

Solidarity Network

Bulletin Number Six
May 1989
Thirty pence

Solidarity with those in struggle!



HEALTH AND SAFETY AND BLACK WORKERS

The starting point of this campaign (which is now being carried out by the Health and Safety Commission) is to ensure that black workers are not disadvantaged by the way in which health and safety is implemented. A key area of concern is the way in which health and safety is implemented in the workplace. The Health and Safety Commission has a number of initiatives in place to ensure that black workers are not disadvantaged. These include the following:

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When the project started in 1987, it was a joint venture between the Health and Safety Commission and the Black Workers' Health and Safety Committee. The project was funded by the Health and Safety Commission and the Black Workers' Health and Safety Committee. The project was funded by the Health and Safety Commission and the Black Workers' Health and Safety Committee.

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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.

Contact addresses:

Convenor: John Lang, 74 Kingland Road, Plastow, London E13.

Secretary: Andrea Campbell, 6 Chertsey House, Arnold Circus, London E2.

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FULL SUPPORT TO THE DOCKERS

- ARGUMENTS WE MUST GET ACROSS

Ron Cooper from Hull discusses some of the problems the dockers will face.

At the moment the shipping companies and the Port Employers are avoiding the registered ports by discharging bulk carriers at the Euro-ports into smaller feeder ships or coasters which can navigate difficult estuaries and rivers to discharge at unregistered wharfs. This is a big problem for the dockers. On the Humber estuary there are nine unregistered wharfs — Groves, Neap House, Honderndyke, New Holland, Flixborough, Burton Stather, Boothberry Bulk Storage and Gunnet — which have been handling increased shipping in the build up to the strike.

The port employers and the Tory lobby argue that the registered ports are being avoided because the scheme makes them too expensive. This is not true. Take Hull for example. There are now 800 registered dockers employed on a single dock. These dockers are handling the same annual tonnage that was handled by 5,000 registered dockers employed along 11 miles of docks in the 1960s — when Hull was Britain's third port. The National Dock Labour Scheme has allowed for this transformation with the introduction of con-

tainerisation and new working practices. It would be difficult to find other industries which have seen such a massive increase in productivity over such a short period of time.

The fact of the matter is that it must be more expensive to use unregistered ports. They have to discharge into the feeder ships, navigate some of the most dangerous waters around Britain, discharge at unregistered wharfs with a lack of modern handling equipment, and then cope with inferior road and rail links. It is obvious that if the NDLB is abolished the first thing which will go is the private wharfs as the port employers and the shipping companies move into the former registered ports with deep water channels, modern handling equipment and good road and rail links. The first people to lose their jobs will be those employed at the unregistered wharfs. This is why the dockers have always argued that the Scheme should be extended to all ports.

The National Dock Labour Scheme has given the dockers continuity of employment and a stable workforce which has allowed them to organise and gain a high degree of control of their own industry. This is the real reason why the Tories and the Port Employers want to abolish the Scheme.

SOLIDARITY NETWORK SUPPORTS THE DOCKERS

An emergency meeting of the steering committee of the Solidarity Network was held in Hull on Saturday May 6th to discuss the organisation of support for the dockers. It was attended by about 30 people including members of Hull Trades Council and a leading shop steward from the Hull docks.

The Hull docks steward gave an update on the situation which resulted in a wide ranging discussion as to whether the strike should be in defence of the NDLS or demanding similar conditions from the port employers. It seemed to many that the main problem was the decision of the TGWU NEC that any dispute must be within the law.

This would mean, according to TGWU officials, that there should be no picketing of the non-Scheme ports or the inland container bases since this would be illegal secondary action. Nor could the passage of diverted cargo through the non-Scheme ports be impeded for the same reason. By the same logic rail or transport workers would be unable to boycott such material or workers in factories refuse to dispatch it. This policy was seen as very worrying since it would mean that the strikes would have their hands tied behind their backs right from the outset.

Most of the meeting was spent discussing the kind of solidarity support which could be given to the docker by both organisations and individuals. The following are some of the suggestions adopted:

PTO

EAST LONDON DOCK SUPPORT GROUP SET UP

The second meeting of an East London Dockers support group was held on Thursday May 11th in the Approach Tavern E2. It was a successful meeting which laid the ground work for extensive support work once the strike is off the ground.

The meeting was addressed by Micky Fenn from the National Port Shop Stewards Committee who said that the ballot was now taking place and the result would be known on about May 19th. He said he expected a high vote for strike action in Tilbury but expressed fear that the TGWU may allow the High Court to interfere with the decision before it was implemented. He said as far as Tilbury was concerned most dockers wanted the decision of the ballot implemented immediately irrespective of decisions of the High Court.

He said that stewards from Tilbury were visiting both unregistered ports in Britain seeking support and also the continental ports which face similar attacks under the pressure of 1992.

The East London Support Group are planning a public meeting on the docks dispute in East London at the Davenant Centre in White Chapel Rd at a date to be announced. They have also arranged a social at the Rosemary Branch pub, 2 Shepperton Rd N1, on Friday May 28th at 8.00 p.m. The proceeds will be split between the dockers and the P&O strikers.

SOLIDARITY NETWORK SUPPORTS THE DOCKERS ORGANISE NOW!

(Continued from page 3)

- Form support groups everywhere possible.
- Twin with the ports nearest to your area, the Solidarity Network can give details.
- Organise meetings now with dockers speaking. Invite others in struggle onto the platform — seafarers, rail workers, bus workers etc.
- Resolutions of support should be adopted in by all labour movement organisations.
- Arrangements for fund raising should be organised now, appeal sheets bank accounts and so on.
- Support groups should check the unregistered ports or inland container bases in their area.
- Contacts who could be held with crucial international support, including language skills can be assembled.
- In Hull a Triple Alliance of transport workers has been formed — this could be considered in other areas.
- A joint leaflet from the Solidarity Network and the Hull dockers aimed at the workers in the non-Scheme ports setting out the need for their support to be produced and widely distributed.

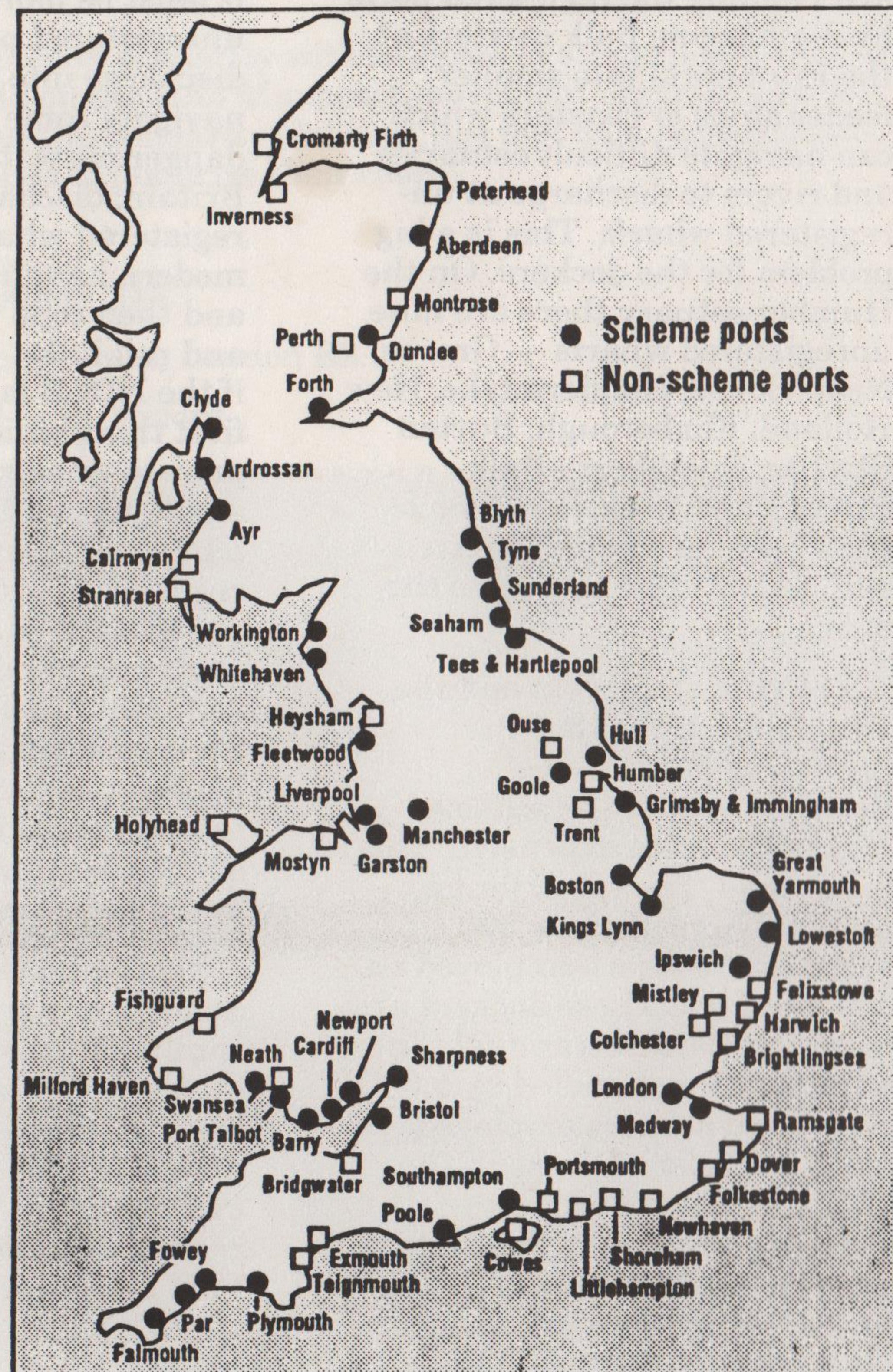
SOLIDARITY NETWORK MEETING IN BRISTOL

The Solidarity Network held a successful meeting in Bristol last week which was attended by a delegation of dockers from Bristol docks. Plans were made to set up a dockers support group as soon as the strike gets off the ground.

