

WORKERS

POPULAR YARNS OF CLASS WAR

August 1984 30 pence

PLAYTIME**UNDERMINING THE SELL OUT**

WHAT WE'RE STANDING IN : Coming Clean on the Miners Strike

As this issue of Playtime is published the miner's strike enters its 24th week. A national delegate conference has rejected the NCB's 'final' offer, and voted to continue the strike indefinitely. The NCB's campaign for a return to work linked to the annual holidays has been a failure, as even their 'independent' house journal, the Times, has been forced to admit. The continued efforts of the women's support groups organising and distributing food has alleviated some of the desperate hardship caused by the strike, and provided a remarkable demonstration of practical solidarity. And in recent weeks there have been clear signs that many strikers have become more than ever determined to continue the fight to the finish. Not just evident in miners insistence that they would sooner see pits close than be starved back, but in the escalation of organised sabotage. A series of arson attacks on transport belonging to the NCB and private contractors has dramatically raised the level of attacks, which had already caused £1 million pounds worth of damage to NCB property to the end of July. Appeals by NUM officials to stop have been ignored and activities reached a peak on August 7th when several hundred strikers toured two Nottingham pits and the local NCB headquarters during the early evening (when police presence was minimal) attacking windows and cars and dispersing as the first police reinforcements arrived. Though evidently only involving a minority of strikers these are the first welcome signs of organised attempts to by-pass both the unions useless set piece mass picketing and the hitherto successful police operation preventing it from succeeding. Similarly the police assaults on mining communities are more regularly meeting violent resistance.

Against this it's also clear that the overall direction and control of the strike remains firmly in the hands of the NUM executives, and the majority of strikers are not actively involved. In this context the prospects for what can be won remain what they were 3-4 months ago. The gap between NUM and NCB at the last set of negotiations in July had narrowed considerably – the demand for the NCB to verbally withdraw its current plans was dropped and short term guarantees given over five pits. The difference was simply over how to set the criteria for closeability in future NUM/NCB bargaining. Scargills 'militant' demands that a settlement will have to include items like a four day week, an improved wage offer and early retirement, are simply signals to the NCB that a settlement will have to include such items as sweeteners if an 'agreement' on the basis for future closures is to be sold to the miners.

For anything better than a face-saving sell out to be achieved the strike would need to become more solid and be successfully extended in conjunction with other groups of workers. Though the

In this issue of Playtime we're not going to go into a detailed account of events in the strike of the sort we have given in the past. We believe it's important for all militants and revolutionaries to be able to make for themselves as accurate an estimate as possible of the prospects and significance of any given strike (or any other instance of class struggle) in its own terms. One of the motivations for producing Workers Playtime was our dissatisfaction with the constant attempts to look at events through the rose tinted spectacles of preconceived ideas – and with the ludicrous ideas allowed to

prospect of another dock strike is there over the blacking of coal destined for Ravenscraig steel works, and the rail work to rule planned for September 10th will undoubtedly affect some coal movements, by themselves these are far from enough. As it becomes clear that coal stocks at power stations and existing pit head stocks will last until the new year the only hope of extending the strike significantly is to stop coal movements on a large scale. The miners could not achieve this themselves without blacking by transport workers. It's already clear that they cannot expect any widespread automatic solidarity – it is also doubtful whether official instructions to workers not to cross miners picket lines will be forthcoming, for all the bluster from 'left' union leaders. It must be faced that as things stand the prospects for the sort of victory many of the miners are determined on are not rosy.

In this situation the tasks facing the strikers are not hard to see. The physical maintenance of the strike through food collection and distribution must continue. The emerging attempts by the NUM bureaucracy to take control of this

flourish by this refusal to look at what's actually happening. At this level our ambition was to demonstrate the sort of basic account of struggles which is possible even where direct sources of information don't exist. In other words to do what anyone convinced of the importance of class struggle should be capable of doing for themselves.

But this certainly wasn't our only reason for producing Playtime. We also wished to contribute positively to the debate about the importance and direction of class struggle. We believe that no struggle

(assisted by the Communist Party) must be resisted. The lessons of national control of picketing and of national and regional control of strike funds are there for all to see – consistent inertia and active sabotage of local initiative.

And the growing anger of strikers must be turned in a practical direction. Direct links must be forged directly between militant pits and regions, and within mining communities, so that when one off closures restart after the strike ends, miners in the affected pits have a solidly based confidence in their ability to resist closure, or simply sell the jobs as dearly as possible. Miners must know already that when an agreement is reached over the basis for closures, they will be able to count on nothing from the NUM when closures restart – as miners in those pits closed over the last couple of years have found the hard way.

Lastly miners must directly approach transport workers to ask for blacking of coal movements. The results of relying on deals between union executives have already been seen – for example in the deals over exemptions from blacking.

however militant can win more than short term, sectional gains and that that will remain the case while capitalism dominates every aspect of society. That no change of government or system of government, no programme of reforms however 'radical' can significantly better our situation. Only the overthrow of capitalism – the system of state and exchange economy which exists in every country in the world – will end the social division and alienation, the exploitation and oppression that make up our lives. Only then will it be possible to achieve a genuine community, without racial,

sexual or class division or exploitation. The workplace clearly isn't the only place in which the revolutionary struggle to overthrow capitalism will take place. That involves overthrowing all capitalist social relations, for capitalism doesn't just dominate the workplace but all of society. However as the heart of the capitalist system — the place where capital itself is produced through our exploitation — it is where a crippling blow can be dealt by taking control of the means of production. Of course we don't simply want to run them ourselves but to create from the potential within them a society fit to live in — but that can only be done on the basis of workers seizing control away from capital. The debate about how to get from here to there was what we wished to contribute to through Playtime.

The reaction to the miners strike in those circles of people who believe like us that revolution is necessary and desirable has illustrated the scale of the problem. From the start we have seen divisions paralleling those in the miners own ranks. Some were convinced from the start that the strike was 'doomed' and that nothing could come from it relevant to revolution except an awful warning of what happens when workers don't overthrow capitalism, but stick to struggles for reforms. Others from the first were frothing at the mouth at the Significance of the strike as if it meant social revolution was just around the corner. Its necessary to avoid both extremes — the first leading to a cynical passivity, the other to frenzied activity and then disillusionment.

It seems we need to go back to basic principles.

The miners strike is important to us as fellow workers or proletarians, because it has happened at all. The last four years have seen the effects of economic crisis on class struggle — a series of defeats of groups of workers, the steady growth of mass unemployment and heavy attacks on us as capitalism attempts to rationalise itself in unsuccessful attempts to restore profitability. With all its problems the miners strike is the first serious fight by a group of workers, not over pay but over jobs. And it's the first industry-wide strike to remain solid in the face of fierce resistance from not merely the employers but also the state via the police, and equally in the face of considerable difficulties. From the start it was seen on both sides as not merely an attack on the NCB's plans but as a challenge to the government. As such it has already had an effect in boosting the morale of other sectors of workers in pursuing their own claims — the relative timidity with which the opportunities have been

taken up testifying as much to the degree to which workers had been convinced of the need for the 'new realism', as it does to the cunning of the government or the manipulations of the unions.

But the importance of the strike goes beyond the fact that it raises the general temper of class struggle by setting an example. For us as revolutionaries it is important because the experience of being involved in such a mass struggle is a radicalising one. It creates the conditions within which talking of overthrowing society becomes more than daydreaming.

Participation in intense collective struggles has the effect of changing peoples sense of the inevitability of the everyday misery of capitalism, and of their ability to act to change it.

People acquire a heightened sense of how they are exploited, and as the system reacts to their struggle, of the meaning of class divisions and the violence with which capitalism will defend them. The experience of acting collectively can expose the hollowness of 'normal' relations at work. The experience of being abused in the media sets in perspective the same sort of attack on other strikers. Together with the contact with other workers the struggle brings it can deepen the sense of having a common class identity.

The experience of struggle can lead people to admit, and express class anger. At the same time it can provide an experience of autonomy, arising from the sense of individual and collective power in activity, and from the sense of freedom from the normal constraints and institutions of capitalist society. Both experiences are transient — but they are vital in the development of class consciousness.

People can come to see through the political institutions of capitalist society as a result of their experiences. Not just the class divisions separating them from their employers, but the class role of the state and it's servants in aiding them. Not just the openly anti-worker groupings but the false friends — the socialist and leftist parties, and the trade unions. People can come to an understanding that these institutions are not eternal and unchangeable, they can acquire a sense of the possibility of things being different, being better. The experience of acting collectively, of organising their own struggle can lead to a sense of class power. It can lead to an understanding of the need for organised collective struggle to resist and challenge capitalism, and that such struggle cannot be organised through or by the institut-

ions of capitalist society, whether unions or parties.

In a struggle on the scale of the miner's strike these effects aren't confined to the workplace — as we've seen they have embraced the communities within which miners live, even their families. The experience of the struggle breaking out of the original limits of the factory or pit can lead to a sense of how the struggle is linked to other struggles. How one's own oppression and exploitation are linked to the different oppressions and exploitation of others.

Some of these elements are present in all situations of class conflict, even the most isolated and individual. The significance of mass struggles such as the miners is that the degree and intensity to which they are experienced is magnified. And on the other hand they are no longer confined to the participants — a struggle such as the miners takes place in the public sphere in a way most strikes are not. It spreads the experiences arising from the strike to all other workers — even if it is only as passive spectators.

The fact that people come to a greater sense of class consciousness as the result of class conflict, says nothing about how that consciousness will be applied, or about what conclusions will be drawn from it. Much of the experience remains just that — something which people don't have the language to articulate or discuss. And the sense of the experiences importance which leads people to radical ideas to find ways of describing and understanding their experiences, mostly leads them to ways of thinking and systems of ideas which far from challenging capitalism reinforce it, and far from leading to revolution lead to the conviction that it's impossible.

