

workers

# PLAYTIME

Popular yarns of class warfare

FEBRUARY 10p

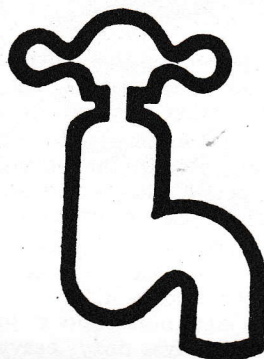
## all washed up?

As we write, the consequences of the first national waterworkers' strike have not been as serious and as far-reaching as had been predicted. It is perhaps surprising that the strike took place at all. On four occasions in the past four years the waterworkers seemed poised to take action, but withdrew at the last minute. The divisions imposed by the union structures, and the bureaucratic negotiating procedures have succeeded, in the past, in cooling things down and preventing the workers themselves from bringing their own strength to bear. For example, in 1980 NUPE waterworkers voted on three occasions to strike, but were held back by the General and Municipal Workers Union. Last year a majority of waterworkers voted to strike, but their intentions were lost in the bureaucratic tangle of the unions Joint Negotiating Committee.

This year it has not proved possible to hold back the growing militancy of the waterworkers. The main reason for this is not difficult to see. Whereas in 1975 the waterworkers had approximate parity with other public utility workers, at present water workers are getting at best around £135 per week as against £165 for electricity workers. (These figures are the ones published — there is plenty of evidence which suggests waterworkers normal pay is often well below the sum quoted.) This is partly due to the waterworkers own complacency during negotiations — gas and electricity workers have been ready to take strike action. It is also due to the fact that electricity and gas workers have been able to use modernisation programmes as a lever in pay bargaining.

The water service, on the other hand, has been a government target for strict controls and cuts in investment — (since 1973 capital expenditure has been halved). The fact that the water service was close to collapse in many departments before the strike has been obscured by the apparently

from financing the industry from taxation, to financing it from charging the full cost to customers. Indeed the government aims this year to transform the water service into a tax collector by inflating charges to consumers a further 15% — which will make a profit for the Treasury. By contrast the waterworkers full pay claim would add only 2½% to costs.



### DRAIN ON RESOURCES

The government is playing this game in much the same way as it played the Health Service dispute — arguing that the workers' actions are a drain on public resources needed to maintain public health and safety. In reality, the opposite is the truth. Only when the workers have been defeated can the government's plans to restructure and cut back services on its terms and at the public expense be guaranteed. From the waterworkers' point of view, this specifically means the dismantling of the National Water Council and diffusing their potential strength by conducting wage negotiations at local level.

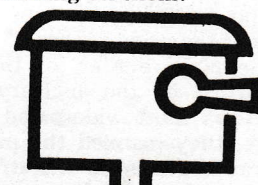
It is true that certain clumsy interventions by the government, which has been riding high on the tide of recent victories, has inflamed many waterworkers. But their inexperience in industrial action, and their willingness to abide by union guidelines, has greatly restricted the effectiveness of the strike. In spite of their power as workers in an essential service, they are in danger of handing victory to the government on a plate.

'Strikers' are unblocking filters and maintaining pumps in the sewage works, installing standpipes and even keeping factories in business by repairing mains. Yet their only hope of victory is to bring the maximum pressure to bear as quickly as possible. We have already seen how the State has won a number of

victories (over the steel workers, the civil servants, NHS workers) by grinding down the workers patience and financial reserves.

### 'TORY' PIPE DREAM

Once again, the strike is being used for this purpose whilst attention is focussed on negotiations, where the management side is led by an ex-railway union organiser and an ex-Tribunite MP. The opposition and the broader labour movement will try to concentrate blame on Tory interventions. In the meantime, the media will have plenty of time to concoct horror stories about old ladies being cut off, 'right to work' protests etc. The government is clearly hoping that this will put enough pressure on workers for them to give up. To win, waterworkers will have to maximise the effectiveness of their own actions, and physically prevent any other workers from scabbing on them.



The occupations which took place at a number of water supply and sewage plants on February 8th were an essential first move in this direction. If waterworkers can capitalise on the low pay offers made in the gas and electricity industries (both below 5%) and extend active solidarity with the gas and electricity workers, this could prove decisive.

Reports that management and white collar staff are being paid up to £1000 a week for their scabbing, together with the bogus productivity offers, have greatly increased waterworkers determination not to give in. The unions have found themselves manoeuvred into a corner which could make it very difficult for them to negotiate a sell-out.

