

WORKERS PLAYTIME was a short-lived libertarian paper that ran to ten issues between 1983 and 1985 before, as is so often the case with libertarian papers, folding. This was unfortunate because a lot of good stuff appeared in its pages, news items being subjected to considerable analysis. The main focus was on workplace struggle from the perspective of Marxist economics but many other areas were also covered, including police (non)accountability, nuclear weapons, workers' autonomy, the role of the unions, and much else. This pamphlet is the second in a series designed to make the ideas contained in WORKERS PLAYTIME available again. (The first one was entirely on the printing industry and is titled PRINTERS PLAYTIME). If you like revolutionary politics spiced with a healthy dose of sarcasm and abuse then look inside.

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THE PLAYTIME OMNIBUS

*A MISCELLANY
FOR YOUNG PEOPLE
COMPILED BY*
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London Under Six Foot of Blue Sewage

The abortive attempt by the filth to hunt down David Martin using a process of elimination made visible the new style of London policing. The novelty doesn't lie in the botched assassination of Stephen Waldorf. That's only causing a stir because the wrong person was taken out (middle-class, clean record, influential friends). On the contrary the record of the police in using firearms 'solely to deal with threats to their own lives or to the lives of others' is well known - from the India House killing of two youths waving toy guns in 1973 (by a then unknown squad called the SPG), through shooting armed robber Michael Calvey in the back in 1978, to the murder of Gail Kinchin as she was being used as a human shield by David Pagett, who's now doing 12 years for her manslaughter. No, the novelty lies in the image of responsibility to the community the police are concerned to show. This concern is born of a shrewd appraisal of the political forces (left and right) who are mustering for a reform of the Met imposed from the outside. It picks up on the rhetoric of the Scarman report as a defence against any change in direction except for where the police themselves want to go.

So the day after the Waldorf shooting Kenneth Newman apologises (!), an enquiry is set up, and two of the hit squad are immediately charged, one with attempted murder. Of course nothing has really changed. The inquiry is an internal one and 'Wyatt Earp' and 'Bat Masterson' still only face the inhuman barbarity of acquittal or even a year or two in an open prison.

But better relations with 'the com-

munity' are clearly seen as the key to avoiding trouble through giving an image of responsiveness. A more blatant illustration of this process in action can be seen in the events in Stoke Newington the week of the Waldorf shooting.

SUICIDED?

On January 12th, Colin Roach, 21, unemployed, black, asked a friend to drive him over to Stoke Newington High Street to visit his brother. The friend now says he seemed 'petrified'. On the journey he talked about someone who was going to kill him. He watched Colin get out in the High Street and then walk into Stoke Newington police station. Concerned, he went to get Colin's father who lives in Bow. His concern was justified - as Colin walked into the front entrance of the sty a sawn off shotgun was pushed into his mouth and he was blown away.

The police claim he did it himself. His friends insist that though he was worried about something following his release from a three month jail term a week or two before, he wasn't suicidal nor a suicidal type. He'd spent the day normally enough visiting friends, buying parts for his car etc.

Relations between police and community in Stoke Newington are founded on total distrust and mutual loathing. This was reinforced by what happened after the shooting. Colin's father arrived at the station not yet knowing about his death. He was questioned for three hours (as 'part of the process of identification') and a statement was taken from him before he was told. He was then asked if he wanted to telephone his wife to break the

news to her! He declined, so the police thoughtfully drove him home, taking the opportunity to search part of the house, and helped him calm down Colin's mother, who became 'terribly distraught', by having a policewoman physically restrain her. The following day the family were refused permission to see the body. So far just another example of the sensitive policing Stoke Newington's used to.

It met with what's increasingly becoming the typical response. Two nights later a large crowd gathered outside the police station to demonstrate their anger and dissatisfaction. A 'violent confrontation' ensued in which two police were injured. So eight people were grabbed and awarded the usual package of charges.

The local 'community relations' industry began to work overtime. Hackney CRE called for a public enquiry into the incident, Hackney Black People's Association for one into local policing. Local councillors and left MP Ernie Roberts started making noises.

ACCOUNTABILL

In an attempt to defuse the situation the police called on new style 'public accountability'. A meeting of 'community leaders' was called the next day. Police gave their account of the incident, including a post-mortem report which supported their argument that Colin had shot himself. Local police commander Bill Taylor said the police had called the meeting to be 'as open and helpful as we can', to 'allay misunderstandings'. He was 'challenged' by community activists and leaders though attempts to go 'too far' were stifled by local MP Clinton Davies, who insisted all contentious issues should be left to the inquest. The community leaders left bold-

ly asserting that 'several questions still needed answers'.

Clearly unimpressed by all this local youth staged another demonstration outside the police station two days later (17th). Police eventually launched a baton charge, making 19 arrests. The crowd dispersed but remained in the area in small groups for some hours.

The same night a public meeting at Hackney Black People's Association formed a Support Committee for the Roach family. Support was promised from both Hackney Council and GLC police committees. A march from the town hall to the police station was arranged for the following Saturday.

The march attracted 500 people who observed a two minute silence outside the police station. The stewards' calls for a peaceful demonstration were ignored by a part of the crowd. 'Scuffles' broke out as the demonstration dispersed. Perhaps coincidentally a jeweller's shop window was smashed nearby and several thousand pounds worth of stock taken. A large group of youths ran down Stoke Newington High Street breaking windows. In the subsequent fighting two police were injured and 22 people arrested.

INQUIRIES DEPT.

The different levels of response throughout this affair indicate the reality behind the current debate about 'police accountability'. At one level a sizeable section of the community's automatic response was to assume the police had murdered him. In this police/community relations in Stoke Newington are exceptional only in degree, and in the fact that a series of incidents of 'insensitive' policing have brought matters to boiling point.

Above this discontent exists the layer of voluntary, welfare and community groups who make it their business to 'represent the community'. In this case they have been united in attempting to focus discontent into an official inquiry of some sort. (As opposed, for example, to investigating and publicising the facts for themselves.) Beyond this their activities are restricted to issuing press releases and being present when any opportunity presents itself to ask 'searching' questions in public. This situation isn't necessarily improved by the formation of a support committee. All too often in the past similar committees have become nothing more than scenes of faction fighting between competing politicians for whom such committees offer another public 'forum' for them to perform in.

RED KEN OR BLUE KEN:

MERE T(W)OKENISM

The death of Colin Roach occurred as the 'debate' over the Metropolitan Police reached a new stage. After a succession of scandals - corruption, royal security, handling of the riots etc - calls for reform had turned into actual blueprints. The week before Colin's death the 'red' GLC published its own proposals for reform. The report expressed their concern that 'policing by consent had come under strain' and that 'in many areas of London people have withdrawn their cooperation from police activity'. Also that the crime clear-up rate in London was the lowest in the country. They argued that control of the Met (to be merged with the City of London force), should be transferred from the Home Secretary to an elected police authority, consisting of the GLC police committee (controlling finance),

and police committees in each borough deciding on policy and operations in consultation with local police commanders. This control would be strictly limited, however. National policing functions (royal and diplomatic security and computer and intelligence services, including Special Branch) would be hived off and placed under the control of an elected national authority. And most policing decisions 'would continue to be made by the professional on the ground'. 'However, those decisions would be made under authority from the police authority, a delegated authority which could be recalled, limited or extended at any time'. This string of left cliches was expanded on by Paul Boateng chairman of the GLC police committee. The new police authority might have to be consulted about 'controversial' policing operations (SWAMP style operations, mass evictions etc). But it would ignore the local police commander's advice at its peril and would be answerable in court for any failure to uphold the law. The aim was to 'provide the framework for a new improved relationship between the police and the public'. For Boateng the problem isn't so much corruption and brutality as 'inefficiency and poor management'. too little communication and discipline in the force and overconcentration on 'reactive' policing. The GLC's plan, on the contrary, is seen as a move towards preventive policing.

CROWD POLEASING

What it boils down to, in fact, is another layer of local government patronage, with more highly paid 'jobs for the persons'. The new committees would assist the police in those areas of policing where community relations are likely to be a

problem. The illusion of public control would be created, and having helped prevent 'abuses' and 'insensitivity', the police would be left better able to deal with the real problems of law and order. While quite happy to use oppositional rhetoric and the discontents of minorities (amongst whom they are pursuing votes) this is the real concern underlying Labour Party calls for police reform. This is an election year, law and order is runner up to unemployment as a concern of the electorate, and as an article in the New Stateman put it: 'Any Labour government will come to power in very difficult economic and political circumstances. If it intends to implement a socialist programme, it will require the cooperation and not the enmity of the police'.

STRATEGIC BILLS HIT

The week after Colin Roach's death the Met produced its response to its critics, in the form of a report by Kenneth Newman on the first stage of internal reform. As an example of its attitude to accountability the report itself hasn't been published, only a ten page resume. This is gauged at the level of public concerns. Extra police are to be moved from the specialist crime squads to deal with street crime and burglaries - seen by Newman as a priority. Close reading reveals that these officers have been released from their existing duties by computerisation and more efficient management. In other words the change is little more than taking advantage of the existing situation. Similar buckets of whitewash are poured into the announcement that the SPG will from now to concentrate on anti-burglary patrols, together with the local instant response units. Just a new way of saying

they will be carrying on with more roadblocks and more stop and searching of 'suspicious' people.

In a gesture towards accountability each of the 24 police district commanders will liaise with police-community consultative committees (the watered down version of Scarman's proposals as set up in the Police Bill going through parliament), using them as a 'vehicle for directing overall strategy'. In other words, the police will 'take the temperature' of the local community through such committees without being bound by them.