SOLIDARITY NETWORK: NEXT MEETING

The next open meeting of the steering committee of the Solidarity Network will be held in Bristol, at the St Worburchs Community Centre Horley Rd (near junction three of the M32 off Mina street), at 12.00 p.m. on Saturday June 3rd.

FOR INFORMATION, CONTACTS WITH DOCKERS, AND SPEAKERS FOR MEETINGS: Contact John Lang at the Hackney TU Support Unit London 249 8086.



LONDON UNDERGROUND TRY TO IMPOSE 'ACTION STATIONS'

TUBE WORKERS MOVE TO BATTLE STATIONS

The tube strike scheduled for May 8th was called off when the Executive of the NUR by a vote of 11-8 voted to comply with a High Court injunction declaring the ballot paper illegal. A second ballot is now taking place. K. Jones, an NUR Guard, explains the issues involved.

Tube workers have had enough.

They have had enough of the imposition of the new lateness and absence procedures — which are now called 'unsatisfactory attendance' offences and which record under that catch-all heading both self-certificated and GP certificated illness. Probationary periods under this regime vary from six months to two years on the whim of the manager. That manager will now be one of the new breed of 'Centurions'. Yes, believe it or not, this is name for new first line managers who each have a team of between 60 to 100 rail workers under them. The ten general line managers will have unlimited control of their workforces — if they can smash the agreements that at present provide the basis for strong unionisation on the tubes.

Both the NECs of the NUR and TESSA called ballots of the 10,000 plus workers affected by these threats. First the normally anti-strike TSSA membership voted by 2-1 for a strike followed by an 8-1 vote by NUR members. Both NECs have called for all-

out strike action from Monday May 8th unless management unconditionally agree to withdraw its plans for 'Action Stations'; its 'unsatisfactory attendance' scheme and its competitive tendering and privatisation plans.

The seniority issue is at the centre of this growing dispute. At present in order to move up the grades a tube worker must pass certain exams and is then listed, in seniority order, for the depot or location of his or her choice. In the past this system has largely neutralised favouritism, racism and sexism in the area of promotions, transfers and redundancy arrangements. For example in the station supervisory grades Asians make up 37% of the total on the underground. On the buses where seniority criterion don't apply they make up only 2% of comparable grades. The unions have clearly labeled management proposals as racist and black workers have overwhelmingly rallied round the unions. They made up 50% of the mass meetings on the eve of the ballot. Management wish to abolish seniority and substitute 'suitability'. Appointment would be on the basis of who not what you know and thousands more jobs would go.

All tube workers know that if successful management can make giant strides towards privatisation.

Amongst train operators, initially on the one-person-operated lines (now unfortunately the majority) but them throughout the system, this situation has

fueled a massive upheaval over rates of pay. Two unofficial one day strikes have crippled the capital, the second much more successful than the first. All drivers on the tube whether they have a guard or not are paid £4.74p per hour. The guards' rate is £3.17p per hour. The campaign started as a move to restore the differential for OPO operated trains but in order to unite all train grades this has been changed to a claim for £6.43p per hour for all drivers and the restoration of the previous differentials for the guards which would bring them up to £5.30 per hour. The ASLEF officials are even more frightened of making that claim than the NUR officials. Management response has been to place an enormous shopping list of productivity items on the table which would make the deal self-financing. If accepted, either by the full timers or the drivers unofficial committee they would totally undermine the conditions of all tube workers.

There is a problem at the present time that the drivers unofficial committee is secretive and unaccountable. With over 80% of drivers and guards answering their calls, secrecy is no longer necessary or beneficial to the progress of their claim. They should call mass meetings and urge their supporters to go on all out strike from May 8th alongside all other London Underground workers. That is the way to defend all conditions and get a no strings increase for all.

K Jones, London Underground guard.

MAXWELL'S EMPIRE — THE WORKERS STRIKE BACK

Recruitment into the NUJ at Pergamon Press in Oxford, Robert Maxwell's original company from which he launched his multi-million empire, has led to a backlash by management and their refusal to grant full recognition to a new branch of the NUJ. We have received this report from one of the workers involved.

A strike by members of the NUJ at Pergamon Press in Oxford is increasingly likely in the face of the management's failure to recognise the union in most of the department where it organises. This has been brought to a head by the arbitrary sacking of an NUJ member at the start of the year.

A strike ballot has produced an overwhelming majority for action despite the intimidatory atmosphere fostered by management. Their response to a local press report of the dispute was to herd the whole of the workforce into the canteen to hear the Managing Director issue a sacking threat to anyone taking strike action. Designed to frighten the workers, this bully-boy tactic led to anger at

management's refusal to grant basic recognition rights.

Management have been surprised at the rapid development of the NUJ chapel over the past year. For editorial and other NUJ eligible work Pergamon employs mainly young people, often fresh from school or college, with little or no experience of trade unionism. These young workers are initially pray to illusions of bright prospects and promotion by management. Most however find themselves low-paid, untrained and overworked in cramped, unhealthy working conditions. In the past this has bred demoralisation and a staff turnover of 50% per year.

On top of this management operate a strict regime to counter worker hostility. Workers are for example warned verbally that revealing your salary to a fellow worker is a sackable offence!

The staying power and the militancy of the Pergamon NUJ chapel shows that it is possible to organise workers in the current climate and under conditions often thought unfavourable.

STRIKE AT TELEPHONE CABLES DAGENHAM

After seven weeks on strike 400 workers at Telephone Cables Ltd in Dagenham returned to work on April 19th. The workers originally came out on strike over a pay claim. The company, owned by the electronics giant GEC-Plessey, had offered to increase the £2.67p per hour earned by the workers by 16p.

The strike received little publicity and support was slow to come forward despite the fact that the factory is right next to the giant Ford plant. Strike pay for the members was £21 per week and so there was quite a bit of financial hardship. Solidarity was received from BT and postal workers who refused to cross the picket line.

Finally the management threatened to sack the whole of the workforce if they did not return to work immediately. A ballot to stay out was narrowly carried but the management then extended the deadline on the dismissals and at a mass meeting on April 18th a decision was taken that the workforce should return to work together.

Because of the financial hardship suffered the financial appeal is remaining open for a few weeks. Donations can be sent to: Keith Edwards, TCL fund, TGWU, 43 West Ham Lane Stratford, London E15. Cheques payable to TCL strike fund.

JUSTICE CAMPAIGN AGM

200 supporters and delegates, about a third of them miners, attended the National Justice for Mineworkers Campaign AGM in Sheffield on April 8th. The meeting was addressed by the president of Sheffield Trades Council, Terry French, Tony Benn, Mick Gosling and Jason Groombridge from the striking seafarers at Dover.

The good size of the meeting four years after the end of the strike showed the measure of respect which remains for the struggle of the miners and the way victimised miners are seen as the symbol of that struggle.

Terry French, however, speaking on behalf of the remaining 159 victimised miners, pointed to various problems with the campaign as he saw them:

'At the end of the miners strike, a strike which was sold out for political ends, there were approximately 1,000 miners sacked and 150 in Thatchers jails, for terms ranging from a few months to eight years. There are now 167 still victimised and two still in prison, Russell Shankland and Dean Hancock. And let's remember that whilst we were celebrating the 5th anniversary of the strike they were sitting in a cell remembering their 5th anniversary... In 1987 we were told that when Labour won the election we would all be reinstated, well we lost that election and was it any wonder?

'If the NUM would recognise its responsibility to sustain these men (and I am not talking of the national officials) the NJMC could devote its considerable energies and talents not in running jumble sales and benefits but in securing the reinstatement for these victims of Thatchers war against the miners.

'It was to that end that I submitted a resolution to my branch

last year calling on the national conference of the NUM to hold a ballot for a 50p levy to sustain us. That resolution became policy but to this date has not been implemented. We are told that it is "on the back burner" and that "there are more important issues at stake". In the meantime the victimised miners continue to live in their twilight world of insecurity...

'Well I'm fed up with being on the "back burner". The strike has been over for four years and each and every one of us remaining is an ugly stain on the NUM and the trade union movement generally. Its high time that this stain is erased and it is to that end that I demand that the ballot for the levy be implemented as soon as possible and then the Justice Campaign can concentrate on gaining justice for the miners — which is reinstatement'.

Tony Benn said that the miners strike had been seen every where as an absolutely crucial struggle. He spelled out the arguments against nuclear power. All the important issue of the day, he said, could be traced back to the miners strike. He said that what people wanted today was a political lead. He

strongly supported a strike in the docks industry in defence of the National Dock Labour Scheme and called for solidarity groups to be formed to support the strike. He said that if the lessons of the miners strike were learned and the dockers received the support they would need a national docks strike could see the demise of the Tories.

Mick Gosling paid tribute to the work of the Justice campaign. He said that everyone was being picked off one by one and that solidarity was vital in today's struggles. He said he had been victimised 'because we had had the Ford Motor Company closed down and could have won everything we wanted'. He pointed to the struggle in the North of Ireland and said that that was where the methods used against the miners was perfected.