Class activity and consciousness, which arise from the experience of class conflict are the necessary precondition for coming to understand the need for and possibility of revolution — but they do not automatically create that understanding. The purpose of revolutionary organisation is organised activity to develop a better understanding of class conflict, class society and what is needed to replace them. And to develop ways of making those ideas clear and accessible to other proletarians.

The real significance of the miners' strike is to impress on us the need to develop the organisational links which can make talk of an autonomous, collective class response a reality. For us as revolutionaries, this means coming to terms with the urgency and scale of what has to be done.

MATERIAL SOLIDARITY

As the weeks pass the question of material aid for the strikers becomes more important. Inevitably after an initial enthusiasm, the amount of contributions reaches a plateau, or even falls. Since for many this is the only form of support that is possible, its important that efforts are kept up.

It is also important that wherever possible people make sure that funds go direct to help the strike rather than into the NUM national funds to pay the £115,000 a week spent on administration costs.

As the precedent for sequestration of funds has been set in South Wales it will become increasingly important to see that money doesn't get caught up in wrangling between regional executives and sequestrators, but gets to branch or pit level direct.

For those not sure of where money will go (this is particularly the case in London where official collections have been sewn up between the NUM executive and the S.E. Region TUC) should try channelling resources towards the women's support groups direct. Many local initiatives exist collecting food and also urgently needed household goods for distribution direct. Less obvious than food but just as much needed are baby food and toiletries : soap, sanitary towels etc.

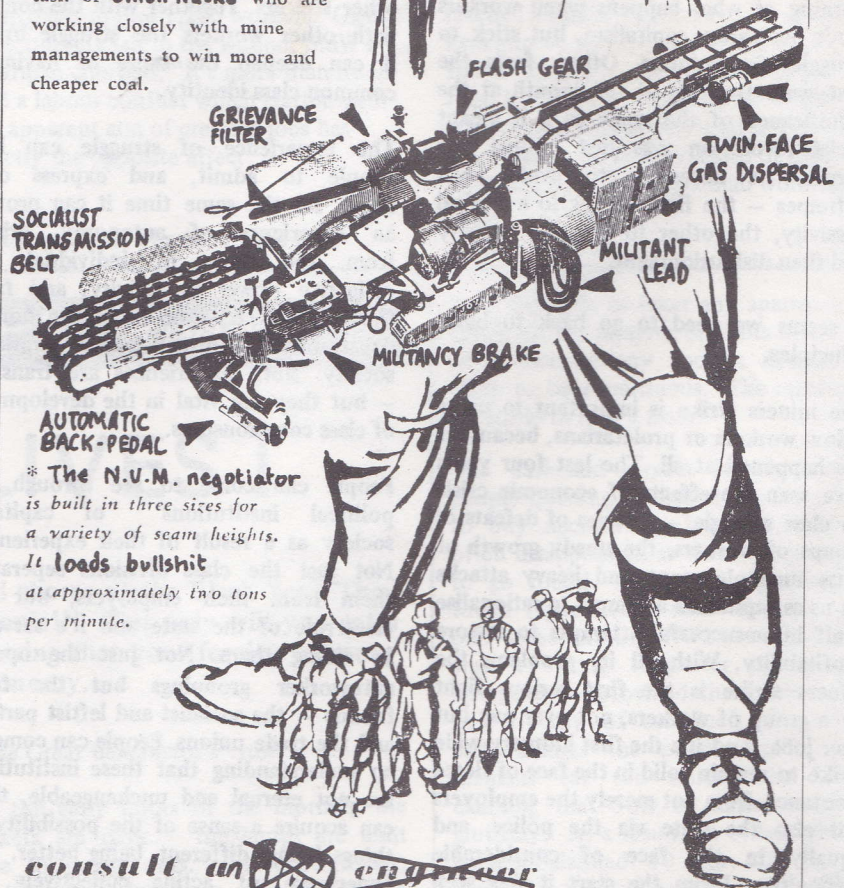
COMMUNIST PARTY COMMUNITY POLICING

In a recent issue of the New Statesman Beatrix Campbell, one of the CP feminists who have been intervening strongly in the womens support groups wrote that "The very act of collecting has been made political by a police force which appears to be desperately improvising devices to nail any public mobilisation of support for the miners". Its an accurate description of the activities of her fellow CP members on Glasgow Trades Council. Here the efforts of the CP nationwide to build their own dwindling ranks through support activities can be seen in their true colours. Local collections of various kinds — some by leftist groups — but also regular street collections by Glasgow anarchists, unemployed groups and others, were being handed over direct to local pits. The trades council circulated rumours that money was being misappropriated and threatened to call in the police if collections were not stopped. In the meantime they used their influence with the Regional Executive of the NUM to try to have the collections refused. The Exec. wouldn't go that far but did insist that pits return money — which they would accept however for their own regional funds. ■

NEGOTIATING MACHINES TO MAKE ~~MEN~~ GIANTS DWARVES

Given the tools to bring out the coal, to-day's miner has the output of a giant. His labour is multiplied a hundredfold by such machines as the **N.U.M. Bureau-Crat**, a continuous cutting and loading machine which is hitting new heights with production figures in British coalfields.

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* The **N.U.M. negotiator** is built in three sizes for a variety of seam heights. It loads **bullshit** at approximately two tons per minute.

consult an ~~engineer~~
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CLASS STRUGGLE AND THE IDEA OF REVOLUTION

When we were discussing our editorial on the miners' strike, different points of view emerged about the connection between class struggles and revolution. This article develops one of those points of view.

We do not believe that strikes, or any other mass class struggles, automatically lead to a growth of revolutionary consciousness — an awareness of the need for social revolution as the only real solution to oppression and exploitation, the alienation and loss of community that characterises this society.

To explain what we mean by this, it will be useful to look at two versions of the fallacy. One holds that workers are in possession of a merely 'trade union', or reformist, consciousness — that is to say, they behave like the dogs in Pavlov's experiments. On their own, workers may be able to work out which levers to press to obtain extra food pellets or avoid electric shocks, but by themselves they cannot divine the existence of the cage, or a world outside, since they have been born and reared under laboratory conditions (capitalism). They must therefore be either injected with a consciousness-raising drug ('revolutionary theory'), or else forcibly set free by a benevolent animal liberationist ('Revolutionary Organisation'). An obvious feature of this model of consciousness is that in order to be a revolutionary, or to fully appreciate the benefits of having a revolution bestowed upon us, it is helpful for us to be put through repeated doses of pain and failure, the more the better. For workers in struggle, repression and defeat are held to contain valuable 'lessons' which can be 'applied' later. How well we respond to the revolutionary imperative will indicate how well or badly we have absorbed these 'lessons'. In relation to the miners strike, the interpretations of the left are dealt with in Playtime 8. For now, we would point out two things. If this is a true model, it would imply that it would be possible for the working class to create communism without realising what they were doing. It would also suggest, in the light of the 'lessons' of 1926 and the last five years, that the miners would have to be worse than pig-ignorant to even think of going on strike in the first place. Our objection is simply that we are not animals, neither can we rely on capitalism and its ally, the left, to herd us towards revolution.

We can remain in the laboratory, however, to illustrate a second theory of 'revolutionary consciousness', the pathological (spontaneist) version. Certain dogs go mad or become infected with rabies ('class anger') due to the cramped conditions in the cage (alienation), or the introduction of foreign microbes (anarchism, situationism, autonomism), and go round biting all the other dogs, who in turn become so violent ('enragee') that the cage bursts open at the hinges. In one moment the scientist (bourgeois) is torn to shreds and the dogs discover absolute freedom ('take their desires for reality', 'every dog will live in his own Battersea Dogs Home', etc). Apart from the fact that, in practice, rabies causes blindness, thus making it difficult to distinguish between the scientist, the cage and the other dogs, and normally ends in early and painful death, our objection would be that being mad to that extent would make it difficult to establish communist social relations, for which it will be useful to know the difference between our desires and reality, to communicate with one another beyond just foaming at the mouth.

of militant class consciousness, nor something which simply has to be added to it — any more than revolution is simply an extension of 'militant' class activity, or an application of revolutionary 'forms' of activity to the struggle. Getting back to the miners strike, revolutionary groups have variously identified *tactics* ('generalising', 'democratising' the strike); *strategies* (rioting, vandalism, blocking roads); or *social organisms* (womens support groups, the 'community of struggle'), as containing the essence of revolution. We do not agree; revolutionary consciousness is just that — the desire for revolution — not an awareness of the best way to extend, consolidate or win a particular strike; and revolution is what it implies — the overthrow of capitalism and the development of a community in which the institutionalised divisions of class and market exchange have been dissolved; not simply the next step up from a general strike, or a mass insurrection.

A revolution cannot take place without revolutionary *ideas*, and revolutionary ideas do not emerge automatically from reformist and defensive struggles, however massive or bitterly contested. The revolutionary idea is a recognition that revolutionary change is worth pursuing, even when revolution itself may seem so far away, or what lies beyond it so hard to imagine, that to believe in it is practically an act of faith. All the same, it is a cliché that when revolutions happen, the professional revolutionaries are the most surprised; rarely do our notions of revolution match up to the reality. The revolutionary idea does not in itself help us to get from here to the revolution we desire to see; moreover, the possession of such an idea is worse than useless if we do not constantly test it against our own and others' experiences of struggle — for then it becomes mere *ideology*, a barrier to understanding and effective action.

