

Wildcat

MANCHESTER FREE BULLETIN

OUR OBJECTIVES

1. To report on, analyse and seek solidarity for important struggles amongst our fellow workers, especially in the Greater Manchester area.
2. To encourage independent working class activity outside of the control of the trade unions and in opposition to all political parties.
3. To aim at the overthrow of all governments, bosses and leaders by a revolution in which the majority of people, who at the moment are just expected to follow orders, all play an equal part. And we would like to see the creation of a world without the wages/money/market system where we can all have a say in how things are run, and where production is for human need not profit.

NO 3 PASS IT AROUND

WIGAN SIT-IN

In the first week of December 800 engineering workers staged a sit-in at Guilick Dobson in Wigan. The immediate cause of the dispute was the managements' threat to suspend 26 workers for refusing to unload non-union lorries. But underlying this is a dispute over wages. The workers are claiming £15 across the board; The company has offered 1 1/2% on the bonus and nothing on the basic rate.

We arrived at the plant just as the union's strike breaking machinery was moving into action. An AUEW area official had come that morning for "negotiations" with the convenor. Some of the pickets more experienced in union tactics expressed the opinion that he had come to try to get them back to work. And of course they were right. But at the time no-one knew exactly what was happening because the discussions were being held in the strictest secrecy. We were taken into the plant to get more information from the strike committee - but they were equally in the dark about what was going on.

When we came across the union official he was instantly recognisable. He was the only one wearing a suit and tie. He looked and acted like a boss. He told us we had no business inside the plant. He said he was trying to keep the situation "under control", and didn't want any "outside interference". Above all he seemed afraid that we were connected with the Laurence Scott dispute in Manchester, which has also been effectively sabotaged by the AUEW. The two disputes are quite unconnected, he told us.

It was clear the union had intervened in the dispute with one aim only: to end the strike as quickly as possible. The next day the workers were persuaded to go back to work. There was no improved wage offer, although management had withdrawn the threat of suspensions.

The union's attitude provides the link between Guilick Dobson and Laurence Scott. The two disputes are part of a small wave of resistance by engineering workers against the bosses' attacks on jobs and wages. The long struggle by engineering

workers at Staffa has now ended. But the Laurence Scott workers are fighting on. Also in Greater Manchester 500 workers from Gardners recently demonstrated against the renewed threat of redundancies. At Leyland, several hundred workers recently demonstrated outside a union meeting to show their determination to fight redundancies there. In Leeds 800 workers at Kirkstall Forge are out on strike.

If these actions inspired other workers to fight back then the modest wave of strikes could unleash all the pent-up anger and frustration of workers across the country, and become a major strike wave.

This is exactly what the unions fear most. Now more than ever in the face of the governments proposed new union laws, the unions want to show how "responsible" they are. They want to show they can keep their members under control without the help of government legislation. They don't want news of strikes to get around, so that they can isolate and crush them like they did at Staffa, and they tried to do at Laurence Scott.

POLAND

The military crackdown in Poland shows how ruthless the state is prepared to be to maintain the existing system. The total communications blackout inside the country was instituted to prevent organised resistance; travel was forbidden for the same reason; the vast majority of Solidarity officials were arrested, in an effort to decapitate the movement. However this last measure has not worked, for the simple reason that the workers themselves are the driving force in Poland, not the elected officials of Solidarity. Deprived of these "leaders", the Polish workers have put up organised resistance with strikes, occupations, go-slows, sabotage.

Solidarity itself is largely to blame for the weakness of this resistance (compared to the strength of the early days of August 1980). Ever since its creation Solidarity has sought to control the workers, and by calling for token stoppages and dialogue has discouraged the mass strike, the workers strongest weapon. And because the workers let Solidarity take over the links they had between factories and cities, the strike resistance to martial law was isolated plant by plant.