BLOCKHEADS

Newman also gestures towards 'community policing' though his vision is of a corporate management strategy involving the community policing itself. So Neighbourhood Watch Committees based in single streets or estates are to be encouraged. 'I would hope a block leader or street leader would come forward and be a useful contact for the police'. Tied to this are closer links between the police, welfare agencies (teachers, social workers etc) and wider computerisation of information. Despite all the gestures made to areas of concern this is the heart of the changes. Put plainly, the increased militarisation of the police and the extension of their surveillance of the community is dressed up in the language of 'community policing' and 'accountability'. Right wing critics are met with promises of greater efficiency and managerial control. Left wing critics are met with promises of 'community liaison' and greater sensitivity. The hope is that like Robert Marks' 'new broom' trick in the early seventies this will deflect criticism for a few years more.

Police committees, whether the Met's

kind or the GLC's, are only a way of extending police control over us by settling the differences between police and our political masters. Like Orwell's animals in Animal Farm, we'll find ourselves looking in at them - and looking from pig to man and man to pig unable to tell the difference.

PORK SCRATCHINGS

The choice between a 'socialist perspective on crime' and a 'corporate strategy' is only a choice of what language we use to describe the same reality. The surveillance and repression of working class people, the occasional 'execution' of 'dangerous criminals', the harassment of

Nuclear Power Is Great for Business

The government is worried. Too many people are questioning the nuclear weapons programme. So the government is planning to spend millions of pounds to con us into thinking that we somehow benefit from these weapons. More dangerous is the fact that when we question nuclear weapons, we are led to question the whole basis of society.

All the major electronics companies, aircraft and telecommunications companies, shipbuilders, the steel industry, etc, etc, stand to make handsome profits selling equipment to the armed services. The recession has led to a general weakness in the market place for goods for 'peaceful' purposes. They are anxious to extend the military market. There is also room for small businesses, building shelters for the rich. Of course this provides jobs, but what is the point in having a nice

blacks and asians, of youth, of 'deviants', the breaking up of sit-ins and pickets. It's a choice between wasting time complaining to the police or wasting time complaining to the police committee. The truth is that we have even less interest in seeing the Met reformed than the entrenched interests inside it. And the Met is on a loser fighting reform the outside. Sooner or later we will see a bill of 'reform' put before Parliament. When that occurs there can only be one sensible response. Against a background of practical direct action, as wide as possible a unity must be built around the demand 'Kill the Bill'. The task of fighting for a better society - one without police or politicians must begin in earnest.

THE WAR GAME

Whenever war looks more and more likely, politicians, as natural liars, always shout more and more about peace. Just before the second world war it was Chamberlain mumbling about 'peace in our time'. Today, politicians mumble about 'deterrence'. But when Reagan compares the nuclear arsenals in east and west Europe, he is careful not to mention the substantial numbers of American sea-based nuclear weapons. In fact America has always been well ahead in the nuclear arms race, and is now preparing for a limited nuclear war in Europe.

THE EUROPEAN THEATRE OF WAR

Germany is the favourite to host the proposed war. The largest industrial centre in the world is around north Germany and Holland. This area would be destroyed. A major rival to American business would be wiped out. With a few nukes lobbed into the industrial centres of north Italy, the Paris region and the English midlands, west Europe would be stitched up for a few decades. For their part, the Americans could pacify Czechoslovakia, Poland, East Germany and Hungary with nuclear strikes. It could all be conducted in a civilised and gentlemanly way, with neither Russia nor America receiving a direct hit, but mutually dealing with each other's allies. Of course there would still be all the Cold War rhetoric, but the resulting peace would be a victory for 'humanitarianism' on the back of devastated Europe.

FROM THE WAR OF WORDS....

In the thirties and forties, people were sent off to concentration camps at Dachau and Auschwitz, and in Siberia. Modern technology means that mass murder can now be brought to the comfort and privacy of our own homes. As usual war is not so much between two countries as between the state and the population. They have started this with a war of words. The Jews were persuaded to pay for their railway tickets to the camps. We are being persuaded to pay through taxes for our own destruction. We are being persuaded to accept destruction passively. But as the women at Greenham Common are finding out, our democracy is limited to the lib-

erty to agree with our ruling class. When the ruling class feel they are losing the war of words, they use force and violence.

...TO CLASS WAR

It is no good waiting until the police and army are waiting to bash our heads in. We must be ready to use whatever means are necessary. Sometimes 'peaceful' action is appropriate, at other times more direct and violent action is needed. We must not shrink from its use, as in the final analysis, it is our commitment to go the whole way which will lead to success. The way out of the nuclear labyrinth cannot be found by protesting and voting Labour. The working class, those who put most into the system and get least out of it, will have to challenge the whole basis of society. By destroying the basis whereby industry, economics and politics run our lives, we can destroy the power that threatens us with the holocaust.

In the East, they will have to dispose of the commissars, army officers and party functionaries who keep them in line. Here our task is similar. Despite Foot's vague gestures, ALL the main political parties have built up the arsenal of nuclear weapons. NONE have curbed the power of the armed forces. NONE have done anything to stop the use of troops in Ireland.

If we are serious about creating a society without nuclear weapons, we must be ready to challenge the state itself and defeat it. We must destroy the class society that it defends.

Workers? Autonomy??

Nine years ago, the miners struck for a real increase in pay, and not only got it, but brought down a government. Since that time, industrial disputes have been getting fewer, and more likely to end in defeat. The most powerful groups of workers, according to tradition, are being forced to accept mass redundancies. Those who have public sympathy, according to the opinion polls, have lost many weeks wages in strikes, and then gone back to work with nothing, like the firemen and health workers.

Dole has been cut at the same time as unemployment was rising. There is now competition for the worst-paid jobs. The value of state benefits and allowances has fallen. Other elements of the social wage, like education and health, are being run down. More money and wider powers are being given to welfare agencies and the police, so as to contain, soften and if necessary suppress the response of working class people to the effects of poverty.

In 1983, the miners face the same prospect as workers in the steel, motor and railway industries: their wages falling in value, thousands of redundancies, and a speed-up in the rate of work. These changes, and their effects, are being felt everywhere in the working class. The small gains we made in the past, are being taken away by employers and the state. As the rate of profit falls, it is the workers who pay the cost, as always. We seem to benefit when profits are growing, but these improvements vanish as quickly as they appear, through price rises, higher taxes, faster work, shoddier goods and mass unemployment.

Workers do not want to fight over

wages during a recession, partly because they know they will probably lose, and also because of the fear which mass unemployment brings - of losing their job to an employer who pays less. As the water workers found, even 'winning' is in reality defeat, since it usually means standing still for twelve months instead of slipping backwards. As for the methods workers use to get their demands, the simple stay-at-home strike is getting less and less effective. It often plays into the hands of employers looking for a way to close down without having to pay compensation. The tactics used to get pay rises reflect the nature of that kind of demand, which can only help one group of workers for a short time. This is why the health workers could not expect wildcat sympathy strikes in support of their pay rise, which they were trying to get by arguing that they were a 'special' category.

PROFIT AND LOSS

The economic crisis is not short-lived. It cannot be blamed on bad luck or bad planning. It has happened before, on a smaller scale, and results from the unstable nature of the system itself.

In order to live, the working class depends on being able to sell its labour. What goods and services we produce, how they are distributed, consumed and reproduced, is determined by the logic of capital and those who manage it. This minority controls and effectively owns most of the natural, industrial and human resources. Its aims are to maintain social stability and a steady rate of profits. Stability means keeping the working class in its place, working as and when required,

consuming what is for sale. Profits are made by selling goods and services for more than they cost to make, over and above what it costs to renew the economy and keep the workers in line. The source of this surplus is our labour.

In both human and economic terms, the interests of the working class are opposite to those of its bosses. From the point of view of capitalists, crisis results from the profit motive itself, the pressure to keep growing, to re-invest profits in order to get the same rate of return. The only way for them to do this is to find new markets, or to intensify the exploitation of markets that already exist (by increasing productivity or forcing wages down). If this does not happen fast enough to meet the desire for profitable investment, the result is conflict between capitalists as they search for new sources of profit.

On an international scale, economic war can lead to real war. Usually, the state acts as a mediator between capitalists within its boundaries. But the state is not just a mediator. It is also the military and repressive arm of the ruling class, and a capitalist in its own right. When competition goes out of control on this scale, the state becomes an aggressive entrepreneur, whipping-up nationalist feeling in support of national capital. Whether or not the crisis becomes military, workers are taken out of normal production (through unemployment or conscription); austerity is imposed, and workers are set to fighting out their bosses quarrels. The resulting devastation provides capital with the right climate in which to recuperate and start growing again.

'A' IS FOR ALIENATION

It is not just that one class owns and profits from the work of another. The production of commodities - that is, goods or services for exchange - means that our whole lives are modelled on the profit motive and its requirements. We cannot give of ourselves, our time, our labour, according to our capacity or desire to do so; we cannot take what we need; we cannot decide for or among ourselves what those needs or desires are, or how to go about meeting them. We are only permitted to produce what can be exchanged, sold. In fact we are forced to do so in ways that alienate us and turn us against each other. We can only take what is on sale, not what we need, not what we want, in strict proportion to our wage. And then most of it is rubbish, stuff on which someone can make a killing. Our social relationships repeat the pattern. We are isolated from each other, at work according to profitable divisions of labour; on the streets according to our capacity to purchase goods and other people's time; even at home, where the division of tasks is made strictly domestic, and we are cornered into making private contracts, in the hope that this will secure us against the world outside.

Seen in this way, the question of what demands working class people make, and how to go about making them, takes on a wider meaning. It becomes a question of classes themselves, the way we are exploited, and how this can be opposed. We believe that it is necessary to struggle against the ruling class and its system in every possible way; to go beyond our isolation in this struggle, by developing solidarity at every level and in every place; and in this way to assert the autonomy of the working class against its oppressor. We

can only do this on our own, for ourselves. Finally, we wish to see the ruling class overthrown, and a social revolution in which commodities, the state and both the classes abolished.