Jason Groombridge spoke of the 14th months of the seafarers strike. It was a strike he said which could have been won 'twice we had every port in the country at a standstill and twice it was let go.' He said there are still 400 who continue to strike and continue to picket.
Alan Thornett

5 YEARS ON

Is it really that long ago
When we were naive and not in the know
When we thought the police were there to help and protect
When honest men fighting a cause were treated with respect
When we hoped our jobs were safe and secure
It came hard to learn we could not expect this any more
When we still believed we were being told the truth
Disillusions came later in life and not in your youth
And did we ever believe in the freedom of the press
That accuracy and honesty could be suppressed
We always presumed that TV wouldn't tell a lie
But impartiality in this case did not apply
We assumed union membership meant joining forces
Pooling strength loyalty and all our resources
You can ask any striking miner what went wrong
Because now he's much wiser five years on

Barbara Smith

DES WARREN TRUST APPEAL FUND

In 1973 Des Warren, one of the pickets convicted of conspiracy at Shrewsbury during the national building workers strike. The Shrewsbury pickets were sentenced to three years jail. Des Warren refused to accept this criminal conviction and conducted a long struggle for political prisoner status. This resulted in his serving eight months in solitary confinement.

During the course of his confinement in Leicester prison, the authorities administered to him a habit forming tranquilliser to which he became addicted. Additionally this drug has severely disabled him with Parkinson's Disease. He is now fighting hard to beat addiction to the drug while his physical condition deteriorates due to Parkinson's Disease. He desperately needs full-time treatment which only a fund of this kind can give.

The trustees of the fund include Billy Etherington, Secretary of the NUM Durham Mechanics, and Peter Heathfield. Donations can be sent to them at NUM National Office, Vicar Lane, Sheffield S1 2EY.

NUJ Resolution to 1989 TUC Women's Conference

Charter for Women at Work

This TUC Women's Conference, recognising that women's inequality at work is central to our inequality in society and trade unions, adopts the following Charter for Women at Work. Further, this Conference recognises that the imminent shortage of new workers entering the labour market makes this the ideal time to pursue the objectives set out in the Charter. It therefore calls upon the TUC and all affiliated unions to adopt the charter and work towards its implementation, by means of negotiations, in all workplaces.

- * Pay structures should give effect to the principle of equal pay for work of equal value.
- * All conditions of employment (including sick pay, pensions, holidays, premium and bonus payments) should be applied to part time workers on a pro rata basis.
- * There should be full equality between female and male employees in respect of the pension scheme
- * All female employees should be entitled to at least five months' paid maternity leave - in line with the European Parliament's Charter for Rights of Women in Childbirth. All maternity leave should count as continuous employment with no loss of pension rights.
- * All parents should be entitled to three months' paid parental leave during their child's first two years - in line with the European Parliament's Draft Directive.
- * Women who are pregnant or who are planning pregnancy should not be required to work on Visual Display Units. Pregnant women and their partners should be granted leave without loss of pay to escape likely infection which might be dangerous to the unborn child. Pregnant women should be granted leave without loss of pay to attend ante/post natal clinics and to attend childbirth classes.
- * All children should have access to childcare and education services in line with the TUC Charter for Under Fives, to enable working parents to fulfill their responsibilities.
- * All workplaces should be covered by an agreed policy statement on sexual harassment, designed to eradicate it and including a procedure for dealing with offenders.
- * Paid time off for cervical cancer screening, or on site facilities should be available to all women workers.
- * All trade union members should be entitled to paid leave to attend trade union education courses.
- * All employees should be entitled to attend training courses and all training courses should be accessible to women.

SOLIDARITY WITH IRISH WOMEN P.O.W'S

- DURHAM GAOL

INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY

Since the day when women garment workers walked out on strike from New York sweat shops eighty years ago, March 8th has been adopted as a focus for action in support of women engaged in the fight for freedom. On this day women and men salute the courage of women engaged in armed struggles to liberate their people as a whole.

IRISH REPUBLICAN WOMEN

Throughout the long history of Ireland's struggle against British imperialism, Irish Republican women have demonstrated their steadfastness and valour. The Armagh women joined H-Block men in resisting Britain's attempt to brand Irish Freedom Fighters as criminals, suffering hardship and brutality on no work and no wash protests. Mairead Farrell, Mary Doyle and Mairead Nugent took part in the first Hunger Strike for Political Status in 1980. Ten men died in 1981 on the second Hunger Strike when Britain reneged on the settlement.

MAIREAD FARRELL 3/3/57 to 6/3/88

Born in Belfast, at 18 Mairead joined the IRA. Following capture she began a fourteen year sentence in Armagh Gaol in 1976 and soon became O/C, leading the Republican women through the difficult years which culminated in the 1981 Hunger Strike and after the introduction in 1982 of systematic strip searching as a method of torture in Armagh. On release in 1986 Mairead worked hard to highlight the abuse of strip searching. She also reported back to the IRA. Knowing the risks ahead Mairead said: "ultimately you're either going to be dead or end up in jail." Soon after Mairead Farrell with Volunteers Dan Mc Cann and Sean Savage were gunned down by an SAS death squad in Gibraltar. Immediately Britain created a smokescreen around the facts of this summary execution of three unarmed IRA Volunteers.

Mairead believed in 'a united, socialist Ireland' and that justice for the Irish people as a whole depends on national liberation: "I'm oppressed as a woman, but I'm also oppressed because I'm Irish. Everyone in this country is oppressed and we can't successfully end our oppression as women until we first end the oppression of our country."

Please send cards/letters to Ella: No D25135, Birthday 3rd March, and Martina: No D25134, Birthday 16th April: HM Prison Durham, Old Elvet DH1 3HU. Support the United Campaign Against Strip Searches (UCASS) c/o ALA, 36 Old Queen Street, London SW1.

STRIP SEARCHING

Introduced by Murtagh in November 1982, systematic strip searching was intended to break the spirit of resistance of the Armagh women. This sexual torture has been likened to rape by psychiatrists, but despite condemnation the practice has become more widespread as a method of punishment and control used by Britain. Since that date thousands of strip searches have turned up nothing of note and the practice continues in the ultra secure Maghaberry Gaol, exposing as a lie the Home Office claim that it is a security measure.

ELLA O'DWYER AND MARTINA ANDERSON-DURHAM GAOL

Sentenced to life at the Brighton bomb show trial in July 1986, Ella O'Dwyer/Ni Dhuibhir and Martina Anderson/Nic Aindreaas had suffered eleven months of brutal treatment on remand in Brixton including around 700 strip searches. Conditions in Durham's H-Wing are notorious. Lacking basic facilities, with inadequate hygiene and nutrition the high surveillance wing, in the past considered unfit for male prisoners, enforces a feeling of claustrophobia and sensory deprivation. Strip searching continues. Despite long sentences in inhuman conditions, Ella and Martina demonstrate inspiring fortitude and dedication to the cause of Irish liberation:

"The situation here is the epitome of what occurs out there; but we have managed to turn the oppression against the system. They will always endeavour to suppress us, but they will never succeed...they should never succeed in in suppressing you either. No matter how long we remain behind bars, we shall always remember with pride, who we are and what we represent. Being in prison only reinforces, to quote our comrade Bobby Sands 'The thought which says we're right'."

Since the introduction of systematic strip searching to Armagh Gaol, international Women's Day has been marked each year by pickets of gaols where Britain carries out this sexual torture against Irish Republican women - at Armagh, Maghaberry, Brixton and Durham Gaols. In 1988 hundreds of women and men gathered outside Durham Prison to express solidarity with Ella and Martina for International Women's Day and with help of a Republican flute band from Glasgow ensured our message penetrated the grim walls. Our greetings were also brought to the male Republican POWs in nearby Frankland Prison. In 1989 we again urge all women and men to join the picket on Sunday March 12th at Durham Gaol. A speaker has been invited from the Lifers' Campaign.

HANDS OFF OUR HOSPITALS!

Build the campaign against the NHS White Paper!

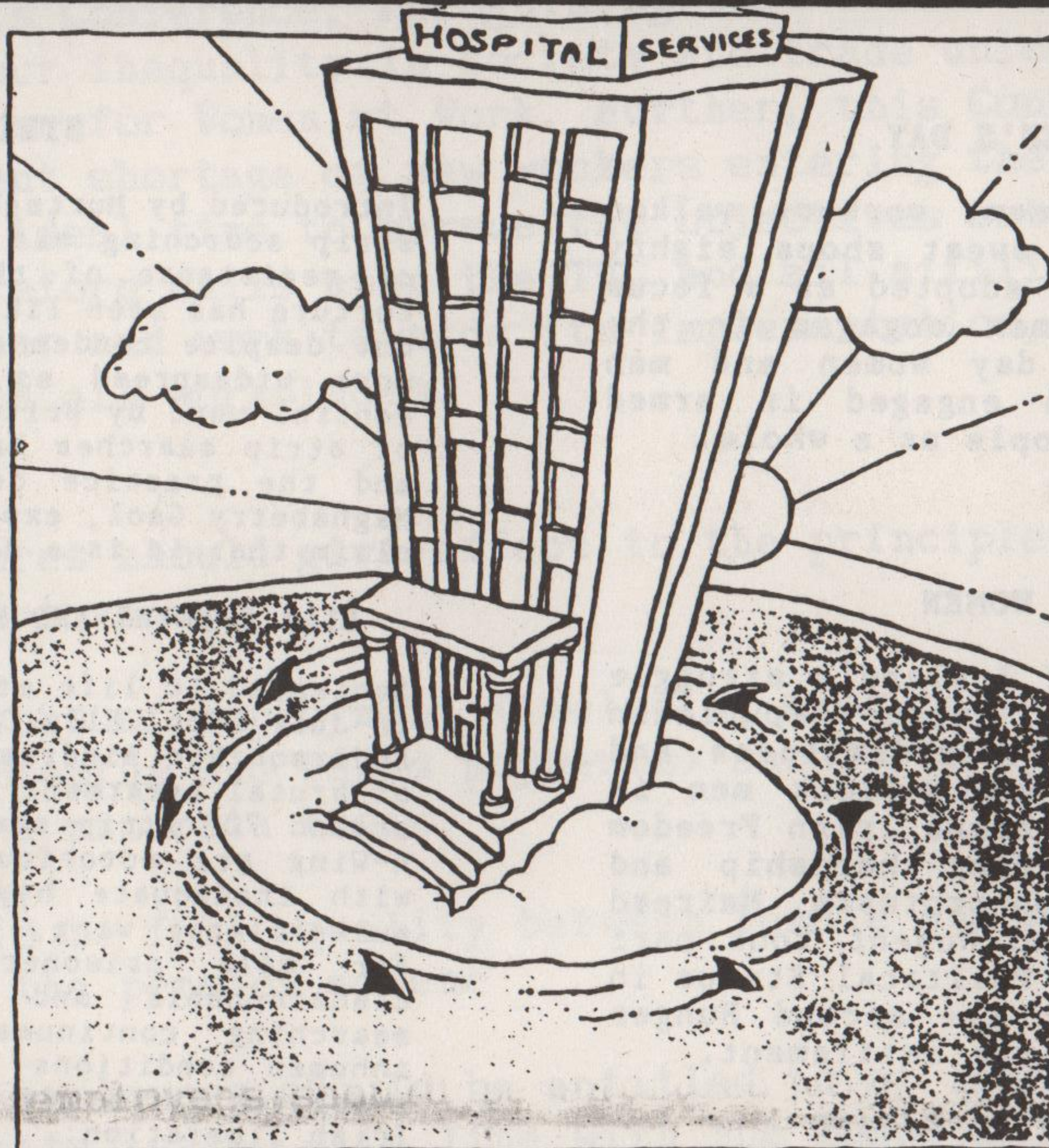
The new government White Paper on the National Health Service is hugely unpopular. Opinion polls show 70% of voters oppose it, while most people also put the NHS at the top of their list of political concerns. That's why Margaret Thatcher did not put the White Paper proposals in her last Election Manifesto – and why she wants her plans rushed through before the next election, to deny voters any say.

