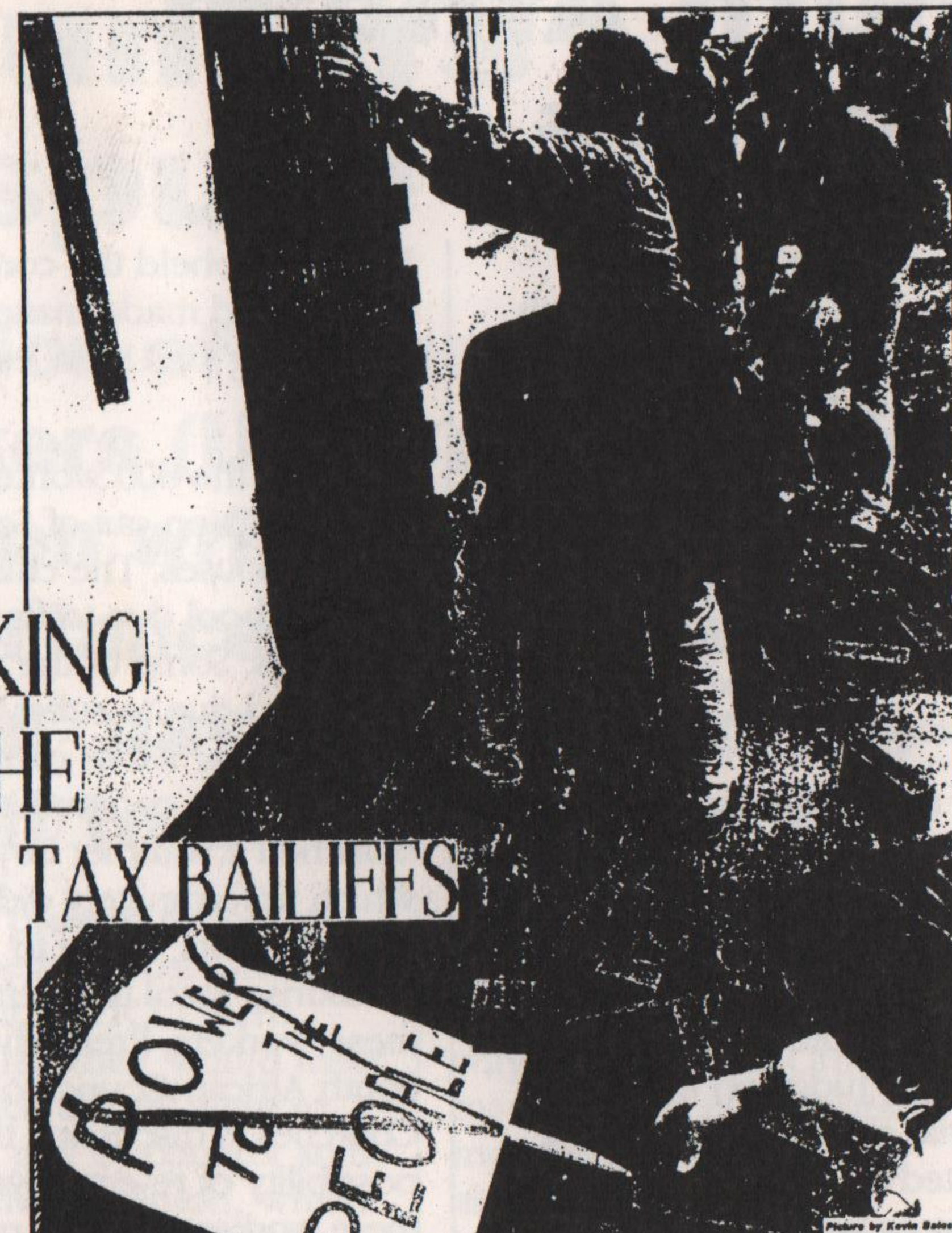


SOMERSET CLARION

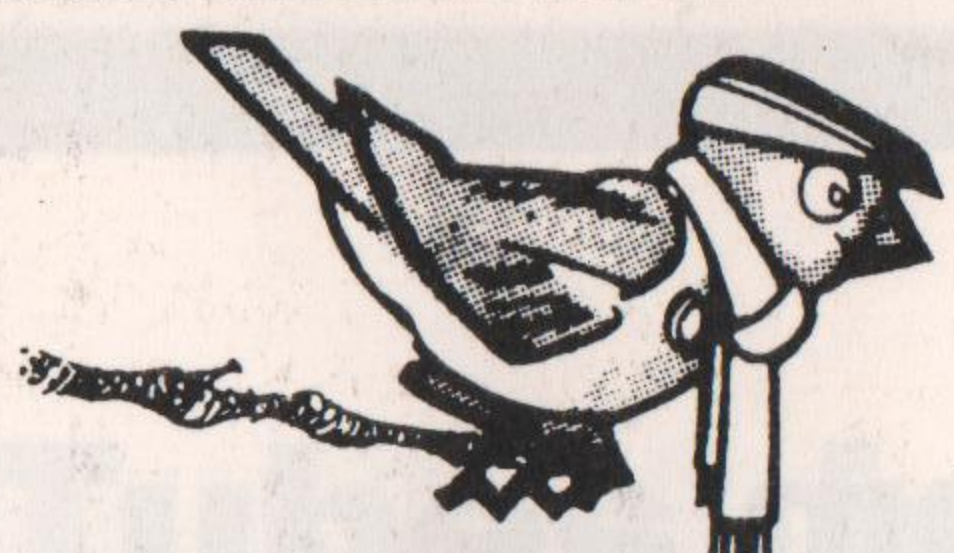
Socialist Journal for the South-West
July 1991



BRICKING UP THE POLL TAX BAILIFFS

SOMERSET WORKERS CELEBRATE MAY DAY

Available from: 4 Gordon Terrace, Bridgewater, Somerset.