To tell workers that revolution is a Historical Necessity, and that revolution is the inevitable consequence of an understanding gained through a direct experience of mass struggle, is usually an act of self-mystification. Very few of today's revolutionaries could honestly say that they first perceived the need for revolution in that way (unless, of course, we use that argument to 'prove' that there are no revolutionaries, as some have tried to do.) For most of us, it has been a matter of *finding the words* to express a feeling about our own lives and the world; words which we did not invent ourselves, even though we may have had to modify, edit and add to them again and again in the process of understanding what revolution means. We do not often get a chance to test this understanding by participating ourselves in mass struggle.

Little wonder that the miners, faced with a barrage of propaganda telling them that the best way for them to win the strike would be to follow a course of action which (by the way) leads logically to revolution, and that they should 'link up' with other workers because it is in their interests 'as workers', have remained impervious to such 'revolutionary theory': *as workers*, our only interest is revolution, precisely

to put an end to that status. Moreover, the assorted leftists and ideologues who infest picket lines, for the most part carry proletarian credentials which even according to their own criteria of correct consciousness would have to be forged, made up or borrowed from a friend. The most that many of them have done in the way of 'class struggle' is worrying about whether they'll be found out, or lying awake at night fantasising about a mass movement in whose ideological embrace they could hide their (self-inflicted) shame. They have forgotten that what brought them to revolutionary theory in the first place was a revolutionary *idea*, the *proposal* of a revolution which would put an end to the 'thousand dull blows and daily humiliations' which fill their lives under capitalism. So instead of using revolutionary theory as a weapon of clarity, making sense of their own experience and activity, they turn it into ideology, a shield which they can use to blank out their own past, and a mystifying veil with which they will disguise to themselves and others the possibility of a different future. This is the origin of the Party



WORKERS PLAYTIME COMPETITION : What do YOU think Scargill and Kinnock are saying to each other? Secondly : what title shall we give to the new Leftist Communist party we will be setting up in the new year? The 10 best suggestions will win FREE and EXCLUSIVE life membership.

mentality. 'Revolutionary' groups are full of people who claim to have come from nowhere in particular, and, in practice, seem to be going straight back there. But today's 'revolutionaries' cannot be compared with the generation of proletarians who will overthrow world capitalism. At least we hope not.

There are moments during struggles, those moments when autonomy is experienced, when revolution may seem an immediate possibility. When the strike or riot is over, the experience fades to a memory, frequently one that people don't have the words to express ; and the idea that revolution is possible comes to seem quite utopian. In the attempt to retain hold of this experience, people look for the language to describe it in the existing political traditions. It is at this point that every variety of leftist Creeping Jesus slithers out to meet them. For every one of these reptiles, the strike is just an opportunity to sell more papers. For those of us who believe that the only solution to the horrors of capitalism is revolution, not leftist palliatives, the need to make our ideas available is just as great . Not because holding them gives us any advantage or privilege, nor because we believe they are the last word or the definite answer, but because in spite of their failings they have helped us make sense of our own experiences, thereby convincing us that the revolutionary solution they point to is correct. There is nothing 'special' about revolutionary ideas ; they are not the property or domain of 'intellectuals', but the product of the experience of generations of revolutionary militants.

It would be tempting to fetishise the moment of clarity when anything seemed possible ; or else fall into the other trap, of trying to account for the apparent 'impossibility' of revolution — the fact that it seems so far away — by filling in the gap with comforting notions about the 'inevitable march of history', which will cause the old world to collapse and reveal communism as the only alternative to annihilation. But revolution will not be the end of history, and communism is not inevitable. There are times when capitalism appears to create conditions favourable to those who wish to destroy it ; but it will not destroy itself.

Class analysis is essential to understanding capitalist society, but it does not give us the key to the revolutionary process which will put an end to all classes. Capitalism will not lay the social, economic or political foundations of communism. The increasing integration and co-ordination of production and the market (the 'socialisation of production') which takes place under capitalism cannot create a unified proletariat ; in fact, this 'socialisation' has gone hand-in-hand with increasing social atomisation. The proletariat will only discover itself in the process of revolution. Until then, it can only be defined negatively, as all those dispossessed by capitalism. The proletariat emerges as a community of *opposition* to capitalism and *for* communism ; it starts to actively reject the divisions imposed by capitalism, as well as the roles capitalism assigns us — 'workers', 'unemployed', 'dependents', etc. Society is polarised into the most fundamental class division of all : for and against the revolution.

This 'community of opposition' is not the same thing as the sort of 'community of struggle' which has emerged during the miners' strike — an alliance between different groups (local retailers, miners' dependents, etc) acting in support of the strike and in defence of their own sectional interests, closely tied to the sectional interest of the miners. The experience of the strike is certainly extremely important, because in practice it reveals interdependence, demonstrates that social relations are not 'natural' fixed or 'eternal'. But this kind of semi-autonomous organisation is also developing in the mining communities where most of the miners are working, where the 'resolve' of the scabs has 'hardened' during the course of the struggle. Scabs are now actively campaigning for a return to work, supported no doubt by other sections of their local community (miners' families, shopkeepers, police, local employers etc), also intent on defending 'their' interests. The difference is that this last sort of revitalised community is renewed precisely around the defence of *normal* capitalist social relations — narrow self-interest, class conciliation, and so on. While the scabs have been justifying their miserable, craven posture in the way scabs have always justified their actions — HP installments to pay, TV licences to buy — the possibility for a change of attitude to capitalist reality exists among the strikers (many of whom have found that since the strike began, they hardly watch TV any more.) Significantly, some have begun to talk about the future in such a way as to suggest that in some sense they prefer being on strike to being at work, in spite of the hardship.

The kinds of organisation and activity generated by mass struggles like the miners strike cannot be said to portend revolution, or prefigure human activity and social organisation in a communist society. Nevertheless, isolated and partial struggles can disrupt the routine of daily life under capitalism to such an extent, that they give rise to moments when a proposal of revolution can suddenly seem the most blindingly obvious proposal of all. In these moments, the exhilaration of struggle, a sense of power and freedom, the intense feelings of solidarity, can make the return to normality an unbearable prospect. Such moments vanish, just when they began to seem more real than reality itself. But they leave behind them a sharper awareness of the misery of daily life, and the possibility of something different.

THE MINERS STRIKE IN LANC'S

We were pleased to receive the following article from a member of Wildcat, a revolutionary group based in Manchester. It covers their experiences of the first few weeks of the miners strike in Lancashire.

Since the strike began, Wildcat has intervened on picket lines, talking to strikers and giving out leaflets (two of which were jointly signed by the Communist Bulletin Group). We have been arguing the effects of trade unionism – both in the actions of the officials and in the heads of NUM members.

BACKGROUND

In the Lancashire area, there are eight pits owned by the NCB, employing 6,500 miners. It is a shrinking area of coal production. The closure of Cronton pit was announced on March 2nd, 1984, and it is now only operating salvage work. At Agecroft pit in Salford, there is only one coal face working. All the other pits are remnants of the old mining community around Wigan and St. Helens, and they are threatened with redundancies.

The 1977 productivity deal, initiated by Tony Benn and forced through by the NUM executive despite a National Ballot rejecting it, led to differences in pay between areas. A faceworkers basic wage is £130 a week before stoppages (surface workers get less.) Productivity bonuses can be up to £100 at the most productive pits in the country – none of which are in Lancashire.

Wildcat regarded the overtime ban – begun in November 1983 – as a diversion from a strike. Whether this was deliberate or not, its effect was to make the less militant miners reluctant to strike because they were short of money. However, it is defended by militant pickets, who claim the ban was effective in lowering coal stocks.

The result of the ballot in Lancs., on whether or not to strike against the NCB's redundancy and pay plans for 1984-5, was announced on March 16th. Only Bold pit had a majority in favour of striking. At the other pits (apart from Agecroft, which voted decisively against), the result was close. Overall, 59% of those who voted were against strike action. 3 days later, pickets from Yorkshire arrived throughout the Lancs. coalfield. The strike spread, thousands of miners went on strike, and coal production – for the time being – was stopped.

LIMITATIONS ON THE STRIKE : THE POLICE

The police responded to the mass picketing by setting up roadblocks on all roads out of Yorkshire, and on the motorway exits in Manchester. We were told of pickets turned away three times and escorted back to Yorkshire, before getting through. The police have mainly been concentrating on Agecroft, as the 'show pit' to be kept working. Only with the arrival of hundreds of pickets from Northumberland and Durham on May 1st., did the police become more aggressive and make more arrests. But they have been resisted. We were told of three Northumberland miners who were arrested and locked in a police van with a superintendent – they threatened to break his neck unless he let them out. He did !

LIMITATIONS ON THE STRIKE : THE MEDIA

One of the main concerns of the pickets has been the media, particularly the TV news portrayal of strikers, lies about the numbers of miners working in the local papers, and the journalists and camera crews touring the picket lines looking for violence. The 'Sun' is singled out by the miners we talked to as the worst offender. We had the pleasure of taking part in the removal of 'Daily Express' reporters from a mass picket at Golborne pit. The media is not just an enemy of the strikers in its bias and lies, but is equally effective in its suppression of information. Miners from Northumberland say that there are no power stations working in Northumberland and all the power workers are laid off. There is no news of these examples of the

picketing's effectiveness, or of workers struggles taking place in other countries.

LIMITATIONS ON THE STRIKE : THE N.U.M.