There is much that we can do to help them. The government and media are presenting the strike as a natural disaster — Encouraging people to see it as the 'natural' thing to cut consumption as much as possible. We suggest: cleanliness is next to godliness. Wash as often as possible. And if that dripping tap is annoying you — turn it on full blast.



enormous rise in water rates — a result of the government policy to switch



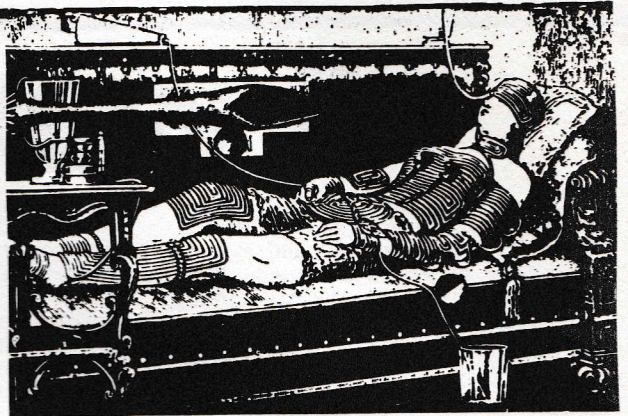
# NHS WORKERS STITCHED UP

The collapse of the health dispute in mid-December added another scalp to the trophies collected by the government in 1982. In many ways it was the most crushing defeat imposed on workers in this government's term of office. The longest running industrial dispute since the General Strike, it imposed severe financial hardships on those giving active support. The 'campaign' aroused widespread public sympathy, raised to a crescendo in the marches of the September 22nd day of action, only to peter out in ignominious defeat. The TUC was able to exploit the campaign to strengthen its grip over the poorer workers and contain militant actions, camouflaged by the rhetoric of its July congress and fake 'solidarity action'.

It is possible to identify two main reasons why the NHS workers were defeated: firstly, the illusions that industrial struggles can be won through passive manifestations of popular support, and secondly, illusions as to the nature of the trade unions.

The main burden of the struggle was carried by the ancillary workers. They took most widespread industrial actions, they manned the picket-lines, they raised funds on the streets. The role played by the nurses was essentially

## TUC-GOVT. PULL OFF ANOTHER OPERATION



one of presenting themselves as deserving of public sympathy. The euphoria over our brave boys in the Falklands was to be translated into concern for our brave girls in the hospitals. The nurses posed with policemen for the newspapers, stuck brightly coloured badges on Joe Public's lapels, and silently got on with the job while the world collapsed about them.

Although nurses do a job which basically involves dirty, heavy, manual work they are surrounded with an aura of professionalism — the sanctity of the 'caring professions'. In the unions division of labour, the RCN does its best to nurture and maintain this image. Public sympathy was translated into merely passive sympathy for the nurses, the other side of the coin being public hostility to those who put their (admittedly low) pay before patients.

With the full weight of the capitalist media behind these attitudes, 'public sympathy' only intensified the isolation of those taking action. There was in reality no NHS strike: in place of a unified action there were token stoppages and strikes by ancillary staff, and a stance of moral responsibility by the nurses and technicians. The government's great success was to reinforce these divisions with the separate pay deals for nurses and ancillaries.

### WHAT'S NEW?

Having recently buried the train drivers, the TUC turned its attention to sabotaging the struggle in the NHS. Tactics which became familiar in the steel strike of 1980 were brought into action. Every necessary step would be taken they declared, to win the dispute whilst maintaining public sympathy. In

reality, this meant:

(1) grinding down the health workers by containing financially punitive actions within a strict code of conduct. Radical trade unionists willingly took up the task of demanding the abandonment of the code of conduct, as though this in itself was enough. As usual, the threat of this 'ultimate sanction' was only taken up in the last week of the struggle (by the COHSE executive) — when the workers were already beaten.

(2) co-ordinating actions to be responsive to the progress of the TUC negotiating committee. Workers were led to believe that their own actions were only supplementary to the 'real' business of making the government see sense. This tactic has the added advantage that, when defeat does come, it can be portrayed as a sell-out by the leadership, rather than inevitable because the interests of the TUC and the government are complementary not diametrically opposed. This had recently been the interpretation put forward by ASLEF following the defeat of the train drivers, and has been echoed by leftists in countless disputes.

(3) creating a spectacle of massive solidarity which in reality only masks the empty sacrifice of workers from other sectors. This false solidarity is not based on the proletarian attitude that all workers are united by common interests. On the contrary, it is based on a division of the working class: the 'better off' sacrificing themselves to lend a helping hand to the poor and helpless. This is insulting to all workers. More importantly, it is worse than useless as a weapon in struggles. No sensible worker wants to lose

PASSIVE PROTEST  
MAKES ME WANT TO  
Puke! TO THE  
BARRICADES, SISTERS!





pay if there is nothing to be gained from it; the unions know this and that is why they call for sacrifice: it breeds disillusionment and rams home the government's message that nothing is to be gained from going on strike. On the other hand, the health workers realised that they could not win the dispute on their own. The fake solidarity of the national and regional one day stoppages prevented the health workers from actively seeking genuine solidarity.

#### BICKERING

The endless bickering and mutual sabotage by the individual unions — COHSE, NUPE, GMBU, TGWU and RCN gave the impression that only the TUC could provide unity and leadership. But the TUC is just a further mediation of the struggle: only if workers seize control of that struggle for themselves, and provide their own leadership, can they hope to win. This is emphatically not just the case for 'unproductive' workers such as in the NHS: capital as a whole is now forced to contain workers' demands as far as possible. Not only have the NHS workers been defeated recently, but also steelworkers, railworkers, BL carworkers, whilst pay has been held down at Ford Vauxhall, in the mineworking and engineering industries and innumerable other cases.

