

WINTER OF DISCONTENT

(Contd. From Page 11)

Party leadership.

At Congress in 1978 everybody expected Jim Callaghan to announce the General Election. Dave Bassett of the GMWU had even briefed journalists on this very subject, and like everybody else was left feeling very stupid when Callaghan burst into song, and did not call the election. Given the background of pay restraint over the previous years at a time when inflation was in double figures, the governments next mistake was to try to limit pay rises to 5% when the most optimistic of forecasters were still predicting inflation of 9.9%.

The first out were the Ford workers who soon won a pay rise well into double figures, to be quickly followed by oil delivery drivers, delivery drivers, hospitals, council workers etc. The Government used threats. They told Ford they would cancel contracts with them, furthermore the army was on permanent stand by.

The programme was an excellent reminder of a proud moment in our history and a sad moment in the history of the Labour Party. It also demonstrated a good lesson for all

CONTACTS LIST

NOTTS CATUC
Jon O'Neill © PO Box M MUWC
2 Beech Avenue Mansfield
NG18 1EY (01623) 424720
MANSFIELD & DISTRICT TUC
(as Notts CATUC)
NEWARK TUC
Dave Bryant 27 Nicholson St
Newark Notts NG24 1RD
NOTTINGHAM TUC
Ian Juniper 118 Mansfield Rd
Nottingham NG1 3HL
RETFORD & DISTRICT TUC
Tommy Hirst, 11 Broadleigh Court
Ordsall, Retford, Notts DN22 7GP
STAPLEFORD, BEESTON & DISTRICT TUC
Mick Worrall 6 Holden Gardens
Stapleford NG9 7GX
WORKSOP & DISTRICT TUC
Dave Pressley 15 Thievesdale Lane
Worksop Notts S81 0NG
Trades Union Resources in Notts
MUWC 2 Beech Avenue Mansfield
NG18 1EY (01623) 424720
118 Workshop
118 Mansfield Road Nottingham
NG1 3HL
Telephone and Minicom
(0115) 958 2369

(Contd from col 1)

trade unionists. Many of the shop stewards interviewed said "We were representing the interests of our members who had elected us, not the labour government and the TUC". Because the shop stewards in the late seventies were well organised they were also able to deliver. A lesson it would be timely to remember.

If this programme is ever repeated ... watch it!!

JON O'NEILL



£0. ITS THE OFFICIAL UNION RATE.

FREETH
CARTWRIGHT
HUNT
DICKINS

SOLICITORS

If your union is a member of the union law scheme, you are entitled to a free first meeting to discuss any problem except work related matters.

Contact Terry Oldham on (0115) 936 9369

FREETH CARTWRIGHT HUNT DICKINS

WILLOUGHBY HOUSE, 20 LOW PAVEMENT, NOTTINGHAM, NG1 7EA. TEL. 0115 936 9369

If you think work has made you ill, you need

Nottinghamshire Trade Union Safety Committee

We offer FREE testing for Hearing, Vibration White Finger, Lung Function and can offer advice on compensation claims and Health and Safety information.

Call us at 2 Beech Avenue Mansfield (01623) 424720 and ask for Tony



"Aiming
to keep
you safe"