The Lancashire NUM officials made explicit that they had no wish to see the class violence of mass picketting remain on 'their' territory. Frank King, NUM Branch President of Parkside pit, said that pickets calling out 'scab' and 'blackleg', "make it hard to cross the picket line". What did he expect the pickets to say ?! Gaskell, NUM Branch Secretary at Golborne pit, commented that the "pickets were jeering and shouting", and "had a bad effect on the afternoon shift". These officials wanted control of the Lancashire area. They called a one-week official strike, for March 26th-30th, it was said to "press for a national ballot". Gaskell, however, revealed the real reasons : "Things were getting too hot with the pickets ... we decided to quieten the situation". The effect was to remove the pickets from Yorkshire, and send the Lancashire miners home.

Only the most militant miners came out to picket. At Bold pit a strike committee was elected to organise picketting. Miners were told to picket only their own pits. Consequently, they had no information, and we had to tell them what was happening at other pits we had visited. There was some 'unofficial' picketting of power stations, but the pickets were told not to do that until union leaders had met. The pickets we spoke to said they didn't want a national ballot – it was unnecessary as the strike was growing. At Sutton Manor and Bold pits, there were disputes about safety cover. Pickets at these pits told us "we're staying out next week whatever the Lances



NUM decide."

CONFUSION

What the Lancs NUM did decide, at a delegate meeting on March 31st, was to call off the strike action. This set the scene of confusion which has plagued the Lancashire miners ever since. Agecroft returned to work, Bold and Sutton Manor stayed out, Cronton kept working salvage, and miners at other pits were divided. The pickets didn't know what the local NUM was doing, or what the officials' attitude to the strike was.

Following the National NUM conferences in Sheffield on April 12th and 19th, when the ballot rules were changed, and the area strikes re-affirmed, Lancashire leaders were concerned not to return to mass picketting where they were not in control. At an area NUM delegate meeting in Bolton on April 27th, a decision was taken to "ask" miners to join the strike. It was later reported that "many branch secretaries had no mandate to vote either way." There had been no consultation at all with the miners. The union removed workers completely from decision-making, while obviously they wanted to participate. There was mass-lobbying of all union meetings. We were told at Sutton Manor pit that half the miners there wanted to attend the first area delegate meeting, but only one coach was going.

The pickets told us that the last Lancs NUM meeting was arranged to find a way of sending them back to work, which is why thirty of the lobbying miners organised a sit-in and occupied the NUM headquarters at Bolton. They wanted to prevent further meetings, saying "you don't need a meeting to run the strike - only to call it off." Sid Vincent, Lancs NUM General Secretary, is hated by the strikers for saying different things to different people. During the sit-in he said NUM meetings were cancelled because he wouldn't cross the picket line at Bolton.

While this sit-in was going on, the message from the union on the picket lines at the pits is "Work normally and don't cross the official picket lines." No-one knows what this means! On May 5th a striking miner from Golborne pit showed a letter saying "from this afternoon, the strike is official at Golborne." He had been on strike for eight weeks.

On May 8th, Vincent declared the strike in Lancashire official. The sit-in ended, but there was some feeling that they should have stayed and used the NUM facilities to print leaflets themselves. Everyone on the picket lines knew that many fewer miners had been working, due to the presence of 300 Northumberland and Durham pickets - not due to Sid Vincent.



DEMANDS OF THE STRIKE

Miners told us that the strike was to make sure that no pits were shut until they were worked out. It is obvious that when a pit is 'worked out', it is not that there is literally no coal left, nor is it anything to do with peoples' need for coal or jobs; it is what is considered economically viable by the bosses. We argued the need to go beyond this, at least to include the pay claim and grievances over working conditions. This would be one way to involve miners who were reluctant to strike. Some miners thought that once pit closures were settled, then the pay claim and all other matters would be settled. No-one thought they could alter the demands of the strike. It was up to Scargill.

YORKSHIRE PICKETS

Lancashire miners were suspicious of 'their' local union, and consequently were more interested in ideas of self-organisation, such as organising picketting themselves, and tape-recording union meetings. On the whole, older miners had less faith in Scargill than the younger ones - who mainly made up the mass pickets. The pickets from Yorkshire were more keen to defend *all* NUM actions, although we heard an interesting story from a picket from Selby in Yorkshire. We asked why Yorkshire miners did not support the South Wales fight over redundancies in January 1983. He told us that pickets from South Wales arrived at Selby, a meeting was called, and the miners there agreed to strike. But the Branch NUM officials were divided, and as a result of their equivocations, the action ended in a one-day token strike. He said he thought it would have been better to strike then, last year, when there was more support.

COAL MOVEMENTS

Coal is only supposedly being moved from pitheads to hospitals, old and handicapped peoples' homes, schools and miners' families. In fact, union officials are issuing vast numbers of dispensations for factories using coal. Pickets at Sutton Manor told us that union convenors at local factories had made agreements with the NUM to take coal if it was used for heating the factories, and not for manufacturing. If workers had had collections for the miners, coal was being taken to those workplaces. At Plesseys in Liverpool, workers were being made redundant. The unions there were campaigning for higher redundancy payments - and arranging with the NUM for coal to go in and keep the factory operating!

ON THE PICKET LINES

The numbers of active Lancashire pickets is tiny. Since the strike began, at any time there has been a maximum of about 100. Thousands of miners are at home, for the whole idea of being on strike is based on not turning up to work, and waiting for victory to be negotiated. The active pickets realise the need to combat this. They said they need more pickets to stop all the mines, the power stations, and all coal moving. They have had some successes: the NCB machinery works has been closed, 90% of train drivers are refusing to move coal from Warrington and Wigan, and despite what the papers say, very little coal has actually been mined here since the start of the strike.

We argued the crucial importance of active participation in actually controlling the strike, and the strength of collective action. The pickets agreed, saying how you "saw things from the other side" when you were actively picketting. But the shortage

of pickets led to demoralisation, as day after day, they watched local miners going in to work. They were unable to picket power stations as there were too few of them to resist police aggression, and they were unable to stop coal moving from a massive local coal dump. This led to desperation, the lowest point being before the arrival of the Northumberland pickets on May 1st. The Lancashire miners turned to sabotage: NCB lorry tyres were slashed, nails spread, and conveyor belts cut through. We were told: "If we can't stop them one way, we have to do it another."

SPREAD THE STRIKE!

The crucial point about the limitations of the strike so far, is that *all* the miners we have talked to, are aware of how vital the strike is for the whole working class — in the fight for our interests, to show workers can get the upper hand over the bosses. *But* there is a reluctance to argue that the strike should therefore be spread beyond the miners. Time and again they say "we must get all the miners out first." We say it's the same fight for all workers, that no jobs or working conditions are safe in this crisis, but the miners have been approaching other workers as trade union members. For example, there are two opencast pits in the area, not owned by the NCB, and with workers in the TGWU not the NUM, so they are still mining coal even though they are in their own dispute over pay and conditions. Lorry drivers in the TGWU who have been threatened with the sack if they refuse to cross picket lines, are left isolated in a personal dilemma, and so pickets have let them cross. The response must be collective, from the workers themselves, not directives of general support from union leaders to individual members.

Active miners had visited local factories to collect money, and told of their embarrassment and humiliation when doing this. We said that the arguments of the strike, not buckets for money, should be taken to other workers, especially those with their own struggles. Rather than diverting all energy into picketing Nottinghamshire and Agcroft pit in Lancashire, if miners joined their strike with other workers, the scab miners would see the potential in a strong movement and join in.

Even within the mines, on the picket lines the first question is "what union are you in?" On a picket line at Parkside pit, we saw all non-NUM members drive in to work, not stopped at all by the pickets. When we visited Bold pit in May, the pickets we spoke to thought that the canteen workers ought to be on strike too. But, they said that *they* couldn't tell them that. "I'm just a worker — I've no authority" was what they said, and asked us to go to the strike committee, as they couldn't leave the picket line! This is what

being in a strong union means — workers unable to have confidence in themselves as workers, without the backing of the NUM.

Through making these criticisms, Wildcat is now greeted on the picket lines as "You're the ones who support the miners but not the union".

SIGNS OF RADICALISATION

It was the desperation of the most militant pickets in Lancashire, and the ineffectiveness of the struggle as it was being run by the union, that created an awareness of the need for more radical action. Wildcat produced a leaflet with the agreement of these pickets, urging all members of the working class to join the picket lines, and to transform the struggles of other workers into immediate joint strike action with the miners. It was to be given out as widely as possible, by the pickets as well as Wildcat members. If large numbers of non-miners turned up to the picket lines — which was not inconceivable, given local community support — then not only the present organisation, but the trade unionist preconceptions of the strike would have been challenged, and, we thought, significantly altered.

As it was, although the leaflet was well-received, it was inappropriate. We had over-estimated how far the radicalisation of the Lancashire pickets went. And after talk of solidarity by Scargill, NUR and ASLEF bosses put a stop to any strike movement on the railways, and went to negotiate. The leaflet also coincided with a change in the NUM's tactics for controlling the strike, which pushed the pickets further back into the union's grasp. About 300 miners from Northumberland and Durham arrived to form daily mass pickets throughout the Lancashire coalfield. In contrast to self-organised mass picketting being an expression of the collective strength of the working class, what is happening at the moment is a totally controlled, military-style operation. Scargill is himself directing mass picketting nationally. The individuals involved are simply so much cannon-fodder, in set-piece confrontations with the police, such as at Agcroft pit, or, on a larger scale, at the Orgreave coke works in Yorkshire. The local NUM officials have little fear of such rituals. Militant workers are given their role to play in the strike in these mass pickets, giving the illusion of positive activity while preventing them from radicalising their own tactics and demands.

