

THE WAY FORWARD.

REPORT FROM THE NATIONAL NURSES CONFERENCE 26 NOVEMBER 1988

Due to the position we found ourselves in at Springfield we decided to call a national conference. It was clear that nurses had a great deal to learn from each other over a number of issues: how to deal with the RCN and union leaders; how to work to grade; how to de-plan and strengthen the action and defend suspended nurses.

We agreed to produce a newsletter to strengthen the fight over regrading and to allow the wealth of experience that exists across the country to be used to build up the hospitals.

The conference resolved to have a political campaign in the union to call the national action that could win. It was agreed that we needed to fight for unity between NUPE and CONSA to prevent the debacle earlier in the year, with different days of action being called by different unions, being repeated.

The conference agreed that national indefinite strike action is the way to win over regrading, but accepted the inconvenience meant it was currently unobtainable. That is why working to grade, day strikes, and lobbies of health authorities could be so important in building union organisation, necessary to take the dispute forward.

A campaign by Hickmatt and Mackenzie should be key in changing this situation and winning a minimum 17.5% for everyone.

THE CURRENT SITUATION

After the national conference, nurses at Springfield discussed the implications for our strike. We felt the strike had been important in helping to spread the action. We also recognised we were ahead of most hospitals, and that no individual hospital could win alone.

We therefore agreed, after 4 weeks on strike, to propose a return to work and continue the fight in a different form. It was a hard decision to take, but the campaign is too strong for unity and a national lead are essential to take the dispute forward.

We agreed to maintain the work to grade, keep the overtime ban, and have a 24 hour strike on December 9th. We also elected 12 new stewards.

GUIDE ON WORKING TO GRADE

Some of the ideas raised at the conference have already been successful at Springfield

1. Union guidelines are too vague. Nurses from all organisations have met grade by grade to work out details together about what they can and cannot do.

2. Every attempt has been made to aim the action at nurse managers, who are often asked to get down, and are constantly turning the hospital to do drug rounds.

3. Every nurse has a form their managers must sign if they are expected to perform tasks above their grades (they are currently refusing to sign such forms) and therefore the nurse continues to work to grade.

4. Nurses are only allowed to move within their own unit - this limits the extent to which nurses with good grades can be shifted to cover for others refusing to perform certain tasks.

5. Working to grade is difficult and requires a lot of support/signature from stewards regularly checking all wards. Weekly meetings help to ensure the action sticks.

6. Management have tried to change hospital policies to stall the work to grade. They have attempted to reduce the number of nurses giving drugs from two to one - following UNCC advice. We are in dispute over this and are advising nurses to continue with two in the interests of safety.

We found it much harder work than being on indefinite strike, but management still hate it.

The above articles are from the CONSA Springfield Trade Union Office Bulletin, more copies of which can be obtained from the North Manchester General Hospital, Delany's Rd, Crumpsall, Manchester, 10p each, cheques payable to CONSA Springfield

Solidarity Network

Bulletin Number Five

January 1989

Thirty pence

Solidarity with those in struggle!

Defend the dockers!



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What is the Solidarity Network?

The Solidarity Network was set up at a conference called in solidarity with workers in struggle and held in Leeds on November 1987. The conference sought to build on the kind of support movement organised for the miners and for the print workers at Wapping. Since then the Solidarity Network has met on a regular basis, has organised support for a number of disputes and helped to publicise their cases. It has worked with the Chesterfield Socialist Conference, holding a joint rally in London in support of those in struggle, and helping them to organise the Sheffield trade union day-school. The Network has begun the publication of a bulletin, the first and second editions of which have been published. The Chesterfield Socialist Conference has taken decisions which strengthen the links which had already been formed with the Solidarity Network, and has given the Solidarity Network a seat on the Chesterfield Steering Committee.

Affiliation form

We invite your organisation to affiliate to the Network and strengthen this work. Organisations which affiliate will receive copies of the Bulletin and will receive up to date information on disputes. We also invite individuals to take out a subscription to the Bulletin, which would help the Network and provide regular information.

a) My organisation wishes to affiliate to the Solidarity Network.....

b) I wish to take out a subscription to the Solidarity Bulletin.....

Name/Organisation.....

Address.....

I therefore enclose.....fee

The affiliation fee for organisations is £10. Subscription fees for individuals are £6.00 waged and £3.00 unwaged. Please send to 74 Kingsland Rd, Plaistow London E13.

DEFEND THE NATIONAL DOCK LABOUR SCHEME

The government and the Port employers are organising a direct challenge to the National Dock Labour Scheme established in 1947. With the possibility of a national dock strike in defence of the scheme we are pleased to carry the statement below from the Shop Stewards in Hull which calls for a national support network to be set up in advance of a strike.

The National Dock Labour Board, which was introduced in 1944 and made a statutory body in 1974, gave dockers a limited amount of security of employment for the first time in their history.

In 1951 there were 72,000 registered dockers, but with ongoing modernisation and the impact of containerisation the labour force had been cut back to 60,000 in the 1960s. In the 1960s the Port of Hull could boast a labour force of 4,000 registered dockers who were employed along 12 miles of docks, stretching from the eastern to the western city boundaries. However, through natural wastage and severance (redundancy), the local labour force now stands at a mere 650 employed on one dock. Because of modernisation, today's labour force is handling the same annual tonnage of cargo was handled by 4,500 dockers in the 1960s. Nationally, the labour force has been reduced from 72,000 in 1951 to today's figure of 9,643.

Prior to the introduction of the NDLB, the port employers drew their labour from the market

place, which in periods of relatively full employment left them short of labour. To overcome this the NDLB created a pool of experienced dockers who had to report to the employers twice daily, and were then either sent home (dinting) or taken on depending on the amount of work available. To maintain this pool of labour the employers paid 3% of their wage bill to the NDLB.

What did the dockers get from this? For the days when they were dinting they were paid slightly less than the majority could have claimed in state benefits, and because they were classed as fully employed they were debarred from claiming benefit until the introduction of FIS in the 1970s. Therefore financially many dockers were actually worse off during slack periods in the 1950s and 1960s than if they had been employed on a casual basis with access to state benefits.

However, what the NDLB did introduce was a stable workforce which could be organised to fight to improve the pay and conditions within the industry. There is no doubt that through strong organisation and continual struggle at rank and file level the dockers have won what they themselves feel are good terms and conditions of employment, but more importantly they have gained a high degree of control within their own industry.

Because of this the port employers and Tory Government are now intent on smashing the NDLB scheme, arguing that

they should be able to employ on a casual basis, in other words a return to the 1930s with hiring, rule through fear, and jobs bought and sold in the pub on a weekend.

To this end Tory backbenchers and the port employers have been lobbying the Government to scrap the NDLB. Aims of Industry, who have been involved for two years, have now organised a meeting in London on 17th January 1989 which will be attended by the Tory Committee pledged to abolish the NDLB and representatives from all the port of employers. The dockers are now of the opinion that the attack will come around this date and are pledged to defend the NDLB with all out strike action.

Although they are a militant workforce, always giving magnificent support to other workers in struggle, they know that they cannot win in isolation. Therefore they are appealing to fellow workers to start organising support groups now.

For information, contact:

Hull Docks Shop Stewards Committee Tel 0482 796151 Extn. 426

Charlie Lindsey (steward)
0482 826740

Walt Greendale (steward)
0482 657517

Ron Cooper (Hull Trades Council Secretary) 0482 709854

Bristol Dockers Preparing to Strike!

John Bees has been a Bristol docker since 1973, both his father and grandfather were Bristol and Avonmouth dockers. As Chair of the Bristol Docks Shop Stewards Committee he came to talk to the October Meeting of the Somerset Community Defence Campaign about the impending crisis in the docks.

John's grandfather had been victimised for trade unionism in the days when the Port had about 70 different employers, who combined to pay poverty wages to casual dock labour. His father had been out of work in the days of the 'pens', for periods of up to six months. It was the National Dock Labour Board Scheme introduced in 1947 which began to end the state of affairs and which is now under threat by the Conservative Government.

Besides job security, the Scheme restricts job work to registered dockers, and an injunction can be taken out if this is breached. John is a registered docker in the Port of Bristol, a registered Port under the Scheme, employing 488 registered men now, compared with approximately 1,325 when John started in 1973. There has been no new recruitment for ten years.

Registered Ports in the South West are Bristol, Sharpness, Parr, Fowey, Charlestone, Plymouth and Falmouth. Non-registered ports include Bridgwater (Dunball), Watchet, Exmouth and Teignmouth, who employ T&GWU dockers, either on a casual basis or outside the Scheme.

Because of the containerisation and other handling changes, numbers of dockers have declined from 67,000 in 1967, to about 10,000 now.

John believes that these

10,000 would 'fight to the death' to defend their right to work. They still have great strength, though few in number. The Miners' Strike deprived business of only one commodity, which was bypassed by nuclear power and oil, by dockers handle *all* imported and exported commodities. Solidarity between dockers and other port workers, between non-registered and registered dockers, between dockers and lorry drivers is the crucial factor in any dispute. International solidarity would also be vital, Holland, Belgium, France and Italy also have a docks scheme similar to ours, and their trade unions could give support to striking British dockers.

At the moment, the T&GWU is conducting a campaign around the docks, with leaflets and a film made for Channel 4. The Tories boast of 50,000 jobs created if the Scheme is broken, but in reality these will all be casual jobs, working a few days a week, with three or four dockers fighting for every job that is a return to the old days. The National Dock Labour Board Scheme means that the T&GWU has equal representation with the employer on discipline and recruitment committees — rights which will disappear if the Scheme ends.