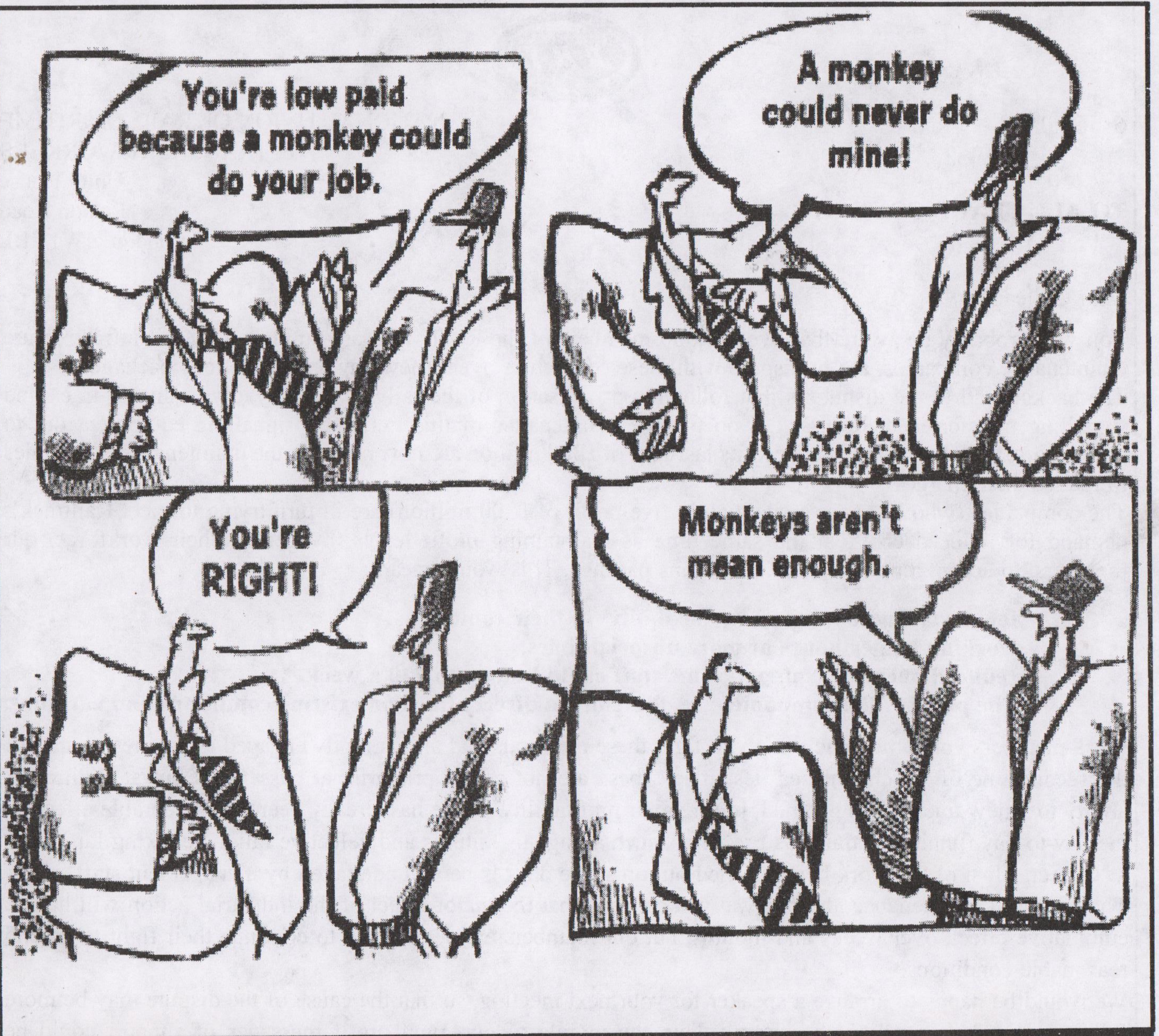
NOTTS TU NEWS

ISSUE 18

Free or Donation

July/Aug

Published by the Nottinghamshire Association of Trades Union Councils



CONTENTS

- P2. RMT RAIL WORKERS DISPUTE
- P3. OCCUPATION OF TRANSPORT HOUSE, CARDIFF
- P4. THE MINERS - TIME FOR JUSTICE
- P5. CONFERENCE: NEW LABOUR & THE LABOUR MOVEMENT
- P6/7 HEALTH & SAFETY

- P8. US SHRINKING BENEFITS
- P9. BENEFIT FRAUD - THE TRUTH
- P10. VIRTUAL VILLAGE PROJECT
- P11. HARRY LOACH - AN APPRECIATION
- P11 THE WINTER OF DISCONTENT

CAMPAIGNING & DISPUTES

RMT RAIL MAINTENANCE WORKERS DISPUTE



6 July 1998

NATIONAL UNION OF RAIL, MARITIME
& TRANSPORT WORKERS
Unity House
Euston Road
London NW1 2BL

TO ALL TRADE COUNCILS

Dear Colleague,

You will probably be aware that over 10,000 members of the RMT, who are employed by rail infrastructure maintenance companies, are in dispute with these companies over a new pay and conditions package. The background to the dispute is that following privatisation of the railway industry, ownership of track and signalling transferred to Railtrack, who put the maintenance of this track and signalling equipment out to contractors. Railtrack, who made profits last year of £388 million are now pressing the maintenance companies to reduce their charges.

The companies (who last year made a collective profit of £300 million) are in turn trying to meet Railtrack's demand for reduced costs, at the same time as maintaining profit levels, by getting their workforce, our members, to accept a new pay and conditions package. This would mean:

- ⇒ fewer staff accepting more 'flexibility' in their conditions,
- ⇒ working longer hours at more unsocial times,
- ⇒ reduced overall earnings - some staff could lose up to £40 a week.
- ⇒ The plans of the companies are, therefore, a direct attack on existing conditions and earnings.

RMT members voted overwhelmingly to fight these proposals and are currently engaged in a series of strikes, the second one of which finished yesterday. These are not aimed primarily at passengers but at Railtrack's ability to renew track when planned, hitting their profitability. There has already been a considerable effect on the day-to-day running of trains as problems, such as signals failures and defective rails, are taking far longer to correct. Most of the work being carried out on strike days is being undertaken by management staff.

The nature of maintenance and renewal work means that the major effect of the industrial action will have a cumulative effect, over weeks and months, but our members are determined to continue their fight to defend reasonable conditions.

We would be happy to arrange a speaker for your next meeting, so that the cause of the dispute may be more fully explained. It would also certainly help the morale of our members if messages of support could be forwarded by your Trades Council to the Union.

While we hope to achieve an early resolution, we recognise that this may be a lengthy dispute. I would ask you, therefore, to consider practical help, in the form of a financial donation to the hardship fund which has been set up to assist those members on strike, and their families.

If you are able to make a contribution, I would be grateful if cheques could be made payable to 'RMT Strike Fund 98'.

Yours sincerely,

J. Knapp

J. Knapp
General Secretary

CAMPAIGNING & DISPUTES

OCCUPATION OF TRANSPORT HOUSE ,CARDIFF

The Welsh Labour party headquarters is in Cardiff situated on the second floor of an imposing modern building belonging to the Transport and General Workers Union.

It was decided to target the Labour Party to highlight three aspects of New Labour policy; namely their refusal to abolish or even eliminate any of the abusive features of the Job Seekers Allowance (JSA) the recently introduced welfare system, also we were protesting against the Welfare to Work scheme which is being introduced and which is in line with the US and Canadian workfare systems and is aimed at the same end result, the lowering of labour costs of the lowest 20% of the labour market. And finally we wanted to show solidarity with our unemployed comrades in Europe whose occupations have done so much to put the unemployment issue in the public spotlight. We did not want Blair to be able to say at the summit where he is proposing workfare and the cutting of welfare budgets throughout Europe a project he had openly adopted before he became elected, there is no resistance in UK.