The key proposals which most people reject are:

- Encouraging major hospitals to "opt out" of health authority control, becoming pre-NHS style Hospital Trusts, taking decisions behind closed doors. They would be free to sell off assets or close down 'uneconomic' services as they please, tear up agreements covering staff pay and conditions and union recognition, and switch more beds from NHS to private patients to make more money.

- Establishing a new bureaucratic machinery for cross-charging between health districts, and encouraging the establishment of an "internal market" in health care. This is an abandonment of any real attempt at planning services: the danger is that the more costly, time-consuming forms of care, for the elderly, chronic sick and mentally ill, will be further squeezed, while health authorities scramble to "compete" for faster-moving, more 'profitable' and prestigious surgical specialities. The hospitals which lose out in this 'competition' would lose money as well as patients – meaning many people would face cuts in local services, and longer journeys for treatment.

- Encouraging family doctors and major health centres (with over 11,000 patients) to "opt out" and become independent "budget holders", shopping around for the cheapest available treatment for their patients.



hospital doctors and GPs – anyone willing to fight this new, fundamental threat to our health service.

We need campaigns in each health district which 'target' the major hospitals and health centres most likely to "opt out", and mobilise public opinion into active opposition.

Already the first steps have been taken. On February 15 over 150 people from all over London attended an inaugural meeting at Camden Town Hall which agreed to build a London-wide, district-based campaign under the dual slogans *Hands Off Our Hospitals* and *Hands Off Our Health Service*. Meetings, leafleting, petitioning and lobbying have begun in several big London hospitals.

The *HANDS OFF* campaign, supported by London Health Emergency, offers pamphlets opposing the White Paper, leaflets, badges, stickers and car stickers as well as speakers for meetings and advice and support to local campaigners. Any organisation may affiliate for a minimum donation of £20, and individual supporters are also welcome.

With more and more consultants, registrars and GPs already speaking out against the White Paper, a big *Hands Off Our Hospitals* campaign could yet force the government to climb down – and give a new boost to the wider fight for proper funding and development of the NHS.

AFFILIATE NOW to *Hands Off Our Hospitals!*

Please affiliate our organisation to *Hands Off Our Hospitals!*. I enclose a cheque for (£20 minimum)

Name.....
Position held.....
Organisation.....
Address.....

(Send to *Hands Off Our Hospitals!*, 335, Grays Inn Rd, London WC1)

Patients would then have the "choice" of travelling for treatment or not getting it. The new GP budgets would be rigidly cash-limited: as little as a 5% overspend two years running would deprive them of their "independent" status. Yet the cash limit averages out at a mere £60 per patient per year. Clearly GPs will be under pressure to refuse to treat the more costly elderly and chronic sick patients, and restrict their lists to young, healthy, middle class folk.

The new system would be even more remote and less accountable. Nobody in the community would even be asked their views on whether their local hospital should "opt out", and health workers would be ignored – any notion of a ballot or referendum has been ruled out by Kenneth Clarke. The new Hospital Trusts, like the proposed new slimmed-down health authorities, would contain no genuine or elected representatives of the local community (existing council representatives would be kicked off), no trade unionists, and only token involvement of Community Health Councils.

How do we fight back?

Everyone knows the plans are unpopular. We need to link health workers, other trade unions, community groups, political parties,

VICTORY FOR MARION GAIMA

The Solidarity Network has given whatever support it has been able to give to the struggle of Marion Gaima against deportation from Britain. She has recently won her case and her right to stay. The following press release gives the details.

Marion Gaima, a NALGO member threatened with deportation to her native Sierra Leone, has won a five year battle to remain in the UK.

On March 28th, the Home Office announced the decision to revoke a long standing deportation order. Home Affairs Minister Timothy Renton said his decision to revoke the order was influenced by Ms Gaima's 15 year residence in the UK, her active role in the church and community, plus a recent ruling of the court of appeal in her favour.

The court of appeal ruled last December that the Home Office had made procedural errors in the processing of Ms Gaima's application for political asylum,

and that her claim had not been fairly considered.

Ms Gaima's application for refugee status was based on her fear that she would be persecuted if she returned to Sierra Leone where her father was a minister in the previous Government and a leading member of the opposition Sierra Leone People's Party.

Ms Gaima's campaign against deportation has had wide support. Her union NALGO played a leading role in the campaign, as did diverse sections of the religious community. Over 3,000 signatures were handed into the home office on a petition in support of Ms Gaima.

The Home Affairs Minister also received letters from around the country, including personal queries about the case from MPs Tony Banks, Tony Benn, Dennis Skinner, Teddy Taylor, Janet Fookes, Harry Barnes, Harry Cohen and Diane Abbott.

Commenting on the decision

Ms Gaima said: 'For five years I have lived with the fear of being separated from my family, friends home and job. It was an incredible ordeal and I'm glad the nightmare is finally over.'

'However grateful I am for myself, I realise that there are hundreds of others facing deportation who have made their lives here, or who cannot go home for fear of persecution. I hope that my case has some kind of positive impact on the fate of the others.'

Ian Charlton, branch secretary of Hackney NALGO said on behalf of the branch that the decision was viewed as a victory for the entire membership. 'Hackney is a multi-racial borough and deportations are a potentially very divisive issue which affects us all. Our union defends the right of all working people to live and work without fear of deportation, and will continue to support our members affected by present immigration laws.'

MICK GOSLING

After the ballot for strike action to demand the reinstatement of Mick Gosling was lost, the TGWU Ford 1/1107 branch issued the following statement to the Ford workforce.

The failure to take strike action to win the reinstatement of Mick Gosling, Chair of the TGWU 1/1107 branch, is a defeat for us all at Ford. On the basis of this the management will want to deal once and for all with the Assembly Plant which has been the main opposition to its drive for speed-up and flexible working.

A stark choice now faces us, symbolised by Plant Manager Jeff Body's lying letter to B shift workers on the day of the ballot. Ford want to turn our trade

union organisation and representatives into tools of the company, policing its policies and fire-fighting the disputes its arbitrary action creates. This is the road to company unionism, job cuts, worse working conditions and eventually closure...

Management are intent on creating a reign of fear on the shop floor, steamrolling through speed-up and changes in working practices while everyone is looking over their shoulder for who the next victim will be. Already Clare Smith, another worker from the B shift, has been sacked after speaking out at a company presentation about Ford plans to end Sierra production at Dagenham.

Now clock notices have been posted in the PTA threatening

workers with dismissal for distributing 'unauthorised literature'. According to the Blue Book this is anything which has not been 'approved by an appropriate company official'. No doubt management will claim the right to decide whether you can see and read Branch-bulletins...

In order to defend our jobs and working conditions we have to defend our union against management interference. We are a part of a powerful national union. This union exists to defend its members, not make itself attractive to management. We will continue to raise all the issues which affect us... we are not about to roll over and kick our legs in the air.

KEEP THE SIERRA IN DAGENHAM

DAGENHAM: THE REAL CHOICE –

TWO CARS OR CLOSURE!

STATEMENT ISSUED BY TGWU BRANCHES 1/667, 1/1107, 1/1918

Ford's high-handed announcement ending Sierra production at Dagenham is a declaration of war on the entire workforce. Management have not even gone through the pretence of discussing the transfer to Genk with the trade unions.

In an off the cuff response at a meeting with plant convenors just before Christmas, Bill Hayden, Ford of Europe's manufacturing director, said the move was under consideration. Four weeks later our JWCs were simply called in and informed that the decision was being taken straight to the shop floor.

Not only have we been treated with contempt, but management is insulting our intelligence. Substitute Fiesta production will limit job losses to 500, says Jan Ubaghs, the new manager of Dagenham Body and Assembly Operations. That's this year alone! **Secret company documents exposed during last year's pay strike - and never denied by management - showed plans to cut 3,000 jobs from the Body and Assembly Plants by 1992. And that was based on the CDW27, the Sierra replacement, coming to Dagenham.** The Genk workers have been told that 2,000 jobs will be created in Belgium by the transfer.