When the Scheme was set up in 1947, a tonnage limit was set and a loophole created for the smaller ports to be excluded. John says the injury rate in dock work is very high, 8 men have been killed since 1973, the last one only recently, on November 9th this year. With loads such as 8-12 tons of timber commonly handled, injuries on the hand and feet especially common. Piecework is the operating system, and other firms' gear is always being used. John was severely crushed a few years

ago, and off work for 6 months. The T&GWU has its own team of safety representatives and the Health and Safety Executive have an officer with special responsibility for the docks. The New Portbury Dock's opening was delayed for a year until the employer agreed to have a medical centre there. Previously they had argued that the same centre could be near Avonmouth and Portbury, as the distance was negligible 'as the crow flies' — in other words, across the mouth of the river! There was another dispute, also successful, over the right of ambulance staff to work overtime whenever dockers have to, to provide complete safety cover.

Although women were employed at Avonmouth to dock work during the Second World War, there are no women employed at the moment. The Tory-controlled City Council, which is also Port employer, has a policy to encourage women to apply for jobs. But with no recruitment and a steady reduction in staff through voluntary redundancy, most men employed are family links.

The problems that have plagued the Portbury Dock were there from the start, when Bristol City Council spent £50 million digging a hole in the ground, with tarmac and one shed. One crane operated when five were needed. So the job of a properly equipped port facility was only half done. The rail link, via an upgraded Portishead/Avon cargo line was never put in, so the container trade so important to Southampton never grew here. The money quickly ran out, and the City Council found itself paying out £5 million a year in interest charges.

But the Port of Bristol is working flat out at the moment, with its minimum complement of 488

men. Major imports are cars, timber and pulped paper. The Tories' propaganda against the NDLB Scheme is that no company will invest there; but there is a £24 million plasterboard factory being built and BP are building a liquid petroleum gas plant. Other major investments are also taking place.

The South African trade in the Port of Bristol has declined from 5.6% of the total in 1986 to 4.4% in 1988. In 1986, 50,000 tons of South African coal came through in Bristol Docks. This has now been reduced to 15,000 in 1987, out of a total of 100,000 tons — the bulk of the replacement being Chinese coal.

Both the City Council, Bristol Anti-Apartheid and T&GWU dockers are co-operating to ensure that things keep moving in the right direction. However, if the Tories reclaim the City Council anti-apartheid involvement in the docks would go.

When the Tories last controlled the City Council and the docks, they brought in a Port Director, Scott-Morris, to sort out the T&GWU, but he failed. John says he used to resort to hiding in and about the stacks, spying on the dockers! When he couldn't defeat the T&GWU, he turned on his own management, and became Port Consultant at £52,000 a year (part time).

John is proud of Bristol Docks T&GWU's record of industrial solidarity. Industrial action on health and safety over Portbury has already been mentioned. When canteen staff were under attack, the dockers picketed the entrance and even arranged on one occasion to turn up, 200 strong, to demand a meal at the same time, from a skeleton staff of terrified Managers! Dockers were out for 51/2 weeks during the miners' strike — the only real attempt to open up a second front with the NUM, against the government. On March 3rd this year, the docks were only workplace to take industrial action in support of hospital workers. The vote at the mass meeting for the 'illegal' solidarity

action was massive, with only 2 against. The T&GWU Plymouth bus drivers were supported in their recent successful strike. All this means that the dockers now deserve maximum support from other workers when the Government attacks them. Collections of £200 are a regular event at canteen meetings, and several have been taken this year for the Dover NUS — links with the NUS are obviously strong. Many solidarity actions have been taken with foreign crews, many from West Africa, who strike on reaching Bristol for pay that has been withheld for up to 18 months.

John describes an impressive level of trade union discipline during strike action at the docks, picking on selected ships, at selected times, with selected men. He says there have even been times when he as Chair of the Shop Stewards Committee has arrived at a berth to negotiate, only to be met with a spontaneous walk-out, with the men taking his arrival to be the signal! There is an effective shop stewards national network that it obviously preparing for the coming struggle.

The Clarion has published this account of the Bristol dockers to forewarn the labour movement of the need to get its act together to achieve maximum solidarity, including strike action, to defend our dock workers. The struggle is one they believe they can win, with our help. John Bees and other members of the Shop Stewards Committee are willing to speak to labour meetings to put the case for a national industrial struggle in support of a strike over the NDLB scheme. Please contact John with messages of support. John Bees, 6 Avonmouth Road, Shirehampton, Bristol BS11 9NE

This article has been reproduced from the **SOMERSET CLARION**, the socialist journal of the somerset community defence campaign, 4 Gordon Terrace, Bridgwater, Somerset.

WOMEN

I work in a canning factory in Bridgwater, Somerset. A thousand women work there, on four shifts, as casual, part-time workers. The work is low paid and repetitive, with little regard for health and safety. The union was weakened recently in a take-over, when the redundancy list included all the union activists. Women workers only meet other women on the same shift, and the constantly high noise levels prevent all but the most brief and superficial communication. The small number of full-time factory workers are all male. Men are prevented from doing 'women's work' — a man I know recently turned up inquiring about part-time work, and was told 'no vacancies'. His wife came along later the same day and was hired immediately. Casual workers are laid off suddenly, without warning, and seemingly at random. Extra shifts are offered as 'overtime' to individuals selected by the section supervisors — if your face doesn't fit, you don't get any extra work. These aren't insuperable problems, but it's important to recognise them in the fight to build a strong union there.

Working conditions like these are not unusual in this part of the world — where workers face the same exploitation as their predecessors in 19th century factories. In my factory, working class experience of exploitation under capitalism, far from disappearing, is being recreated and intensified. The destabilisation of union organisation in workplaces like this has been accompanied by the introduction of large numbers of part-time and casual workers — mainly women and young people, whose perceptions, both of themselves as workers and of the trade union movement, must be explained and confronted. Recruitment of women as active trade unionists is no longer just a question of equality, but a matter of political survival for the movement. At the moment, only about a third of the members of TUC-affiliated unions are women, while women make up 45% of the

AND THE TRADE UNIONS

workforce. Unions miss out because they lack the input of women workers. The political contribution of women in the peace movement would, if paralleled in the labour movement, have made a significant difference to our ability to confront the challenge of unemployment, anti-trade union laws, etc. But women miss out even more, because they are non-unionised and therefore without protection from increasingly vicious employers, at a time when their health, well-being and income are also under attack from social legislation and spending cuts.

As a woman trade unionist I'm not asking a lot. How can I get male trade unionists to accept me as an activist, and to work with me towards the full and active involvement of all the women at my factory?

Our senior (male) shop steward works in another department, and has not visited my section since I've been there, and I've had no reported sightings from those who've been there longer. I phoned him during the week I started work, and suggested we meet to talk about recruiting in my section. I also said we needed a shop steward, and that this should be a woman. This last remark must have frightened him off, as he promised to get in touch when he was less busy, and I've not heard from him since!

In November, the union was conned by management into organising a ballot of the whole workforce, including non-members, on the pay offer. A thousand women workers, whose opinion has never been sought on anything at work before, suddenly found themselves being herded into the canteen, 'to vote for your pay rise', in the words of our section supervisor! When I challenged this, I was told by the senior steward that this was now 'law'! Not liking to disagree with a colleague in front of management, but extremely worried about where this particular road might

lead us -- next year management will probably by-pass the union altogether -- I've asked for a meeting to discuss the whole issue. So my early encounters with the union will not be fruitful, as I've hoped, but confrontational.

For a start, we must have more women shop stewards and health and safety reps. The acid test is to ask sympathetic male shop stewards or union delegates to stand down in favour of a woman. It never fails. There's always a reason why they can't! I'm not trying to be divisive, I've got no personal difficulties in working with men, and have long since accepted that my best comrades, for what looks like the foreseeable future, are going to be men. But I'm tired of the male power struggles that are part of the movement as I know it. And they definitely put women off.

Recently I asked a shop steward from a nearby factory -- a good comrade and active steward -- how a young woman who'd shown an interest in the union was getting on. She'd been turning up to branch meetings as the only woman, I'd talked to her about standing as shop steward, and she seemed keen. He told me, a bit embarrassed, that things were a bit difficult now, as he'd made a pass at her, which she hadn't liked, so she'd dropped out. Sexual harassment has been the death of many young women's early hopes in the movement.

Many women persist in the myth that they're not 'real' workers. I work with a woman whose husband is on permanent nights, for an extra 30p an hour, they can't afford a car, or holidays, and they've got two kids. She insists that she works just for some pocket money for herself! Some male trade unionists seize on this as justification for the movement's lack of commitment to women, without seeing that it's a false self-perception, which the movement must challenge, if we are to win women to the cause. The multiple burden that women carry as

homemakers, mothers, carers, sex-objects, etc. conflicts with their role as workers. And many men in their personal and public relations with women continue to contribute to that confusion -- sexual harassment and pornography, pay discrimination and defining jobs by gender are examples of what I mean at the workplace, and they've got to be tackled at that level.

And we can't expect the initiatives to come from the top, they've got to be at workplace level. Union and TUC moves to set up equal rights departments and women's committees deteriorate into token gestures if they are not fed by an active women's membership. Worse, they become platforms for political careerists -- this time, female -- who are more concerned with their own futures as full-time union officials and/or MPs than with building a movement from the bottom. I'm a member of the Regional Women's Advisory (note 'Advisory', this means you can't actually decide anything!) committee of the T&GWU. For two years we've been asking for a list of women members in the region. In spite of computerised membership and a host of other modern techniques, this apparently simple matter has not been forthcoming. Not surprising really because the political will to provide us with this most basic of tools for doing the job of reaching our women is lacking. A strong women's movement in the unions frightens union bureaucracy, which would prefer to block initiatives than risk something which was not controlled from the top.

I met a senior shop steward recently who said there were four shop stewards at his workplace. When I asked him how many were women, he said 'Two, of course!' When that response becomes the usual one, we can start to crack the problem!

Glen Burrows

Transport and General Workers Union

NUM Strike - 5th Anniversary

National Justice for Miners Campaign MAILING

I should like to notify all affiliates that the next quarterly meeting of the NJfMC will be on Saturday 28th January 1989, 1pm to 4pm at the Sheffield Trades and Labour Club, Duke St Sheffield.