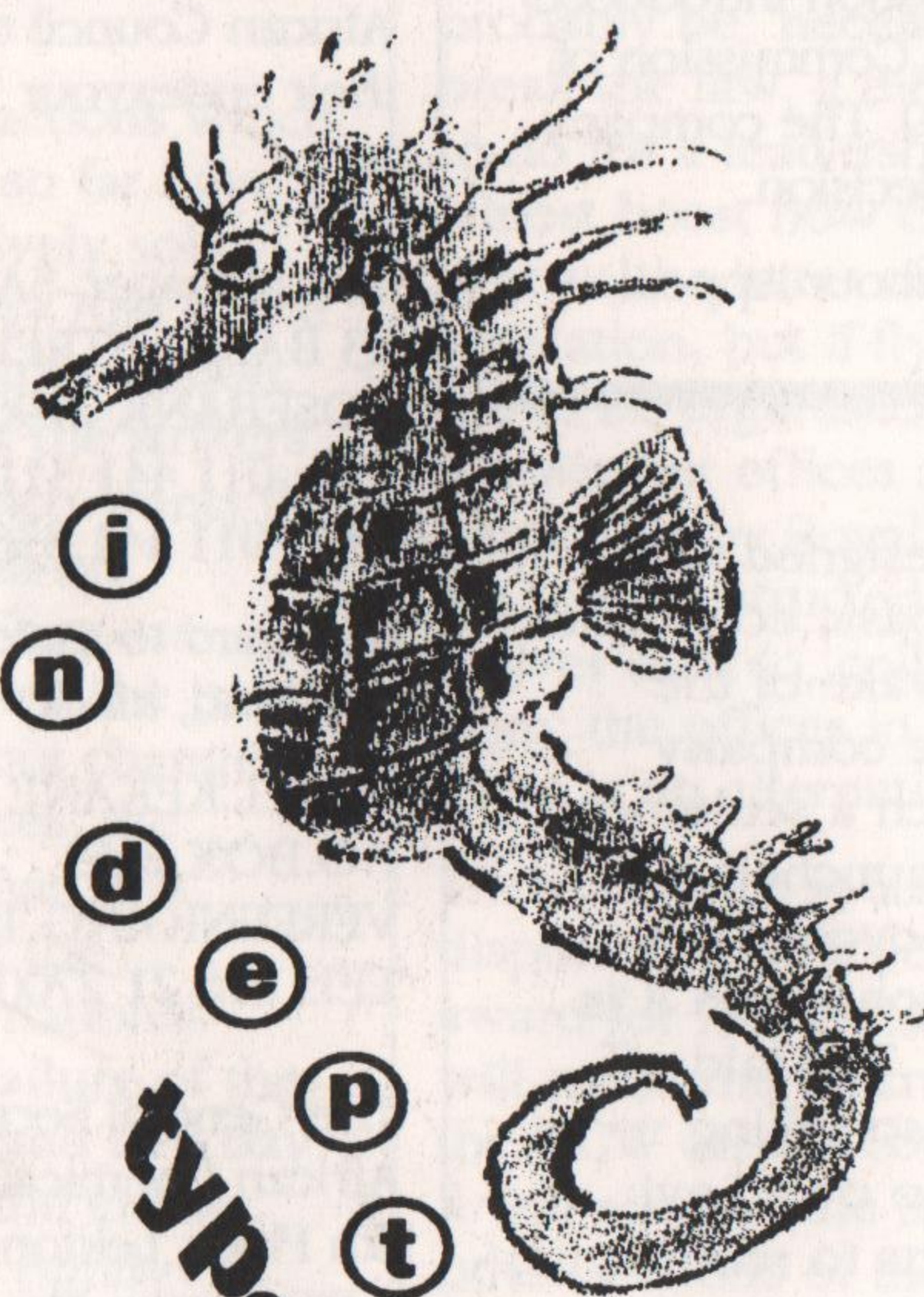


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Solidarity Network

BULLETIN

NUMBER 10 SEPTEMBER 1991 30p

Solidarity with those in struggle!

Plus Features on:

Cowley Assembly Plant
Pergamon, Poll Tax,
Post Office Counters
dispute, Tube Workers,
Levi Strauss boycott.



OILC on the problems facing the oilworkers

4821
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What is the Solidarity Network?

The Solidarity Network was set up at a conference, called in solidarity with workers in struggles, held in Leeds in 1987.

The conference sought to build on the kind of support that was organised for the miners and the printworkers at Wapping. As well as offering practical support the conference sought to emphasise the reasons for so many industrial defeats so that these experiences could be used by workers in struggle in the future. The following is part of the statement that was agreed by the conference;

'Most disputes have been defeated because of the lack of support of the official leadership of the movement. To try and change this situation we need to discuss the lessons of these disputes and take them into future actions. The purpose of this conference is to try to change the situation of repeated betrayals and defeats of workers in dispute and to put us in a better position to organise practical support both in political and financial terms.'

Since its formation, the Solidarity Network has continued to meet on a regular basis and has consistently supported workers in struggle.

Contact Addresses:

74 Kingsland Road, Plaistow, London, E13, 9PA.

2 Allin Close, Blackbird Leys, Oxford.

138 Charles Street, Leicester, LE1 1HB.

4 Gordon Terrace, Bridgewater, Somerset.

35 Clough Road, Golcar, Huddersfield, HDT 4JX.

Affiliation Form

We invite your organisation to affiliate to the Network and strengthen this work. Organisations which affiliate will receive copies of the Bulletin and will receive up-to-date information on disputes. We also invite individuals to take out a subscription to the Bulletin, which would help the Network and provide regular information.

My organisation wishes to affiliate to the Solidarity Network

I wish to subscribe to the Solidarity Network Bulletin

Name/Organisation & Address.....

I therefore enclose..... Cheques should be made payable to 'Solidarity Network'

The affiliation fee for organisations is £10. Subscription fees for individuals are £6.00 waged and £3.00 unwaged. Please send to 74 Kingsland Road, Plaistow, London E13.