#### EFFECTIVE ACTION

If workers are to begin to reverse in 1983 the defeats of 1982, they will be forced to take their actions beyond the confines of trades unionism. The unions rigidly separate workers by trade and sector (even within unions — eg. the TGWU), and between firms. Workers must seek to generalise their struggles, not merely hope for a union call for solidarity.

In some cases this will mean demanding walkouts by fellow workers and backing up demands with physical force. (This did occur in some isolated cases in the North of England and Scotland). It means seeing through empty gestures (eg. the Geraghty affair), and seeking effective action. It means abandoning the illusion that 'public support' can win anything — with the weight of the media behind it, capital can always manipulate passive opinion to its own advantage. Essentially it means overcoming the isolation which Trade Unionism imposes on workers who take up the struggle, and seeking unified action based on the community of interests of the working class as a whole. If this does not begin to happen, we shall see more humiliating and demoralising defeats such as the one imposed on the health workers.

We Welcome Abusive And Hostile Correspondence, Unsuitable Articles And Boring Cartoons. However We Will Tolerate Excellence. Our Address Is On The Back Cover.

# Greenham — Common mistake

## *Old wine in nuke bottles*

The year of the Falklands war closed with the peace movement still as innocent, confused and middle class as ever. Its hopes were revived in the bizarre goings-on out in the Berkshire commuter belt. On Sunday 12th December 30,000 women held hands around the nine mile perimeter of the US airforce base at Greenham Common, sang peace songs, dispersed, and quietly drove home. The next day 2000 women, who had stayed behind in the cold and wet, momentarily held up the progress of the contractors who are constructing the silos for cruise missiles.

Although these protests have been spiced up with feminist rhetoric, the essential ingredients of the age-old disarmament movement were present. The threat of imperialist war and the nuclear arms build up has resulted in a massive rise in support for peace organisations such as CND throughout Europe. This is nothing new. In periods of rearmament, pacifist protest politics are essential for channeling and containing people's fear and disgust within a capitalist framework.

Before the First World War, there was the Neutrality League. Before the Second World War, there was the Peace Pledge Union. Early this century, the social-democratic parties of the Second International were committed to oppose imperialist wars. But, already integrated into the bourgeoisie political framework, their response to the outbreak of World War I was to vote war credits for 'their' national governments.

#### NUCLEAR REACTION

In the thirties, the British Labour Party was the main political force opposing rearmament, and a keen supporter of the interminable disarmament debates at the League of Nations. By the end of the thirties it was attacking the government for not prosecuting the war with sufficient vigour. It joined the war cabinet in 1940 and after the war the great reforming Attlee ministry set about building Britain's own nuclear arsenal.

Today, the Labour Party sees in the nuclear issue a nice safe campaign around which to organise some passive oppositional support. CNDers are trying harder than ever to present themselves as responsible capitalist politicians. In Europe they want to see a "nuclear-free zone". They have attached such great moral weight to this cause that the real issues have been completely obscured from view.

But even if capitalist states were impressed by moralising crusades, what would it matter if Reagan halted the deployment of cruise in Europe, and the Russians withdrew SS-20's from their western borders? Is it any great improvement if we are nuked by an SS-4? And even if nuclear weapons are

entirely withdrawn (eg. to nuke the Chinese), the destructive potential of 'conventional' weapons (nerve gas, bacteriological weaponry, non-nuclear missiles and bombs), is hardly an improvement. Yet to add weight to their arguments, many CND supporters are busily devising 'non-nuclear' defense strategies.

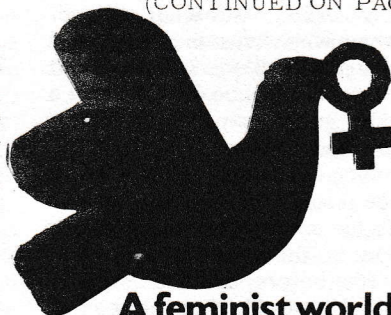
Before the First World War, pacifists and disarmers loudly protested against the race between Britain and Germany to build more and more Dreadnought battleships. In the event hundreds of thousands of workers suffered horrifying deaths in the trenches of Europe while the great battleships spent most of the war rusting in Portsmouth and Wilhelmshaven.

At Greenham Common the traditional pacifist nonsense about war being the product of the wickedness, greed or stupidity of politicians has given way to feminist nonsense about the wickedness, greed and stupidity of men. This time all will be different, because men will be cutting sandwiches and brewing tea while women oppose 'male' violence. This understanding of violence is insulting to both sexes. The Greenham protestors stereotype women as passive, non-violent and 'caring', therefore the true enemies of war, a phenomenon biologically determined by the aggressiveness of the male sex.