Comrades from the south of England the North West and North East members of Unemployed Action Group and Brighton Campaign Against Benefit Cuts, entered the building at 1 pm on Monday the 15th of June.

A comrade in a suit had previously gone inside to check it out.

On announcing the occupation some left but a number of officials refused to go. We started a dialogue with them to explain why we were there and demanded to speak to Tony Blair, meanwhile in an adjacent room other comrades were hanging banners out of the windows and starting to contact the media by phone and fax.

Other comrades outside the building were taking photographs, contacting the media, issuing press statements, distributing the paper of the Euromarches and giving out leaflets.

Cardiff was hosting the EU Summit and there was a high state of security alert with frequent road blocks.

Within minutes two police were in the building and we had to play for time. We explained why we were there and pointed out that welfare to work would undermine their pay. Their sergeant arrived who claimed to be a Member of Parliament. Next came the trade union official who was responsible for the building, we pointed out that the founder of his union Ernie Bevin, had started by organising a successful campaign on behalf of the unemployed in Bristol and he agreed that unions had to listen to unemployed people because they were not able to join trade unions. Meanwhile in the other office the

telephones and fax were in full use.

Our next visitor was a police superintendent. We told him we were forced to take this action because other means of protest like the march on Saturday had attracted no media attention. We said we were prepared to face arrest because we knew other forms of protest would be ignored.

Much to the annoyance of the labour party officials present he said he would leave us until five o'clock.

This was OK by us as we had planned to stay for only a few hours.

We were left with two police constables who proved sympathetic and helpful.

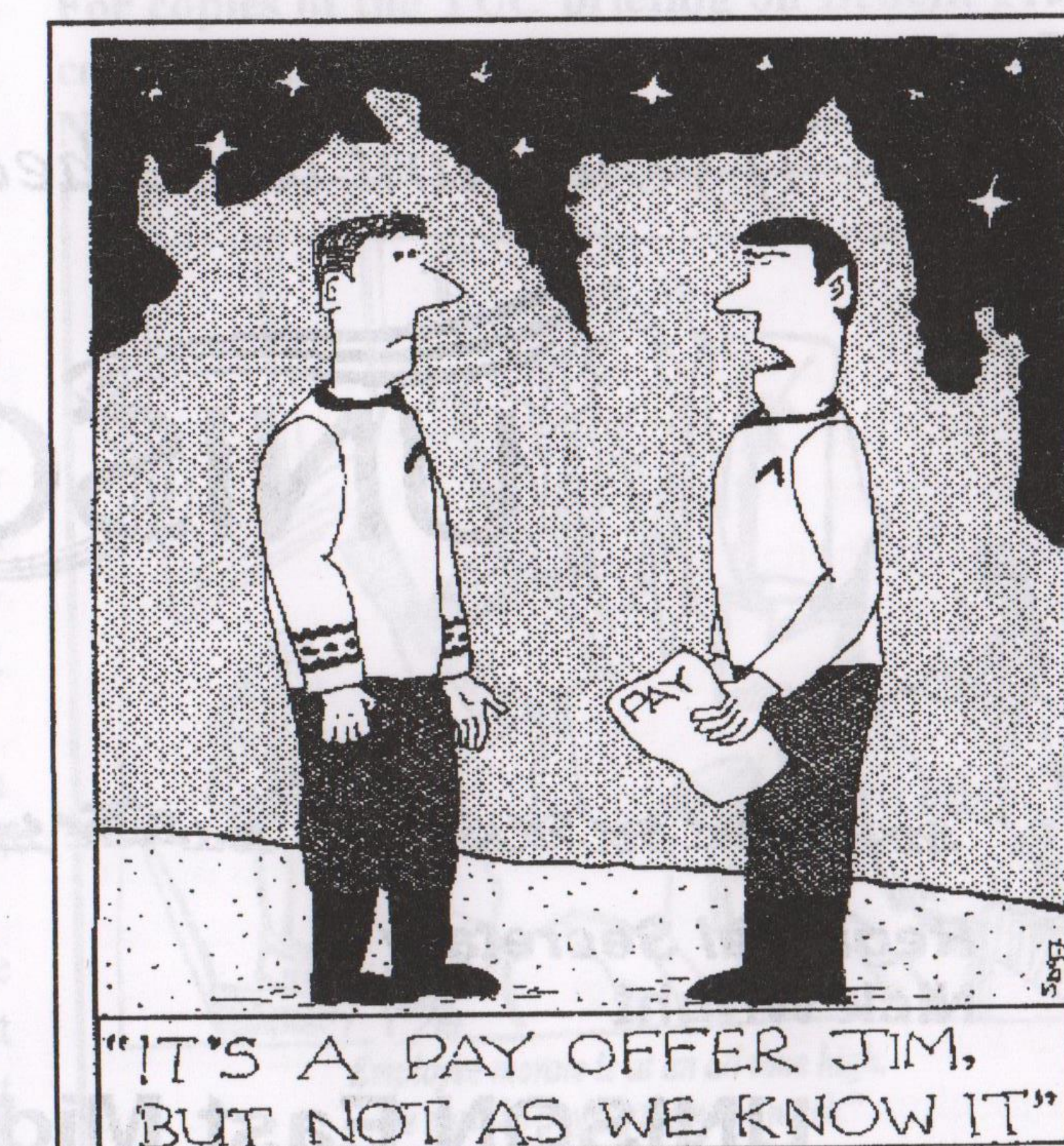
Supporters from Reclaim Europe and Reclaim the Streets gathered on the grass outside along with tv and press reporters, and a number of interviews were conducted including one with French Radio.