Workers autonomy is not a blueprint or a set of policies. It exists only in as much as we can develop our own activity and ideas in opposition to the ruling class. It develops from our desire to see the downfall of this system becoming a conscious understanding of the need to destroy it and the ways of bringing this about, in the course of everyday struggle with other members of our class. When theories are cut off from our practical experience, they become mere ideology, at best irrelevant, at worst elitist. If, on the other hand, we deceive ourselves that anything worthwhile and permanent can be gained by reforms, then we are condemned to endless isolation, cynicism and defeat.

BLOOD BROTHERS

Trade unions, which rely on this deception among waged workers, stand as a barrier to their struggles, even on the level of reforms. They exist only to negotiate the price and conditions of labour, and are therefore a part of the system itself, since they cannot be used to challenge it. At the highest levels of the bureaucracy, unions operate alongside national governments and private capital. They take part in economic planning, enforce government policy on wages and conditions, and participate in schemes of social control, especially when Labour is in power. The unions reinforce all the divisions within the working class, between workers in one country and another, between waged and unwaged, skilled and unskilled, between workers in different industries,

trades and workplaces. At the local level, union branches manipulate their members by pre-empting their demands and enforcing agreements on discipline. They restrict workers demands to short-term wage settlements and changes in conditions. Activity against employers is only permitted if it can be used to consolidate the power of the union officials. The unions require militancy on tap, to order. Sometimes they will suppress strikes, sometimes they will demand heroic sacrifices. Sometimes they miscalculate (last month the miners dealt a second blow to the personal ambitions of their union president, Scargill).

Unions smother autonomous activity in the workplace, by outlawing independent agitation of all kinds, and by keeping discussion to a minimum. When disputes are made official, the unions take control. They slow down the pace of activity by sending strikers home, organising phoney one day stoppages, demonstrations, delegations and endless negotiations. This is how they span out the dispute over wages in the National Health Service, which ended in defeat. When strikes threaten to by-pass union channels, spread out of control or use unsanctioned tactics, the union officials will attempt to sabotage them, denounce their members, and sometimes call in the police, as they did during the 1979 lorry drivers strike, and again last month, when assembly workers at Fords Halewood damaged cars in protest at lay-offs.

If unionism is a dead end, so is politics. It is not a question of electing people who will manage things more efficiently on our behalf, any more than it is one of putting forward more militant delegates to negotiate our wages. It was the Labour government of 1974-79, not the Tories, who be-

gan the present round of austerity measures. Meanwhile the inner cities have felt the full force of leftist welfare planning. The old working class ghettos have been demolished in programmes of estate building, brand new ghettos where twice as many people could be put at half the cost. Labour councils have built up heavy welfare bureaucracies, partly to deal with increasingly poor and unruly populations, partly to build up a power-base for themselves in the local state.

As for the notion of a working class party, it is a contradiction in terms. Whether they aim at being elected in order to nationalise factories, or at overthrowing bourgeois democracy in order to substitute their own brand on our behalf, political parties can only be concerned with management and control. They cannot, even if they wish to, overturn capital itself; that is a task for the whole of the working class and nobody else. Nobody can create a better world for us. The problem of exploitation is in the end a problem of social relations, not one of economic management. Historically, every socialist and revolutionary party, along with every socialist and revolutionary union, has ended up in one of three ways; oblivion, complete integration into the ruling class, or if they managed to seize power on the back of a revolution (as the Russian Bolsheviks did in 1917), they have become a new ruling class, the state and the only employer, and just as ruthless.

WORKERS POWER OR WORKERS PLAYTIME?

A fairly new proposal, but one getting more popular with politicians of all shades, is the idea of workers co-operatives, in which everyone has an equal say in the

running of the business. The theory is that this will make everyone work harder, since they have a share in the profits. Very little changes. In fact, it can be a way of making workers pay for unprofitable factories. Co-ops are still subject to capital, because they have to sell their products at market values. This means that they are still engaged in commodity production, and cannot claim to be making what people need: at their worst, co-ops are an extreme form of exploitation, working long hours very hard for low wages. Self-managed misery, all for the sake of an illusion.

In this country, talk of Workers Autonomy has only appeared quite recently. Elsewhere, and especially in southern Europe, it has been a recognisable current in working class struggles over the last fifteen years. In reality, autonomous workers groups have existed for a lot longer. Wherever working class people have brought their resentment to bear on the collective problems of everyday struggle, they have found the need to organise and fight in a completely independent way, not only against the employer and his class, but outside of unions and parties, and often against them. Such groups appear during periods of conflict as a way of developing communication and solidarity among the workers involved; they can draw lessons freely and apply them as they are learned, then pass that knowledge on to other groups. When the level of struggle dies down, so inevitably the autonomous groups cease to function as before, often being re-integrated into reformist political structures. Nevertheless, those who remain can develop the movement towards autonomous workers struggle by continuing to try and open up discussions and anti-work activity in the workplace. If they

are isolated, they may form groups outside the workplace itself, as a way of continuing this discussion among the widest possible circle of people, even though such groups can never be a substitute for workplace activity. (The group which produces *Playtime* comes into this category.)

In the longer term, we believe that the development of the revolutionary working class can only come about through autonomous activity and discussion at every level - within the workplace and outside. This article has concentrated on the struggles of waged workers in the work-place, but the principles apply to every member

Hammer and Tongs

An illustration of the state of demoralisation within the unions is provided by the Crossword strike in Scott Lithgows last year. Industrial relations have been excellent within British Shipbuilders recently (so say the bosses). It's perhaps not accidental that Scott Lithgows which is the most likely yard to be closed down has been the scene of some of the only strikes to mar this record. This account of the strike is based on one written by one of the strikers. It demonstrates clearly what *Hammer and Tongs*, the rank and file paper inside Scott Lithgows during the late seventies, said in 1979:

Workers have a long history of allegiance to their traditional leaders, ie the unions and the shop stewards committees - but surely now we must realise that only independent action can show us the way forward.

Should we... decide to carry the fight

of the working class equally, wherever they are in conflict with the bosses and their system. We must fight for ourselves, with others who share our struggle, whether we are on the dole, working, homeless or harassed (or all those at once - think about it). The pressure and divisions which are imposed on us can be turned into an attack on the system from all sides. As these attacks grow in strength and number, they will become a revolutionary movement of the whole working class, which has one common interest; the end of capitalism and its conditions of endless poverty, work, crisis and war.

We need a new world.

forward, then we cannot afford to leave the struggle in the hands of the unions or the stewards. Delegations would have to be picked from the mass meeting to link up workers in other ship-yards. These delegates will be answerable to the entire workforce at the mass meetings and not to the unions. These delegates would be the delegates of the Lower Clyde shipyard workers and not puppets of the unions.

The entire workforce must control the struggle if we are to prevent it from becoming a fake. If we put an end to the struggle now, all we are doing is telling the government, British Shipbuilders and the unions we are prepared to accept the dole queue.

CROSSWORD STRIKE

At the end of September last year, platers at Scott Lithgows in Glasgow struck in defence of two victimised stewards. Pat Clark and John Gillishan were in

the company's welding school one morning, learning to use a type of welding rod for building oil rigs. (It's the lack of orders for oil rigs that's currently threatening Scott Lithgows with closure.) Power had been cut off so that repairs could be done. The two remained at their work bench waiting for it to come on again. To relieve the boredom they began doing the *Financial Times* crossword.

The welding manager came over and insisted they put the paper away. An argument broke out. The conversation was all directed at Pat Clark - when Gillishan tried to speak the manager told him to shut up, no one was talking to him.

Clark was finally asked if he accepted the works rules or not. He refused to give the desired answer as he felt no rules were broken. At 4.00 pm both stewards were suspended pending a disciplinary hearing the following afternoon. The next morning convenors approached the industrial relations manager. He agreed he wouldn't have sacked men in those circumstances but said he could not get involved in this case. At the hearing the two apologised to the manager - he was no longer prepared to accept this. Clark was sacked and Gillishan suspended for four weeks.

The platers met the following day. Rather than strike immediately they called in the boilermakers full time district official. The yard convenor told the meeting that if it had been anyone else caught doing a crossword this wouldn't have happened.

Pat Clark was one of the workers issuing the bulletin *Hammer and Tongs* inside the Scott Lithgow shipyards during the late seventies. It was this and his work within the union which marked him out as a target for victimisation by both the

management and the union hacks, neither of which were particularly overjoyed at the existence of a voice within the workforce advocating direct action, autonomous workers organisation, self-management etc.

An appeal was heard by a company director on September 21st. The director said his mind was made up and that the proper decision had been made.

The platers called a meeting in the yard canteen. *It is common practice for a sacked worker to attend in order to put his case to his work mates. Before our meeting got off the ground, the police came into the canteen and removed Pat Clark from the premises - but not John Gillishan. Something unprecedented in the past and ominous for the future.*

So the platers left the yard and held the meeting on waste ground outside. After a long discussion they voted overwhelmingly for strike action demanding reinstatement. A strike committee, 17 strong, and open to all platers to join, was formed. This committee issued a leaflet to all workers in Scott Lithgows outlining the incident and asking for support. The shop stewards committees denounced the leaflet as containing lies and half truths.

The strike committee then invited the media to attend a strike committee meeting. *One evening, myself, another strike committee member and the two stewards in question were having a quiet drink in a local hotel when we were accosted by four convenors from Scott Lithgows demanding that we call off our press conference as the yards can't afford any more bad publicity and such a conference would box management in and make it more difficult to find a solution. We told them that the press conference wasn't definite,*

if the press came along it would take place, if they didn't it wouldn't take place. As for finding a solution, that was simple - reinstate Pat Clark and lift John Gillishan's suspension. One convenor told us, when he saw that they were getting nowhere with us, Cameron Parker (managing director) won't have to sink the boot in on you, we'll fucking sink the boot in on you. The press conference took place as arranged.