For now the military may be able to break individual strikes and force people back into the factories - but they can't force them to work; in the first week of martial law only one tractor was produced at the giant Ursus factory. And they can't imprison everyone - for who would then run the factories, hospitals, schools, offices, etc?

The shooting of workers in Poland in 1970, 1976, and again in 1981 shows that the authorities in the eastern bloc have as little in common with the workers as the authorities here. In fact the authorities in the west go hand in glove with those in the east when it comes to repressing workers. Bankers in West Germany,

Britain and the USA have been saying that they're pleased that the military have taken over, as it increases the chances of Poland repaying some of the money it owes the banks. One banker even said he'd like to see a Soviet invasion! However the way things are going the banks will never get their money back, especially since even less is being produced now than before the army moved in.

Poland is the first industrial country to face bankruptcy. Could Britain be next? We are already facing unemployment, price rises, wage cuts, rising police repression..... What has happened in Poland points our own future if we do not act. We must stand up and fight, as the Poles are still doing, and refuse to accept austerity, and repression.

A recent Home Office study of police-community relations in Moss Side claims that most contacts with the police by both black and white people in Moss Side are "friendly". Presumably the injuries suffered by people picked up during the riots were caused by playful digs in the ribs and back-slapping by policemen who didn't know their own strength.

BURY CLEANSING DISPUTE

The word "privatisation" is now well known to many workers, especially those in the nationalised industries such as British Aerospace and the Gas Board, where the government has decided to sell off the profitable sectors leaving the remaining "unprofitable" sectors under even greater pressure to make savings.

Less well known are the attempts of various local authorities to dispose of certain services they provide generally on a "non-profit" basis, so as to make savings in their budgets.

The Southend Council has been a trail blazer here with the disposal of their Cleansing Department. Now our very own Bury Council has decided to consider a similar arrangement (along with some 86 other councils across the country).

It is important to understand exactly what is going on here and not to get lost in the political battles of Labour and Tory over the supposed benefits or inefficiencies of "public" ownership.

All Local Authorities - Labour, Tory and Liberal (who hold power in Liverpool remember) - have, as employers, attempted to get as much work out of their employees as possible for as little wages as possible. Over recent years, against the background of a major economic crisis, that has meant continuing cuts in services and reorganisation of the work process. Disposing of certain services to private companies is simply one of a number of strategies aimed at achieving more cuts. They could do this directly themselves, as the Labour opposition Bury seem to suggest. But they clearly think it would be easier for the Local Authority to disguise the next round of cuts in a transfer of the service and to relinquish direct responsibility for further cuts by making the service subject to competition amongst different private companies, who in the present recession are cutting each others throats (and those of their workers).

If anyone doubts that this is the intention of the Bury Authority, Councillor Brooke, chairman of the Public Services Committee, has said that they would hope that the company would take on the existing Council workers, "...one appreciates it might be the case of less men doing the work for more money.", only don't rely on the more money bit!

Whilst working for a private company isn't necessarily any better or worse than working for the state, a transfer of the Cleansing Service at this stage would break up a number of workplace liaisons that presently provide a basis of solidarity action amongst Council workers.

For both these reasons it is important that such measures are completely opposed. Office workers in Bury are already refusing to co-operate with the private survey aimed at justifying the disposal of the Cleansing Department, but much stiffer resistance will be needed. Rather than relying on the promises of Labour politicians committed to "efficiently run" public services

(like the Labour Council in Coventry who drove their manual workers to all out strike action against cuts in wages), action needs to be organised by Council workers themselves. To start with there needs to be more contact between those services likely to be threatened with "disposal". The GMC has already paved the way for moves towards disposal of some of its own cleansing services by handing over three of its waste disposal plants to "Waste Treatment Ltd", a private company run indirectly by Councillors and their officials. Hammersmith Council in London is trying to dispose of its Direct Labour organisation to Bovis Construction Company against opposition from its workers. The Labour Council in Manchester has already made drastic cuts in its own DLO - would they or a successful SDP-Liberal Alliance next May be tempted by a similar scheme?