The December 3rd meeting was highly successful, with some 50 people present and with lengthy and wide ranging debate on the business under discussion.

A generous presentation of £500 was made to the NJfMC from the Liz Hollis Bequest, this being only a part of a £7,802.69 total made to numerous Women Against Pit Closures and Miners Wives Groups and the Miners Solidarity Fund.

The North West Justice indicated that a major event to commemorate the 5th anniversary of the start of the strike was planned for Saturday March 4th at Manchester Town Hall. It would consist of a conference in the day followed by a rally at which Tony Benn, Arthur Scargill and Peter Heathfield would be among the speakers and with a fund raising deficit in the evening.

The South East Justice indicated that they were planning a similar event in London on Saturday 18th of March to coincide with the return to work in Kent two weeks after the rest of the country.

The NUM are planning a major national gala to commemorate the centenary of the Miners federation of Great Britain (the forerunner of the NUM) in Yorkshire in June and the NJfMC would be applying to

have a major presence at this.

The large attendance at December's meeting augers well for the future of the NJfMC. It ensures debate and decisions representative of the Regional Justice Campaigns, Labour and Trade Union affiliates and especially the Miners Wives and Women Against Pit Closures groups.

The agenda for the next meeting will be drawn up in consultation with officers and Regional Secretaries but if you have items you wish to be included, please write to me at the above address to arrive anytime up to the day before the meeting or telephone in and it will be included.

This is your Justice campaign, not mine or any other individual, so please keep us informed of any changes or requests so that they can be included in our activities.

Finally 1989 is an important year for the NUM in many, many respects, with the 5th anniversary of the strike and the centenary of the NFGB taking place. With your active support and involvement, I'm sure we can ensure that the NJfMC can play a major role in 1989 and that the voice of the sacked and victimised miners, their wives and families, will continue to be heard, loud and clear.

Your in solidarity
Billy Etherington (convenor),
Terry Norman (secretary).

For information about the NLfMC:
Billy Etherington,
DCMA, Red Hill, Durham. Tel 38 43515.

SOUTH EAST REGION NJfMC

Four years after the great strike 30 victimised Kent miners still demand their jobs back and justice. The victimised men still continue to receive support from working and retired miners in Kent and from the wider labour movement.

On Thursday 15th December in Deal, the victimised men met for the first time in 18 months to discuss their futures and a proposal from Betteshanger miner Hartley Storrs that two of the sacked men sit on the South East Justice Campaign Committee.

Meanwhile British Coal have scrapped a longstanding and reasonable successful bonus incentive scheme and imposed a new scheme which has not been freely negotiated with the local union. If accepted there would be reduction of 30% in potential bonus earnings.

Miners at Betteshanger are now working to the 1966 National Power Loading Agreement which ran parallel with the incentives bonus scheme. However, British Coal are now threatening to reduce wages even further and breach the NPLA itself. Management continue to harass miners. The miners see this attack as similar to that of P&O and the Government on the National Union of Seamen.

Betteshanger is one of the more successful collieries in Britain lying 35 out of 80 in British Coals fiscal league.
Ed Fredenburgh.

Support the Victimised Miners

Appeal by the FIFTH ANNIVERSARY COMMITTEE

March 1989 marks the fifth anniversary of the heroic 1984/1985 miners strike.

As a tribute to the miners and their families who waged the struggle and in support of the 200 miners who remain victimised a major rally is planned for Saturday March 4th 1989.

This event is supported by the Manchester city council who are kindly providing the Town Hall for the day.

Speakers confirmed include; Arthur Scargill, Peter Heathfield, Tony Benn, and Denis Skinner.

Entertainment for the anniversary celebrations will be provided by those artists who supported the miners strike and continue to support the labour movement.

In order to make the fifth anniversary a success we are asking for your support and sponsorship of the rally. In the short time in which we have been publicising

the event we have received an overwhelming response.

Those sponsoring organisations offering considerable support, financially and practically will be credited in a souvenir programme which will be on sale on the day. Fifth Anniversary Organising Committee: 26 Sandleigh Avenue, Withington, Manchester. M20 9LW.

NATIONAL CONCERT AND RALLY

SATURDAY MARCH 18th 1989.
ACADEMY THEATRE BRIXTON

By Terry French

March 1989 will see the 5th anniversary of the great miners strike. A strike which if it had been successful would have drastically altered the political climate both in England and on the Continent. But, as history will show, we were allowed to be beaten, and as in all defeats there are casualties.

Five years on we still have 198 victimised members, men who are black-listed, and can only find the odd piece of casual work in the twilight zones of employment. Three particular NUM areas are finding it increasingly difficult to sustain their members - Notts, Scotland and Kent. Kent in particular, with only 600 members are trying to maintain 23 victimised members. These include the whole of the Branch Committee from 1984 and the remainder are those who took the most active interest in Branch affairs. 4 of this number are approaching their 60th birthday and will receive much reduced pensions owing to the loss of 5 years pension contributions.

this is why the N.J.M.C is still in operation and to commemorate the 5th anniversary, we are going to stage a major event in London on March 18th 1989 at the Brixton Academy. Not only to raise much needed funds, but also to again put the issue of victimised miners in the forefront of industrial politics.

To get this project off the ground, we need to raise a working capital of at least £4,000 by February. Any donations, whether large or small, will be gratefully received. Please send all donation to Mick Poole, 72 Claremont Road, Forest Gate, London E7 OPZ., and make cheques payable to: SOUTH EAST REGION N.J.M.C. Contacts: Mike Poole, treasurer 01-555-7123

NUS

Day of Action

Saturday 4
February

Calling all trade unionists

7.30am

Picket line, Eastern Docks,
Dover

RALLY

2.00pm

Eastern Docks, Dover

Speakers:

Sam McCluskie (NUS General Secretary), John Prescott MP, (MPs and leading trade unionists)

Additional information :
contact:

Dover NUS Strikers
0304 240590

SOLIDARITY NETWORK

Report from 2nd Annual Conference

The Solidarity Network held a successful second annual conference in Leeds on November 5th. There were 130 people present, some were delegates from labour movement organisations and others active in support groups, solidarity campaigns, or in their trade unions.

There were delegates from eight support groups, Leicester, Hammersmith, Harrogate, Thurrock, the Hackney Seafarers Support Group, the Hull Disputes Support Committee, the Oxford Disputes Support Group and the Somerset Community Defence Campaign. Women from Women Against Pit Closures were also present.

There were eight Trades Councils represented: The Five Towns' Trades Council (West Yorkshire), Wakefield, Hull, Birmingham, Camden, Hammersmith, Oxford and Chelmsford. Some local Labour Parties from the Leeds area sent delegates - Leeds, Leeds North East, Chapel Allerton and Keighly.

The morning session was chaired by Janet Seymour, from the Silent Night Strike, and the introductory report presented by Tony Richardson - a TGWU shop steward from Austin Rover in Cowley.

He outlined the work of the Solidarity Network over the past year, pointing both to its consistent work in support of disputes and the discussions it had been able to have with groups of strikers about the problems of struggles. He referred in particular to one of the quarterly open meetings of the Network held in Deal with many of the rank and file leaders of the strike and to a similar meeting held in Leeds with a delegation from the Vickers strikers. He reported on the development of joint work with

the Chesterfield Socialist Conference and the joint rally held with them in London.

The weakness of the Network he said was that it had outgrown its structures and had to be much better organised if it was to develop the work. The Bulletin had to be reorganised and improved in both its presentation and its coverage.

He also pointed to some of the major problems facing the Trade Union Movement as a whole. Referring to the latest proposed round of Tory anti-union legislation, which amongst many other things, requires a 70% poll for a strike vote in a postal ballot, something almost impossible to achieve. The major problem has been the refusal of the TUC and almost all of the Trade union leaders to break the law. They refuse to break the law whilst the Government uses that refusal as an invitation to bring more laws in. He said the importance of the seafarers strike was that it did at one stage point the way by posing the breaking of the law and the spreading of the action to the rest of the Seafarers Union and the trade union movement as a whole.

The first platform speaker was Joyce Bently representing the striking seafarers from Dover. She talked of the extreme difficulties and isolation now facing the strikers despite the support which had been organised and how difficult it was to see a way forward for the strike.

Dave Chappel, a UCW branch officer from Bridgewater, reported on the postal workers strike and developments since. He wanted to put, he said, a more optimistic view than the speaker from Dover. The postal workers had been sold out but they had shown their strength and they were ready for more.

A speaker from the Bradford Labour Group gave an account of the situation on Bradford City Council.

Two striking COHSE nurses from Manchester reported on the escalating struggle of the nurses against the regrading imposed on them by the Government.

A message was read out from Mike Grindley leader of the victimised GCHQ trade unionists. He had been due to speak but was not able to come due to heavy commitments over the weekend in preparation for the day of action on Monday.

A message was also read out from Terry French, who also had other commitments, on behalf of the Justice for Mineworkers Campaign. He said that the Justice Campaign was paralysed through the refusal of the secretary, Dick Withecombe, to resign after being called upon to do so by an overwhelming vote at the last quarterly meeting of the Campaign.

At the end of the day the Conference elected a new expanded Steering Committee with Janet Seymour as chairperson and John Lang, a rank and file leader from the Wapping dispute, as the convenor. It also elected a production team to produce an improved, printed, Solidarity Network Bulletin.

The decision was also taken to continue to develop the joint work between the Solidarity Network and the Chesterfield Socialist Conference - both in relation to the Trade Union Policy Group and the Socialist conference itself. The conference also decided to call on Chesterfield to call a Chesterfield trade Union Conference in a year's time to organise a discussion on the way forward for socialists in the unions.