BACK TO WORK LADS

The district official now called a meeting of the strikers. He said the boilermakers executive had arranged a meeting between the strikers and British Shipbuilders on condition that there was a return to work. He gave a speech about the state of the nation and the industry. *When he had finished making his plea for sanity and common sense to prevail, he called for a vote on whether to return to work or not. At this there was objection. It was pointed out to him that we didn't conduct our meetings in that manner. The call for the meeting to be opened up for discussion was accepted by the body of the hall to the delegates displeasure. When the meeting was thrown open for discussion the feeling of the men was that as long as we stay out we are strong - past experience has shown us that a return to work ends in defeat. After a lengthy meeting a vote was taken and the outcome was to stay on strike.* The official said he would report to the boilermakers executive and they would hold another meeting with a ballot box.

Letters appealing for financial support brought a response from other parts of the country. However those sent to the Scott Lithgow shop stewards committees

went straight into the dustbin. *According to the shop stewards we were liars and distorters and brought bad publicity to the yards and in their wisdom the shop stewards decided that neither were they going to call mass meetings or departmental meetings to discuss the platers appeal for financial support.*

Another leaflet was distributed to Scott Lithgow workers answering the stewards lies. The stewards claimed that Pat Clark had told the manager to fuck off (he hadn't). They claimed outside elements such as anarchists and the SWP were involved in the running of the strike, and that the strike was being used for political gain. They circulated ridiculous stories about the political associations of some of the strikers - including the allegation that one member of the strike committee belonged to the Red Brigades and the Red Army Fraction. The stewards made clear that if pickets were put on the gates they would instruct workers to cross them. In fact all the strikers were asking for were for departmental meetings to be held at which they could put their case. Though workers put pressure on stewards to call meetings only one department (the platers mates) managed to hold one and support was rejected. However, collections at the yard gates *got a fantastic response.*

At a shop stewards meeting one steward said the company should do a Hunterson on the platers. Chicago Bridge had sacked its entire workforce on strike at the oil rig yard at Hunterson Ayrshire in October 1980, and re-employed those it wanted back. They got full backing for this from the Amalgamated Society of Boilermakers and the GMWU (the two unions have since merged).

The stewards now wrote to the local

paper accusing the strike committee of distorting the facts of the issue from the first and misleading the strikers.

The only reason that we could think of at the time regarding the stewards letter in the front page of the local rag - for them doing this to us was that, they had made a deal with management. In the past when the platers have been on strike, after a period of two or three days the company started suspending other sections of the work force. But in this issue this never happened and we were out on strike for three weeks.

We believe that the deal was struck between the shop stewards and the company was that, if the company refrain from suspending the rest of the work force then the shop stewards committee would sabotage the platers strike by whatever means they could.

A couple of days after the shop stewards article in the local press the district delegate called another meeting with a

Peoples Crawl for Jobs

The second Great Peoples Crusade for Jobs got off to an inspiring start in Glasgow on April 23rd, with a stirring speech from Michael Foot on the need to *arouse the conscience of The Nation*. Infused by his deep personal knowledge of the human waste generated by redundancy, this established the flavour of the whole event.

The main group of pilgrims, in their distinctive green-and-lemming coloured anoraks, was joined on its passage south by others from the four corners of England. It enters the Socialist Promised Land of Brent on June 2nd, where it will be

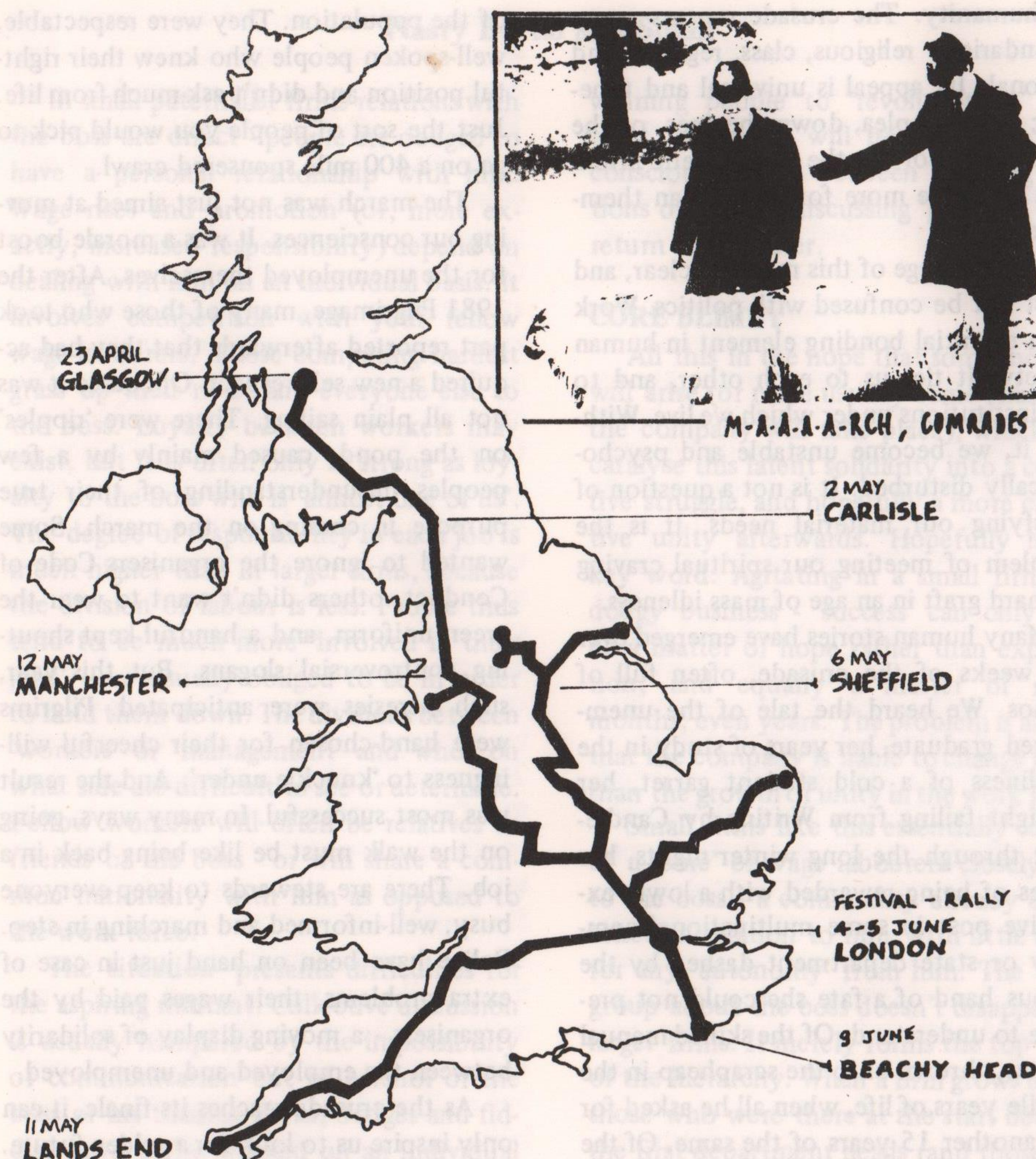
view to returning to work. This time he got what he wanted - a return to work so that the meeting between the union and the company could take place. Well the meeting did take place in Newcastle - Pat Clark was still sacked and John Gillishan got his suspension reduced to a week.

On May 14th, 1982 the aforementioned shop stewards committee signed a no strike agreement with the company. The Scott Lithgow shop stewards committees afraid. The companys propaganda regarding the state of the industry has been accepted by them. No way are they prepared or willing to fight any future redundancies that seem to be coming our way. This attitude of theirs - if we are good boys and behave ourselves maybe we will get orders. Heaven help us when the crunch comes because there is no ground work being done to fight redundancies and closures.

In Poland the army breaks up workers strikes. In the Scott Lithgow group its the shop stewards committee that breaks strikes.

greeted by Ken 'Giss'a Job' Livingstone. It climaxes in Hyde Park on June 5th, when the marchers will all put brown paper bags on their heads and take part in a mass 'die-in' for Jobs. If this gesture succeeds, rumour has it that an extra leg will be added to the route, ending at Beachy Head in Sussex on Democracy Day (June 9th). The celebrants will join hands in a symbolic show of unity and jump off together.

Not since the Royal Wedding has the plight of chronically unemployed people so captured the imagination of the British



public. Comparisons spring easily to mind - the unemployed marches of the 30s; the Canterbury Pilgrims; the Childrens Crusade of the 14th century (when thousands of infants from all over Europe were persuaded to march on Jerusalem, only to be sold into slavery or die between Marseilles and North Africa); the annual migration

of caribou across the plains of Canada (when many fall into rivers and drown).

The march was blessed, before it set out, by the Catholic Archbishop of Glasgow, the Anglican Bishop of Manchester and the Moderator of the Church of Scotland. It is, after all, a 'coming-together' of all kinds of people from the 'broad church'

of humanity. The crusade crosses many boundaries - religious, class, regional and rational. Its appeal is universal and timeless; it is the plea, down the ages, of the deserving poor for the sympathetic attention of those more fortunate than themselves.

The message of this march is clear, and must not be confused with politics. Work is an essential bonding element in human society. It ties us to each other, and to the institutions under which we live. Without it, we become unstable and psychologically disturbed. It is not a question of satisfying our material needs. It is the problem of meeting our spiritual craving for hard graft in an age of mass idleness.

Many human stories have emerged over the weeks of the crusade, often full of pathos. We heard the tale of the unemployed graduate, her years of study in the loneliness of a cold student garret, her eyesight failing from Writing by Candlelight through the long winter nights, her hopes of being rewarded with a lowly executive post in some multinational company or state department dashed by the callous hand of a fate she could not presume to understand. Of the skilled manual worker, thrown onto the scrapheap in the middle years of life, when all he asked for was another 15 years of the same. Of the ex-foreman, stripped of his job abusing others, and now suffering massive hair loss through abusing himself.