Upstairs we made extensive contact with the media and issued a press statement. We were also in contact with the whips office at the house of Commons.

We were interviewed on the telephone by Red Dragon local radio which we listened to when it was broadcast at 4pm.

We left at 4.30 with no sign of the police and in high spirits.

John Clayden



CAMPAIGNING & DISPUTES

TIME FOR JUSTICE!

In 1985 Trade Union Congress passed a composite resolution on the Miners Strike 1984/85. The final paragraph called on the TUC to campaign for, and the next Labour government to provide:-

(i) A complete review of all cases of miners jailed as a result of the dispute.

(ii) Reinstatement for miners sacked for activities arising out of the dispute.

(iii) Reimburse the National Union of Mineworkers all monies confiscated as a result of fines, sequestration and receivership".

A few weeks later the Labour Party conference passed a resolution giving full support to this TUC policy and calling on the next Labour government to implement the points listed above.

Today there is still over 40 mineworkers who have been victimised so effectively that they have not been able to find any kind of employment. These men have

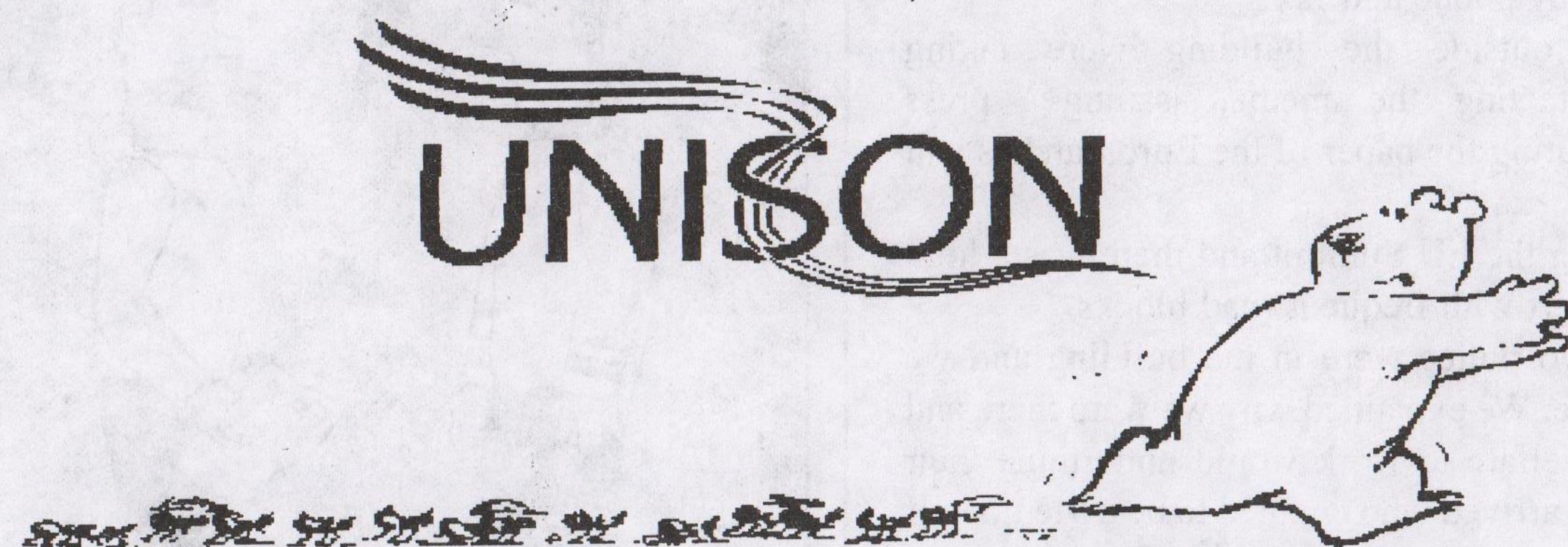
not received a wage since March 1984. Clearly the vicious pit closure programme has made the promise of reinstatement impossible, but there is no reason why these men should not be technically reinstated. This would allow for their Mineworkers Pension Scheme credits to be substantially upgraded giving some degree of future security to men who fought honourably for their industry, their communities and the future of their children. It is difficult for these men to accept that finance is a problem when they are aware that this Labour government has taken 742 million actuarial surplus from the Mineworkers Pension Scheme in the past year!

We call on the Trade Union movement and the Labour Party to honour the promises made all those years ago at the end of the strike. These men have waited for 13 years ...

IT IS TIME FOR JUSTICE!

If you want to be heard - speak in

UNISON



Regional Secretary
Nick Wright

Regional Convenor
Norman Wilson

UNISON East Midlands Region

15 Castle Gate, Nottingham NG1 6BY. Tel: 0115 956 7200

CONFERENCE REPORT

NEW LABOUR AND THE LABOUR MOVEMENT

Anyone going to this short conference at Sheffield University hoping for a debate on the big issues facing trade unions would have been disappointed. What we got was a series of prepared speeches with little time - or encouragement - for discussion: it just goes to show you can't trust academics to get stuck in to the problems of real life!

The majority of speakers were from the "New Establishment", representing either New Labour or New Trade Unionism - those who clearly didn't, such as Alan Simpson MP and Hilary Wainwright (editor of "Red Pepper" magazine) were kept well away from the others, in case socialism might be catching.