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Contributions to the Solidarity Network Bulletin represent the writers' views, and not necessarily those of members of the Solidarity Network.

A member of the OILC talks about events leading up to the formation of the OILC and the problems that the oilworkers are now facing

When the American oil companies came over to the North Sea with their oil exploration experience, they also brought with them their own brand of industrial relations and practices. They estimated that oil production would last thirty years. Today that forecast takes us well into the next century. Now, anyone can get it wrong but did the Americans miscalculate or were they being deceitful? Was their assessment a furtive and deliberate attempt to delude everyone to make them out to be a benign lot who had come over to bail us out of a recession and high unemployment? Today there are very few Americans left in the North Sea. They have returned home richer and well forgotten but for the intimidation and anti-trade union attitude that serves as a legacy to their mammon.

The offshore workers have been waging a long running battle to have the same terms and conditions they are privy to onshore but, they also find it equally difficult to convince the British public that life offshore—from helicopter to the rigs—is extremely dangerous, low paid and with long hours and rotten conditions. The Americans have done a great job with their propaganda but then you don't need an offshore bear (worker) to tell you how adept they are at that.

The trade unions had very little success in the offshore business for a number of reasons. The oil companies threatened that they would pull out of the North Sea if the Unions refused to co-operate fully. There were also seven unions competing for fresh members and the construction industry has never been a bastion of the trade union movement. It is these factors

that allow for an industry that is fragmented and marginalised, where hook-ups (first stage when a rig is taken out) have different terms and conditions from post hook-ups (second stage when a rig is in production) and where catering

everyone. Quite frankly it was Russian roulette with the pistol being passed among the oil companies. Anyone of the 'seven sisters' (oil companies) could have fired the gun, they were all guilty of playing with peoples lives, but it was Occidental 1988



and drilling are poorly organised primarily because they are unskilled areas. Just as importantly, it is an industry that is as remote and isolated as the Falkland Islands.