The organisers of the December 12th protest said they wanted no men present to exclude the possibility of violence marring their moral exhibitionism. Let us not forget the fundamental point. On Sunday the 12th, tremendous havoc could have been caused because of the tiny police presence. Instead, on the following Tuesday when the protestors had left, construction of the base was being carried out as normal.

The wars of the last century have shown that war is an essential aspect of capital's struggle for expansion and survival. The peace movements have shown that a strong pacifist movement is essential to the democratic state if it is to obscure the nature of war and finally win support for "wars to end wars" (against Russian Czarism,

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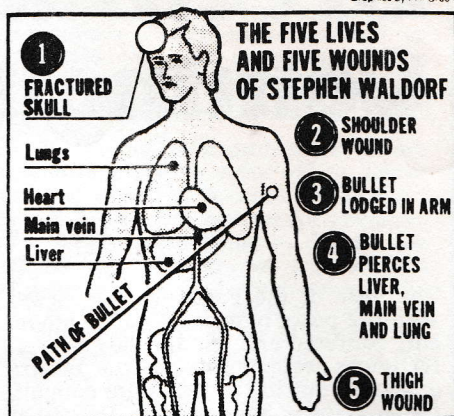
**A feminist world  
is a nuclear-free zone**



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 public 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 Kincaid 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.

## The incredible luck of Waldorf

Graphics by Phil Green



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

stified by local M.P. Clinton Davies, who insisted all contentious issues should be left to the inquest. The community leaders left boldly 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 Peoples Assoc. 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 called for a peaceful demonstration were ignored by a part of the crowd. 'Scuffles' broke out as the demonstration dispersed. Perhaps coincidentally a jewellers shop window was smashed nearby and several thousand pounds worth of stock taken. A large group of youths ran down Stoke Newington High

# London under six

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 enquiry 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 community" 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 station 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.

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 Newingtons 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 Peoples Assoc. for one into local policing. Local Councillors and left M.P. Ernie Roberts started making noises.

### ACCOUNTABILITY

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

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 real-

# foot

ity behind the current debate about 'police accountability'. At one level a sizeable section of the community's automatic response to Colin's death 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 exist 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 politico's 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 Colins 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 inc. 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

"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 Statesman 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 co-operation and not the enmity of the police".



### STRATEGIC BILLSHIT

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

such committees, without being bound by them.

### BLOCK HEADS

Newman also gestures towards 'community policing' though his vision is of a corporate management strategy involving the community policing itself. So Neighborhood 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 militar-

isation 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 Orwells animals in Animal Farm, we'll find ourselves outside looking in at them - and looking from pig to man and man to pig unable to tell the difference.

# of blue sewage

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 commanders 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 isnt 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 preventative 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

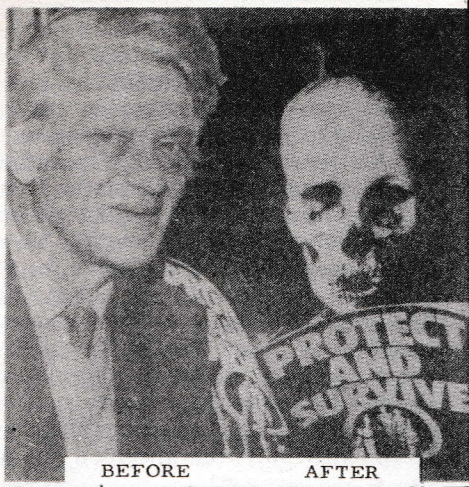
attitude to accountability the report itself hasn't been published only a ten page resume. This is guaged at the level of public concerns. Extra police are to be moved from the specialist crime squads to deal with street crime and burglaries — seen by Newman as a priority. Close reading reveals that 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 on 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 liase 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

### 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 harrasment of blacks and asians, of youth, of 'deviants', the breaking up of sit-ins and pickets. Its a choice between wasting time complaining to the police or wasting time complaining to the police committee. The fact 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 in fighting reform from 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 a unity as possible must be built around the demand 'Kill the Bill'. The task of fighting for a better society — one without either police or politicians must begin in earnest.





BEFORE

AFTER

(CONTINUED FROM PAGE THREE)

German militarism, 'Fascism', 'Totalitarianism' etc.) and "just" wars (the Falklands). They play a vital role in the democratic game by hindering the emergence of a proletarian response to war.

### LIFE IN THE FASLANE

This response is opposed to all forms of nationalism and militarism. Unlike the pacifists, we cannot argue that Britain would be better defended by rejecting cruise, unilaterally disarming etc. Our attitude must be internationalist: all weaponry under the control of capital (in any country) is weaponry against the working class (of all countries).

Our aims are not pacific, but revolutionary and warlike: we do not call for disarmament but seek the arming of the proletariat. We recognise that the ruling class cannot be brought to disarm through moral pressure, but will only be disarmed through the organised violence of an insurrectionary working class.

To talk about the working class in this context is liable to lead to great confusion.

The change in society necessary to end war - which means overthrowing the capitalist system which depends on war - cannot be brought about by 'manual workers' or 'the labour movement' - yet this is the image conjured up by the terms working class and proletariat.