Brendan Barber (Deputy General Secretary of the TUC) told us that "partnership" was now the name of the game, but was unable to comment on the value of a partnership in which one partner can make the other redundant. Dennis McShane, MP, made a lot of jokes about what he was allowed to say, but Tony Blair needn't have worried - he also wanted to emphasise partnership and the role of unions in "seeking to stabilise and calm the labour market", ie. keeping you in order! Alan Simpson gave his usual Labour Left line: don't leave the party, stay and fight; most members retain the old core beliefs; trade unions need to reclaim a role in forming Labour Party policy - the man's an optimist! Unlike some on the left, he doesn't see Proportional Representation leading to the reappearance of a socialist party; we shall see.

Hilary Wainwright called for a coalition of socialists, both inside and outside the Labour Party to start to roll back the lurch to the right and pointed out the democratisation and lack of confidence in the labour movement at present. We need new policies and new ways of supporting our aims. She believes that if Proportional Representation doesn't lead to a new party (with trade union support), there will be a massive

and bitter struggle for the Labour party - and pointed out that while Blair's support in the country and the labour movement is currently wide, it lacks any real depth and is quite brittle. He isn't as safe as he looks

Finally, we were subjected to a presentation by Diana Jeuda, who is a senior trade union officer (USDW) and a member of Labour's National Executive. My notes for this session read as follows: "Absolutely appalling! Which world does this woman live in?"

In her Virtual Reality, Labour and the unions continue to enjoy an excellent relationship, with Labour continually responding to the TU agenda. Only one or two little problems blight the picture and they'll just go away if we ignore them - so nothing to worry about folks, it's all in hand!

We need more meetings/Conferences on the relationship between the unions and New Labour, but not organised on these lines. Real people with real daily problems need to start thinking and discussing the previously unthinkable - how about these issues for a start:

Should unions refuse to financially support MPs who vote against union policy?

Should unions affiliated to the Labour Party consider cutting the link and only "paying by results" - if it works for Bernie Ecclestone, maybe it can work for us!

Should the TUC set up a new Labour Representation Committee - the original Committee was set up in 1900 to secure representation for ordinary working people in Parliament and gave birth to the Labour Party in 1906.

So it's over to you - all of you - and don't worry, I'll be happy to help!

MIKE SCOTT
(Notts County Unison)

RED RAMBLES 1998

Red Rambles are monthly guided walks in Derbyshire, Staffordshire and Leicestershire for Socialists, Greens and Anarchists. Walkers are reminded to wear boots and suitable clothing and to bring food and drink. Walks are 5-8 mile in length.

Sunday 23 August

Meet at 11.00 am at Royal Oak Public House car park, Wetton, Derbyshire. 5-6 mile walk via Thors Cave and Wetton Hill.

Sunday 20 September

Meet at 11.00 am outside Scarthin Books, The Promenade, Cromford, Derbyshire. 5-6 mile walk to Bole Hill.

(Contd. from column 1)

Sunday 11 October

Meet 10.30 am at the Barley Mow pub, Bonsall, Derbyshire. 5-6 mile walk to Ible via lead mining relics and pastures.

Sunday 22 November

Meet 11.00 am at Surprise View car park on A623 Hathersage to Sheffield Road. (1½ miles out of Hathersage on left). 6-7 mile walk to Stannage Edge via Carl Wark ancient hillfort.

Sunday 27 December

Meet 11.00 am at Strutt Arms Pub car park, Mildford, Derbyshire (A6 Derby to Belper road). 4 mile walk via the Chevin.

Enquiries (01773) 827513)

HEALTH & SAFETY

LAW AND MORALS: HOW FAR HAVE WE COME?

In the year 2002, it will be exactly 200 years since the very first piece of health and safety legislation. was introduced.

The *Health & Morals of Apprentices Act 1802* went a little way to improving the conditions for children working in the cotton mills and various factories.

The provision of ventilation and certain aspects of welfare were included in the Act. However, the improvements were certainly not exceptional and would have probably not even been made by many of the employers. Moral aspects of the Act were concerned with children attending church on Sundays, obeying their masters and probably being made aware of their place in society.

At this time, when death or injury as a result of work activities, was regarded as more of an inconvenience to employers, this act would, in reality, have done very little to ensure the safety of children.

Various pieces of legislation were introduced in the following years, including the first *Factories Act 1833*. There would not be sufficient space for this article to name many of the pieces of legislation that continued to spring up although a few have been listed (extracts courtesy of the Croner publication: *The Law of Health & Safety at Work*):

<i>The Shop Hours Regulations Act</i>	1886
<i>The Seats For Shop Assistants Act</i>	1899
<i>Factory and Workshops Act</i>	1901
<i>The Factories Act</i>	1937
superseded by	
<i>The Factories Act</i>	1961
<i>The Office, Shops and Railway</i>	
<i>Premises Act</i>	1963

Many of these and other acts would be incorporated into modern legislation and regulations including guidance notes and ACOPs. For instance, The Seats for Shop Assistants Act could be considered and important welfare issue, seating requirements would now be found in the *Health, Safety & Welfare Regulations 1992*.

The law of Health & Safety was confusing and only applied to specific workplaces. Even with all the legislation that was around, Health & Safety had a low priority, the prevention of accidents and ill health did not appear to be the main concern. Much of the emphasis was placed on compensation following the event, efforts to ensure there was no repeat were rarely considered.

The passing of the *Health and Safety at Work Act (HASWA) 1974* was the beginning of a new era in occupational health and safety. This act brought an estimated further 8m workers under Health & Safety law.

An enabling act, HASWA includes requirements to ensure the safety of the public also from work activities. Many of the regulations in place today are a direct consequence of HASWA. The Act also brought about the creation of the Health & Safety Commission/Executive. Today we have countless regulations, the majority aimed at improving standards and ensuring the safety of people.