Prior to the Piper Alpha disaster in 1988 unsuccessful attempts were made by offshore workers to obtain decent conditions of employment. Also in 1983 meetings were being held in Aberdeen and Glasgow by two full-time officials to organise the bears with the intentions of going for trade union recognition and a single offshore agreement. Alas the meetings folded due to a lack of interest. 'The Sword of Damocles' had been hanging over the whole offshore industry and incidents where workers lost their lives offshore were becoming regular due to cut-backs and travelling by helicopter was a risk for

whose luck run out. The scenes of the Piper Alpha inferno shown on television will forever remain with the offshore workers. Their prophetic warnings of such a disaster were denied and ridiculed by the oil companies and the Department of Energy. It is unforgivable that it had to take 167 deaths for people to sit up and take notice.

The anger and bitterness amongst the bears led to the Offshore Industry Liaison Committee (OILC) being formed. An unofficial rank and file body, financially supported by contributions organised on the rigs. Its aims were the responsibility of safety to be transferred to the Health & Safety Executive and for trade union recognition. The support for the OILC from the bears was quite breathtaking and on the first anniversary of the Piper Alpha

disaster the North Sea was brought to a standstill as thousands of workers downed tools in respect for those who had perished in that inferno. The oil companies regarded the days stoppage as recalcitrance, but such was the response from the bears they felt inhibited and decided not to take any retaliatory action. Confidence and expectations of a change in attitude and responsibility in the oil companies developed amongst the bears, so much so that when they realised that nothing had changed they decided to take matters into their own hands and called for action. As chairman of the OILC, Ronnie MacDonlad had no alternative but to go along with the offshore spokesmen who were instructed by the men to withdraw all labour in support of their claim, for proper safety, trade union recognition and single offshore agreement. The strike lasted three weeks and involved mostly the construction industry. The oil and contracting companies demanded a meeting with the trade unions and insisted on a return to work. The bears were adamant that their demands be central to any negotiations and refused to call off the strike, believing the unions had thrown their hats into the same ring. What no-one was aware of at the time was that the EETPU were having talks with the employers and when this finally came out it was too late. The bears had been stabbed in the back by Eric Hammond's brand of trade unionism. The OILC and the remaining unions had no alternative but to call off the strike. In the months that followed the OILC continued to pursue their demands and the organisation became active on the rigs at Morecombe, Ravensburn and Lowestoft. It was no longer an issue confined

(continued on Page 4)

OILC continued

to the Shetland Basin, it was an issue for all offshore workers.

With the continuing delay of the Cullen Report into the Piper Alpha disaster, patience and tolerance offshore was wearing thin and incidents offshore continued unabated. 1989 was the worst year in the offshore industry for 'serious incidents' and Cecil Parkinson's brainchild of having safety reps was regarded by the bears as a papering over the cracks exercise. The last straw came in July 1990 when a Sikorsky helicopter crashed into the Brent Spar rig and six more lives were lost in the name of profit, in an incident that the men are convinced could easily have been avoided. Action was demanded and taken by the bears and the determination and resilience shown personified the unity within the OILC.

Retribution was swift and all those taking part in the sit-ins were sacked as were shop stewards, spokesmen and Cecil's safety reps who were at home at the time. This time the oil companies and contractors had no qualms about retaliating—they had friends in the Government. Over seven hundred were sacked and placed on a blacklist. The rest of the offshore workers were given a choice to either sign a no-strike contract or face the dole. Meanwhile the EETPU were having talks with the same management who sacked the bears and the one-table approach had been betrayed once again. Today the offshore industry is back to its old ways with intimidation having been re-introduced after a two year sabbatical, the NRB (Not Required Back) is again being used regularly and the unions have their backs to the wall. The OILC is however still around and continues to hold weekly meetings in Aberdeen, Glasgow and Newcastle. Its supporters offshore continue to gather funds and distribute their paper 'Blowout' and it is still pursuing

its demands for trade union recognition. Regrettably three unions – AEU, GMB and EETPU – have recently signed a hook up agreement which will again sectionalise the offshore industry and amuse the oil companies somewhat. It is certainly no panacea, nor is it what the bears want. The full-time officials are completely opposed to the hook-up agreement or any other agreement which they see as fragmenting the unity of the OILC, but it appears the national officials know better. If these peers do have the interest of the bears at heart, why do they refuse to come out of their ivory towers and talk to the offshore workers? What gives them the right to turn worker against worker, to put self interest before safety and to pontificate on an industry they know very little about?