The people on this march were not the caricatures of grasping ingratitude we all know. These were not the insolent youths, crabby housewives, social outcasts, unmarried mothers, thieves and professional dole queuers who make up seven-eighths

of the population. They were respectable, well-spoken people who knew their rightful position and didn't ask much from life. Just the sort of people you would pick to go on a 400 mile sponsored crawl.

The march was not just aimed at moving our consciences. It was a morale boost for the unemployed themselves. After the 1981 Pilgrimage, many of those who took part reported afterwards that they had acquired a new self-respect. Of course it was not all plain sailing. There were 'ripples' on the pond, caused mainly by a few peoples misunderstanding of their true purpose in coming on the march. Some wanted to ignore the organisers Code of Conduct, others didn't want to wear the green uniform, and a handful kept shouting controversial slogans. But this year, such heresies were anticipated. Pilgrims were hand-chosen for their cheerful willingness to 'knuckle under'. And the result was most successful. In many ways, going on the walk must be like being back in a job. There are stewards to keep everyone busy, well-informed and marching in step. Police have been on hand just in case of extra problems, their wages paid by the organisers - a moving display of solidarity between the employed and unemployed.

As the crusade reaches its finale, it can only inspire us to look for a golden future. This is not the first hunger march, and it will not be the last. One day we may all be taking part in this wonderful movement. As it grows in size, fervour and moral authority, we can glimpse the first dim streaks on the horizon, the dawning of a new age of truly full employment. When that day breaks, we will all be put to work, and work will make us free.

Nasty Brutal and Small

In small paternalist firms relations with the boss are direct - people are obliged to have a personal relationship with him. Wage rises and promotion (or, more exactly, increased responsibility) depend on dealing with him on an individual basis. It involves competition with your fellow wage-labourers. Those competing hardest grass up their rivals and everyone else to the boss. Loyalty between workers may exist, but it is often only as strong as loyalty to the boss who is 'almost one of us'. The degree of responsibility in each job is much higher than in larger firms, because the division of labour is less. People thus tend to be much more 'involved in their jobs' - are usually obliged to be in order to hold them down. The divisions between 'workers' or 'management' and whos on what side are difficult to see or determine. Fellow workers will often be relatives or friends of the boss - or will share a common nationality with him as opposed to the work force.

The situation presents difficulties for the aspiring militant. Collective discussion is usually hampered by the impossibility of communication out of earshot of the boss or his toadies. Perks, dodges and fiddles have to be worked on an individual basis and hidden not only from the boss but from the other workers. (Part of the paternalist bosses power derives from 'allowing' fiddling). The development of unity among the workers is a slow process of building and testing interpersonal solidarity at a friendship level, and trying by all means possible to stoke the natural antagonisms between boss and work force into concrete divisions. Without getting sacked. Its absolutely not a matter of

winning people to 'revolutionary' positions. Indeed it will normally involve a conscious choice between building relations of trust or discussing 'politics'. I will return to this later.

CORE BLIMEY

All this in the hope that some incident will arise (or more usually some change in the company will take place), which will catalyse this latent solidarity into a collective struggle, and hopefully a more collective unity afterwards. Hopefully is the key word. Agitating in a small firm is a dodgy business - 'success' can only ever be a matter of hope rather than expectation, and equally a matter of many months, even years. The problem is always that the company is liable to change faster than the growth of unity in the work force.

Small firms like this essentially consist of a 'core' of wage labourers closely tied to the boss - a community already established in relation to him, with little space for any 'autonomy' from him. The 'core' group about the boss doesn't disappear in larger firms. It merely forms the top layer of the hierarchy. When a firm grows in size those who were there at the start become the first department heads (and those that don't often constitute a problem on the shopfloor). Old, loyal and preferentially treated and paid workers are generally rabidly pro-boss and company.

Recruitment in firms up to a certain size is normally 'internal'. Companies start up with the boss hiring old friends, friends of friends, his relatives and so on. Most of these people will be a dead loss from the point of view of worker solidarity - being effectively what would be middle manage-

ment in a larger firm, and often becoming same. The first actual 'workers' as distinct from management will be people hired as assistants to this 'core' of management. Again, these people are more likely to be recruited from people recommended by existing employees than from the dole office or by advertising. Bosses like to think of these new recruits as part of the family. Its with the growth of company size to the level of separate departments that deliberate recruitment of a distinct 'work force' will take place. Its now that departments will be expanded around recruitment from particular strata of 'cheap labour', depending on whats available locally.

In the boom years after the last world war pools of cheap labour were built up through immigration, while women and youth were being exploited on a hitherto unknown scale. The advantage of using such pools of 'reserve' labour is not only its cheapness - its also the possibility of exploiting the inevitable divisions between sex, age and race. This was particularly important where these 'reserves' were used in the process of breaking up and reorganising established industries, as Asian and female labour was used in the wool textiles industry.

Today, of course, labour needs are totally reversed. Mass unemployment has swollen the numbers of the 'reserve army' of available cheap labour. Offering, one might think, immense possibilities of exploitation for sweat shop proprietors. However, the same economic climate thats produced mass unemployment has sharpened the economic pressures on small businesses as well. Hence the state intervention by the Tory government to reduce wage costs by establishing a supply of

cheap youth labour, and by reducing unemployment and supplementary benefit - putting on pressure to reduce low pay. The end result is super-exploitation as industries are forced to restructure, and still greater numbers of job losses. As companies expand or are merged together (though not so much where companies are merged into a group but maintained as separate firms) the possibilities for workers unity and struggle multiply dramatically. Where a section of the work force has been employed (usually around a particular process) and the whole idea is that they are paid less and treated worse than everyone else, there is an obvious source of grievance. However the isolation created by their separation as a particular department or shift increases the possibility of unity developing. This can be helped by a common sex or racial background. To start off with this is usually a solidarity of the oppressed - a defensive response to common treatment. But it can build into something more, especially in small firms where the sophistications of personnel management are lacking. As often as not middle management will create immense problems for themselves through incompetence compounded by racism, sexism and general unpleasantness. The possibility for communication out of earshot of middle management increases as departments become well separated in terms of function and geography. It can equally develop in those situations where a language or patois is shared in common as distinct from management. That said in the context of Asian workers obviously not all Asians speak the same language or share the same cultural background.

Its equally important to avoid the idea that its always a question of white bosses

exploiting coloured or black labour. In the rag trade there are large numbers of sweatshops owned or managed by people from one national or racial group, exploiting their relatives and co-nationals as the 'core' group, and then exploiting other racial or sexual groups as the work force.

WHY BOTHER?

So what does this all mean and why am I writing it ? A large and expanding sector of the working class are employed in small to medium size businesses without unions and often without any negotiating machinery whatever. In such firms the first priority of workers is self defence against exploitation. The task of militants and 'revolutionaries' - almost invariably isolated individuals - is to help generate shop floor solidarity and increase the divisions between shop floor and bosses.

But whats this got to do with revolution ? Hard core 'revolutionaries' will doubtless already be dismissing the above as mindless economism, mere demand militancy or somesuch. 'Revolutionary' papers like *Workers Playtime* normally concentrate on struggles in large unionised industries. (The 'Key' sectors of 'The Class'). Its comparatively easy to cobble together accounts of strikes in them by assiduously reading lots of newspapers and then drawing political conclusions from a distance. (Though to be fair to *Workers Playtime* it still takes more effort than fleshing out a single press clipping with a lot of 'revolutionary' hot air as most of our rivals do).

Inside large industries its the degree of relative job protection provided by formal negotiating and grievance structures which allows the growth of rank and file groups/factory groups organised around a political

platform/even party cells. Whether these are loyal oppositions to unionism or 'anti-union' they exist in the space opened by the existence of unionism, and can concentrate on being a militant 'political' opposition to the official negotiations over wages and conditions.

POLITICAL CELIBACY

In most small businesses by contrast this space for 'political' militancy doesn't exist. As I said above, where the isolated militant decides to openly proselytise his 'revolutionary' views he usually does so at the expense of isolating himself as at best a standing joke and at worst an active nuisance. I am not suggesting for a moment that people abandon their political views about the need to destroy capitalism in favour of militant sectional self interest. I am saying that political discussion can't be forced on people but should arise out of whats being commonly discussed. And more importantly that militants have to decide for themselves the question of what is more important in any given situation - building interpersonal collectivity or arguing about politics. Both are obviously necessary - but often enough they are contradictory needs. I am also saying that neither can be done outside the workplace collectivity. Of course people can choose to isolate themselves politically and argue for 'pure communism' if they want, just as they can isolate themselves by becoming devotees of 'conspicuous militancy' and attempt to 'lead' their fellow workers into Struggle (or into bringing in The Union). In the latter case they make it easy for management to pick them off (or buy them off). In the former they make it easy for their fellow workers to discount what they say, and for themselves to keep clean

hands in the 'reformist mire' of defensive struggles.

It is often said despairingly by leftists that the 'unions have forgotten how to organise or struggle'. Of course these struggles reveal most clearly the anti-working class nature of trades unionism. But even revolutionaries, busy setting up autonomous groups in big industry, will shrug their shoulders and agree its an impossible situation for organising. I believe that such arguments stand the priorities for revolutionaries today on their head. Because they presuppose a level of class consciousness, of class community and solidarity which does not exist. For some 'revolutionaries' this is no problem. The crisis will reduce us to the same level of exploitation and our 'spontaneous' response will be to throw up autonomous fighting institutions - Workers Councils. This ignores the obvious fact that where Councils have been set up by workers themselves (as opposed to politicos (1917) or 'anti-politicos' (1936)), it has been on the basis of existing working class community and solidarity. Community clearly doesn't presuppose solidarity, but it is its necessary precondition.