Miners in Lancashire feel there is less need to become involved, as the strike has been taken out of their hands. The strike committee organises pickets from a locked room at Bold Miners Welfare Club, which is being used to accommodate people. The initiative for action and the ability to move

the strike forward beyond its original aims, has been removed. The NUM seems to have captured this potential and diverted it onto strictly limited terrain. The recent attempt of Lancashire NUM to expel the miners who are still working, is another way of re-capturing the loyalty of militants.

POSTSCRIPT

As this is being written, the miners strike continues. Wildcat will continue to analyse events and respond with propaganda. We have learnt a lot from our interventions in this strike so far. This will not be our last word on the matter.

H., Wildcat

4th June 1984

Wildcat can be contacted, and copies of their leaflets can be obtained, by writing to:

**Wildcat, c/o Autonomy Centre,
8-10 Gt. Ancoats St., MANCHESTER 10**



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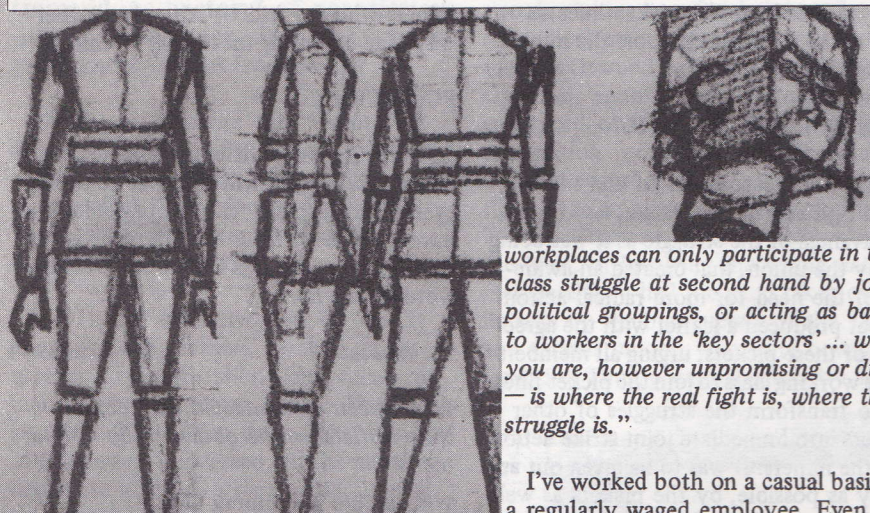
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**Workers Playtime c/o 84b Whitechapel
High St, London, E1.**

The LONDON WORKERS GROUP is an open discussion group involving autonomists, councilists, anarchists and anyone else interested in workplace class struggle from a revolutionary point of view. It meets every Tuesday at 8.15, upstairs at the Metropolitan Pub, 95 Farringdon Road, EC1 (2 mins Farringdon Tube). Anyone is 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 free bulletin (a stamp would be nice), write to: London Workers Group, c/o 84b Whitechapel High St, London, E1.

ART/CLASSES



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 shitbags 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 it's 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 abuse 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 'Playtime' (August '83) 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 there's a lot of people, mostly women, who have done that work at one time or another. It's 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 security 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 just 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 £1000 (none of

"Before developing detail and subtlety of form, we must learn to think of the figure as a series of solid volumes which can move in relation to one another. The underlying forms of these volumes can be viewed as simple blocks based on the cube, cylinder, or sphere. Artists throughout history have based their initial visual consideration of a figure on this principle.

The most important blocks or masses are the upper and lower thorax (rib cage and pelvic girdle), which govern the position and direction of the blocks representing the head, neck, and limbs. It is useful to practise bending and twisting these blocks, bearing in mind the drawings on the previous page. In this way, the figure will reveal itself as being solid from the outset, and this conception of the figure as a series of simple masses is invaluable in constructing imaginary figures seen from different eye levels and viewpoints."

— From an 'Art' textbook

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.

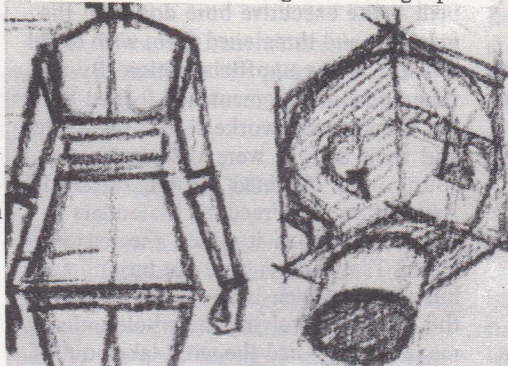
Perhaps an obstacle to generalising this basic day-to-day stropiness as class struggle is that we don't directly confront an employer most of the time. Most often models are employed by ILEA or some other local education authority, but models change their venues very frequently or the venues change them. 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 it's 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, there's no chance that we can gain the same image of

heroism, dedication in doing work that is 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, presumably 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

'key sectors'. It's often connected with a notion of the labour being productive, as well as the worker being in a strategic posit-



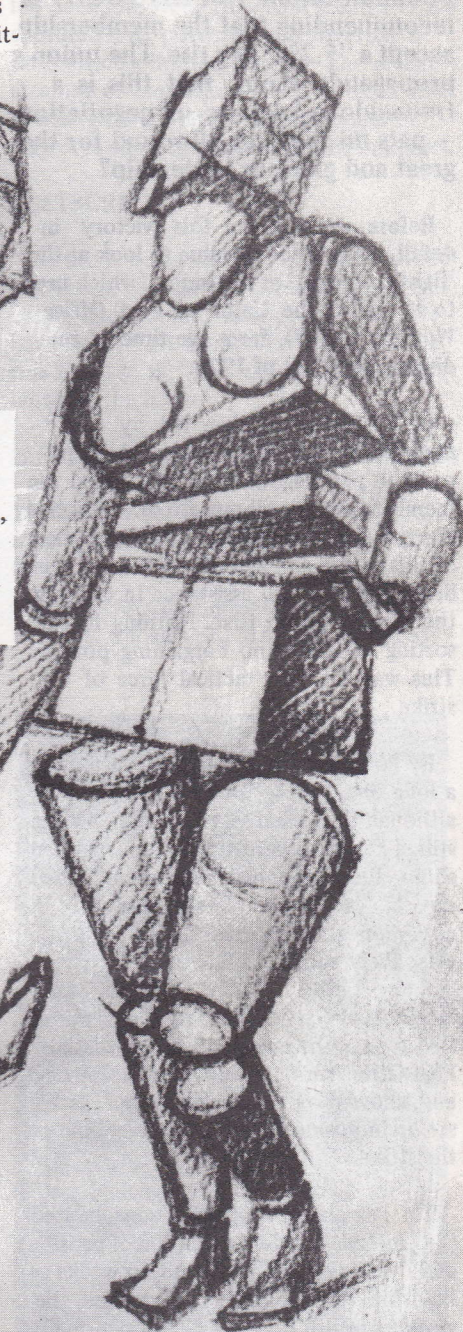
ion to disrupt capital. Take the postal service, for example. Socially useful? One postal worker recently observed that the bulk of the mail he processes includes bills, adverts, and other bits of bureaucracy and corporate swill. Even within areas of work considered to be vital (I assume we'll still be sending letters and phoning each other



where the workforce is predominantly female (there are male art models, but they're in the minority), it's 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 body 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 and 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 smoke's 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



up after the revolution), most waged 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 women's 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 can't create our own hierarchy of struggle within the class based on that division. The idea that one part of the class will act as a 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 it's 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 other's 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.



The executive of the Union of Communication Workers (UCW) is recommending that the membership accept a "5.2%" pay rise. The union's propaganda claims that this is a tremendous 'victory' of negotiation — pats on the back all round for the great and glorious leadership?

Before we examine this 'victory' in detail, it would be of value to look at the 'fighting record' of the union (which used to be called the Union of Post Office Workers : UPW), from the time of the disastrous defeat of 1971.

In '71 the executive, led by ex-CP member Tom Jackson, reached an impasse in pay negotiations, and called the members out on all-out strike. They had given the Post Office two weeks' notice of this action and agreed, on the members' behalf, to give full assistance in clearing the postal system first. Nothing in the sorting offices — no bargaining power. This was the first tactical farce of the strike.

By Post Office standards, the strike was a long one, lasting 7 weeks in all. But although the postal service was at a standstill, a key section of the union's membership — the telephonists — were not called out. Instead of completely paralysing the communications industry, the executive effectively turned a blind eye.

During the strike, the Tory government (led by Heath) more or less ended the Post Office's monopoly on letter carriage and allowed various cowboy outfits to set up in business, effectively scabbing on the strike.

The pay claim was for £3 'consolidated' (i.e., included in the calculation of pensions and overtime rates.) After seven weeks of hardship, the union recommended the workers return for only £2 — fractionally above the Post Office's initial offer — of which only £1 would be consolidated into basic rates of pay. After the strike, the rumour in TUC and ministerial circles was that the government had been on the brink of caving in to the full demand.

The workers returned disheartened, lacking any faith in the union leadership, and totally disorganised.

The effects of this bureaucratic sell-out are still felt today in the postal industry. There is a reluctance to take any kind of industrial action. Until recently, the union executive was constantly reminding the rank and file about the defeat of 1971, every time there was a stir of militancy.

1977 : SIGNS OF A REBIRTH

In 1977, when the Cricklewood branch

unanimously refused to deliver mail to Grunwicks — and a number of large District Offices 'stacked and blacked' Grunwick's mail — the executive bore down on the members and threatened them with expulsion for taking unofficial action. By this time, local management had locked out the Cricklewood workers. The executive said their actions were the result of a court order obtained by the National Association for Freedom (defenders of democracy, when it suited the extreme right.) The workers were not intimidated, but the Grunwick issue — which was on the brink of involving the whole union membership — had the wind taken out of its sails by the bureaucrats of the TUC and various unions, who were bowing to legalities. Thus, potential solidarity action

point for these militants was an organisation known as 'Post Office Worker'. It transpired that this was backed and given resources by the Socialist Workers Party. Those who wanted to become active in POW, but who were not prepared to follow the 'Party line', were frozen out. A good many militants were lost in this sectarian way.