And have the workers in Cologne and Valencia, who also build Fiestas, been told that Ford intend to more than double the Dagenham output of the car? The company is still pressing for the introduction of a third shift in Valencia - a move so far rejected by the Spanish workers. Likewise, German Ford workers have refused to increase capacity through the introduction of alternating Saturday shifts. But the company has declared its intention of increasing capacity by between 13 and 16 per cent at four European plants by 1992. Are we just 'filling in' because our continental colleagues have so far refused to accept any worsening of their working conditions?

We are being asked to accept the loss of the cars and jobs we have now for ple in the sky promises about the future. The Sierra is critical to Dagenham's survival. Out of a European market of 375,000 Sierras, last year Ford sold 162,701 in the U.K. - 43% of the total. 100,000 of these were built in Dagenham.

The Sierra is way out in front in the all important fleet market, meaning sales are relatively stable, and has higher profit margins. The Fiesta is a less complex, fewer jobs, car with smaller profit margins. It depends on individual customers who are the first to feel the pinch of higher interest rates and any slump in the economy. **Even running at capacity we could not match the profit currently made on the Sierra/Fiesta combination.**

The British and European car markets have been at record levels for the last two years, but a downturn is forecast. If Ford gets its way, only Genk will be producing Sierras. But Dagenham, Cologne and Valencia would still be making Fiestas. Dagenham could not survive on the schedules of 400 to 500 Fiestas per day we had a few years ago. We would be on a slippery slope of short time working and further redundancies. *Then what?*

WE NEED INVESTMENT

The myth is being peddled that Dagenham is unusual in producing two model ranges. Genk

produces Sierras and Transits. Cologne, Fiestas and Granadas. Valencia, Fiestas and Escorts. **The key to better quality and efficiency is not a single model and continual pressure on the workers for more work but more investment.**

Dagenham suffers from bad design and engineering and that does affect output and quality. The trade unions have constantly argued for investment to correct this. Building one car on two systems will not do so, only major investment could. The £105 million the company has mentioned is chicken feed, enough to carry out the changes to one car production and keep the plants ticking over.

One of the advantages of two car production is continuous investment as models change. But with only one car, by the time the 'new' Fiesta becomes an 'old' car in five to seven years time, Dagenham will have become a hopelessly outdated plant. What price total closure then?

Jobs across the estate will be hit by one car production. Work in the K.D. Plant is concentrated on the Sierra. The railways, truck fleet and jetty would all be affected. The Engine Plant is currently threatened with the loss of the Dover engine. The I4 engine has only a four year life - no decision has been made on the siting of the replacement. How could the Engine plant survive in isolation on two small diesel engines?

Last year Ford made £317 million profit off our backs and tucked away nearly £900 million in cash at the bank. It should be investing that money here and now to safeguard all our futures.

This position was won by the trade unions in Germany last year following a 100% effective overtime ban in all plants. Ford was forced to concede that 'every investment will be made, that is economically and competitively justified, to maintain the continuing viability of all manufacturing locations in Germany'. All investment decisions are now subject to review by the unions.

SAVE OUR JOBS!

Ford workers across Europe have a common interest in stopping the company using their jobs and lives as pawns in a chess game of international production. Don't think Genk workers are rejoicing at the transfer. Ford has declared its intention of introducing sweeping changes in working practices and a three shift system. At General Motor's nearby Antwerp Plant this has meant Saturdays becoming part of the normal working week. Genk workers also know that when they struck for shorter hours in 1983 we supported them by refusing to increase overtime or otherwise cover work normally done by them.

Remember too, we campaigned for the maintenance of Dagenham as a two car plant in the 1970s. When the Granada was moved out we had to fight for the Fiesta to be brought in alongside the Cortina. Where would we be now if we had not won then?

On 19 January the Ford unions at national level unanimously rejected the transfer. Further representations were made to senior European management last week and all Dagenham estate shop stewards met on Sunday. Meetings with our co-workers in Europe are arranged for February and lobbies planned.

We must all support the campaign to keep the Sierra at Dagenham. The real choice is not between a two car plant and a one car plant. It is between a two car plant and no plant at all.

HEALTH AND SAFETY CONFERENCE

The Conference was organised jointly by the Solidarity Network, the Socialist Conference, and Hazards 88 in Birmingham on March 11th.

Hillsborough, the Herald of Free Enterprise, Piper Alpha, Kings Cross, the Clapham rail crash, the escalation of accidents on building sites and the drop in safety standards in industry all have a common factor — Tory Party policy and philosophy and the kind of society the Tories are creating.

The Herald of Free Enterprise disaster involved bad design, staff cuts, long working hours and bad working conditions. Soon after that disaster P&O announced further staff cuts and a dramatic lengthening of the working week. Sea farers are still on strike in Dover opposing those conditions.

The Piper Alpha disaster involved a lack of adequate safety standards, bad maintenance of safety equipment and inadequate inspection and enforcement.

The Kings cross disaster was preceded by cuts in cleaning and maintenance staff and involved a lack of safety and inspection standards.

The Clapham rail crash involved staff who had been working long hours of overtime to overcome staff shortages and make up their wages.

The Hillsborough disaster was a combination of many of these factors. The background to it was football violence created by Thatcherite society with its mass unemployment, alienation and nationalism. There is a clear lack of investment in football grounds to deal with this. Where fences had been fitted they were the cheapest kind with no way out. Dangerous terraces are preserved and defended because they maximise ticket sales.

It is obvious that a Government which cuts everything and promotes the drive for profit above all else is going to create this situation. Lack of investment in the infrastruc-

ture of the economy which runs down basic basic facilities like the tube and the rail network into a delapidated state is certain to result in accidents. Low pay which devalues the job, worsens the living standards of the worker, forces long hours or a second job is bound to lead to accidents.

It is equally obvious that to attack and weaken the trade unions, who are the guardians of wages and conditions and safety standards and who enforce health and safety legislation will have a dramatic effect of the level of accidents.

All these factors became very clear in the course of the conference on Health and safety organised jointly by the Socialist Conference and the Solidarity Network earlier this year. Presentations made at the conference produced a mass of information showing the extent to which this process has developed. Below we have reproduced some of the material presented.

SAFETY ON THE BUILDING SITES

MATERIAL FROM CONSTRUCTION SAFETY CAMPAIGN AND LONDON HAZARDS CENTRE

Latest HSE accident figures for fatalities in the construction industry are frightening. "Blackspot construction" shows that there are 2 deaths each week, and that the incidence of fatal and reported major accidents is rising fast — by 30% during the five years covered by the report. The most chilling conclusion is that 90% of these accidents could have been prevented, and that 70% were due to the negligence of management.

Site Safe 83 was an earlier Health and Safety Executive (HSE) campaign against the dangers on construction sites that was a complete failure; death and injury rose during 1983! The latest figures from the HSE on their 1987-8 construction site 'blitzes' show a similar dismal failure. The first blitz, between May and November 1987, involved 4,289 visits to construction sites up and down the country and resulted in 1,006 (23.5%) prohibition notices being served. The second one, six months later, involved 6,579 visits and ended with 1,508 prohibition notices (22.9%). Clearly the first blitz had no effect on employers. Yet after the first blitz only 25 prosecutions were taken. The HSE say they do not know what the average fine was, despite a blitz press conference pledge that they would. More recently they have said there will be more prosecutions — but it seems only low level managers and site supervisors need fear.

It should be remembered that a prohibition notice can only be served when there is a risk of "serious personal injury". As a result of the first blitz only 25 prosecutions were taken and the HSE say they do not know what the average fine was, despite a pledge at the first press conference to announce the results of the blitz they that would. More recently they have said that they will be prosecuting more, but only low level management and site supervisors it seems.

On 22 December 22 year old building worker Ian Nesbitt died on a London construction site. He was killed outright when the dumper truck he was reversing up a rough earth ramp overturned, trapping him underneath. The accident sliced off the top of his head.

Ian was working on the Trinity Tower site, run by the contractor Skanska, on London's docklands. "He was leaning back in his seat to counterbalance the dumper," said a workmate who refused to be named. "The ramp was so steep you couldn't easily walk up it. He'd been down twice before. The third time he didn't make it."

Work on the site stopped whilst colleagues waited for Ian's body to be removed: in the view of Tony O'Brien, of the Construction Safety Campaign, the site should not have been allowed to re-open. "The HSE should have closed the whole site down completely until proper safety standards were introduced," he said after visiting the site. "It is management's lack of proper organisation of work that has resulted in this tragic death. We know that workers on that site are being forced to work under conditions that are putting their lives at risk."

The government has announced plans to make the wearing of safety helmets compulsory on construction sites. Mr O'Brien is unimpressed. "We want more than safety helmets. We want a guarantee of safety at work."