COMMUNITY SERVICE

In Britain since the last world war we have seen the disintegration of the 'old' working class communities - through the restructuring of industry, through 'urban planning' which has destroyed working class communities and cultural ties, and through the relative prosperity produced during the post war boom. The period has seen the destruction of many of those ties of mutual dependency which ran through those working class communities. Capitalisms tendencies towards a society

of atomised individuals - Citizens, Workers, Consumers - has proceeded apace as the space for 'individual realisation' has grown. Wider communities of dependency crumbled in the face of the rise of the nuclear family as an independent economic unit, and now we see the 'crisis of the family' as jobs for women and youth give them the potential for economic 'autonomy' enjoyed by many men.

The primary task of a revolutionary movement in this situation is not fighting to build up power bases in the 'Key Sectors' of society - even where its genuinely 'autonomous groupings' as opposed to people getting themselves elected as stewards. For militants in those sectors this is obviously one task. But the basic task of revolutionaries everywhere is helping to rebuild class community and solidarity in the face of its obvious decomposition. In workplaces of whatever size that means doing the basic work of helping to rebuild collectivity and unity in the face of management.

Within small firms that goes hand in hand with the need for everyday self defence. Even if the unions were fighting, anti-capitalist bodies they would be impotent where there was no collective strength on the shop floor. In reality, of course, their power is rooted in our impotence.

What does a new working class community mean? After all we can have no truck with peddlars of socialist nostalgia with their lies about how wonderful it used to be.

I'll leave off with a couple of conclusions.

We must get away from the idea that isolated individuals in unorganised work places can only participate in the 'real'

class struggle at second hand by joining political groupings, or acting as back-up to workers in the 'Key Sectors'. Where you are - however 'unpromising' or 'difficult' - is where the fight is, where the basic struggle starts.

We must get away from conceptions of the struggle which start from the construction of 'Power Bases' in 'Key Sectors' - (as all the various conceptions of 'Workers Autonomy' do) - or which see class consciousness and solidarity as something

Knowing Your Onions (It's enough to make you weep)

Cashing in the continuing disillusionment with or apathy towards the trade unions, the Tories have launched their latest reform proposals under the banner 'Giving the unions back to their members'. The new bill is intended to force the unions to hold elections to national executive positions every five years, and to weaken the Labour Party by requiring them to hold regular referendums on their political levies.

These, at any rate, are the proposals on which any 'debate' will concentrate. The union bureaucracies riposte is to oppose 'outside interference' with independent organisations. Of much greater importance to us, though, is the proposal to compel the unions to hold secret ballots before their members can take industrial action. As it is, workers usually have to face an assortment of bureaucratic obstacles if they come out on strike - unions can strangle effective action by isolating local disputes, or by taking control away from the workers themselves once they have

which the developing contradictions of capitalism will 'spontaneously' solve for us. Of course its true that capitalism as a crisis-ridden system suffers from periodic breakdowns, offering an opportunity for class struggle against the system itself. But its equally true that if that situation finds the majority of the working class atomised, divided and confused, then all the courage, militancy and radicalisation they'll undoubtedly display will not prevent capitalist barbarism from re-establishing itself over our dead bodies.

recognised a dispute as 'official'. The complicated machinery of balloting union members aims to make any immediate shop floor action virtually impossible. Both parties in the great debate will obscure this concrete reality behind a barrage of democratic verbiage.

The origins of all democratic organisation lies in the need to create social cohesion in a society where all natural community is absent. The separation between people which arose with private property demanded institutions which could regulate the relations between individuals in order to serve what was perceived as the 'common good'.

The modern state certainly requires 'authority' in order to carry out its function: democracy does not exclude force or dictatorial forms of government. But the democratic state is equally the guarantor of conciliation and must be seen to rise above the class divisions which give it its existence. So, whilst the state must provide social stability, this demands in some

measure the participation of its citizens. The state cannot appear merely arbitrary, whether it assumes a unitary or pluralist nature. This is why even the most dictatorial regimes must adopt a show of parliamentarism and democracy.

Trade unions appeared in specific capitalist conditions which have long since passed, yet their form has been exported to every corner of the globe. As organisations which represent the interests of workers - which for capitalism are just 'variable capital', living labour power - they are essential to capitalist development which requires a level of 'harmony' or 'understanding' between all its competing interests. As organisations charged with disciplining a class whose very existence poses a threat to society, the trade unions do sterling work in keeping alive the myth of democratic participation amongst those who have least to gain by it.

It is hardly surprising, then, that both the bureaucratic faction seeking to reduce the role of the unions in economic management (the Tories and SDP) and those seeking to augment it (Labour and the Left) are couching their demands in democratic terms. Nor is it surprising that Len Murray and Co went through the ritual of 'bowing to the verdict of the people' before talking to Tebbit about the proposed reforms. (In reality, the trade unions are engaged in a constant dialogue with the government, whoever happens to be in power. They are represented on hundreds of government committees. The representation of 'opposition' is one of democracy's most important functions.)

Behind the rhetoric, the intended outcome of trade union reform is to reduce shop floor activity - an outcome in which both the government and the trade union

bureaucracy have an interest. This is not to say that there is no conflict of interest involved. The trade unions and the Tory Party are grouped into opposing interest blocs whose disputes are what passes as 'politics'. Of course these conflicts are presented in a mystified form, since to be effective, they demand a level of public participation.

The usual objection to this view of trade unions is that, whatever their present shortcomings, they form a focal point for working class community. They are 'where the working class is organised'. But the substance of this claim has greatly diminished, with the disappearance of many former aspects of working class existence. Working class community was once a much more easily identifiable phenomenon - with labour-intensive heavy industries dominating large districts, the union apparatus could form the backbone of a community. This may still persist in some areas. The reaction of Barnsley coalminers to pit closures was against the wishes of the union bureaucracy, but was conducted through the trade union apparatus, which still commands much greater influence over local life than is the case in most industries. But such instances have become exceptional. We may be more acutely aware of the dissolution of close-knit working class community in London (especially since the break-up of the docklands) but the suburbanisation of workers is a nationwide phenomenon.

UNIONS - A GLOBAL PHENOMENON

But even if the trade unions can be seen as a focus of identity, by definition, this must be an identity with the place of work. Not with our needs and desires as human beings - which is the basis for any real

community, but with the focal point of our alienation as commodities at the service of capitalism! This is why programmes to democratise the trade unions, to increase participation (whether this means atomised suburbanites passively filling in ballot forms, or formally associated individuals passively raising hands at the request of bureaucrats) must be seen as being aimed at reinforcing our integration into waged existence, through the lies of 'freedom of choice' or 'grassroots control', depending on whether you read the *Sun* or the *Guardian*.

The other tired line of argument - that trade unions represent gains from past struggles - obscures the specific circumstances in which trade unions came into existence, and how these circumstances have changed. The rapid growth of the productive forces under capitalism has changed the nature of exploitation.

Capitalism took centuries to emerge from feudal society, and to establish itself as the dominant mode of production. The technical superiority of early capitalist over precapitalist forms of production lay in the co-operation and concentration of various labour processes. Manufacture based on a handicraft division of labour displaced fragmented domestic industry.

The workers in these manufactures sold their *labour power* to a capitalist, whereas the domestic craftsman sold the *product of his labour* to a merchant, retaining control or ownership of the tools of his trade.

But although the worker had been dispossessed of the instruments of his labour, the labour process still rested on his skill, qualifications and know-how. In short, labour was still of much greater import-

ance in the technical processes of production than capital. Trade qualifications meant that workers were not easily interchangeable, and competition between workers much less than was later the case.

This gave the early combinations a great leverage when confronting employers. It is scarcely surprising, then, that from the fourteenth to the early nineteenth centuries, trades combinations were ruthlessly outlawed in Britain.

As capitalism established as the dominant mode of production, and manufacture was consolidated, the statutes which had been enforced against wage labourers for four centuries became to be seen increasingly as an unnecessary and cumbersome burden. In 1813 the laws for the regulation of wages were repealed. *They became an absurd anomaly as soon as the capitalist began to regulate his factory by his own private legislation, and was able to make up the wage of the agricultural labourer to the indispensable minimum by the poor rate.* (Capital, volume 1, chapter 8).

The legislation of the unions followed a similar logic. The repeal of the Combination Acts in 1824 was easily passed through a corrupt and unreformed parliament, with a campaign by the bourgeois radicals Place and Hume, largely on the basis of employers own testimony. The later Act of 1825 restricted trade union activity to the negotiation of wages and working conditions. Although the state had ditched a number of cumbersome statutes, it would not hesitate to invoke the common law if trade unions went beyond their legitimate function. It was only over the course of a century that a legal identity became clearly defined for the unions.

IS THE CNT A SPANISH ONION ?

But the unions never challenged wage slavery. They acted as defensive mechanisms to wring concessions out of employers by collective bargaining. Unions served as a counterweight to the power of individual capitalists, while the logic of the capitalist economy *as a whole* exerted its influence over both. *The workers combine in order to achieve equality of a sort with the capitalist in their contract concerning the sale of their labour. This is the whole rationale (the logical basis) of the trade unions.* (TJ Dunning, Secretary to the London Consolidated Society of Bookbinders, in Trades Unions and Strikes, quoted in Marx's Unedited Chapter of Capital) . . .

Unions enabled workers to prevent the *price* of their labour falling below its true economic price: the value of labour power, that is, the minimum necessary in a given society at a given moment for the working class to reproduce itself. (In other words enough to keep the worker and his/her family alive but at the mercy of the employer).

Even as a defensive organisation, the union was unable to go beyond these local and partial successes. Wider struggles, not least against the extension of the working day, were overtaken by capital's own movement.