POW produced a magazine which appeared every couple of months (more often, if a specific issue needed commenting upon.) All of this propaganda was, however, subjected to the approval of party hacks before it was published. When, in 1981, the SWP's Central Committee decided that workplace organisation was not the way to achieve the Trotskyite ideal, the mantle of

CHANCE OF STRIKE LOST IN POST

An Article from a postal worker
in the rank-and-file group
'Communication Worker', about
the recent 'victory' over pay.

was sabotaged.

In the same year, postal workers were involved in the 'South Africa Fiasco'. They had agreed to black all mail going to South Africa, as a protest against apartheid. NAFF went to the courts once again, and again the union leadership suppressed this popular action.

Twice in the space of twelve months, the union leadership had proved it was more concerned with upholding the 'rule of law' than supporting the workers' wishes. On two occasions, rank and file initiatives had been hindered, suppressed and finally defeated by the leadership.

At Branch level, a tiny minority of militants were beginning to flex their muscles. From about 1976, the rallying

Rank-and-File organisation was handed over to the Militant Tendency's 'Broad Left'. This, while still in existence, has proved to be of a poorer nature than the old POW. The Broad Left, as its name suggests, entertains any individual from the Labour Party and all points left; however, its record of activity within the workplace is non-existent compared with POW, which had, at least, been very active around the Grunwick dispute, and effective in combatting the National Front's attempts to organise within the industry. The Broad Left, which is an arm of the Labour Party, stands on the platform of firstly; Trade Union reform, to be achieved via the ballot box by having its candidates elected to bureaucratic positions — replacing one set of corrupt officials with equally corruptible ones (the Broad Left's Gerry Casey was elected in 1982,

whereupon he denied all knowledge of the Broad Left. Subsequently, he was instrumental in conning the workers at Basingstoke back to work after they had struck in solidarity with a sacked colleague). Secondly ; propaganda aimed specifically at the carnival of the Annual Conference. No serious attempt at organising in the workplace has, or will be, undertaken by these reformist individuals.

Recently, a revolutionary alternative to the Broad Left — Communication Worker — has appeared. Not under the wing of any organisation, CW is limited at the moment to propaganda, due to its size. CW's organisation is collective : all items published in its name are discussed, altered (if needs be) and agreed before being printed. The group

were to be met without 'strings' being attached.

The Post Office's initial offer was 2%. At the union's Annual Conference, the executive sought and got a mandate to call industrial action (the shape of which would be determined by the executive), if the claim were not met. The cynical and those with long memories among the membership were very dubious about the shape of their tactics and plans for industrial action.

Then, quite spontaneously, wildcat strikes broke out up and down the country. Firstly in Cambridge, where the action was linked to a number of local issues as well. From there the action spread — Milton Keynes, Peterborough, Luton, London SE1, SW1 and so on. On May 30th, an unofficial rally, held in a park next to the building where negotiations were taking place, took up the slogan that "5.2 is not enough, we want 15% !" General Secretary Alan Tuffin reluctantly addressed the crowd. In concluding his rousing speech, in which he promised "your executive would not settle for less", he insisted that everyone should return to work immediately! The wildcat action spread.

By the middle of the next week, the Post Office had upped the offer to 4.9%. With a little bit of financial juggling with the overtime rates (strings, effectively), the offer was made to appear as 5.2% — the massive 'victory achieved by the union's skilled negotiating team'.

None of the improvements in work conditions were included in the offer, but the executive promised 'urgent and meaningful negotiations' (the cynical and those with long memories are definitely not falling for this.)

Laying aside the wildcat action (which obviously helped), the miners' fight for survival has, as with the railworkers, forced the government's hand in agreeing to improve the Post Office's offer.

Odd pockets of militants within the industry realised that the executive's readiness to accept the offer was effectively scabbing on the miners' fight. They also realise that the wildcat actions were instrumental in changing the Post Office's mind in the first place. The fight now is one of propaganda and organisation. Communication Worker sees the immediate task to be one of informing workers in the industry of the reality of the executive's con, and to encourage and assist in the formation of more groups like CW up and down the country.

For further information about CW, contact:

'Communication Worker', Box 15,
136 Kingsland High Street, London E8

About Us

The editorial group of Workers Playtime are mostly members of the London Workers Group (see details elsewhere in this issue). Playtime is however an organisation in its own right, and not the public face or theoretical journal of the LWG.

Unless otherwise indicated individual articles reflect the thoughts, fantasies and inadequacies of their authors (in no particular order).

Playtime is intended as a forum for discussing the reality of class struggle. If you have something to contribute — news, feedback, accounts of class struggle, articles, illustrations, whatever, we'd like to hear from you. There is no editorial line — but that doesn't mean we don't know what we disagree with.

We especially welcome accounts of class struggle by participants, or people with a closer perspective than we have. We won't change things without consulting you but we may add an introduction to fill in background. We'd obviously prefer to do that with you so means of contacting you easily would be useful.

The content of Playtime has largely been accounts of workplace class struggle, and commentary on capitalist politics. That reflects the interests and knowledge of the people who write for it. We do not see the workplace as the only site of class struggle, or as more important than its appearance elsewhere. We'd particularly welcome accounts or correspondence from people who have experience of other areas of struggle.

Contrary to the impression we might give its not necessary that articles be very long and stuffed with quotes, facts and so on. Short punchy stuff is equally welcome.

If you do want to write a full article, get in touch. Playtime is collectively edited, and articles are discussed at Playtime meetings before a decision is made to publish. Disagreements are discussed and stuff is frequently rewritten. So its best to contact us as soon as possible with an outline of what you want to write.

We don't guarantee to publish stuff sent to us but we won't change things (Beyond adding or subtracting spelling mistakes, subheads and illustrations) without consulting you (We may cut letters but we will indicate we have done so). If we disagree we may publish a response alongside it.

If letters are intended for publication please make it clear what you're arguing about so people aren't obliged to read back issues they may well not have, to fully appreciate your genius. In any competition for space short snappy letters will win.

If you fancy helping to produce Playtime get in touch. If you just want to see what sort of idiots produce it, or have a discussion about it then meet those of us at the London Workers meetings every Tuesday.

DEADLINE FOR CONTRIBUTIONS FOR THE NEXT ISSUE (PLANNED FOR THE END OF SEPTEMBER) IS TUESDAY 18th SEPTEMBER.

NEW ECONOMIC MIRACLE !!!

BOSSSES GET QUART FROM A PINT POT

One of the central tasks of the revolution will be the reduction of working time to the absolute minimum. Communism will mean the progressive abolition of work *as such* once wage labour has been overthrown. Whereas at present capitalist technology requires workers to devote a lifetime of labour to create free time for their superiors, under communism, technology would be developed and applied to create free time for all.

In the meantime, we have to fight for the best deal going. Under capitalism, it was not until the second half of the nineteenth century that working hours began to be reduced; up until then, capitalist accumulation depended largely on the extension of the working day, ultimately, to the limits of human endurance. Workers' struggles to impose the implementation of regulations limiting the length of the working day accelerated the introduction of technology and methods of production which could increase the productivity of labour (output per worker/hour). By the first half of the twentieth century, many workers in western Europe had secured a 40-hour week; but the increased *intensity* of labour more than compensated for the surplus value capital had lost from the imposition of shorter working hours.

Today, in the midst of a recession which has no end in sight it is all the more necessary for businesses to raise productivity whilst squeezing wages.

For capital, the less business there is, the more profit has to be made on the business done. In spite of the promises and the sci-fi propaganda, the "new technology" does not mean a life of leisure and abundance, but only hard work and unemployment.

The continuing intensification of labour demands that workers' lives be strictly organised around the demands of capital. This is precisely what they mean when they talk about greater "flexibility" and "mobility" of labour. And the unions' response in timidly "demanding" a 35-hour week only shows that they are ever ready to fulfil their role as the

agents of any planned rationalisation.

In Germany, the land of "economic miracles", workers have been fighting for a reduction in working hours. After a series of skirmishes in the spring (see Playtime June 1984) 58,000 engineering workers in Bade-Wuerttemberg were called out on strike.

It was the response of Europe's biggest union, IG Metall, to the metallurgical employers' federation's refusal to enter negotiations on the demand for a 35-hour week, without any reduction in wages. IG Metall had no choice but to call some sort of strike. For three years on end it had accepted compromise after compromise on wages. The result of this has been a cut in workers' purchasing power, and a consequent rise in discontent amongst the rank-and-file.

When the bosses' federation snubbed the union bureaucracy, IG Metall proposed a members' ballot for a strike. The union's rule-book requires at least 75% of the workers concerned to vote in favour of strike action before they can be called out. If the union leadership was hoping this would let them off the hook, they were deceiving

themselves — an enormous majority voted for a strike. The bureaucrats now had to show that the union had teeth. As the president of the union's Company Committee at Mercedes-Funk said, "The young ones are more political, and also more impatient. They would like to see faster reactions". He himself was to experience evidence of this new combativity, in his own factory.

The demand for a 35-hour week with no cut in wages had been concocted by the union. But any discussion of its implications was restricted to the usual empty posturing as far as the "public debate" was concerned, although more could be learnt by reading the small print.