UNEMPLOYMENT

NATIONAL UNEMPLOYED WORKERS' MOVEMENT CONFERENCE

On the weekend of the 31st of October, in London, about 100 people from 37 organisations of the unemployed from all over Britain, gathered together for a conference to launch a national organisation of the unemployed. I went as an unemployed representative of South Manchester Claimants and Unemployed Workers Union.

Despite the fact that unemployment is predominantly affecting 3 sectors of the working class more severely; i.e. women, blacks, and youths; the conference was unfortunately, though predictably 90% white, male, and unlikely to see 20 again. There were the usual left-wing look-alike factions armed with newspapers, head-bangers all, that having failed to gain control of the trade unions whilst in employment, were now committed to producing from the conference an organisation of the unemployed in their own image and under their own control.

Saturday was split into workshops. The one on 'Youth and YOPs' had an average age of 30, whilst 'Ethnic minorities' was 100% white. 'Women and unemployment' conveniently chose segregation, allowing the men to concentrate on the 'real' issue of 'lets play at trade unions'. The workshop on 'T.U.s' attracted about 40 men and 4 women - this was where it was all at! A man from Hull thought we ought to ask the TUC to set up a union for us, as the unemployed obviously weren't capable. The majority were critical of the TU bureaucracy and its seemingly endless ability to 'sell out' the workers, but still clung to the idea that these institutions offered the only possible way for workers (employed and unemployed) to fight back. They believed that the TUs could be democratised and that if we were to play a part in that process we had to gain their acceptance and get representation on Trades Councils, so we mustn't do anything to upset them. For instance if we called ourselves a Union, they might see us as rivals.

Many local TUCs and TCs were hostile to the unemployed organising

separately from the existing TUs. Demarcation disputes had already occurred in some towns with unemployed workers union delegates being expelled from the TCs. This is not surprising as right now TUs are afraid of losing their power as rising unemployment whittles away their membership and their income. This is the only reason that unions like the TGWU are suddenly interested in recruiting the unemployed and YOPs workers. Changing the TUs, like changing the Labour Party, is a life-time project, and the ruling class and its governments would be greatly relieved if the unemployed diverted their energy in this direction. The minority view (which I supported) preferred the self-organisation of the unemployed, without reference to the TUs, whilst supporting workers at grass roots level in their fight against redundancies.

Sunday was taken up by a full day-long session on what constitution, aims and objectives the conference should adopt. It was interesting to see how the left-wing look-alikes manipulated the outcome. Manipulative tactics were used to remove from this session the only constitution that everyone had seen before the conference and to force the conference to vote on a constitution they had only just been shown.

The Islington constitution proposed a loose federation of existing groups that would include all claimants and unwaged workers (e.g. housewives). The Southwark constitution proposed a TU structure, individual membership, dues and a coordinating committee of 15 to be elected at the AGM. The Southwark constitution was taken first with amendments that had miraculously materialised overnight to give the impression that as this stage had been reached it was already accepted and this was railroaded through thanks partly to the blatant bias of the chair in favour of Southwark. On a card vote (each organisation having one vote) the Southwark constitution won 21 to 11, with 5 abstentions.

In the closing minutes of the conference as people were voting with their feet, the usual token gesture was made towards the women present by passing a meaningless resolution in support of 'their' campaign. And so the National Unemployed Workers Movement was launched, though its relevance to the 3-4 million jobless remains to be seen!

CONTACT Wildcat

We would like to hear from anyone who agrees with the ideas expressed in WILDCAT and who would like to help us or join our group. If you don't agree with us we'd like to hear from you too - we'll try to answer letters, either personally, or in WILDCAT. We would also like to hear from people in other areas who are interested in what we are doing.

If you would like us to mail you copies of WILDCAT as they appear, please write enclosing £1 to cover postage to:

Wildcat, Box 25,
164/166 Corn Exchange,
Hanging Ditch,
Manchester M4 3BN