The development of new technological processes cut the ground from under the craft unions feet. At first the intensification of capitalist competition had expressed itself mainly as the lengthening of the working day beyond the limits of human endurance and the widespread introduction of child labour, all with the active support of the state. By extending the working day exploitation was increased in simple, *absolute* terms. Every additional

hour added to the surplus value produced. But there are obvious physical limitations to the increase in *absolute surplus value*. By introducing new technology, the output per worker per day is increased. So, whilst the length of the working day may remain constant, a greater proportion of the day is spent producing surplus value: surplus labour time is increased *relative* to necessary labour time (the labour time necessary to pay the workers wages).

CRESS MATERIALISM

The capitalists motive in introducing new technology is that he can reduce the price of his product below the competitive market average, and thus enlarge his share of the market, whilst at the same time getting a larger than average return of surplus value on each commodity produced. So his goal in introducing new technology is super-profits. But of course, once his industrial competitors have adopted similar technology these super-profits are wiped out. The value of commodities is equalised downwards, and the increase in *relative surplus value* is generalised throughout the industry.

Technology in its specifically capitalist form has an additional benefit for the capitalist class as a whole: whereas in early manufacture, the worker still dominates the instruments of production, in large scale industry the machine (= capital = dead labour) dominates the living labour of the worker. The machine assumes all his skill and craft. The worker is effectively reduced to a mere extension of the machine. This is the basis of modern factory discipline.

Hence one of the fundamental supports used by the working class to impose the sale of labour power at its value - trade

and qualification - progressively disappears. Capital increasingly turns out not 'workers' in any qualitative sense, but interchangeable proletarians capable of being moved from one job, industry or region to another. This intensifies competition between workers leaves the craft unions having to fight an impossible rearguard action against some of the effects of technological change.

At the same time, competition is intensified between the waged and the unwaged. Economic expansion - the accumulation of capital - is translated less directly into job creation as capital is increasingly re-invested in more advanced machinery, and only incidentally into new employment. Consequently there is less scope for the trade unions to exploit economic upturn to raise wages. Wages are stabilised within the narrow limits of capitals requirements. *The silent compulsion of economic relations sets its seal on the domination of the capitalist over the worker.* (Marx).

CELERIED STAFF

The growing domination of the productive process by capital completes the mystification of the relationship between wage labour and production. Throughout capitalism, wages appear to be payment for the product of labour (this is the basis of the commonly held view that profits are derived from the circulation of commodities, ie profits arise from a swindle perpetrated against the consumer). In fact, wages in no way reflect the value of the product, but the value of *labour power* (the minimum socially necessary for the workers maintenance). Anyone who doubts this should try comparing the value of a car workers output with the value of

his wages ! But once capital has achieved total (or real) domination of labour, the mystification is reinforced, since it is capital, not labour, which appears to be productive. Furthermore, wage labour is generalised throughout society. The middle classes, whose numbers and power are first magnified with their importance as a technocratic class charged with managing more complex production processes, and later as the class charged with the social management of society as a whole, are paid in a similar way to the workers. Thus wage labour no longer appears synonymous with the production of surplus value.

In the early period of the capitalist mode of production, the period of manufacture, when capital only dominated labour partially or *formally*, the value of labour power remained fairly constant. This is because it is only rapid technological progress in the production of commodities necessary for the maintenance of the working class which reduces the input of resources (labour time) necessary to reproduce labour power. Consequently the movement of wages only represents oscillations around the value of labour power - an increase in wages automatically implies a fall in profits, and, conversely, one of the ways to increase the production of surplus value is to reduce wages. This relation is immediately apparent, and workers therefore combine in the factory to resist the attacks of capital.

DO ONIONS GIVE YOU HOLYTOSIS ?

But in mature capitalism, in the phase of the *real domination of labour by capital*, it becomes possible, as a result of the increase in the productivity of labour and the consequent falling value of commodities, to increase workers real wages (buy-

ing power), whilst reducing *relative wages*. This is because the proportion of the working day necessary to meet a workers wages is reduced. It becomes possible to raise wages whilst simultaneously increasing the rate and mass of surplus value.

At an immediate level, this phenomenon greatly reinforces capitals potential for class domination, and the working class (at least, in the capitalist heartlands of the world market) is more readily integrated into the capitalist state.

The reduction of *relative wages* occurs without any apparent personal intervention by 'the capitalist' whatsoever. The action of technological progress on workers relative wages results automatically from commodity production, within which labour is itself a commodity. This is why the unions are impotent to challenge the fall in relative wages. The struggle against the fall in relative wages is not one fought on the basis of defending a price - it is not fought in the terms of a market economy. On the contrary, it is an assault on the wages system itself, against capitalist society in its entirety.

In the modern era, the unions are cultivated by the bourgeoisie as brokers of labour power, as managers of variable capital. In particular, they have the job of disciplining workers into long term acceptance of the intensification of labour, through speed-ups on the line etc, which new technological processes entail. As permanent organisations working within the framework of commodity exchange, they form an indispensable defensive barrier to any assault against *the holy of holies, against the law of capitalism which tends towards a progressive reduction in relative wages*. (Luxemburg)

In a period of generalised recession,

however, the increase in real wages can no longer comfortably coexist with the reduction of relative wages. With the rate of profit under constant pressure, capital needs to direct the maximum surplus value towards its own requirements. In these circumstances the role of trade unions as institutions which objectively defend capitalist relations can become more apparent. Their function as part of capitals management structure becomes all the clearer when they are actually negotiating cuts in real wages and redundancies, or when any 'benefits' they win are at the expense of workers in other sectors.

Unfortunately, this does not imply that the situation is necessarily pregnant with revolutionary possibility, at least in the short term. To assume so is to underestimate the compulsion of capitalist relations, and the weight of capitalist ideology. Even where workers do challenge the traditional union management structure, this is generally in a way that does not pose any fundamental threat to the system as a whole. The Solidarity movement in Poland swept away the old union structures, but only to fill the vacuum with a more democratic structure, administered by workers raised from the shop floor, under the tutelage of Polands alternative ruling elite. In Britain, too, militant workers often see the solution in terms of a change of union or a change of leadership. But here, where the state is more pluralist, the ruling class can itself set in motion and dominate the democratic dialogue, forestalling any unnecessary upheavals.

ENDIVE STORY

Indeed, the current 'debate' about union democracy is no more than the ideological sugar-coating on moves to re-

define the role of the unions (yet again) in contemporary management structures. This does not require any 'conspiracy' on the part of the ruling class. Bourgeois politics is nothing but a constant search for an elusive social equilibrium in which commodities (including labour power) can be bought and sold to maximum effect. In the to-ing and fro-ing of bourgeois politics, some institutions inevitably gain at the expense of others as a result of any 'reforms'. All of these institutions claim to have the public interest at heart. We are not convinced.

Shoot the Buggers

The TUCs derisory 'Day of Action' in support of the white-collar secret service auxiliaries at Cheltenham provides a gloomy illustration of the current level of working class militancy.

The event seemed almost deliberately structured around an interlocking series of ironies. The unexpected display of 'protest' was the usual mixture of 'conspicuous militancy' on the part of union leaderships, while called at sufficiently short notice that nothing 'untoward' could occur. The instigators, however, were not the usual leftist bureaucrats but the right wing 'moderates'. Duffy, Basnett, Graham, Tuffin, Losinka - the unfamiliar expressions of militancy poured from lips still stained brown from their overtures to the government. For them Cheltenham represented not just a significant block of (largely right wing) votes and several hundred thousand pounds in lost dues, but a slap in the face from Thatcher. Having made considerable concessions in the attempt to gain re-admission to the national

I am not suggesting for one minute that the question must always be 'all or nothing' or that reformist struggles can be ignored. Reformist struggles are an inescapable reality, and the source of experience for the future. But it is important to understand that so long as they remain under the control of the unions (or for that matter any institution with a permanent interest in the capitalist set-up), these struggles will not so much be 'sold out' as pushed in such a direction as to serve the long term interests of capital rather than of the working class.

economic conference chamber, this unilateral, unannounced action came as a low blow and Len Murrays public gasps of outrage were quite genuine.

Wounded pride combined itself with a sense of the importance of these particular workers. As the traditionally strong sections of the 'labour movement' have been defeated or restructured into quiescence over the last six years, the strategic importance of the public service membership has grown.

But behind this was a more general awareness by the TUC of the importance of its white collar members. As Len Murray put it in a recent radio interview: *I suppose our average member, our typical member, a generation ago probably did wear a cap and was a man who stood at a lathe, a wood-working lathe or a metal-working lathe or something like that, or dug coal out of the ground etc. But I suspect our typical member these days is someone whos sitting at a keyboard, whether its a woman typing out letters or*

whether its a man operating a computer or whatever have you. So ones seen a change in the occupational pattern of trade unionism.

For the TUC right wingers the day of action thus had a serious purpose - its over-riding effect was merely to emphasise their impotence. There can be no sudden conjuring up of the rank and file militancy of the late 60s and early 70s even if it was wanted. The 'action' had gone as far as they dared as it was. A serious call for a one day general strike as opposed to unspecified 'protest action' would only have emphasised the feebleness of the response.

TAP DANCE

The Left bureaucrats consoled themselves by denouncing the inadequate time for preparation the TUC had allowed. UCATT, for example, one of the first two unions to declare its support for the 'action' managed to get a communique to Fleet Street, but was unable to get instructions down to site level. In reality this bluff would also have been called if enough notice had been given. And where a union - the SCPS - did call a strike, they promptly agreed with the other civil service unions that they could cross picket lines.

On the government side Thatcher had set out to appease the American paymasters for the Sigint system, in which Britain is 'senior partner', and maintain GCHQs secrecy. This secrecy was regarded as essential not from any need to conceal operations from the Russians, but to prevent discussion of GCHQs activities - directed at British citizens, foreign allies and largely in defiance of international law - and of Britains role as American imperialism number one son. Her achievement

was to do more damage to morale and continuity of staffing in GCHQ than the most militant union could have. And to expose it to more discussion than a hundred articles by Duncan Campbell.