Over the years, safety professionals have introduced new techniques and methods in risk assessment and accident prevention. There is a wide variety of relevant and specialised training for employees. Trade Unions train potential safety representatives to a high standard including negotiating skills. The changes in health and safety over the years have been phenomenal.

Nevertheless with all of the legislation, all of the skills, knowledge and experience, with all that we have supposedly learned from past experiences, how far have we really come since the Act of 1802? Let me put in into some sort of perspective. In almost 200 years the population has probably tripled, we have all the modern technology and other advances mentioned above, including enough legislation to fill a football stadium. Against this, there is an ever-increasing number of hazards and dangers, including new substances. In reality, if you were able to compare the death rate, number of accidents and cases of industrial related diseases, it is questionable as to whether there would be very much difference.

There are number of reasons why the carnage continues in my opinion:

1. Enforcement and the penalties for employers who knowingly contravene regulations are not strict or severe enough.

2. The emphasis on profit and, in many cases, the employers' greed, their sole purpose being personal wealth. Legal aspects of health and safety are not always the main issue. Health and safety should not exist simply because it is required by law. At the start of this article, I spoke of the Health and Morals Act - well, health and safety is also about morals. Imagine if all the law on health and safety was suddenly removed and employers had no legal obligations whatsoever to safeguard the workforce. Imagine if no course of action could be taken by employees injured at work, how many employers would still aim to safeguard the workforce because they believed it was the moral thing to do? *If many of the employers today took a moral stance and acted upon it, then it might be possible to take compliance with the law so much further.*

Tony Ridgeway

HEALTH & SAFETY

HAZARDS '99

10th National Hazards Conference FINANCIAL APPEAL

Dear Friends,

The 10th National Hazards Conference, to be held in Bristol on 26-28 March 1999, will be the single most important event for Trade Union Safety Representatives in 1999, and will celebrate 20 years of the Safety Representative's Regulations.

This Conference; which will attract hundreds of Trade Unionists from every type of industry, will present a unique opportunity for Safety Representatives to update themselves on changes in the law, Trade Union policies and current good practice in workplaces. Every year, hundreds of workers are killed, thousands are seriously injured in accidents caused by their work, and thousands of workers are diagnosed as having developed an industrial disease, caused by conditions at work. Most, if not all, of these fatal and serious accidents and ill health could, and should, have been prevented if management had carried out their legal responsibilities to provide a safe working environment, and safe ways of doing the jobs that they ask their employees to do.

Safety Representatives make a substantial contribution to improving Health and Safety standards at their workplaces, a contribution which has been acknowledged by research commissioned by the Health and Safety Executive, proving that workplaces where there are active Safety Representatives are safer than those workplaces without an effective Trade Union presence. But--- Safety Representatives need regular support to enable them to continue to fight, often against the odds, to protect their members from ruthless or unthinking employers. They need what this Conference can provide:

- an opportunity to talk over the problems they face with other Safety Reps from the same, or other, industries;
- to collect up-to-date information from their own, and other, Trade Unions; to recharge their batteries to continue for another year.

WE NEED YOUR MONEY IN ORDER TO MAKE THIS CONFERENCE SUCCESSFUL !!

Please support us. All organisations supporting us will be acknowledged in our publicity, unless they request otherwise. Thank you.

Judith Connor

For the Hazards '99 Organising Committee

Sponsorship Form I/We wish to sponsor the Hazards '99 Conference in Bristol

Organisation..... Contact Person

Address:

Phone:..... Sponsorship Amount: £.....(made payable to Hazards '99)

Please return to Hazards '99, c/o Fire Brigade Union, SW Regional office, 158 Muller Road, Horfield, BRISTOL BS7 9RE

E-MAIL FROM NEW YORK

US SHRINKING BENEFITS

Since the 1970's, the gap in wages between skilled and unskilled workers in the United States has widened sharply. But new research shows the inequality does not stop there. Discrepancies in job benefits and the quality of work life have also grown, pointing to a bigger chasm than previously recognised.

"Unskilled workers get the short end of the stick - and it's getting shorter", said James Heckman, an economist at the University of Chicago.

Study after study has shown that the gains from the post 1970's economic growth have eluded unskilled workers. The median wage of those with only a high school diploma fell by 6 percent, adjusted for inflation, from 1980 to 1996, while the earnings of college graduates rose by 12 percent.

Though there have been indications in recent months that a scarcity of workers in the surging US economy has begun raising wages for those on the low end, the gain has been modest and not enough to counter the decades long trend. Besides, wages alone provide an incomplete picture of a worker's standing. Though economists have long recognised the need to incorporate working conditions and fringe benefits in any comprehensive analysis, they have been stymied by a lack of detailed data.

Until now, Brooks Pierce, an economist at the US Department of Labour, used confidential data regularly collected by the Bureau of labour statistics from businesses to measure trends in total compensation. The results are striking. While specialists had long assumed that benefits acted as a levelling influence, particularly because of government-required benefits like Social Security and unemployment insurance, the opposite is true.

By Mr Pierce's calculation, the total compensation in 1982 of workers in the top 10 percent - \$35.16 an hour - was 4.56 times that of workers in the bottom 10 percent - \$7.72 an hour. Fourteen years later, the ratio had increased to 5.56 to 1, with highly paid workers having gained \$1.73 an hour and low-end workers having lost 93 cents an hour. Benefits led to a greater discrepancy in earnings between high-wage and low-wage workers in both 1982 and 1996. Moreover, they were responsible for one-tenth of the increasing disparity between the working elite and the working poor over the 14 years.