In the standard leftist use of these terms housewives, the unemployed etc. have no real place - because they could contribute little or nothing to The Seizure Of Power. Gestures are

of course made to the way in which they are oppressed. But this view merely reinforces the material divisions between different sections of proletarians - and looks forward to a seizure of state power as if this wasn't just a recipe for more efficient exploitation after "The Revolution".

In talking of a proletariat we are not attempting to write off or ignore the real divisions in capitalist society - between men and women for example. Nor are we attempting to dismiss the efforts of women to expose and struggle against their oppression. We are saying that the divisions can only be finally overcome by attacking the system which produces them. It is the need for this which enables us to talk about a common class interest, and about a proletariat - those people, in other words, with a very real material interest in overthrowing capitalist society.

### THE E.N.D IS NIGH

The proletariat in this sense consists of all those, waged or unwaged, employed or unemployed, who are exploited and oppressed by capitalism and who have neither control over their productive activity, nor over the productive activity of others.

We do not underestimate the immensity of the tasks involved in building an effective opposition to militarism. The Falklands war has shown how strong a hold nationalism and militarism have on the British working class alone. It was ample demonstration of how defeated and demoralised the working class is at present.

But our starting point must be in clear opposition to all forms of nationalism, including the pacifist and utopian nationalism of the anti-nuclear and peace movements.

### Meanwhile in France.....

#### RIOTERS ATTACK POLICE STATION

Police used tear gas yesterday to break up rioters in Vireux, northern France, who attacked a police station with petrol bombs, stones and metal bolts. Shops and houses were boarded up in the border town.

The rioters were a group of anti-nuclear protesters demonstrating against the siting at Chooz of a nuclear power plant. They were joined by steelworkers angry at the planned closure of their plant, and extremists from Paris.—Reuter.

# s.s. stri

On January the 7th., Birmingham DHSS staff who'd been on strike since September reluctantly voted to accept a sell-out cooked up by the DHSS and 'their' unions, the CPSA and SCPS. Two days before Oxford SS staff had accepted a similar sell-out. This strike was a classic example of union sabotage.

The strike began in Birmingham's Erdington office on Sept. 19th. An SS officer on the public counter found two others had reported in sick and there was already a queue of 80 claimants. Unable to take the pressure, she walked out, followed by most of her colleagues. The incident was the last straw in a long-running dispute over understaffing. Rising unemployment has seen SS work loads rise while staff levels have been cut as the Tories slim down the civil service. This was achieved by a block on recruiting permanent staff. Management made up levels with casuals, recruited from the unemployed, hired during peaks of work like the summer. Casuals have no job security, more importantly for management they are not included in civil service statistics, which thus show a 'reduction'. One union estimate is that they form ten to twenty per cent of the SS and DoE. But their use puts further pressure on full-time staff who have to train each lot in and oversee their work.

Understaffing is a nationwide problem - earlier last year, other offices struck and got extra staff. But after balloting members the CPSA SS section declared there was "insufficient support" (in reality, a small majority) for a strike, over staff levels nationwide. Negotiations continued at local level - in Birmingham these broke down, staff wanting 10% more permanent staff, management offering more casuals.

#### INSUFFICIENT SUPPORT

The strike was an embarrassment to both unions. Having ruled out strike action over staffing and conditions, they were concentrating on plans for a big pay claim in 1983. Delicate negotiations were underway among all 8 civil service unions to co-ordinate another useless united front of the sort that screwed up the civil service strike. Engaged in this vital work, actual rank & file militancy was seen as a wasteful drain on the strike funds. Both unions have been losing membership and hence revenue. So from the start, the executives concern was to end the strike quickly at minimum cost.

This posed problems - local militancy was very strong. On Sept. 17th, 26 Midland SS offices held a one-day strike, and offices nationwide were threatening support action. The unions went for a programme of slow escalation, pulling one extra Birmingham office out weekly. They negotiated with DHSS management, producing a codification of what was already on offer. The SCPS executive rejected it, the CPSA recommended it to the strikers, who rejected it. An official regional one-day strike on Sept. 24th closed 29 of 38 W. Midlands offices called out. 7 E. Midlands offices struck in sympathy, as did isolated offices elsewhere. The executives clearly hoped this would be a harmless outlet to dissipate local militancy. However, 2 days later Oxford SS also came out on strike.

### CAREER OPPORTUNITIES No. 1: Unemployment Centre Workers.

Our regular look at finding work and overcoming the horrors of redundancy and worthlessness.

A NEW centre providing help and advice for Hackney's 17,000 unemployed has opened in the borough.

The centre which is at present housed at the Central Baths on Lower Clapton Road is one of 15 in London.

It aims to:

- Bring unemployed people together.
- Offer advice and counselling.
- Organise educational programmes.
- Provide for practical activities and
- Push for concessions for unemployed people.

Two full-time officials have been appointed to help achieve these ambitions. They are Ian Lambert from

Haringey Advice Centre and Lesley Lee from the Brighton Unemployed Centre.