The following resolutions were agreed at the Solidarity Network Conference:

Resolution from the Steering Committee

That the Solidarity Network continues and develops its joint work with the Chesterfield Socialist Conference. In particular we propose:

- 1) That we support Chesterfield local and national initiatives
- 2) That we encourage involvement in the Chesterfield Trade Union policy group at national and regional level
- 3) That we support the idea, already discussed to some extent, that the Chesterfield movement is urged to call a Chesterfield Trade Union Conference, in about a years time, to discuss trade union policy and the organisation of the left in the unions. The Solidarity Network to give full support to such an initiative should it take place.
- 4) That we urge Chesterfield to support those in struggle and campaigns such as Anti-Poll Tax and defence of the NHS.

Resolution on El Salvador

This conference notes:

- 1) That increasing level of attacks against the trade union movement in El Salvador in the form of mass sackings, arrests, assassinations and torture of trade union leaders and rank and file activists.
- 2) that the trade union movement organised by the UNB is steadily growing in strength and popular support despite the repression.
- 3) That there is a growing majority of the population in favour of demands by the UNB for a negotiated political solution to the 8 year civil war.
- 4) That in the face of popular resistance more leaders in the army and the ruling class are calling for a policy of "total war".
- 5) That the left in El Salvador believe that things are coming to a head and will result in mass popular insurrection or the physical annihilation of the popular movement within 9 months.

This conference resolves to:

- 1) Spread support and solidarity for the El Salvadorian Trade Union movement.
- 2) Call on all labour movement bodies to affiliate to the El Salvador Solidarity Campaign, pass resolutions, spread information and send money via: "The Bread not Death Squads" fund to the El Salvador Trade Union Movement.

Resolution from the Steering Committee

The Solidarity Network has developed over the part year and has outgrown the structures adopted at last years conference. We now need a more formal structure and a division of labour which can administer the Network in a more efficient way. We therefore propose the following structure for the next year:

- 1) An (approximately) 15 member Steering Committee which should meet at least every three months as a Committee. It should have:
 - a) A chairperson
 - b) A convenor
 - c) A secretary
 - d) A treasurer

2) An open meeting of the Steering Committee should also be held every three months in addition to the meetings of the Committee.

3) The Bulletin should be improved and regularised by:

- a) Producing a printed version
- b) Election of an editorial Board responsible to the Steering Committee.

(Those elected for the above positions were:

- John Lang - Convenor
- Andrea Campbell - Secretary
- Janet Seymour - Chairperson
- Tony Richardson - Treasurer

Marion Gaima

On 6 December 1988 Marion Gaima, a Newham resident, won her appeal against the Home Office decision to deport her. The three Appeal Court judges ruled that the Home Secretary must look at her case again. Although this decision lifts the immediate threat of

deportation, the campaign will continue to pressurise the Home Office to ensure that Marion is allowed to stay in the country where she has lived for the past 15 years.

A petition containing over 30,000 signatures will be

presented at a lobby of the Home Office, Queen Annes Gate, London SW11 on Thursday 2 February at 10.30am. This is the same address that letters of support for Marion can be sent to.

Defend Mick Gosling

P.T.A/ H-BUILDING SHOP STEWARD'S COMMITTEE

A THREAT TO EVERY FORD WORKER

- ◆ On Tuesday 17 January, the trade union appeal against the sacking of Mick Gosling, a Sierra Line 3 operator and Chairman of the Transport and General Workers Union 1/1107 Branch, will begin.
- ◆ Mick has worked at Ford Dagenham for ten years: in the Engine Plant, Paint Shop and for six years on Sierra Line 3, B Shift. *He has no previous disciplinary record whatsoever.*
- ◆ **This is no 'ordinary' case.** The top managers in the Assembly Plant pressed charges against Mick which were dropped, changed and altered at will (see over). We are convinced that were responding to decisions taken at the highest level to 'sort out the PTA'.
- ◆ As Plant Manager, Jeff Body, said in the hearings: 'Unconstitutional action gets up my nose in an extreme fashion and I am going to stamp it out.' *A scapegoat was needed.* As an active trade unionist, but without the limited protection of a shop steward's position, Mick fitted the bill perfectly.
- ◆ **We will never allow the company for force any employee to work with the constant threat of dismissal over his or head for the 'crime' of being an active trade unionist.** But the special conditions of employment management wanted Mick to sign made him liable to immediate dismissal for anything management alleged he said, leave alone did.
- ◆ On our advice Mick refused to sign. If he had, others would have been forced to and a reign of fear created on the shop floor. For standing by the trade union position Mick was sacked.
- ◆ **The Assembly Plant Shop Stewards Committee believe Mick's frame-up and sacking is a deadly threat to every Ford worker. We are committed to his unconditional reinstatement.**
- ◆ We will fight this all the way because our bread and butter - our wages and working conditions and our efforts to keep jobs in Dagenham - depend on our ability to organise free from the fear of victimisation.

□ AN INJURY TO ONE IS AN INJURY TO ALL □
□ REINSTATE MICK GOSLING □

A VICIOUS VENDETTA

The management campaign to sack Mick Gosling is a vicious vendetta. A worker with ten years service and a spotless disciplinary record was hauled before top management on a string of false and trumped up charges. None of the senior stewards involved had seen anything like it before. As the union destroyed the company's case, charges were dropped and changed at will.

1. DROPPED was the most serious charge - carrying an automatic five shift suspension - that Mick had been absent from plant in working time on Friday 11 November chairing a TGWU branch meeting.

When Deputy Convenor and Mick's shop steward, Stan Seaforth, asked why other people who attended the lunchtime meeting, including himself, were not being challenged, Jeff Body, the plant manager, replied: 'Your name wasn't put towards us. It might have been luck or judgement.'

By contrast, the trade unions named over 20 witnesses ranging from Mick's foreman and workmates to three senior stewards and a union official, *who proved he was on his job* either side of lunchtime.

2. ALTERED was the allegation that Mick incited an unconstitutional stoppage on Tuesday 15 November when the chassis stamping job was returned to Line 3.

The company had not done its homework. *When the stoppage started at 8a.m. Mick was in the Medical.* The accident report he handed to his foreman on his return shows he did not even leave there till 8.25a.m. He played no part in the meeting which voted to go home.

So the charge became that Mick encouraged other workers to abide by a majority decision. The following morning over 40 Line 3 workers received a warning letter threatening progressive disciplinary action in the event of future stoppages. Two days later just *one* worker was singled out and marched towards the gallows for the same offence. **Is this justice?**

3. INVENTED was the allegation that on nights on 1 September Mick stopped the line in a dispute over unsafe lighting following a major accident in the G3 area which hospitalised two workers.

On a list of stoppages since the summer shutdown issued to trade union officials on the day he was charged, 18 November, this incident, unlike every other, is reported as 'line stopped by Gosling'. On a list compiled only a week after the event there is no mention of Gosling's name.

WHAT A DIFFERENCE TEN WEEKS MAKE

How the Company listed the 1 September stoppage on line 3 on 9th September 1988

"Lighting fell onto the Dragline injuring two people.

Sierra Lines 2, 3, 1 and then 4 stopped to inspect their lighting."

Personel Manager, Phil Taylor, claimed there was "no malice aforethought" in the addition of Mick name to the later list.

How the Company listed the 1 September stoppage on line 3 on 18th November 1988

"Lighting fell onto the Dragline injuring two people.

Sierra Lines 2, 3, 1 and then 4 stopped to inspect their lighting. Sierra Line 3 stopped by Gosling."

The sole source of evidence on this charge is a statement by area superintendent, Barry Paton - allegedly written at the time but never previously shown to the trade unions - blaming Mick for the stoppage. A procedure condemned by Convenor Joe Gordon as 'underhand'.

Cross-examined on this statement, Barry Paton failed to correctly identify the foreman on Line 3 at the time no less than three times! In a proper trial a judge would advise the jury to ignore the evidence of such an unreliable witness. Ford have a different approach. *The company minutes have been rewritten to show Barry Paton correctly identifying the foreman! Is this justice?*

4. FIVE MONTHS AFTER the event the company suddenly found Mick was responsible for Line 3 going home on Friday 1 July following. This followed ex-production manager Barry Thomas's infamous 'drugs search' of a workers tea box the previous afternoon. Most of the plant, managers and workers alike, knew there was going to be trouble the next morning. One of the few people who did not was Mick - for the simple reason *he was absent with permission on trade union business when the incident happened! Is this justice?*

Other allegations were made and withdrawn until finally, two days into the hearing, management dragged out Mick's application form from ten years ago. He had covered up the time he spent at university from 1970 -74 getting a degree. Friends, stewards and managers had known this for years. Even Ford's press office has described this as 'purely incidental' (City Limits 15-29 Dec. 1988).

It was raised because the rest of the frame-up had fallen apart. Yet *nearly three years ago*, following the sacking of a new start for failing to declare her degree, the Personnel Manager at that time wrote to all Assembly Plant workers assuring us: *'We will most certainly not pursue a vendetta against graduates working here'*. He didn't say excluding Mick. **Is this justice?**

Ford Motor Company Limited

April 22, 1986

Dear Employee,

This letter is to confirm the commitments we gave to your Trade Union Representatives on Monday.

1. We will not exclude graduates from working on the production line. Several graduates had second interviews in the recent recruitment exercise, although they did not get jobs. This was because they were unsuitable for various other reasons, not because they were graduates. If suitable we would have hired them, and we will do so in the future.

2. We will most certainly not pursue a vendetta against graduates working here.

[Extract from letter sent to all Assembly Plant workers, signed by E A Sketch, Employee Relations Manager.]

On the basis of these discredited and irrelevant charges the company moved towards dismissal. They knew the charges wouldn't stick. So a further trap was laid. *A statement was prepared for Mick to sign giving him different conditions of employment than every other worker in the whole of Ford UK.* The final paragraph read:

"I understand the company has given me a Final Warning, and that if I am involved in any future unconstitutional action or in encouraging other employees to take or continue such action, or if I am involved in any other breach of my Conditions of Employment, I will render myself liable to dismissal."

Catch 22. Don't sign and be sacked today. Do sign and be set up and sacked tomorrow. Under the statement's terms Mick could have been sacked for anything management alleged he said, yet alone did. And even an official strike is a breach of Conditions of Employment.