Benefits have long been perceived as a great equalizer. In percentage terms, a bare-bones \$3,000 medical insurance package adds more to the compensation of a worker making \$20,000 than a full frills \$10,000 package for an executive earning \$200,000.

The catch, according to Mr Pierce, is that a growing number of workers at the bottom of the pay scale have lost access to key employer-provided benefits. More than 80

percent of workers received paid holidays and vacations in 1996, but fewer than 10 percent of those in the bottom tenth received paid leave of any kind. Similarly, about 70 percent of workers have pension plans, while less than ten percent of those in the bottom can count on any employer-financed retirement benefits. Access to health insurance follows a similar pattern.

Employers generally cannot deny benefits to lower-wage workers without putting the tax-exempt status of those benefits at risk. So how is this disparity in benefits possible? Henry Farber, an economist at search on medical benefits confirms Mr Pierce's finding, points to loopholes that allow companies to deny benefits to workers just starting out and to workers not classified as full time.

"Employers are figuring out all sorts of ways to discriminate between employees they wish to keep and those who come and go" he said.

In some cases, employers have turned to temporary and contract workers, whose pay packages do not include time off and other benefits. United Parcel Service even endured a strike in which a big issue was the company's desire to use more part time workers to hold down costs.

Perhaps an even bigger surprise than the lack of benefits is how little people with especially demanding or unpleasant jobs are compensated for difficult working conditions. Job hazards, everything from working in extreme temperatures to working a dangerous, lonely night shift at a highway convenience store, would seem to command higher wages than similar work under less taxing circumstances.

By looking at arguably the best measure of job conditions, the risk of injury, a new study by Daniel Hamermesh, an economist at the University of Texas, found that workers on the low end of the wage scale were falling ever further behind. In 1979, workers in the top quarter of wage earners lost 38 percent more days to on-the-job injuries than workers in the bottom quarter, Mr Hamermesh found. By 1995, the pattern had reversed. High-wage earners lost 32 percent fewer days than low-wage earners.

One possible explanation for the failure to reduce injuries among low earners, suggest Alan Krueger, an economist at Princeton University, is the declining power of labour unions. While employers may know how dangerous a job is and how much it would cost to make it safer, individual workers rarely do. *A union may be able to even the playing field by tracking health and safety issues and negotiating improvements.*

Eric Fenster (efenster@igc.org)

FEATURE

BENEFIT FRAUD - THE TRUTH

Frank Fields latest consultation document "Beating Fraud is Everyone's Business" was launched with the usual fanfare of publicity on Monday July 13th. Behind the media frenzy it would be useful to put the whole exercise in context. This document has to be looked at in relation to other events, i.e., New Deal Reform, The Benefit Integrity Programme etc. In fact, behind the media hysteria, the paper does try and adopt a balanced approach with three clear objectives:

- 1) *A Secure system "with money only going to those who are entitled to it".*
- 2) *A first class service "which responds to individual beneficiary's needs".*
- 3) *"Those who are eligible to claim and receive their entitlement".*

Nobody would argue with those.

The DSS Benefits Reviews show that 2% of claims by value are fraudulent with varying degrees of suspicion that another 5% by value may also be fraudulent. The total cost of fraud is therefore 267 billion pounds per annum. Incorrectness also leads to annual underpayments of 600 million pounds. As the TUC pointed out in its contribution to the Welfare Reforms response, "Benefit fraud can be surprisingly difficult to measure. The government usually takes Weekly Benefit Savings (WBS) as the measure of fraud. One problem with this measure is that the WBS are an estimate and are calculated by multiplying the actual amount of benefit saved by 32 weeks.

Large scale fraud is wrong and the Green Paper recognises the role of landlords and employers in encouraging and committing fraud.

In 1997 the Policy Studies Institute interviewed a number of claimants and found that fraud was often committed by people who didn't understand the rules of the benefits they were claiming (DSS Research Report 64).

To put some balance into the discussion it is also worth remembering that there are more people not claiming benefits they are entitled to than there are who make fraudulent claims - between 2.9 and 4.5 million in 1995-96 (Hasard 17.2.1998). In fact the major fraud to which the government loses money is tax. For example:

- ◆ *Customs and Excise estimate that up to £66 billion of turnover is undeclared for VAT.*
- ◆ *Excise found in 1997 reached £960 million.*
- ◆ *Inland Revenue estimates that £60 billion of income is undeclared for tax purposes.*

This makes benefit fraud look like the little league.

It is important that both of the current consultations, Welfare Reform and Benefit Fraud are just that. Let your MP know your views on both issues. The proposed changes in the Welfare State are a resolution. It is vital we get it right.

For copies of the TUC briefing on Benefit Fraud, contact MUWC, 2 Beech Avenue, Mansfield, Notts, NG18 1EY. Tel. (01623) 424720.



FEATURE

VIRTUAL VILLAGE PROJECT

The Virtual Village is a project set up by the Nottinghamshire Rural Community Council which delivers to deprived and isolated rural villages in Nottinghamshire job and training opportunities, economic regeneration capabilities, advice and information services and a host of other facilities using a range of the latest computer communications technologies.

Following the closure of nearly all the Nottinghamshire pits, many coalfield communities find themselves facing severe economic and social need. People in the villages are concerned about the range of issues such as lack of jobs, lack of facilities, isolation and a loss of the community spirit they once enjoyed. The project links eleven of these villages in a countrywide network which is among the first of its kind in the country. Recent developments around the Internet and computer communications mean that services which were previously unattainable, or which at the very least could only be found in the nearest large town, can be delivered directly into villages, wherever they may be.