In issue no. 21 of the 1983 edition of the union journal 'Metall', the union's president Hans Mayr had made one thing abundantly clear: "What is spent on reducing the working week will no longer be available for increasing wages". Such a declaration showed in no uncertain terms the labour movement's acceptance that any reduction in working hours would be indirectly an increase in wage rates, and consequently, the workers



German worker shows far-sightedness of the trade unionist perspective

would have to abandon any wage claims whilst pursuing the demand for 35 hours. This also implied that wages lost in previous years — fairly substantial losses — would not be recovered. What's more, the union did not even foresee an improvement in wages if, eventually, productivity was to rise. This would normally be cash in hand for the haggling over the renewal of Germany's unSocial Contract. Mayr and co. even had the audacity to declare, "With the claim for a shorter working week, we can put an end to all the ridiculous wage demands of past years". In effect, IG Metall was informing its membership that all future wage claims were being dismissed as "ridiculous" in advance.

Working for 35 instead of 40 hours for the same wages may appear an attractive proposition, and the union leadership was counting on the workers seeing it this way. But the demand also presented great advantages for the bosses. History has often shown that a reduction in working hours is accompanied by a rise in the productivity of labour. The following statement, which can be read in a union pamphlet entitled "The 35-hour week: The Right Track", is not without foundation. "Half of the working hours which would be lost in a weekly shift can be made up for by an increase in productivity." (And this is assuming the same methods of production). So if wages are kept down, whilst hourly output per worker is increased, then the result is a relative reduction in wage rates. The union was giving, in advance, a green light to the bosses for this relative wage reduction. There is no getting away from the fact that, whilst on the one hand, the union issued a call to struggle, supposedly in the interest of the workers, on the other hand it gave all sorts of guarantees for a modernisation and restructuration in the interest of capitalism.

The same pamphlet also says, "When we have reached agreement on wages, we want to fix very well defined limits on overtime, and come to a settlement which will make up for it by way of extra time off". Overtime would obviously be an important issue if a cut in working hours was implemented; also, the situation of those already working less than 35 hours would have to be considered.

In general, anyone doing overtime gets an increased rate of pay. The plans for the 35-hour week presented by IG Metall suggested the possibility of not paying overtime in money, but compensating for it with time off. But not at any specified time, and especially not at a time suiting the worker. Various union publications clearly show that the bureaucracy running IG Metall wanted to give the bosses a free hand in forcing the

workers to do overtime in return for a promise of time off, but only when this wouldn't upset the course of production. The factory would be able to mobilise and demobilise its manpower according to its requirements, and would in this way gain a much greater flexibility. Here is a form of mastery of labour power that every capitalist will find ideal. The worker wouldn't be able to refuse overtime if the order-book was full, and would then have to take his days owing in slack periods. The unions even invented a neat phrase for this, "the concentration of free time". It is quite clear who would be doing the "concentrating, and who would be "concentrated". And indeed, the compromise deal eventually cooked up to end this dispute assured the bosses exactly this sort of flexibility.

So that there would be no doubt as to the nature of the work process aimed at, the union spoke of a "levelling" of time off and a "levelling" of overtime. With an unexpected consequence: some workers would receive lower wages than they do at the moment. However, this is true to the present orthodoxy in IG Metall, as well as the DGB union confederation (the equivalent of the TUC), which thinks that many workers are earning too much. The July 1983 issue of 'Gewerkschaftliche Monatshefte' (Union Monthly), which reflects the views of the unions' social-democratic leadership, said, "A situation in which some can do overtime whilst others are unemployed is intolerable". IG Metall also argues that the state unemployment scheme would profit from the 35-hour week, since it has to pay out benefits for those who, at the moment are not

Companies should share out work

Company personnel managers were urged this week to take a lead in sharing out work as a way of reducing unemployment.

Writing in the August issue of *Personnel Management*, Professor Peter Warr says: "We surely need to revise our traditional attitudes to employment and how it is structured."

Professor Warr, who is director of Sheffield University's Social and Applied Psychology Unit, suggests that personnel managers "should be leading the debate at both company and national level."

"If they can draw union or worker representatives into this debate, so much the better, for most unions have so far viewed the problems of unemployment through a traditional and narrow perspective."

His most radical proposal is for a system of unpaid leave. For instance, he says, employers might have contracts for a minimum working year of 40 weeks plus four weeks' paid holiday. Employees could be encouraged to take unpaid leave for the remaining eight weeks, in segments of at least one week at a time.

Such a scheme, he says, would allow

companies to employ more people at a lower cost. And it would also give freedom of choice to those who wanted time off for family or other reasons.

Another possibility is that firms facing the need for cut-backs could make at least a partial switch to permanent part-time employment instead of simply abolishing full-time jobs.

Part-time work has been steadily increasing but all the same, Professor Warr claims that more part-time jobs are still needed and there are potential benefits for several groups of people.

Part-time contracts can provide people with training and experience. They in turn provide employers with a reserve of resources to be called upon during holidays, periods of high absenteeism or in very busy times. Furthermore, should a full-time vacancy occur, experience of part-time work allows both the employer and the employee to make an informed decision. Remember that part-time work can take many shapes: alternate weeks, short weeks and many other possibilities should all be examined.

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This sort of 'radical' proposal for disguising unemployment is becoming increasingly familiar, as the failure of traditional (Keynesian or monetarist) attempts to solve the problem becomes clearer. In so far as it represents a serious managerial strategy, it makes short-time working a more 'attractive' proposition by introducing an element of voluntarism. The effect would be to produce a more atomised workforce, such as exists in the new-technology industries, where more 'flexible' working arrangements are already fairly common. The 'debate' in the recent German dispute saw the two 'sides' of industry struggling to find a common ground on these strategies.

working full time because of the recession. The union argues that the money the scheme has to pay out will be either saved or reduced. This will also benefit the national economy, which seems to be much closer to the hearts of the trade union movement in Germany than the condition of the working class.

But the union's line of argument was at its most specious in its attempts to play on workers' solidarity with the unemployed. In underlining the advantages that the bosses would draw from the 35-hour week, the union's principal argument was that it would bring a reduction in the costs of production. The union also argued that the state could make savings. This idea is developed in the pamphlet mentioned above, 'The 35-hour week: The Right Track'. "The 35-hour week can contribute towards promoting a more favourable situation in industry and in the national economy by means of a reduction in the costs of production. We should not forget that each person on the dole costs the state 24,000 marks (£6,500) per year." This is a completely erroneous argument. If a higher productivity of labour actually improved company profitability, the company would make use of any extra profits to introduce new technology and machines with which it could produce more in less time. Far from leading to a reduction in unemployment, it does not require a very vivid imagination to believe that unemployment would actually increase.

At the start of the strike, a journalist wrote, "If things go according to the

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wishes of IG Metall, the conflict will soon be over". There is no reason to doubt it. The union never launched an all-out strike, which would have posed a threat to the union's institutional interests. The union's principal action was to call out car components factories around Stuttgart. It's certainly no fluke that these factories are in a region with no reputation for combativity. This was no warning shot, as the union bureaucracy declared. They hoped that the bosses would immediately come to the negotiating table. "We wish", declared union negotiator Hans Janssen, "to give the bosses one last chance". Janssen did not hide from a journalist another reason motivating these tactics: "This way of conducting the strike will not hurt the union's funds", adding straight away that, if necessary, IG Metall would not have any problems in supporting a long strike.

But 'fighting talk', even as half hearted as this, is no indication as to the way a union bureaucracy intends to conduct a dispute. It was quite clear, early on in the strike, that IG Metall was ready to negotiate with the bosses immediately, and work out a compromise. "In principle, any compromise is possible", declared Janssen. This could only mean that the outcome would be more advantageous for the bosses than for the workers by comparison with the original plan put before the public.

After the bosses had offered a two hour cut in working hours for night and shift workers only, IG Metall responded on

June 6 with a proposal for a three hour cut by 1986. They promised to renounce the 35-hour week if unemployment was down 500,000; the bosses and the government felt confident enough to be able to dismiss this as "unrealistic". Further attempts to find a settlement that could be sold to the workers failed, and on June 15 a mediator was called in. A deal was finally struck on June 27. This was immediately hailed by union leaders as "an achievement of historic dimension". Mayr said, "the door to the 35-hour week has been pushed open, despite the economic recession". This great victory — a cut in working hours to 38.5 from April 1985, with this year's wage rise held to 3.3% and next year's to 2.2% — was immediately greeted by angry workers storming the negotiating hall, complaining of a sell-out.

It soon became clear who had really won this dispute. The 'small print' in fact allows individual companies to negotiate 'flexible' working hours within the 35-40 hour range with workers' councils (factory staff committees). Opel was soon announcing that it would introduce its rationalisation plans before the cut in working hours was implemented. And on 5th July BMW announced that it would scrap plans to hire 1,200 workers. Glee-fully rubbing salt in the wound, BMW's chairman chortled, "It's more than ironic that a labour conflict which started with the apparent aim of creating jobs has exactly the opposite effect".

But complaints of sell-outs are not

enough. The fact is that the unions did not want to lose their authority over the rank and file: the strike had to be led exactly according to their strategy. After calling out workers in Bade-Wuerttemberg and Hesse in the first two weeks, the union took no new initiatives, leaving the employers to punish some 400,000-500,000 workers with lockouts. The union focused the dispute on the courts — contesting the legality of the lockouts and the withholding of unemployment benefit — and on the negotiations. Hans Mayr said he would not "extend the conflict so long as arbitration was in progress".

There were some attempts to wrest control from the bureaucrats and lawyers. For example, at one point early on in the dispute, workers at Mercedes came out on strike on their own initiative. IG Metall's leadership was furious and did all it could to stop their action. But when the workers stuck to their guns, refusing absolutely to accept the order to return to work, the union had no choice but to recognise the strike — grudgingly, of course.