#### BACK-UP

Behind them is a committee of borough councillors, trades council officials and representatives from the ILEA, Hackney Council for Racial Equality and Hackney Association for the Disabled.

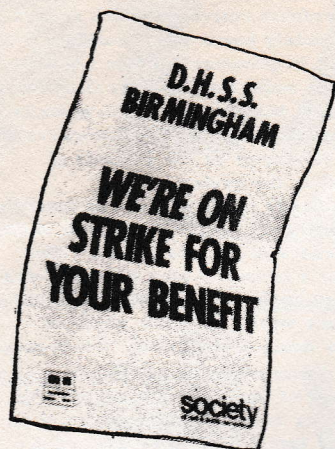
It is hoped that out-of-work people will provide the energy for the centre and eventually be able to run it themselves.

HACKNEY GAZETTE

January 18 1983



# ke: whose benefit



## MAJOR OPERATION

The Oxford strike went back to the notorious Operation Major. A police investigation into landlords preying on homeless claimants (charging for false certificates, enabling claimants to claim rent from the SS) was turned into a high-publicity strike against 'scroungers', with the landlords as prosecution witnesses. 286 claimants were arrested on Sept. 2nd in a 'temporary' SS office (set up by police in an old school). 172 were charged and held there all day, then remanded into custody at special courts without legal representation, 137 pleaded guilty when finally tried, and went to prison - 30 days for each £67 fiddled. Police claimed a £1½m fiddle had been broken up - in fact only £60,000 was involved. 2 weeks later an internal police investigation began into faked evidence.

Oxford SS management clamped down - the large transient population living on emergency payments were told claims would no longer be processed the same day, but would now take a week. Protests forced a ministerial order on Sept. 29th to process claims the day they were made. But no extra staff were to be provided. SS staff promptly walked out, demanding 25 extra permanent jobs.

By now the strikers' demands for permanent staff were clear. The strike was presented as being about giving a better service. "It's about giving the public the service they deserve and running the system properly and efficiently!"

## CENTRISM

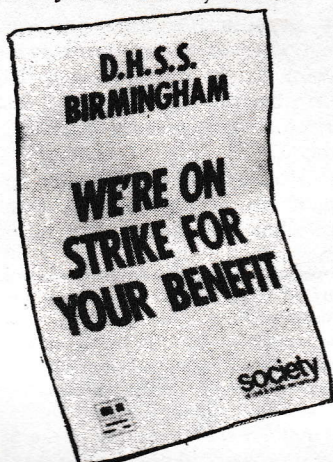
In both Oxford and Birmingham emergency payment centres were set up by SS management manned by senior officials and the Fraud Squad officers. Existing claimants on running orders for Giro's weren't affected by the strike. The centres made flat rate emergency payments (£22 pw single, £36 married.) to people making new claims. However, no rent or heating supplements were paid, and school leavers living at home got no benefit at all. The unions initially supported the emergency centres. The strikers opposed them throughout and demanded the members in them be called out.

Negotiations produced a 'new' package deal - no extra permanent staff, 7 temps for Oxford, 45 for Birmingham, an agreement on extra advance recruiting, two reviews: one of inner city problems in local offices, another of staffing in local offices to be completed by March. This was what was on offer before -- what was new was a no-strike

pledge (including overtime bans) until the reviews were completed and co-operation with work studies. Again the SCPS exec. rejected it, the CPSA again recommended acceptance. Alister Graham, CPSA gen. sec., put it to a mass meeting in Birmingham on Nov. 19th -- he was shouted down and the package rejected.

## CONSPICUOUS MILITANT'CY

The CPSA leadership realised it had completely misread the level of militancy, and that drastic efforts were now called for to break the strike. In what appeared a complete about-turn, they called a nationwide one-day SS strike for Dec. 3rd, agreed to pull out more Midlands offices and instructed its members in the temporary payment centres to stop working (this had no effect). A one day CPSA conference on pay strategy for the 1983 claim was set for Dec. 9th. -- it was decided to use this occasion to hold an SS section conference to discuss 'escalation'. The SCPS agreed to join the one day strike.



Underneath, nothing had changed. One day strikes are useless, and no effort was made to build support in any case. Indeed, the CPSA refused to allow a bulletin outlining the strikers case to be produced. They clearly hoped the one day action would be a flop, thus putting extra pressure on the strikers to accept the deal on offer.

In the event it closed 360 of 514 SS offices. In Birmingham, 1000 strikers marched to a rally where union officials made the traditional militant noises.

The Dec. 9th. conference agreed an exec. plan for an all-out strike from Jan. 17th. All regions were to be balloted and another conference on Jan. 12th was to ratify this. This allowed the issue to be delayed a month with every opportunity for there to be "insufficient support", or for strikers to lose heart. In any case, the SCPS rejected the idea of an all-out strike (unlike the CPSA they would be committed to full strike pay). Instead it proposed a 5-week programme of selective regional action involving the SS Giro computers at Reading and Newcastle. The two unions agreed to start talks to bring these plans into some kind of harmony.

