment slips, paying only what they considered to be a reasonable fare.

The struggle in Milano, Italy, was somewhat more heated a year ago when anarchists occupied subway stations, taped shut the ticket receiving machines, held the ticket supervisors hostage in their booths, and waved passengers through the turnstiles.

Ticket machines across the city were systematically sabotaged and offices of the transit authority were firebombed. Damage to the ticket machines was so widespread that thousands of passengers rode for free for months.

Europe's airwaves go underground

If you thought Orson Wells' broadcast of War of the Worlds was soundly convincing, try tuning in to a live, on-the-spot report of a pitched battle between Italian student demonstrators and the police, complete with a description of police firepower, what streets they controlled, and where more demonstrators were needed to even out the odds.

This wouldn't be an of-beat, commercialized package of real-life drama, designed to supplement some mind-numbing disco on a top 40 radio station, but rather, it's the kind of refreshing, unconventional broadcasting some European radio fans can look forward to these days from a growing number of politicized underground radio stations.

These non-commercial, legal and illegal stations from Bologna to Paris are vying for the continental airwaves in an attempt to provide an alternative source of information and entertainment distinct from the commercial pop most listeners grow accustomed to.

AIRWAVE SQUATTERS

Italy is in the forefront of the alternative radio station movement, with more than 1,000 local radio stations each, in their own way challenging the traditional political control of the media by a State monopoly.

They "squat" in disused wavelengths, until the law clears them out, offer openly "biased" broadcasting depending on which political or social group operates them.

One of the most famous of

these underground, "free radio" stations is the politically autonomous "Radio Alice," which started in February, 1976, with a \$300 used transmitter and a record player bought on an installment plan.

A volunteer collective runs the station, but organization of its daily broadcasts is open to independent work teams of feminists, students, squatters, gays, and cultural groups.

UNCENSORED NEWS

Up to the minute news and eyewitness reports are uncensored because the collective is committed to the principle of allowing anyone to speak openly. Listeners constantly phone the station and are given the opportunity to discuss, on the air, personal or collective problems dealing with sex, drugs, unemployment, and other matters.

In Milano, Italy, following a two hour analysis of a demonstration on Radio Popolare, conducted through phoned-in accounts and link-ups with other stations, an observer commented:

"An interpretation of what happened emerged from the contributions of the different people involved. It's as if during the day, things happen in the streets, and during the night, things happen through the radio stations.

That's very important: the whole movement is in contact through its radio stations and everybody can link up and speak. The whole shape things take is decided during the night on the airwaves and

executed during the day. The thing has the control that comes from an action being discussed by tens of thousands of people through the radio."

When a woman was recently gang-raped in Rome, there was an immediate mobilization through phone chains and announcements over Radio Citta Futura. Within six hours, 10,000 women had poured into the streets.

Since most of the stations are non-commercial, operating capital comes from a groups' own pockets, listener subscriptions, trade union donations for air time, benefit concerts on the air, and alternative news agency

efforts in which station staff package and sell news items to other groups.

Many rely on inexpensive, used equipment to keep their costs down and rent-free squatted headquarters where available.

In Spain, they stay light and mobile with cheap compact radio transmitters that allow them to broadcast concise reports of strikes and demos from rooftop locations and sign off before the police can zero in on them.

Police crackdowns on the illegal stations across Europe pose a constant threat, and more than one station can boast of a live recording and

transcript of a police break-in and arrest.

Opposition also comes from powerful radio monopolies wary of potentially bothersome competition. In France, where there are over 80 non-commercial stations, some of the radio monopolies trying to jam those stations occupying unassigned airwaves have wound up blacking out whole areas of

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Radio appeal brings Italian anti-rape protesters out into the streets.