Generally, though, IG Metall, and IG Druck, the printworkers' union which reached a similar deal on July 6, kept a firm grip on the conduct of the dispute. But as 'The Observer' commented on June 3, "The crisis suggests the country is heading into choppy waters". In other words, there is evidence of renewed militancy in the West German working class.

PLAYTIME TRAVEL : Roumania

DRACULA LIVES !

FANCY A wee holiday on the sun-kissed shores of the Black Sea? Then why not take a trip to beautiful Roumania!!! Not only will you get a great tan but you'll feel really good knowing that your foreign currency is contributing to the exciting socialist economy...

For these are, to quote the state-controlled press, "the years of enlightenment" Under the benevolent rule of President Ceausescu you will discover all the delights that the decadent West can offer but enjoy them in an environment unspoiled by capitalist exploitation.

Unhappily, here the travel brochure blurb must end and awful reality take its place. Stray a little from the holiday trail and you will see what really takes place under

"the Great Benefactor's" rule.

In the early hours of the morning the streets are dark — the lamps are unlit due to power cuts. The consumption of electricity has been reduced by 50% because the regime is unable to pay for oil imports to fire the power stations. Room temperatures may not exceed 15C in winter. Television programmes end at 10 pm (except on the birthdays of Mr. Ceausescu and his wife Elena). Elevators only run from the third floor. The Police

have the right to enter any apartment to check on the number of lights in use and to cement-up any sockets deemed by them to be superfluous. The miscreants are liable to heavy fines.

The darkened streets do not prevent people queuing outside shops from 2 am to buy necessities. However, they are often disappointed as there is not enough to go round. With a truly Orwellian touch (typesetter's note: in more than one sense; during WW2 Orwell himself was a strong supporter of capitalist stringency — provided there was a show of 'equality of sacrifice'), Mr. Ceausescu blames the population! "Roumanians eat too much", he asserts, claiming that 30% of illness is due to gluttony. As a result, an official diet has been proclaimed: 10 eggs, 100 grams of butter, 1 kilo of cooking oil, 1 kilo of meat etc. per person per month. Not starvation rations, perhaps, but the trick lies in trying to obtain them. Actual famine conditions exist in some parts of the countryside, in what was known before World War 2 as "the breadbasket of the Balkans".



As the tide of resentment against this so-called 'Communist' government rises, the state becomes ever more authoritarian. Police permission is required to have contact with foreigners (strains of "The Internationale" in background) or to own a typewriter, which might be used to publish a leaflet.

The beleaguered regime is increasingly suspicious of everyone. Intellectual life is at a standstill. 20,000 were 'encouraged' to emigrate last year. The concentration of power into fewer and fewer hands has resulted in a unique development of nepotism in Roumania. President Ceausescu holds no fewer than seven government and party posts. His wife, Elena, is second in command. His brother, Ion, is Deputy Minister of Planning, while his other brother, Ilie, is Minister of Defence. Nicu, his son (alas, not the brightest of lads) has been given the fun job of Minister of Youth. However, the third brother, Nicolae, holds the most important Ministry of the

Interior where his brother-in-law is a Deputy Minister. At the last count there were no less than fifty Ceausescu relatives occupying prominent government and party offices.

Far from helping the paranoid president, this set-up has further isolated the regime. Last year a coup d'etat was foiled which cost the lives of several prominent military officers. For such a palace revolution to be successful it would require Moscow's blessing. This could not be automatically counted upon, given the conservatism and caution of the Kremlin. Although the Ceausescu gang has sometimes broken ranks with its Warsaw Pact allies (recently and notably over the Olympics boycott), the alternative might be a damn sight more unpalatable for the muscovite bureaucracy.

No, the real danger lies in the increasingly restive working class. Serious industrial unrest has expressed itself recently in strike action in the mines at Marmuresh, in the port of Galate, in the city of Brashov and even in the capital, Bucharest.

The possibility of the sort of upheavals that hit Poland 1980-81 is something that exercises the minds of the entire stalinist ruling class. Hence the promise made by Russian Foreign Minister Gromyko during a visit earlier in the year to increase deliveries of oil and coal on very favourable terms. Whether it will be enough to save Ceausescu's decrepit apparatus remains to be seen.

What is beyond dispute is that even the most generous assessment of Roumania's 'People's Democracy' must give members of the Communist Party, and adherents of the 57 varieties of marxist ideology cause to hesitate and ask themselves searching questions about the State and the Party, and the nature of power itself.

As the anarchist Bakunin observed more

than a hundred years ago:

"...in Mr. Marx's popular State, we are told, there will be no privileged classes at all. All will be equal...at least we are promised that... though I doubt whether that promise can ever be kept... There will be a new class... One can well see how, beneath all the democratic and socialistic phrases and promises of Mr. Marx's there survives in his State everything that contributes to the truly despotic and brutal nature of all states."

Bakunin: "Perils of the Marxist State" (1872)

For the people of Roumania it is no longer a theoretical question — it is the living nightmare of state socialism.

The marxists argued that the state could only be ended by creating a strong State, that monopolies could only be abolished by creating one central monopoly, that the Party was needed to lead the working class which was incapable of anything more than a trade union consciousness, that discipline, obedience and military virtues were prerequisite for liberty. To them the anarchists are children, utopians. The state socialists have made the words "internationalism" and "socialism" stink in the nostrils of the working class the world over.

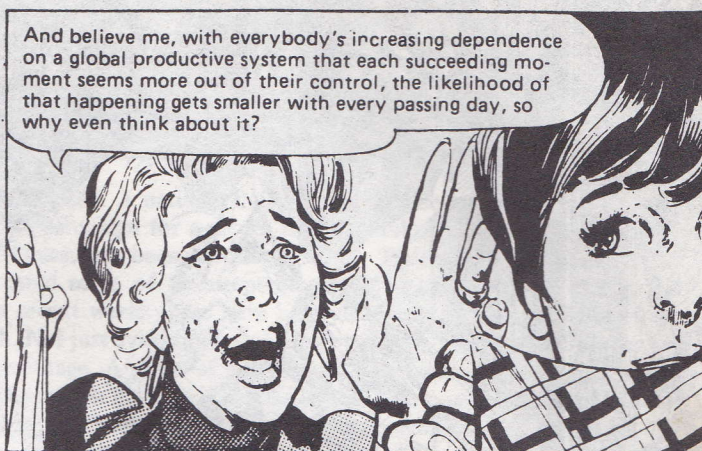
The country which gave us the legend of Count Dracula (Vlad the Impaler) finds his bloody appetites embodied in a new corrupt and brutal ruling class. Dracula lives on in the Orwellian world of "Big Brother" Ceausescu.

This article was sent to us by an anarchist comrade in Glasgow. Those unfortunates who were still awake several hours into the opening ceremony of the great Los Angeles Festival of Nationalism will recall that one of the biggest cheers in the parade of athletes was reserved for the Roumanian team. Their popularity — enhanced, not diminished, by the number of gongs they carried off — exposed the shallowness of the American/Western criticism of human rights violations, corruption etc. in the 'Communist' world. If socialist countries can be encouraged to break with Moscow, anything can be excused, or at least brushed under the carpet. This confirms that the ideological aspect of the rivalry between the superpowers is only secondary (though still important). Yugoslavia and China have already been 'rehabilitated' as a result of their diplomatic and economic ties with the West. All of these countries are capitalist, whatever the political superstructure, and whatever the pressures they feel to strengthen, weaken, renew or renounce alliances and trading ties.

... AS WE JOIN MIDGE AND CINDY, CINDY HAS RELUCTANTLY AGREED TO CONSIDER JOINING THE WORKFORCE; READ ON ...



Darling, I'm really glad you decided to think about joining us— though it's not as if you could really choose not to any more, is it? Not without a lot of other people joining you, anyway.



And believe me, with everybody's increasing dependence on a global productive system that each succeeding moment seems more out of their control, the likelihood of that happening gets smaller with every passing day, so why even think about it?



Besides, you don't have to give up much—just your curiosity, your creativity, your capacity for critical thought... oh, and of course, mostly your time—8 hours a day of it, 5 days a week, 50 or so weeks a year for about 30 or 40 years of your life... plus, of course, everything you produce, and, ah, your right to decide what to produce and what it gets used for after you produce it.

But just look at what you can get! You can buy this, or anything else here you want, anything you see! Isn't that marvellous! And you can even buy things you can't see, like a life-style, or a sense of well-being, or the admiration of your neighbors and co-workers for your stereo, or your car, or your clothes, or your house, or anything!



And then there's all the good television programs, movies, records, concerts—so much great entertainment being produced for our consumption.



Admittedly you can't buy back your time, but what would you do with all that time anyway? I know I'd just get bored, or worse yet, *frightened*, if I had to wake up every morning and decide what I was going to do with my life that day. Besides, face it, this is the way life is, so what can you do about it?



You can say "no,"—darling.

Comrades, proletarians!

Why not get together with some friends and say NO!!! Say no to work — say no to the boss, say no to the union! Say no to the bill, say no to social workers. Say no to nationalism, labourism, religion. Say no to the telly, sport and sliced bread! You'll find that the more you say no to the thousand and one ways this society keeps you down, the more you'll discover your OWN desires! But remember — it's more fun to do it with a friend... and even better with lots of friends!!

**YOU'LL GET
A LOT OF SATISFACTION.**

PLEASE NOTE OUR NEW ADDRESS :

Workers Playtime, c/o 84b Whitechapel High St, London, E1.