## ALL OUT STRIKEBREAKING

Negotiations continued over the same package. The unions were putting the a case based on SS budget underspending and the fact that staff levels were below what the SS itself considered necessary.

MPs were lobbied to this effect. Behind this rhetoric, they were clearly signaling that any concession would be enough for them to recommend acceptance.

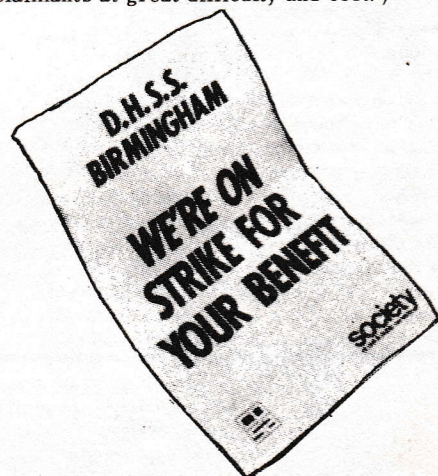
On 17th. December Birmingham strikers voted overwhelmingly to continue the strike. That week, the necessary concessions were made -- the no-strike clauses were dropped and minor re-wording done.

A CPSA exec. meeting on Dec. 23rd called to discuss finances unanimously agreed to recommend acceptance as "the only realistic course open". Consultations over the all-out strike were stopped -- without consultation. The next day a joint unions/DHSS statement was issued announcing that the unions would recommend an end to the strike, and were agreeing co-operation over the staffing levels. The beauty of the situation for the executives was that the earliest that mass meetings of the strikers could be called was two weeks away, after the Christmas holidays. Plenty of time for the strikers to accept the inevitable while enjoying a Christmas on strike pay. In the event the scheme worked.

The week after the votes to return to work, the Council of Civil Service Unions agreed the 1983 pay claim. £12 for the lowest paid, 10% for middle grades, an £85 minimum wage, a 35-hour week. An SCPS amendment proposing that local union organisation prepare for a grass-roots campaign in support of the claim leading, if necessary, to an all-out strike, was defeated. The membership 'wouldn't support it'.

## ISOLATION

Union sabotage is no surprise. The unions aim was to trade worsening working conditions for a "big" pay rise. Faced with militancy over conditions they did their best to limit it to small areas, and restrict struggle to useless activities like one day strikes. Taking charge of negotiations they traded the strikers demands for union participation in a 'joint review' with "ministerial involvement". The inability of the strikers to rapidly extend the strike themselves meant that their sacrifices were ultimately useless. The unions knew that only by refusing to cooperate with emergency centres and shutting down the benefit computers could sufficient pressure be put on the govt. to win the strike. (Local authorities would then be obliged to make emergency payments to claimants at great difficulty and cost.)





Indeed while the strike was on the CPSA voted to reverse previous policy and do all those things in any future strike over pay. As CPSA senior vice-president said: "Public sympathy never won a dispute for anybody." In this strike however the strikers were deliberately isolated - understaffing was treated as a local problem to be negotiated, and the strikers were 'special cases' due to 'appalling working conditions'.

Leftists took up this theme parrot fashion, and called for solidarity for the strikers as they belonged to an important sector of white collar militancy. Such calls for solidarity largely fell on stony ground. Oxford Claimants Union did collect 900 signatures from claimants supporting the strike - but at a subsequent national claimants union conference they were notably isolated in arguing for such support. Most claimants and ex-claimants regard calls for solidarity as a sick joke in light of their experiences at the hands of the SS.

#### BLOODY MINDED

At first sight this refusal of solidarity might seem reasonable. Some SS officers try to help claimants - but aside from pressure of work the system itself strangles any good intentions. Staff who appear pro-claimant are swiftly moved off the public counters if not back into the dole queue. And many SS staff allow themselves to adopt the attitudes towards claimants the system encourages. No-one who's spent any length of time in SS offices will fail to have their share of horror stories. At this point the leftist argument about the increased militancy in SS offices has to be seen in context. The CPSA and SCPS were traditionally right wing unions. Only recently have the effects of cuts and pay restraint had an effect on militancy. This has been increased by the influx of younger, often better educated people into the civil service. Many having resigned themselves to a shitty clerical job opt for the SS as an opportunity to do "something socially useful". As a result militancy often goes hand in hand with leftist ideas. (One result the Broad Left capture of the CPSA exec. last year - where they have acted like any other bureaucrats.) However militancy is most commonly expressed in the form of bloody-mindedness about the job. And bloody-mindedness is by no means automatically channelled into class struggle. It can as easily be directed at claimants and fellow workers, as at management (often enough at both).

Refusal of solidarity on these grounds is understandable - but also unjustified. Misdirected bloody-mindedness is scarcely unique to SS staff - its general among workers who have to deal with "the public" or "the customers". Its quite unreasonable under the circumstances to demand that SS staff act like angels before supporting them.