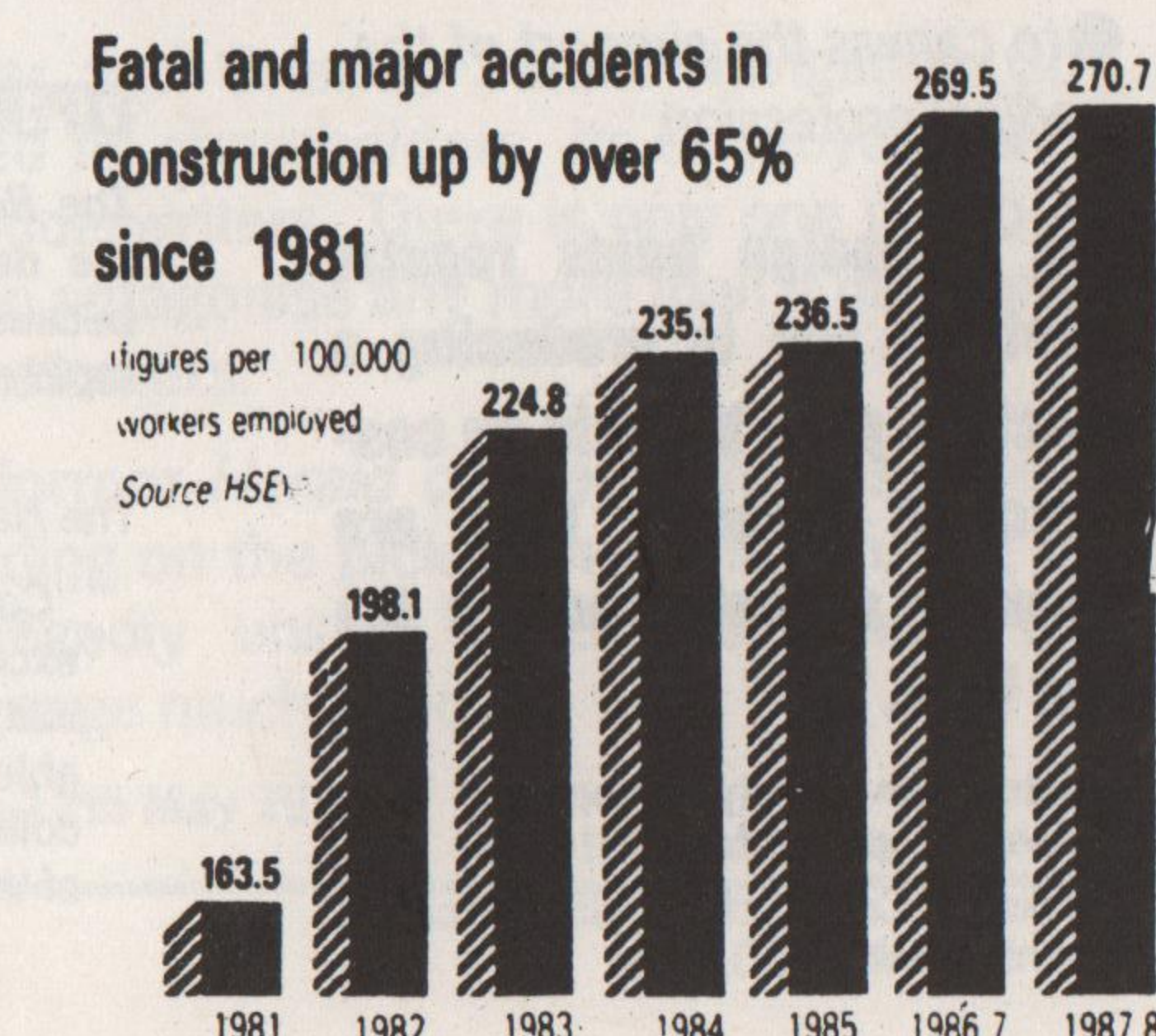
The number of building site accidents has increased every year this decade. A record number of construction workers suffered

fatal or serious injuries last year. Latest official figures show that a construction worker is killed or seriously injured every hour. Less serious accidents occur once every couple of minutes.

But sites are not just unsafe, they are unhealthy. Occupational diseases afflict 20,000 building workers every year. Bronchitis, cancer and other diseases of dust and poor site conditions kill an estimated 4,000 building workers annually.

The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) has attempted to encourage safer sites with high profile publicity campaigns. During the year of "Site Safe '83", the HSE's first campaign, there was an increase in site deaths and injuries. Construction "blitzes" followed in 1987-88 but sites got more, not less hazardous.

Tony Linehan, Chief Inspector of Factories, admits the HSE's strategy has met with limited success. "Unfortunately publicity alone does not lead to better conditions on site . . . there has to be an expectation of an inspection." In London there are just 12 inspectors. The chances of them visiting any particular site are remote. 36 workers died on London sites last year, almost a quarter of the national total.



Construction Safety Campaign

A powerful new campaign has emerged in response to the rising toll of death and injury on Britain's building sites — the Construction Safety Campaign (CSC). Members of the Campaign — largely building workers from both private and public sectors — know all too well the story behind these figures. "Building site deaths are at their highest for 30 years — in London alone in 1987 there were 37 deaths. It is an obscenity that while profits in the construction industry continue to soar, those who create the wealth continue to die. As safety costs money, we can only conclude that employers' greed comes before our safety needs" said Tony O'Brien, CSC Secretary.

The aims of the Construction Safety Campaign are:

- to get the labour and trade union movement to make deaths and serious injury in the construction industry a major political issue.
● for local authorities to refuse to employ contractors and sub contractors with a proven record of wilful and serious negligence in the matter of safety in construction.
● to make a prison sentence on the employer mandatory where gross negligence is proven, or in the event of death or serious injury.
● to ensure no sacking of workers who raise health and safety issues on sites and a statutory right to immediate reinstatement.
● to canvas the support of the medical profession.

The Campaign holds regular meetings and is producing a special 4 page bulletin on construction hazards. They are planning a conference in the New Year.

Construction Safety Campaign: Tony O'Brien, 72 Copeland Road, SE16 1LJ
*Blackspot Construction, HSE Accident Prevention Unit, HMSO, £4.00

SAFETY AT SEA

HERALD OF FREE ENTERPRISE FROM THE DOVER STRIKERS

On Friday March 6th 1987, the passenger ferry HERALD OF FREE ENTERPRISE capsized with the loss of 191 lives outside the port of Zeebrugge.

The ship sank in about one minute. It was a roll-on/roll-off ferry of a type that was to be heavily criticised by Justice Sheen at the official inquiry that followed.

The ship sank so fast that even the incredible heroism shown by passengers, crew and rescue services could not avoid a terrible disaster.

One crew survivor was Assistant Purser Steve Homewood.

The Herald of Free Enterprise was not the first roll-on/roll-off ferry to have a disastrous accident. Nor has it been the last.

Working at sea has always been a dangerous occupation. What makes working on roll-on/roll-off ferries different is that in addition to the dangers from the elements, the design of the vessel itself is dangerous.

- * ships of similar design to the Herald of Free Enterprise have sunk before. When the European Gateway, also owned by Townsend Thoresen, sank after a collision, the official technical investigation forecast that a similar accident could happen to a passenger ferry with catastrophic loss of life;
* 60% of roll-on/roll-off ships lost after collisions sank or capsized within 10 minutes.

The reason that roll-on/roll-off vessels are uniquely dangerous is that they have design features which make them especially suitable for quick loading into the vehicle decks. Their high sides and lack of internal bulkheads make them top heavy and very vulnerable to a sudden inrush of water through the bow and stern doors, or other openings, as in collisions.

Just a couple of inches of water on the deck can cause a ship to capsize — as happened with the Herald of Free Enterprise.

EXPERTS WARN

The Royal Institution of Naval Architects condemned the design of roll-on/roll-off ferries in March 1988 because they were "unacceptably vulnerable" to rapid capsizing.

The Nautical Institute agreed. It wrote:

"Commercial expediency cannot be given as an excuse to absolve governments of their responsibility to the public... Ro-Ro ferries are vulnerable to capsizing should they be involved in a collision. This is incompatible with the provisions of the Merchant Shipping Act."

THE COST OF SAFETY

The shipowners don't agree. On World in Action on April 27th 1987, ferry designer Jack Brown agreed that fitting watertight bulkheads would make ferries safer.

However, he added "At what price?". The proposal was "economically dubious" because it would make ferries "less competitive".

The owners of the Herald of Free Enterprise knew the design was unsafe. In 1986, after a series of warnings, ships designers British Maritime Technology asked every ferry operator for £10,000 to research Roll-on-Roll-off safety. Only one operator replied — Sally Line, one of the smallest.

That was how Mr Justice Sheen summed up the attitude of the owners of the Herald of Free Enterprise towards the running of their ships.

- * the ship had a permanent list ever since it was launched six years previously. Repeated complaints from the ship's captains were ignored. The company forced the ship to sail with a ballast tank permanently full of water to counteract the list — which lowered the ship's bow;
* other ballast tanks were filled to allow cars at Zeebrugge's low dock to off-load. The time to empty the tanks was longer than the harbour turnaround time. The owners were warned to fit pumps to clear the tanks more quickly. They refused, claiming the £25,000 cost was too high.

The Court of Inquiry made two sorts of recommendations:

Immediate improvements. Bow door warning lights and closed circuit television should be installed. Steps and handrails that would allow passengers to reach the outside of the ship when it has capsized should be fitted. The owners complained that this idea could give foreign competition a cost advantage(!).

Fundamental changes. These should include compulsory watertight bulkheads, and vehicle decks higher above the water line, with the phasing out of older ships not built to these standards or incapable of conversion. Justice Sheen accepted these changes would increase turnaround times but said that safety demanded them.

The Herald capsized because the ship was designed with fast turnaround times and maximum capacity taking priority over ship safety. A couple of inches of water entering through the open bow doors was sufficient to sink the ship. Yet well after the dangers of ro-ro ferry design were known, P&O were commissioning even larger ships built to the same design.

HAVE P&O LEARNED ANY LESSONS?

After the Zeebrugge disaster, P&O Chair Sir Jeffrey Sterling promised swift compensation to survivors and the families of those who died. He also promised a massive stepping up of safety measures throughout the company. What has actually happened?

August 1987 A BBC Brass Tacks programme revealed on Bank Holiday weekend the Pride of Free Enterprise was sailing so short of crew there was insufficient crew cover for fire-fighting.