◆ The company is lying when it says Mick was sacked when he refused to reaffirm his Conditions of Employment. He will do that any time.

◆ As trade union representatives we firmly believe that if Mick had signed this statement others would have been forced to and a reign of fear created on the shop floor. And as trade unionists it is impossible for us to act on any issue - be it pay, health and safety or defending jobs - if workers fear victimisation.

◆ For this he was sacked - dismissed in reality for his trade union activity and trade union principles. We will not let the company get away with this.

SUPPORT ROLLS IN

Support for Mick Gosling's reinstatement has spread across Ford and beyond because his sacking is widely seen as an attack on our basic rights and union organisation. The two other large TGWU branches on the Dagenham Estate, the 667 and 1918 have joined forces with 1107 in condemning the sacking.

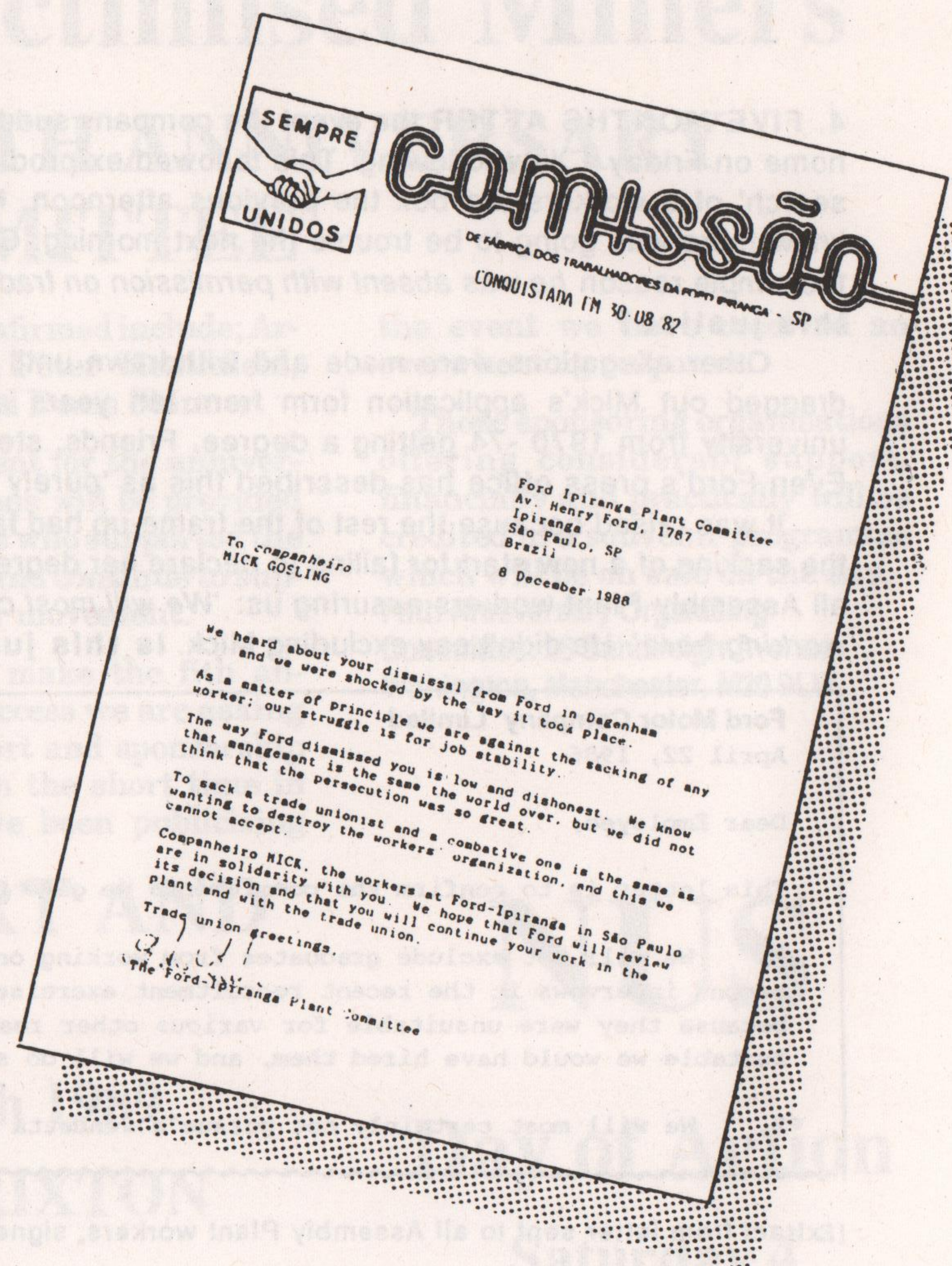
The 667 rejected the company's claims against Mick and found the accusations unfounded. The huge Ford Halewood TGWU 6/562 branch agreed to 'demand the reinstatement without victimisation of Bro. Gosling.'

Halewood Body Plant Shop Stewards Committee unanimously demanded reinstatement: 'We consider the insistence by the Ford Motor Company in demanding Bro. Gosling sign an individual contract of employment that differs directly from any other employee totally unacceptable.'

In a cutting letter to John Hougham, Director of Personnel, the *Workers Commissions of The Ford Valencia Plant, Spain*, have written: 'For a long time now Ford has been developing a new philosophy which proposes that all of us who work in Ford are ONE BIG FAMILY. But in reality this is a bad family because the PARENTS (if the top managers can be seen as such) exploit their 'children' more every day, expecting these children will remain satisfied and happy. And in the event of this not being the case they throw the children out the house.' The Workers Commissions call on the company to reconsider and re-instate Mick.

The Ford Ipiranga Plant Committee in Brazil has also written to the Director of Personnel saying 'we do not accept the company's arbitrary act in dismissing him, as it represents a threat to the organisation of workers in the whole Ford Group'.

Resolutions of support have been received from many other trade union branches. The matter has even been raised in the House of Commons. Forty two MPs have signed this Early Day Motion demanding reinstatement.



No. 10

Notices of Motions: 5th December 1988

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119 MICK GOSLING AND FORD MOTOR COMPANY

That this House condemns the victimisation and sacking by the Ford Motor Company of Mick Gosling, Chair of Transport and General Workers Union 1/1107 branch at Dagenham; further supports the union's rejection of the special conditions of employment which the company tried to impose upon him which amount to a denial of his rights to free speech and assembly and trade union activity; and further calls upon the Ford Motor Company to unconditionally reinstate Mick Gosling on his appeal.

Mr Jeremy Corbyn	Mr Harry Barnes	Mr Jimmy Wray
Mr Tony Benn	Mr Terry Patchett	Mr Frank Cook
Mr Eric S Heffer	Mr Alan Meale	Mr Ronnie Campbell
Mr Bernie Grant	Mr Eddie Loyden	Mr John Cummings
Mr Tony Banks	Mr Dave Nellist	Mr Ted Garrett
Mr Max Madden	Ms Diane Abbott	Mr Keith Vaz
Mr Dennis Skinner	Mr John Hughes	Mr Ian McCartney
Mr Bob Cryer	Mr Brian Sedgemore	Mr Terry Lewis
Mr George Galloway	Mr Ken Livingstone	Mr Doug Hoyle
Mr Chris Mullin	Mr Harry Cohen	Mr Keith Bradley
Mr Pat Wall	Mr Dennis Canavan	Mr Martin Redmond
Mr Bill Michie	Mr Bob Clay	Mr David Marshall
Mr David Hinchliffe	Mr Terry Fields	Mr Robert Parry
Mildred Gordon	Mr Paul Boateng	Mr Sydney Bidwell

MAKE THE TORIES PAY

The Tories' imposition of unjust pay grades has sparked a level of industrial action never seen before from nurses.

"We were led to believe we'd be paid for the work we do" said a Manchester nurse, "When we found we weren't, it left a great sense of injustice."

This was the feeling of many of the nurses who attended a meeting in Manchester organised by the strike committees at Springfield and Prestwich Hospitals, called to pool the widely differing experience in the hospitals and answer the question "What next?"

It's clear that problems face activists with the action of the last month beginning toebb. There's a real danger that the anger will be wasted, and could be easy for demoralisation to set in. Yet if we look back over the last year the action in the hospitals has had its high and low points, from the initial strike by 38 Manchester nurses in January and the strikes that were supported by thousands of nurses in February and March to the comparatively quiet summer. Now the anger has come to the surface over the injustice of regrading.

APPEALS

The Tories hope they can ride out the present storm, with Health Minister Kenneth Clarke delivering a new rebuff to nurses when he insisted most appeals over regrading would "fall by the wayside"

We can't ignore the impact of the back pay that most nurses will be receiving and the performance of the RCN leaders whose true colours have become clearer as the dispute has gone on. Its leaflets have threatened nurses who consider working to grade could be in breach of contract and claim that, "most nurses have been graded fairly."

But just as bad as the RCN has been the shabby in-fighting and inaction by officials of health unions COHSE and NUPE.



"I've been here 18 years. Every year they say you're good at your job and then they give you a grade A"

This together with the vastly differing levels of confidence and organisation amongst nurses has led to a startling unevenness in the level of action.

While the nurses at Springfield and Prestwich have been on all-out strike other hospitals have found it difficult to get a mass meeting off the ground. In some hospitals the work to grade is effective, in others very difficult to organise.

One thing remains constant - the anger at the Tory government's insult in imposing a system of degrading rather than regrading. We have had to wring every penny we've got out of the Tories. They are not off the hook yet.

ORGANISATION

What's crucial for us now is building union organisation. The difference between the level of action in the

psychiatric hospitals - where a minority of the nurses are RCN members - and the general side, where the RCN dominates, is stark. The present situation gives us the opportunity through petitioning, lobbies, one day strikes, and the work to grade to build our union organisation, and elect stewards so that we can take the action forward.