So what kind of things would a visitor to one of these centres be able to do?

Firstly, they will be able to get information on a whole range of topics, from job opportunities, benefits advice etc for those seeking employment, right through to advice and information for small businesses simply by logging onto the world wide web. What they find will be relevant and up to date - much of the information is being collected and organised by the Virtual Village based on surveys the team has conducted in each of the villages. Users new to the 'web' needn't worry either, as the material is arranged so that it's easy for anyone to find just what they're looking for.

In addition, the latest video conferencing technology is being used to deliver courses and face to face advice directly from local colleges and advice agencies. Centre users will be able to put their questions directly to the experts.

Everyone who wishes to use the facilities will join a local membership club, but access will be free to many people. Once joined up they can get their

own personal electronic mailbox so that they can send and receive letters anywhere in the world, at a speed which only the internet can offer. They will also be able to get in touch with other computer users across the globe through joining online discussion and news groups, and talk about anything from gardening to atomic physics.

Finally, we will be promoting local events and activities by allocating space in the Virtual Village for each village to have its own web 'site'. This will be accessible to other computer users from anywhere in the world and the team hope that as many local people as possible will become involved in putting up and maintaining them so that the content will truly reflect the character and interests of the Nottinghamshire communities.

The project started in May 1997 and many of the villages involved are already going online. Later we'll be looking to bring in yet more villages. Anyone interested in using the services will be met by friendly, supportive staff who are specially trained to use the equipment and who will be happy to help all to get what they need from the Virtual Village.

To find out which villages are involved in the project, residents should contact the Virtual Village team at the Nottinghamshire Rural Community Council. We also welcome all suggestions as to how the services might be expanded and improved and we can be contacted at the address shown below.

For more information get in touch with:

Kevin Cooper or Susan Meech
The Virtual Village Team
Nottinghamshire Rural Community Council
Minster Chambers
Church Street
Southwell
NG25 0HD

Telephone 01626 815267
Email vv@nrcc.demon.co.uk

OBITUARY

AN APPRECIATION OF HARRY LOACH, 1912 - 1998

It would be difficult to record all the things that Harry was involved in without writing a book about him. After he'd retired, it was obvious that going to work had only prevented him from getting on with all the other things he wanted to do. His next-door-neighbour said he was more like a teenager than a pensioner.

He was the oldest delegate to Nottingham TUC, and had received the 50 year medal from his union, UCATT. His trade unionism wasn't without cost to Harry as he was boycotted by local employers during his working life, but he would never be intimidated and always acted in solidarity with other workers - most notably in the campaign to defend the Shrewsbury 2, and the building workers strike which preceded it. While living in New Zealand for a period of his life, he was on the Executive of the Wellington Joiners Union.

He was a committed activist on the Trades Council in Nottingham for many years and it was fitting that it was Harry who officially opened the Trades Council Exhibition celebrating a century of trade unionism in the city held last year - though he did have a few qualms about his name appearing in the Evening Post about it!

He was a skilled carpenter who put his practical skills to use for the Trades Council and in helping to get what was then Nottingham Workshop started at 118 Mansfield Road in the late 70's. It was Harry who went to the Karnival presentation ceremony to receive the first cheque from the Mayor which was the first successful fund-raising initiative for the Workshop.

On top of all his other activity, he was a keen gardener who kept his allotment in immaculate condition and was an active member of the Gardeners' Association.

Harry epitomised all that is good about the labour and trade union movement. He spent his life fighting for working men and womens' rights, while his reading and education was honed in the Cosmopolitan Debating Society. He will be greatly missed, not least because of his humour and humanity which always came over whether he was in formal meetings or whether you just happened to bump into him in the street.

Our commiserations go to Edith, his wife, and to Mick and Diane, and to all his family.

IAN JUNIPER

EDITORIAL

THE WINTER OF DISCONTENT

(C4 secret History Series 13th July 1998)

It may, at first, seem a strange idea to make a programme about The Winter of Discontent 1978-9 as part of the Secret History Series. Yet how much of our history in the seventies has been covered since then. The sixties have been (still are), done to death by ex-hippies who are now sharp suited executives. The eighties have also been covered, mainly featuring a modern day baroness who was responsible for exorcising the so called demons of the seventies, *us*.

In fact I can only recollect the Rock and Roll Years, and reruns of Match of the Day as the only televised features of the decade. Now in relation to fashion I can understand this, although I must confess I still have fond memories of platform shoes, and Alice Cooper eye make up. But there is little or no mention of our movements struggle against restrictive Industrial Relations Bills, the Shrewsbury 2, Saltley Gate etc.

So it was good to see a programme which looked at an important part of our history, made even better by the non-judgemental way it was presented.

The programme followed the events of that winter, from Jim Callaghan singing at Congress in September 1978, through until Mrs T's election victory in 1979. Throughout the programme the views and comments of participants were featured, including two of Sunny Jim Callaghan's advisers, Lords Donoghue and McNally, cabinet ministers such as Lord Healy, Peter Shore and Albert Booth, from the TU leadership, Len Murray and Ron Todd, and most importantly shop stewards and members who were in the events.

The advisers and politicians blamed the Trade Unions for creating the conditions which led to Thatchers victory in 1979, the trade union leaders blamed the membership (with the notable exception of Ron Todd), and the stewards?, they were just doing what the members who elected them expected.

It was not the trade union who paved the way for Thatcherism; it was the ineptitude of the Labour

(Contd Page 12)