October 1987 The Press Association reported that only four out of the surviving seafarers have jobs at sea. The company ordered all seafarers on board the Herald to take three weeks rest. This was then deducted from their annual holidays.

November 1987 The Pride of Walmer (formerly the Free Enterprise VII) was reported as having sailed with bow doors open, but the incident was hushed up.

December 1987 Chief and second officer of the Pride of Canterbury sent a memo to P&O's Safety Officer saying navigation safety was being jeopardised because of the long hours worked aboard ship.

December 1987 P&O demands massive staff cuts and longer hours in order to cut £6 million from wages bill. The proposed cuts would have meant 65 crew, not 80, on board the Herald of Free Enterprise, working longer hours.

March 1988 P&O Nordic engine room caught fire. Ship's captain sent lifeboats away because "they were upsetting the passengers". Ship stranded for several hours before towed to Felixstowe.

May 1988 House of Commons told that P&O European Ferries Chair, Mr Peter Ford tried to persuade Kent police to use company figures that showed a higher number of survivors.

May 1988 P&O shareholder tells company Annual General Meeting that "I hang my head in shame as a shareholder", but fails to get company back to negotiating table.

May 1988 P&O crews that refuse to accept new dangerous crewing proposals sacked — including rescue heroes from Zeebrugge.

May 1988 P&O Viking Venturer sails from Falmouth with seven unregistered crew recruited via a local travel agent.

June 1988 National Union of Seamen and Dover seafarers not invited to opening of memorial garden in Zeebrugge by P&O.

June 1988 Belgian Red Cross still not paid £20,000 bill for heroic rescue services.

June 1988 P&O officer reveals P&O European Trader fire happened after ship converted from normal heavy oil marine fuel to diesel fuel to increase 13 year-old vessel's speed. Diesel fuel extremely inflammable in burst fuel line situation, unlike normal marine oil fuel. Officer also alleged TV monitoring system installed to compensate for reduction in crewing had broken down two days before the fire.

June 1988 P&O still forcing survivors' relatives to claim individually for compensation instead of making a generous offer to all.

June 1988 NUMAST (ship officers union) accuses P&O of deliberately shifting officers from ship to ship ahead of planned inspections by Department of Trade and Industry, to ensure that crew levels up to standard.

July 1988 P&O accused by National Union of Seamen of employing non-union labour unfit to be on board ships — including ratings discharged for various offences.

July 1988 Mr John Ball, sacked after leaking report of fire on P&O European Trader takes out private prosecution against P&O alleging serious breaches of the Merchant Shipping Act. Mr Ball, formerly a strike-breaker, was Shell UK Tankers Safety Sailor of the Year.

"The Peninsular and Oriental Steam Navigation Co has antagonised its shareholders, its employees and its insurance underwriters. There is only one group it cannot afford to antagonise any more than it has done already — its customers.
"The sight of former Herald of Free Enterprise crew members standing on the picket lines and refusing to sail under allegedly unsafe conditions cannot do P&O's public image much good."
Financial Weekly, 12th May 1988

A DANGER TO HEALTH

Should 1992 carry a public health warning? Hilda Palmer looks at the prospects for improved health and safety under the Single European Market.

The European Commission is committed to improving health and safety protection for workers and consumers, and tightening environmental safeguards. However as Europe gallops towards 1992 and the removal of all physical, technical and fiscal barriers between the 12 member states of the European Community (EC), European unions are



NOISE DANGER

The EC Directive on the Protection of Workers from Noise was an early victim of employers' pressure. The original EC draft directive took the West German level of 85 decibels (dB) as the top noise level allowable in a workplace. But the Confederation of British Industry (CBI) and other European employers' organisations, along with the British Government, successfully lobbied for the 90 dB level. The CBI claimed it would cost British industry at least 500 million pounds to meet the 85 dB level.

According to the British Health and Safety Commission, four out of every ten workers exposed to 90 dB all their working life will lose their hearing. When it comes to health and safety, the response of employers is all too often a deafening silence.

increasingly worried that the 'social dimension' of the internal market takes second place to business priorities.

About two thirds of the 287 directives creating the Single European Market have already been passed or provisionally agreed (see ILR 31). Six draft directives have been proposed regulating health and safety at work (see box). The directives aim to ensure that minimum standards are common to all countries and that all European companies will be competing on the same level.

Yet it is still unclear to which level standards will be harmonised. For example, Britain's record for fatal accidents at work is better than some other member states. But on occupational exposure to chemicals and noise, British workers fare worse than their counterparts in Denmark and West Germany.

Overall, the stripping away of protective legislation by the Thatcher Government has caused an increase in deaths, accidents and illness at work over the past decade. According to the Health and Safety Commission, factory inspectors have been cut by 20% under the Conservative Government. British workers would therefore have much to gain from an upward harmonisation of health and safety standards which ensured, say, the solvent standards of Denmark and the noise and food purity standards of West Germany.

Once minimum standards are set individual states would in theory still be allowed to retain higher standards. However under the Single European Act, individual states or companies can take other states to the European Court of Justice for national legislation which can be construed as a 'barrier to trade'.

The Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) has already stressed that the British Government would strongly oppose any measures which impose restrictions on industry. This is not surprising given the British Government's track record on EC social and environmental directives. Britain has failed to

ratify directives on maximum limits of pesticides and nitrates permitted in drinking water, and on cleaning up beaches.

However a recent ruling by the European Court of Justice sets a precedent which may make it difficult for states or companies to attack higher standards in particular countries. The Court upheld the right of the Danish Government to refuse to allow the import of drinks in non-returnable bottles on environmental protection grounds. The European Commission had argued that this constituted a barrier to free trade.

European directives require member countries to amend their own laws to meet the directives' requirements. However the six draft EC directives on health and safety are alarmingly vague leaving much scope for national governments to modify them and create loopholes in their own legislation. Is it essential that trade unionists join with environmental groups throughout Europe to examine the draft directives and lobby for the highest possible health and environmental protection from national standards setting bodies.

Hilda Palmer works for the Greater Manchester Hazards Centre

THE SIX DRAFT EC DIRECTIVES ON HEALTH AND SAFETY

- Framework directive on the introduction of measures to encourage improvements in the safety and health of workers at the workplace.

Directives on minimum safety and health requirements for:

- the workplace
- the use by workers of machines, equipment and installations
- the use by workers of personal protective equipment
- work with visual display units
- handling heavy weights

DEAFENING BLACK WORKERS

BIRMINGHAM

Three things led logically to hearing tests being offered to Asian workers at the headquarters of the Indian Workers Association (IWA) in Handsworth, Birmingham:

- the Health & Safety Advice Centre had been doing hearing tests for some years, but recently have been running a campaign on noise at work. Funding from Sandwell Council meant more work in neighbouring Smethwick which includes many noisy foundries, who employ a high number of Asian workers.

- HASAC's Asian Languages Project meant closer work with the Indian Workers' Association.

- BRUSH (Birmingham Region Unions for Safety & Health Campaign) has raised money from union branches to buy a portable audiometer to do more tests in other places.

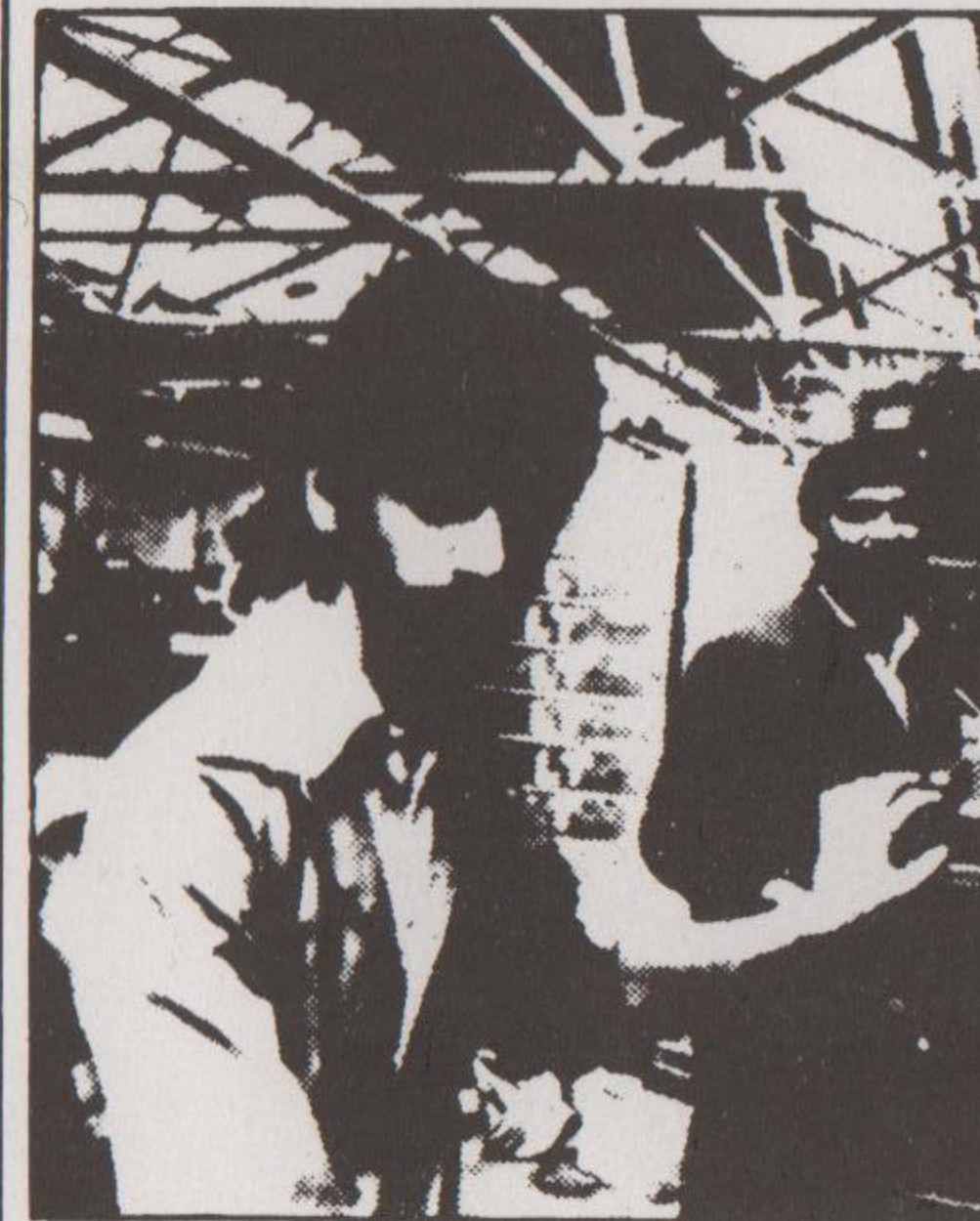


Free hearing tests in Handsworth were offered to Asian workers on one Saturday a month, aimed at anyone who had worked in noisy conditions, from sewing machinists to foundry workers. Articles were placed in Asian language papers and posters put up in shops and advice centres.