THE SPRINGFIELD EXPERIENCE

Many nurses had high expectations from the regrading package, and their first response to reading the criteria was one of optimism - that the experience and skills that had previously been provided on the basis of goodwill, would now be recognised and rewarded.

Within weeks it became clear, however, that the most important factor in regrading was cost. Crucial definitions such as "supervision" and "continuous responsibility", showed a massive disagreement between the management and union side.

At Springfield, the initial grading forms indicated which grade management intended nurses to go on. Stewards called meetings and drew up leaflets for nurses to argue about the skills they possessed, and the job they actually did. Token strikes in August and September got a good response, when nurses burnt their regrading forms on the picket line, and made national news.

When the grades came out, we were felt deeply insulted. A COHSE meeting the day after was held in a mood of walking out immediately! Stewards argued for a bit of time in order to get unity between the union's and across Psychiatry and the General hospital. We also had to fight hard for emergency cover to be retained, such as the frustration and anger of the members. We felt that emergency cover was essential in order to enable us to spread the dispute to the General site and win solidarity from other workers.

Attempts at unity with the General site failed, due to a reluctance to call strike action by other stewards. COHSE nurses at Springfield met and voted for indefinite action with emergency cover, to be joined by NUPE at Springfield just days later.

THE STRIKE COMMITTEE

An open strike committee was set up straight away. Around 50 nurses attended at different times, with 20 or so activists always there. This was a massive improvement on the 8 nursing stewards in existence and allowed us to build our organisation and spread our resources. Most people were new to this level of activity but quickly learnt from experience. The feeling of collectivity gave even the

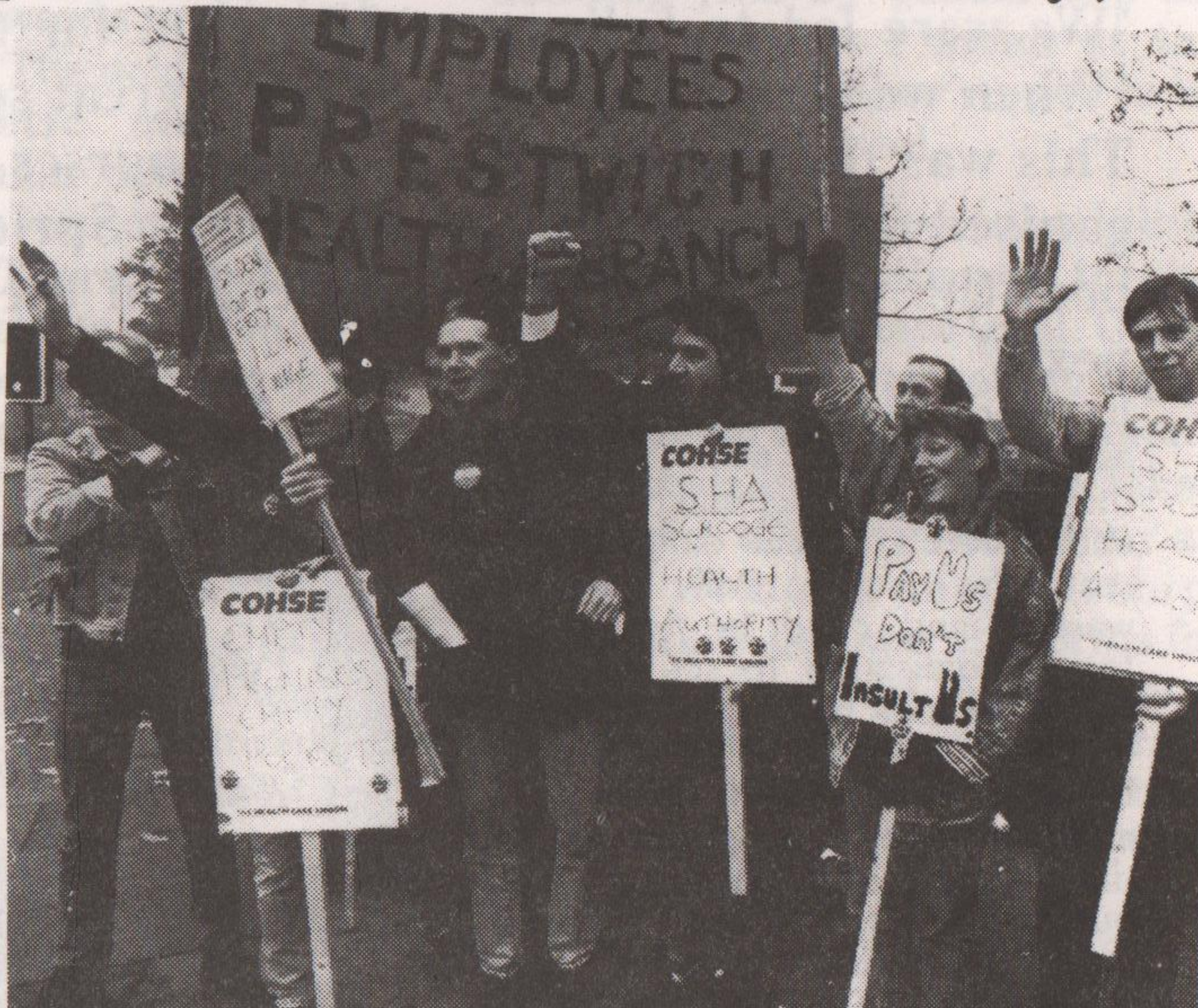
most timid the confidence to tell management what they thought. A steward from the RCN left and was soon addressing union meetings in the locality. Everything from picket line food and wood supplies, to national delegations and media interviews was arranged through the strike committee.

We had come out on the basis of attempting to spread the action over regrading, and in the process pressure our union officials to give a national lead.

The first week was spent organising and sending striking nurses to speak at other hospitals across Manchester. We experienced anger in many places, some with little organisation, some with good organisation but hostility from stewards. For example, Trafford General had no traditions and few stewards. Yet nurses were keen to turn their anger into action. A one day strike met a brilliant response. After just 5 days, 250 NUPE nurses at Prestwich hospital joined the indefinite strike. It was immediately made official. 800 COHSE nurses at Prestwich quickly followed, overturning their stewards' recommendations. With 1200 nurses in Manchester on strike we felt very confident.

ORGANISING EMERGENCY COVER

At Springfield, emergency cover levels had been previously negotiated. The strike committee decided to look at cover levels ward by ward. Nurses would only agree to be moved with the consent of the union, and an overtime ban was in place. Nurses over and above emergency levels took turns to take strike action. Wards below cover levels, where no nurses were on strike,



where levels were low due to the overtime ban or sickness, were management's responsibility. Appalling staffing levels on the wards were down to management, and we expected them to act down to fill gaps. This gave nurses a lot of confidence as well as many laughs. After 2 weeks, managers cried crocodile tears about how exhausted they were.

On Clarke's instructions they began to toughen up, refusing to fill gaps in an attempt to use moral blackmail. The strike committee therefore had a continuing fight with management over levels, and spent hours checking the wards on each shift and dealing with problems. Management attempted to close a ward, which was in practice reopened within 24 hours after an occupation by staff and the patients voluntarily returning.

OUR UNION LEADERS

Two COHSE officials were invited to attend the strike committee. Members were shocked by their attitude. We were informed their role was not to provide a lead over regrading, and

that the strike was unofficial until we had a secret ballot. A lobby of the regional office met the same response.

Having held out against the pressure of a secret ballot for 2 weeks, we balloted our membership and won our 87% result for continuing indefinite action. The union then declared the ballot invalid!

A demonstration called by Prestwich and Springfield attracted 400, despite being actively undermined by a union official. But pressure on the ground forced NUPE to call an "official" demonstration, where nurses from Withington and Wythenshaw took their first day of strike action. Tom Sawyer, NUPE deputy General Secretary, gave a good anti-Tory speech but made no mention of where the action should go.

By the national nurses conference it was apparent that Tom Sawyer's attitude was typical of all NUPE and COHSE officials. We had done our best to spread the strike. The officials were just sitting on their hands. Reluctantly we decided to return to work. (see back page for details).

Round the regions:

Manchester

Nurses at Trafford General, Manchester, were angry and insulted at being given almost the worst grades in the country. Its a hospital where no action had taken place before and union organisation was very weak.

However as soon as grades were allocated nurses showed how insulted they were by a spontaneous work to grade, mass meetings with speakers from Springfield and a unanimous decision for strike action. The 24 hour strike was brilliant with a lively picket of at least 50 people all day supported by other sections of staff. The night staff were so enthusiastic that they kept the picket going all night.

We have had problems in taking the action forward because of the lack of rank and file union organisation, also management have started to intimidate nurses with threats of suspensions of those working to grade and refusing to hear their appeals. One of the ways we are trying to take it forward is to increase the union organisation by using the work to grade to call meetings and build nurses' confidence. If we can elect more stewards then we will be better prepared when the action takes off again.

Bristol

The failure of local officials of COHSE NUPE to unite and escalate action when 23 NUPE members were suspended at Hanham has led to confusion and demoralization in many of the Bristol hospitals. The experience of West Cumbria, Manchester & Edinburgh show that management can be forced to back off if faced with the threat of strike action but this call was not given.

The result is that much of the work to grade action is falling apart and in Stoke Park, Barrow & Hanam Hall itself there no longer seems to be working to grade. In Bristol Royal Infirmary a meeting was planned to discuss restarting a work to grade but was called off by the branch secretary.

The need for an area stewards meeting is becoming increasingly clear to combat feelings of isolation & confusion. Activists need to push for meetings to start a work to grade with detailed guidelines. There needs to be more unity between COHSE & NUPE including official backing for all workers suspended for taking action.

Birmingham

Nursing staff at three hospitals in north Birmingham overwhelmingly voted to take strike action on 14th December, the day the regional health authority meets. Selly Oak hospital and Rubery Hill hospital have already decided to strike on this day, so we now hope that it will be a day the Regional Health Authority won't forget. East Birmingham General began its work to grade last week. At a meeting on 24th November, 150 nurses came to discuss what to do after management failed to respond. One RCN member questioned whether it was Trevor Clay or the members who ran the RCN, as many RCN members wanted to work to grade.