The unions, the opposition parties and the Cheltenham workers themselves promptly set about competing to demonstrate the greatest patriotism in the face of this 'sabotage', and the implied insult to our brave secret service technicians.

What more appropriate in 1984 than to see big 'brothers' Murray and Kinnock stretching out the hand of brotherhood to the humble instruments of state surveillance. What more appropriate than the sight of the dishevelled ranks of leftists - who only a year ago were 'exposing' GCHQ - rushing about to give this gesture some public credibility.

Whats depressing is the number of militants who responded positively to the idea of showing solidarity to the GCHQ staff. The argument being that the majority are white collar workers like any others. The GCHQ staff themselves would deny that, happily embracing the importance of their work for national security. Would the same solidarity be given to a strike by white collar auxiliaries at New Scotland Yard? Sadly we must assume so.

As we have said before, the nature of capitalism is that all workers are forced to compete with one another and perform activities which in part, if not solely, harm other workers. If its illogical to single out groups of workers for attack simply because their activities harm other workers, its equally illogical for those workers to seek solidarity on the grounds of defending the system.

True, at the immediate level the only common interest of workers is in seeing

that wherever bosses and workers are in dispute the workers win, and in refusing to take the divisions imposed by the system out on each other, by turning them back on the bosses. But beyond this level our common interest is in seizing control of our lives and activity. In overthrowing those things which prevent us from creating a world based on our needs and desires - wage labour, commodity production, exchange economy and state, together with the social relations they structure. Genuine solidarity can only emerge when our solidarity with one anothers defensive struggles against capitalist attack turns to the offensive in common struggle to destroy capitalism itself. A struggle aimed at ending class society and abolishing ourselves as functionaries of the system along with the system itself.

That is why there can be no response to calls for solidarity of the kind from GCHQ. Not merely because of what they are and do - though for many that will be enough. But because genuine solidarity commences at the point at which workers are ready to confront and subvert their own function. Not only are the GCHQ workers doing exactly the opposite, they are doing so in the name of defending a

function which is explicitly aimed at maintaining the exploitation of us and our fellow proletarians throughout the world.

ANGER

It is this aspect of the affair that leaves us with an over-riding feeling, not of contempt or derision at the TUCs action, as has become customary, but of anger. For despite this display by the unions and Socialist parties of their complicity in a system which rests on our exploitation and misery, working class reaction to it remains for the most part a passive and brittle cynicism. A sense of pointlessness which can still, however briefly, be moved by calls to defend the institutions that perpetuate and feed off our submission. Royalty, the Nation, Parliamentary Democracy, Unionism: Left and Right are still able to play on sentimental attachment to these images as a means of filling the social vacuum thats left as capitalism penetrates and destroys all forms of community. A vacuum which leaves us isolated from our activities, from one another and from the world we live in. At the end of the day, the need to rebuild community through common struggle against capitalist society remains unexpressed.

Art/Class

I'm not a miner, a postal worker, a printer or even a health worker. I used to do clerical and office work. But for the past few years I've found taking my clothes off so art students can draw pictures of me to be a relatively less obnoxious form of wage labour. It can be very boring, but at least I'm free to think about something

other than invoices when I'm sitting there. I don't have to waste time and money having to buy lots of horrible clothes for work. During the right times of year work is still easy to find when I need it. I get more of a chance to lie down on the job than when I had to sit in front of a typewriter all day - but at the same time I

have to deal with some lot of trendy shit-bags who might demand that I stand all day instead.

I've mentioned one or two of the better points of the job, not because I love the work - I don't - but just because I get asked too often 'isn't it boring?' and 'how can you do such a job?'. Of course its boring, but what other jobs would anyone consider exciting and fulfilling?

With art modelling, like any other form of wage slavery, I'm selling my labour and I need to struggle against the inevitable about that involves. And I want to make that resistance part of a larger class struggle to transform social relations. But what does my situation in a marginal area of employment have to do with class struggle and workplace struggle in particular? An article in *Workers Playtime* about workers in small non-unionised firms suggested that:-

we must get away from the idea that isolated individuals in unorganised workplaces can only participate in the 'real' class struggle at second hand by joining political groupings, or acting as back-up to workers in the 'key sectors'... wherever you are, however unpromising or difficult - is where the real fight is, where the basic struggle is.

I've worked both on a casual basis and as a regularly waged employee. Even in the latter case, isolation is a problem. There are at least five major art schools in London, plus many adult education and evening institutes that employ models. Because of the rapid turnover, I'd say theres a lot of people, mostly women, who have done that work at one time or another. Its open to question whether art models are a significant part of the working class - especially since some of them

are just professional art students themselves - but in any case, the experience of art models is relevant to the problems of casual employment (such as catering) in general. And casual work is very common, either as a means to increase meagre social payments and low wages, or even as the sole means of support.

Now, art modelling isn't a trade which I have any real kind of identification with. Even when I'm working full time, I tend to consider myself unemployed. Strange, but true! Partly because there are long periods of unemployment due to the schedules of colleges, but also because the work seems very peripheral to 'real' life and to most of my political activities. To be honest, I often say I'm unemployed because I'm sick of the abysmally **dumb** jokes most (male) comrades insist on repeating if I say anything about the 'sector of industry' where I work. And should there be any kind of social upheaval, you can bet I won't be pissing about in some art school trying to organise 'art models councils'. If isolation is overcome, a fight can be made for better wages and conditions, but workplace struggle as such is limited so long as it stays within this workplace.

On a small scale, struggle does take place on the job. The most common form it takes is my making clear to some pretentious bastard, that no, under no circumstances will I pose standing on my head with my legs spread apart, so you can make a big stir at the college art exhibition and sell your picture for £1,000 (none of which I'll see). When I worked full time for most of last year, I did talk with a couple of other models at lunch time about how to deal with people like that, and how we can support each other. But

it took me weeks to find out even who the other models are, and when most models work casual or part time, they never find out at all.

Perhaps an obstacle to generalising this basic day-to-day stropiness as class struggle is that we don't directly confront an employer most of the time. Most often models are employed by ILEA or some other local education authority, but models change their venue very frequently or the venues change them. Most confrontations take place with individual students or tutors when they ask you to go without a break, or do some ridiculous pose. Even when I'm able to talk about it later with other models, I'm usually on my own with a class of 20 who haven't a clue what I'm doing is **work**, not sitting back and relaxing. However, some students might be sympathetic, especially in adult education institutes where they're mostly pensioners, unwaged or waged workers in evening classes. For them its a hobby, not their ticket into the cultural elite.

Like other public sector employees, models who assert themselves are often guilt-tripped for selfishness, insensitivity and unco-operativeness. But unlike public sector employees such as nurses, theres no chance that we can gain the same image of heroism, dedication in doing work thats vitally important. For one thing, we're part of the production of bourgeois culture, which is something different from the production of goods and services. And because an aspect of our work contradicts a certain kind of morality, unfortunately some of our fellow and sister proletarians don't want anything to do with shameless hussies like us. In one school, the cleaning women insist on having a separate loo from the models, pre-

sumably because they're afraid of catching the herpes we always leave on toilet seats. If they can't bear to share their toilet with us, will they ever want to go on strike with us?

So, even though we work in a 'respectable, educational' setting, we're often faced with the same stigma placed upon strippers, topless waitresses, prostitutes, and any woman who makes a living in the sex industry. These women are as much a part of the working class as any upstanding horny-handed son of toil, but the double standard of sexism decides they're not. In most jobs where the workforce is predominately female (there are male art models, but they're in the minority), its almost inevitable that some distortion of female sexuality is on the market as well. The ideology which condemns or makes a very bad joke of women who must sell their bodies or an image of it, is the same which decrees nurses, secretaries, waitresses, cleaners etc are only sweet servile drones, playthings or decorations.

So while miners storm police stations, is it a waste of time worrying about the role of art models and other casual workers in revolutionary class struggle? Ultimately we want to render all those categories meaningless, and bring about a society that doesn't force us into any of them for a wage. For those of us in dispersed or isolated workplaces - as well as the unwaged - simply cheering from the sidelines, or adding extra bodies to 'Days of Action' is not the most effective form of solidarity or the way to change our lives. Riots of course have their good points, but we also need to develop more sustained ways of combining. After all, when the smokes cleared and you still have to go to work what will you do until the next one?

I want to finally raise some questions about what we mean when we talk about 'key sectors'. Its often connected with a notion of the labour being productive, as well as the worker being in a strategic position to disrupt capital. Take the postal service, for example. Socially useful? One postal worker recently observed that the bulk of the mail he processes includes bills, adverts, and other bits of bureaucracy and corporate swill. Even within areas of work considered to be vital (I assume we'll still be sending letters and phoning each other after the revolution), most wage labour services capital, not social needs, and useful content is distorted by the system within which it operates. The waste of most work is even greater in womens work in any sector, since it involves servicing male egos and gratification as well as capital. For this reason, class struggle and struggles around sexuality intersect in the lives of most women, waged as well as unwaged.

When a large section of the working

class doesn't work within the key industries, and even less do anything 'productive', we cant create our own hierarchy of struggle within the class based on that division. The idea that one part of the class will act as vanguard for the rest of us isn't limited to Leninoids and party-pushers - I've heard anti-authoritarians talk that way too. Three years ago it was unemployed blacks, now its the miners who'll lead the way. We've seen how developments take place in which one group might become the most active in confronting state/capital - and the fact different sections of the class are in the front line at different times shows the mistake of thinking one or the others a vanguard. When our fantasies and desires of active resistance reside in one group of workers, it shows our own frustration.

Real solidarity means discovering and developing forms of resistance appropriate to whatever situation we find ourselves in, and taking that resistance as far as it can go.