#### WHOSE BENEFIT?

There are more concrete obstacles to solidarity - ironically highlighted by this strike. The strike was presented as for claimants benefit, to fight for a 'better' service. Yet its quite debatable whether its in the interests of claimants for the system to run smoothly. They

certainly suffer from mistakes and delays in payment due to understaffing. They equally certainly benefit from the situation since understaffing means the policing functions of the SS are also swamped. At one level the SS have less time and manpower to harass women over cohabitation, chase people for not "genuinely seeking work" or to force people off the register - all part of the normal functioning of the system. At another level as benefits are held down below poverty line levels and people are forced to supplement them illegally, understaffing means less time spent chasing moonlighting and fiddling.

### SENTENCED TO WORK

The AUEW is urging the TUC to oppose a Government plan to pay convicted 'criminals' £60 a week to do community work. Exact details of the plan for 10,000 community work places havnt been announced but the engineers are already calling for TUC reps. on the Manpower Services Commission (who will run the scheme) to veto it. For AUEW president Terry Duffy.

"It is ludicrous at a time when we are trying to create work for kids who want it, to waste money in this way. We believe in punishment fitting the crime, not senseless charity for criminals".

Its obvious he wants kids to be sentenced to work, but it remains unclear what they are being punished for.

Many SS staff would like to see a liberalisation of at least the first of these aspects. But the social security system is an essential part of the apparatus of power wielded by the capitalist state. Given a level of poverty and unemployment its the job of the SS to maintain those affected - thus making sure the poor are not forced to organise themselves to fight for a living. But to do so at below poverty line levels - thus maintaining the incentive to find work and not lose it. SS militants who want the system to run 'properly' and to offer an 'adequate service', are only asking for this part of the states social policing apparatus to run efficiently and fairly. A fair days benefit for a fair days observance of the rules. Since in reality the system can't afford adequate benefits this is scarcely in the interests of claimants.

#### COMMON INTERESTS

Responding to calls for solidarity with crys of "Soft Cop" are unreasonable - however understandable. All of the administrative and policing arms of capitalism have swollen enormously in recent years - from the extra layers of personnel and supervisory, clerical and accounting staff in industry, to the massively increased state bureaucracy. SS workers are only different in that workers are more visibly affected by what they do. The lowest levels of the SS are as badly paid and overworked as any other section of workers. To

single them out because their activities harm other workers is illogical - 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. But the full implications of this argument must be understood - if its illogical to refuse solidarity on such grounds, its equally illogical for SS workers to seek solidarity on the grounds of defending the system.

Demands for better pay or conditions can only ever benefit particular sections of workers in the short term. What capital's forced to give with one hand it takes back with the other (whether by more work, shoddier goods or higher taxes or inflation). Consequently at this immediate level the only common interest of workers is in seeing that wherever bosses and workers are in dispute that the workers win. (The principle obviously applies through all sections of the working class - employed or unemployed, waged or unwaged). That equally means refusing to take the pressures and divisions the system imposes out on each other, but turning them back on the bosses and the system they administer. At times like the present when bosses have been frightened into acting tough by increased competition and falling profits, and workers have been cowed by the fear of unemployment, solidarity at this level is particularly important. The string of defeats over the last couple of years demonstrates this all too clearly.

#### SOLIDARITY

To the extent that workers allow themselves to be isolated by capitalism and accept without challenge the divisions it imposes - to the extent that they follow its rules and discipline and cheat one another - the possibility of solidarity is diminished and each isolated section is more easily kept down.

But beyond the short term, the common interest of workers isn't in seeing the system run "properly" - in capitals terms that can only mean making sufficient profit to buy off discontent - and today capitalism can't even do that. Our common interest is in seizing control of our lives and activity. In overthrowing the things - wage labour, commodity production, the exchange economy and the state - which prevent us creating a world based on our needs and desires. Genuine solidarity can only begin to emerge when solidarity with one another's defensive struggles against the attacks of capital, turns to the offensive in common struggle to overthrow it. Not for the working class to capture and control the system - but for the working class to overthrow class society, to abolish themselves as functionaries of the system along with the system itself.

It is because of this that there is genuine difficulty in responding to calls for solidarity of the sort made by the DHSS strikers. Because genuine solidarity can only begin at the point at which workers are ready to confront and subvert their own functions.

WORKERS PLAYTIME is produced by some members of the London Workers Group. The LWG is an open discussion group involving anarchists, councillists, autonomists and anyone else interested in workplace class struggle from a revolutionary perspective. It meets every Tuesday at 8.15pm, upstairs at the Metropolitan Pub, 95 Farringdon Road, E.C.1 (Two mins. Farringdon Tube). Anyones welcome to join in (except party recruiters!). If you want to know more but can't face meeting us, or if you want a copy of our irregular bulletin (its free but send a stamp) then write to: Box LWG, c/o Little A, C1 Metropolitan Wharf, Wapping Wall, London E.1. (correspondence only). Published and Printed by the London Workers Group. Our thanks to Little A printers and Aldgate Press without whom.....