Glasgow

THE WORK to grade has been called off in two major COHSE hospitals, Gartnavel Royal and Lennox Castle, after Jim Devine - COHSE full-time officer - asked Scottish Health Minister Forsyth for talks on a "Scottish solution" in return for stopping all action.

However Devine has been forced to sanction strike action where branch votes of 84-91 percent in secret ballots called for it, after Forsyth refused to talk and welcomed the "Scottish solution" as a concession to regional pay variations.

Gartnavel Royal was to strike for 48 hours on 15-16 December.

COHSE and NUPE officially called a lobby of the Greater Glasgow Health Board on 6 December. The Southern General struck for four hours to attend. Officials refused to call strike action, though NUPE is holding ballots on industrial action to defend anyone disciplined for working to grade.

Some NUPE branches are considering holding their own ballots for industrial action alongside the official one to build confidence and call on the union for strike action.

Edinburgh

WHEN THE grades were announced at the Royal Edinburgh there was a one hour strike in protest. The nearby mental handicap hospital, Gogarburn, came out for six days. On the third day we joined them.

We returned to work with a management agreement to speed up the appeals process. By early December we expected to know whether grades would be overturned. In the meantime we have been balloting on industrial action. At the time of writing neither the result of the block appeal nor the ballot is known.

We did start a work to grade, but members decided to give management two weeks grace. The ballot is vague about what action we'll take, but it clearly states it will be strike action. About 80 percent of nurses at the Royal Ed are in COHSE or NUPE, and we balloted together.

But the Royal Edinburgh and Gogarburn are the only two hospitals in Lothian to have taken action up to now. In Edinburgh we're suffering from the fact that the privatisation dispute earlier in the year went down the pan. There appear to be few at the general hospitals who want to work to grade.

North East

THERE WAS very little action in the area in February and March, but there was a two hour walkout when people got their grades in Sunderland. Working to grade took off very quickly.

In November the unions claimed there were 12,000 working to grade. It wasn't true - people were talking about it but not systematically building it. However we found the ballots the unions organised were a good way to win people to putting a work to grade into practice, using them to talk to people about the action.

Now nearly every hospital has a formal position on working to grade but the level of action differs enormously. Newcastle General called

off their work to grade, but nursing assistants voted to start working to grade at St Mary's.

At St Nicholas psychiatric hospital we won the vote for a work to grade by five to one. Stewards organised section and grade meetings to settle guidelines. Elsewhere student nurses held meetings to discuss what they should do so as not to undermine the action. RCN stewards were pushed into saying they'd back anyone who worked to grade regardless of what their national leadership said.

Since then there have been problems. At St Nicholas the work to grade hasn't really been hitting management. But it has given the activists a basis of organisation. Stewards have had to keep in contact with people. What we do now in building organisation is vital.

Sheffield

THERE WAS a one day strike by around 250 nurses at the Middlewood Hospital and the Northern General Psychiatric Unit in Sheffield in mid November. A Joint Action Committee was set up by NUPE and COHSE members.

Now we've been told appeals won't be heard at unit level at all but will go straight to district level. We've balloted on work to grade and strike action. Management twice used legal threats to postpone the ballot. A ballot on working to grade is also on at the Hallamshire Hospital.

Working to grade has been extremely effective in some circumstances. SENs in a pool, all on C, sat down and refused to take charge of wards and the next morning they were all upgraded to D. Twenty night sisters - all but two in the RCN - refused to go on the wards unless there were nursing officers with them, and now they're all graded G.

Leeds

A WORK to grade began at St James - the biggest hospital in Europe - at the end of November. The action followed a ballot of COHSE members. We plan to start making management sign for any work done outside grade guidelines.

At St George's, a hospital chiefly for the elderly, management backed down from threatening to go to the courts over working to grade.

At both hospitals there is a completely different relationship between managers and nurses. But there's frustration at the lack of any real lead from COHSE and NUPE officials. Not even an official leaflet has appeared. Instead they've competed in calling demonstrations. NUPE held a rally on Saturday 26 November. COHSE went for one on 6 December. NUPE planned another nearby in Wakefield on 10 December.

Cumbria

NURSES AND ancillary workers at West Cumberland hospital returned to work following a two week strike after management conceded nurses' right to work to grade.

Four hundred members of COHSE and NUPE came out after 11 nurses across three hospitals were suspended for working to grade. Nurses provided emergency cover but management refused ancillary workers' offer to do the same. Nur-

ses at the hospital had never been on strike before.

The strike began as 48 hour action when management first suspended people. When more suspensions followed the return to work, they came back out and were joined by the ancillaries. Management took a tough line at first, with a district health authority member calling nurses + "mindless morons". Then they conceded negotiations but strung them out over a week.

Their hand was finally forced by a lightning 24 hour walk-out at a community hospital in nearby Workington. The suspensions were lifted and the right to work to grade conceded. Strikers had meanwhile collected thousands of pounds in support of their action.

London

ONE DAY strikes have got off the ground more easily than working to grade in most London hospitals.

The Maudsley (south London) struck on 6 December to join a 500-strong lobby of parliament, but strikes by COHSE nurses elsewhere in the capital were made less likely after a union circular went out denying strikes were officially sanctioned.

Earlier, on 28 November NUPE nurses across 17 hospitals took action. Up to 300 walked out at St George's in south London, 140 at Charing Cross and 80 at the Royal Free. Many others were involved in providing cover. COHSE members at the Maudsley joined the action by striking for two hours. On the same day, 44 midwives at the North Middlesex Hospital handed in a joint letter of resignation.

But the biggest strike has been at St George's, Tooting, where 600 were involved in a three day strike in mid November. Thirty psychiatric nurses at Charing Cross struck for a week at the end of the month.

There have been one day strikes by NUPE members at St Anne's (north London), St Bernard's (west London) and Bethnal Green, Mile End and Whitechapel (east London). One hundred COHSE nurses at Leytonstone House came out for 24 hours and there was an earlier 48 hour strike at Claybury (Essex).

250 COHSE psychiatric nurses at the Maudsley are working to grade.

At Ealing, west London, COHSE voted for a series of 24 hour and three hour strikes from 1-8 December, when Health Minister David Mellor was to visit the hospital. They've been working to grade since 1 December. This was prepared for by organising meetings of all staff grades and sections to draw up guidelines. Members have been advised not to meet managers unless they receive a request in writing and stewards will be available at all times on a paging system. Already in Ealing two mental health resource centres have been paralysed by managers working to grade.

At the Soho and Elizabeth Garrett Anderson hospitals, central London, nurses working to grade were threatened that their appeals would not be heard, their pay would be docked and they'd be reported to the UKCC. But management backed down and eight staff nurses have been upgraded. The result was a solid strike in these hospitals - on 28 November.

THE WAY FORWARD.

REPORT FROM THE NATIONAL NURSES CONFERENCE 26 NOVEMBER 1988

Due to the position we found ourselves in at Springfield we decided to call a national conference. It was clear that nurses had a great deal to learn from each other over a number of issues; how to deal with the RCN and union leaders, how to work to grade, how to deepen and strengthen the action and defend suspended nurses.

We agreed to produce a newsletter to strengthen the fight over regrading and to allow the wealth of experience that exists across the country to be used to build in the hospitals.

The conference resolved to have a political campaign in the union to call the national action that could win. It was agreed that we needed to fight for unity between NUPE and COHSE to prevent the debacle earlier in the year, with different days of action being called by different unions, being repeated.

The conference agreed that national indefinite strike action is the way to win over regrading, but accepted the unevenness meant it was currently unobtainable. That is why working to grade, day strikes, and lobbies of health authorities could be so important in building union organisation, necessary to take the dispute forward.

A campaign by Bickerstaffe and Mackenzie could be key to changing this situation and winning a minimum 17.9% for everyone.

THE CURRENT SITUATION

After the national conference, nurses at Springfield discussed the implications for our strike. We felt the strike had been important in helping to spread the action. We also recognised we were streets ahead of most hospitals, and that no individual hospital could win alone.

We therefore agreed, after 4 weeks on strike, to propose a return to work and continue the fight in a different form. It was a hard decision to take. But the campaign in the unions for unity and a national lead are crucial to take the dispute forward.

We agreed to implement the work to grade, keep the overtime ban, and have a 24 hour strike on December 6th. We also elected 12 new stewards.