One of the first to be tested was Avtar Joughl, General Secretary of the IWA. Publicity about Avtar's case — he won a £3,000 compensation award — led to requests from all the other workers at the foundry he used to work in.

Future plans to extend this kind of work include training someone in the IWA how to do hearing tests for themselves.

SHEFFIELD



There's an old grave in Sheffield of a Yemeni steelworker who was killed at work in 1924. And now there's a fresh one. In June this year, Quassim Nassar was crushed to death at his job. When he died he had already worked over 90 hours that week, with more yet to come. Ironically only the day before he died Omar had been to see Sheffield Occupational Health Project to be tested for industrial deafness.

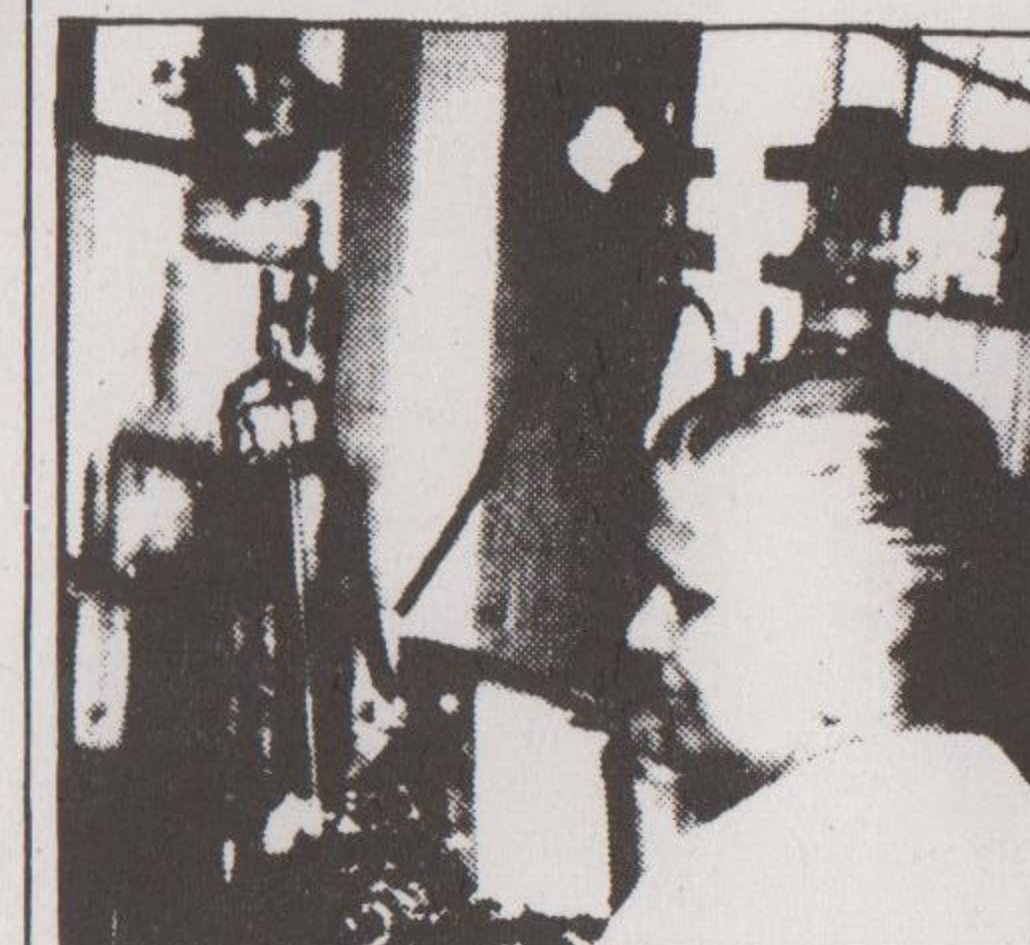
Most Yemenis came to Sheffield in the 1950s to work in the drop stampshops, forges, rolling mills and melting shops. They have tended to get the lower paid jobs, working long hours of overtime to make a living wage. Most of them became trade union members.

John Lawson, an ex-steelworker himself and now a community worker, met a number of Yemenis and, knowing that they had very noisy jobs, had talked with them about their hearing. In 1987 the Yemeni Welfare and Advice Centre followed up this contact and asked Sheffield Occupational Health Project for help in getting compensation for members of their community. Together since then we have done more than 400 hearing tests. Over 90% of those tested are proved to be suffering from deafness caused by work. Some have already won compensation of between £400 and £6000; the rest are waiting for their cases to grind through the legal system.

The startling results of this campaign (which is now financially supported by Sheffield Council) decided us to approach other ethnic minorities. A project worker visited a Bangla-

deshi community centre near the GP's surgery where she works, and arranged to do hearing tests. Of the 50 people so far tested 40 are suffering from industrial deafness.

The Somali community have now got in touch with us. Many had been merchant seamen and those who worked in engine rooms were exposed to high noise levels. They too have discovered that they are suffering from hearing damage.



As these small communities tell their friends in other cities about the hearing test, we are now being approached to help groups in other cities as well as by much larger numbers of Pakistanis working in the Sheffield engineering industry.

So what of other industrial injuries? So far we have not had time to talk to these groups about their work conditions in detail but many of them have chest problems suspected asbestosis and asthma.



When the project started ten years ago it held advice sessions in Working Mens Clubs in order to reach as many people as possible. We are finally getting in touch with black workers through their own community associations.

LOCAL TU SAFETY AND HEALTH GROUPS

Birmingham Region Union Safety and Health Campaign Tommy Harle 68 St Joseph's Avenue, Northfield, Birmingham B31 2XQ. Phone 021-475 4739.

North-Lancs Action on Safety and Health 6 Lyden Avenue, Blackburn, Lancs. Hull Action on Safety and Health Ian Reid, 231 Boulevard, Hull HU3 3EQ. Phone 0482-497029.

Hull Asbestos Action Group Dick Jackson, 123 Cambridge Street, Anlaby Road, Hull HU3 2EE.

Isle of Wight Trade Union Safety Group Bob Davies, 12 Winston Rd, Newport 10W PO30 1RF.

Merseyside Trades Union Resources Centre, 24 Hardman Street, Liverpool L1 9AX. Phone 051-709 3995.

Merseyside Trades Council Health and Safety Committee Phone 051-709 4398.

Portsmouth Area Health and Safety Group Norman Harvey, 32 Rowner Close, Gosport, Hants PO13 0LY. Phone 0329 291 898.

Sheffield Area Trades Union Safety Committee, Seb Schmoller, 312 Albert Road, Heeley, Sheffield, S8 9RD. Phone 0742-584559.

"Potters Action" etc Bill Edmundson, 16 Fieldway, Longton, Stoke-on-Trent ST3 2AN. Phone 0792-327144.

Tyneside Hazards, Jimmy Harrison, 48 Wearmouth Drive, Sunderland. Phone 0783-494482.

Walsall Action on Safety and Health, 7 Edinburgh Drive, Rushall, Walsall, West Midlands, WS4 1HW. Phone 0922 25860.

Wiltshire Hazards Action Group 33 Milton Rd, Swindon SN1 5JA. Phone 0793-486926.

West Yorkshire Hazards Group, c/o Bradford Resource Centre, 31 Manor Row, Bradford, West Yorkshire BD1 4PS. Phone 0274 725046.

Wolverhampton The Law Centre, 2/3 Bell Street, Wolverhampton. Phone 0902-772250.

WORK HAZARDS GROUPS RESOURCE CENTRES

Health and Safety Advice Centre, Unit 304, The Argent Centre 60 Frederick Street, Birmingham, B1 3HS. Phone 021-236 0801.

London Hazards Centre, 3rd Floor, Headland House, 308 Grays Inn Rd, London WC1X 8DS. Phone 01-837 5605.

Lothian Trade Union and Resource Centre 12a Picardy Place, Edinburgh, EH1 3JT. Phone 031 556 7318.

Manchester Hazards Centre c/o MERG, Room 36, Cavendish Bldg, Manchester Poly, All Saints, Manchester M16 (061 228 7974).

Scotland South East Hazards Group Alan Beard, 10 Fountainhall Rd, Edinburgh. Sheffield Occupational Health Project Birley Moor Health Centre, East Glade Crescent, Sheffield S12 4QN. Phone 0742-322541.

TUSIU, Trade Union Studies Information Unit, Southend, Ferringwood Rd, Jesmond, Newcastle NE2 1TJ. Phone 091-261 6087.

London Asbestos Action Campaign, c/o London Hazards Centre.

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