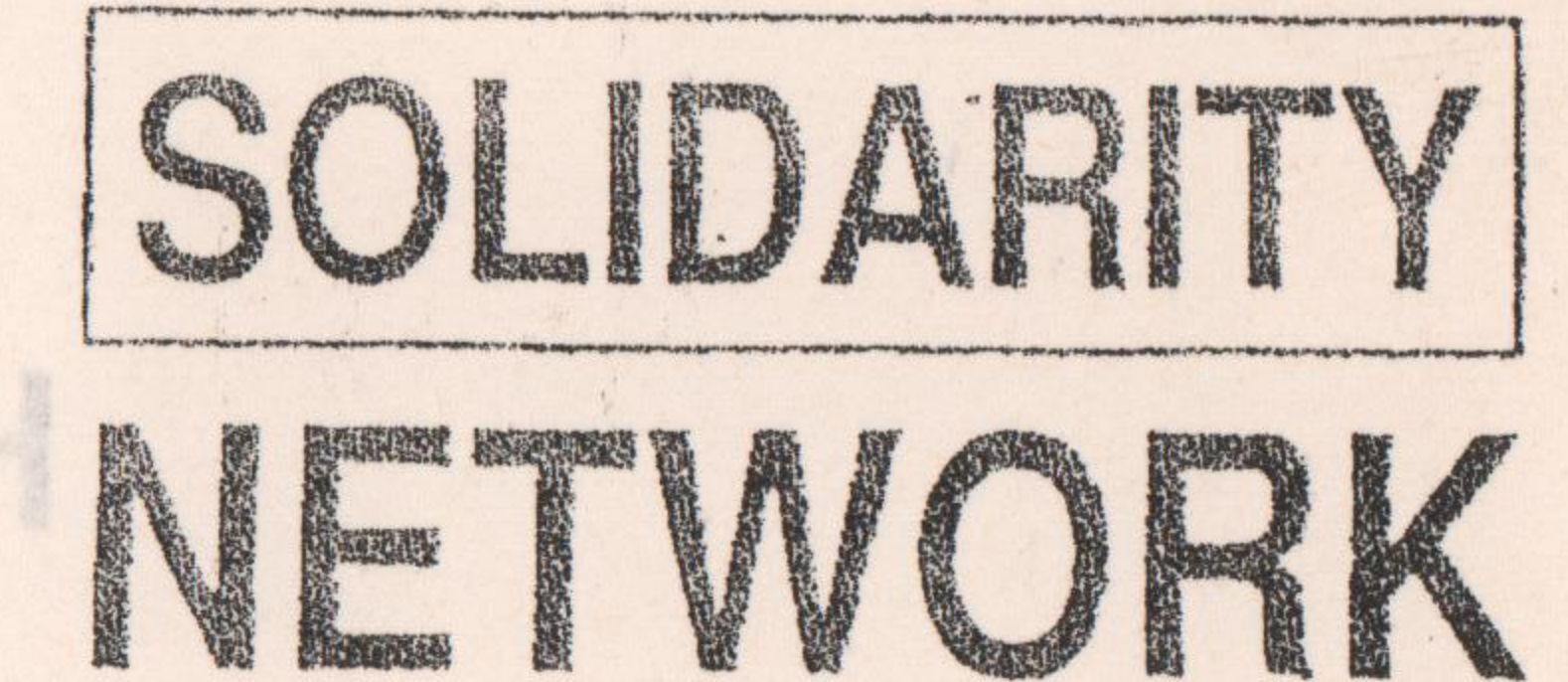
GUIDE ON WORKING TO GRADE

Some of the ideas raised at the conference have already been invaluable at Springfield

1. Union guidelines are too vague. Nurses from all organisations have met grade by grade to work out details together about what they can and cannot do.
2. Every attempt has been made to aim the action at nurse managers, who are still asked to act down, and are constantly touring the hospital to do drug rounds.
3. Every nurse has a form their managers must sign if they are expected to perform tasks above their grades (they are currently refusing to sign such forms) and therefore the nurse continues to work to grade.
4. Nurses are only allowed to move within their own unit - this limits the extent to which nurses with good grades can be shifted to cover for others refusing to perform certain tasks.
5. Working to grade is difficult and members need a lot of support/guidance from stewards regularly checking all wards. Weekly meetings help to ensure the action sticks
6. Management have tried to change hospital policies to limit the work to grade. They have attempted to reduce the number of nurses giving drugs from two to one - following UKCC advice! We are in dispute over this and are advising nurses to continue with two in the interests of safety.

We found it much harder work than being on indefinite strike, but management still hate it

The above articles are from the COHSE Springfield Trade Union Office Bulletin, more copies of which can be obtained from the North Manchester General Hospital, Delauneys Rd, Crumpsall, Manchester, 10p each, cheques payable to COHSE Springfield.



HEALTH and SAFETY CONFERENCE

The recent disasters at Zeebrugge, Kings Cross, the Piper Alpha oil platform and more recently the Midlands air crash have demonstrated the drastic effect that the drive for profits has had on health and safety conditions. Deaths and injuries are soaring both in industry and the community. There were over 160 deaths in the construction industry in 1988.

The Socialist Conference and the Solidarity Network, in conjunction with several health and safety campaigns have organised a conference to be held in Birmingham on March 11th. The conference aims to bring together a cross section of industries, workplaces, trade unionist and community campaigns to discuss how to organise around health and safety issues. There will be speakers from these groups and a series of workshops. There is space for 100 delegates so please book in advance if possible.

DATE **SATURDAY MARCH 11th**

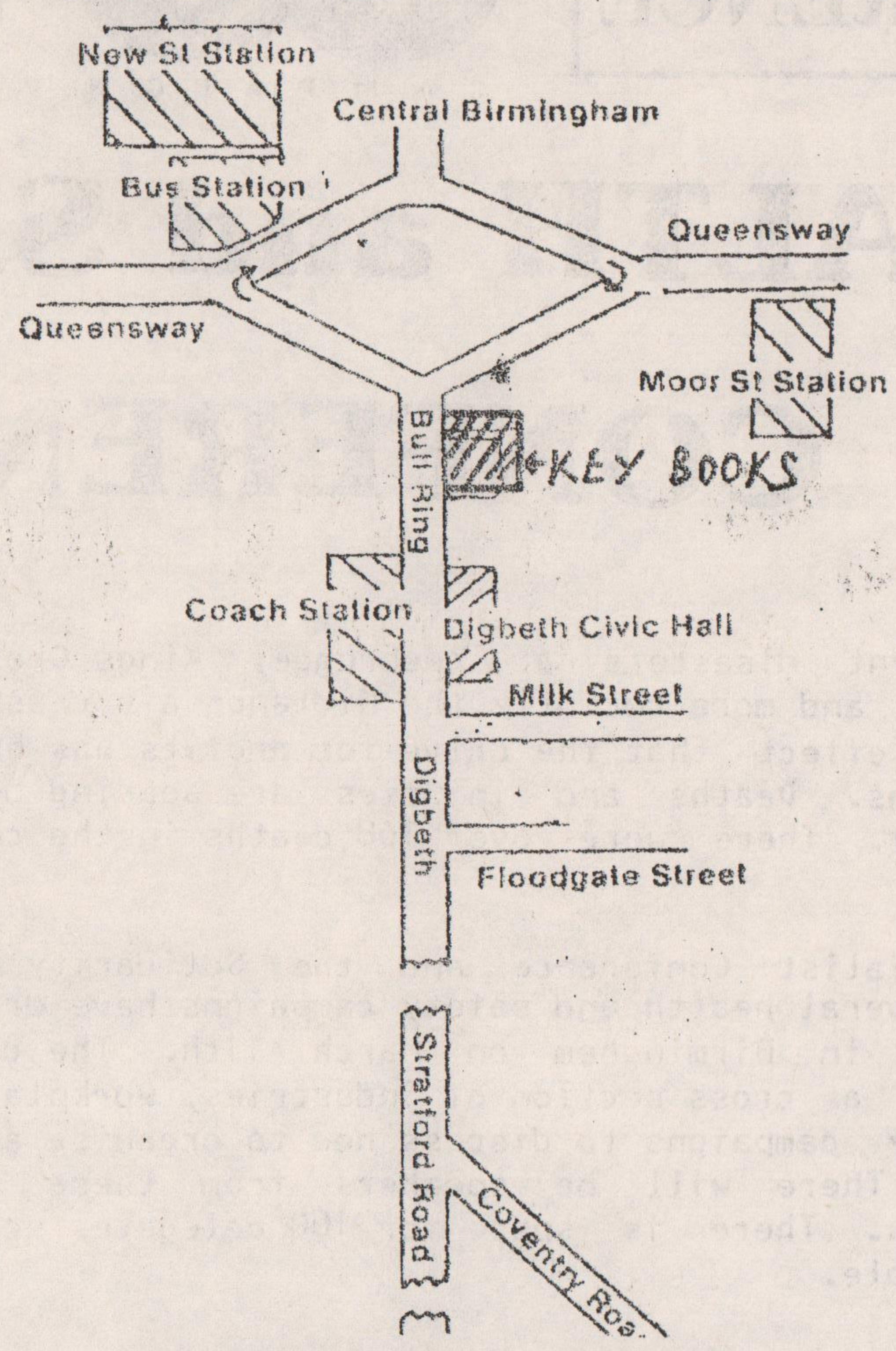
10 30am-4 30pm

VENUE **KEY BOOKS, BIRMINGHAM**

136 DIGBETH

Creche facilities available

HOW TO GET THERE



REGISTRATION

The Registration fee is £3 for organisations £1 for individuals. Please note that there are only 100 spaces available, so register early! We regret that access for the disabled is not available but we will be making every effort to ensure that future venues have disabled facilities.

Please register me for the Solidarity Network/Socialist Conference Health and Safety Conference.

NAME _____

ORGANISATION _____

ADDRESS _____

TELEPHONE _____

CRECHE REQUIRED _____

All Cheques should be made payable to THE SOLIDARITY NETWORK and sent to 74, Kingsland Road, Plaistow, London E.13.

What is the Solidarity Network?

The Solidarity Network was set up at a conference called in solidarity with workers in struggle and held in London in November 1987. The conference sought to build on the kind of support movement organised for the miners and for the post workers at Wapping. Since then the Solidarity Network has met on a regular basis, has organised support for a number of disputes and helped to publicise their cases. It has worked with the Cheshamwood Socialist Conference, holding a joint rally in London in support of those in struggle and helping them to organise the Sheffield road school. The Network has begun the publication of a bulletin, the first and second editions of which have been published. The Cheshamwood Socialist Conference has taken the name 'Solidarity Network' for the bulletin which has already been issued with the Solidarity Network, and has given the Solidarity Network a part in the Cheshamwood Socialist Conference.

Affiliation form

We invite your organisation to affiliate to the Network and strengthen our work. Organisations which affiliate will receive copies of the Bulletin and will receive up to date information on disputes. We also invite individuals to take out a subscription to the Bulletin, which would help the Network and provide regular information.

My organisation wishes to affiliate to the Solidarity Network.

I wish to take out a subscription to the Solidarity Bulletin.

Name/Organisation _____

Address _____

Telephone number _____

The affiliation fee for organisations is £10. Subscription fees for individuals are £3 for waged and £2 for unemployed. Please send to 74 Kingsland Rd, Plaistow, London E13.

SOLIDARITY NETWORK
Bulletin 1