If the Offshore workers are to be properly represented by a trade union, this problem must be addressed by the workers and trade unions themselves. A single offshore union has always been at the forefront of debates at the OILC meetings and those behind the demand have a very good argument, but there are other options which are just as valid and attainable. If the national officials persist with their aloofness and self-serving attitude the security of their own unions could very well be threatened by the offshore workers who may have no alternative but to form their own union. That way nobody wins except the oil companies.

OILC produces its own journal, called 'Blowout'. If you want to assist 'Blowout' and have a copy sent to your home every month, you can subscribe at £10 for one year's supply.

Write to:

BLOWOUT,
Criterion Buildings,
52 Guild Street,
Aberdeen,
AB1 2NB.

Cowley assembly plant moves towards closure

by A Cowley Worker

Nearly 3 years ago British Aerospace/Rover announced the closure of the South works in the assembly plant at Cowley. Immediately, Oxford Trades Council organised a large public meeting, with nearly 200 Cowley workers present. Both Bill Morris and the Trade Group National Officer of the T&GWU offered to help a campaign.

'Cowley Against Closure' was set up to campaign in the town and the surrounding area. But the local union leadership, all right-wingers, one of whom—Ivor Braggins – is on the T&GWU Executive opposed a campaign. They argued that they could persuade the company locally to change their minds – 'We have plenty of time' they said.

To this end they also would not involve the national officers of the Union. Even Ron Todd's offer of help was spurned. After a year of nothing happening the company announced that they were also closing the North Works of the Assembly Plant. At the same time they said they were taking a 10% stake in Honda U.K., which was to develop their plant at Swindon into a car production plant. The Honda plant was going to produce cars for Rover. It was clear that a non-union plant was to produce cars for Rover. It was clear that a non-union plant was to produce what Cowley had previously produced.

The response of Braggins & Co. was to announce to a mass meeting that the 'campaign was now going to start'. They would get together with the local Council and have a 'political' campaign. He refused to put an alternative campaign of industrial action that had been proposed. They set up their own campaign body. This was a small group of selected Cowley senior stewards, Councillors and 'representatives'. In the 18 months of its existence this body did not organise a single public meeting or

demonstration. All it did was to collect a handful of signatures on a petition. Everytime the 'Cowley Against Closure' organised a meeting or any other activity this bureaucratic body attacked it. With the hostility of the union leadership in the plant it became increasingly difficult for 'Cowley Against Closure' to effectively campaign. The council then organised a year long public enquiry whose main findings were that it was too late to campaign against the closures. In the meantime several thousand workers workers had taken Voluntary Redundancy.

The final crunch came when the company could get no more volunteers. In January of this year they announced increased redundancy pay, and on the basis of doing this they got Braggins and Co. to sign a voluntary redundancy agreement, of which the company could not get enough volunteers. As a result of this on April 8th, 325 young people were forced out of the plant. The local Unions had declared a victory, saying that the company had agreed to 'last in first out'. This is how they persuaded a mass meeting, called with no notice as to its purpose, to accept it. In reality the company was able to exempt 40-50 junior people. How a trade union, which is supposed to represent all its members, can declare the loss of jobs a victory defies belief. During the period of his so-called 'campaign' Braggins had accepted 'team leaders' as well as virtually everything else the company asked for. This just shows that however much you run from a fight the employers offensive means that the attacks never stop. Cowley now employs 4-5000, reduced from 9-10,000 3 years ago. Even these remaining jobs are threatened by the fact it will be a one-model plant with a doubtful future.

NUJ outlast maxwell

by a Pergamon Striker

The campaign of the Pergamon NUJ strikers has played a part in Robert Maxwell's decision to jettison his most lucrative book and journal publishing company in Britain. The Captain's last shot before he sailed off into the distance was a job offer, selective re-employment involving the victimization of the Father of Chapel, Jim Boumelha (now Vice-President of the NUJ). Naturally the strikers gave it two fingers – unanimously. The next day Maxwell sold Pergamon to the Dutch publishing firm Elsevier (at the beginning of May) but he retains the lease on the site. The reason for his desperate last-minute offer, after two years of intransigence, was apparently pressure from the very highest level of the Labour party (not enough though!)

Whilst all this is viewed as a great victory by NUJ officials it still leaves the demands of the strikers – reinstatement and union recognition – unmet! Undaunted, the strikers are continuing their two-year national and international campaign working through the labour movement and now extending their contacts to take in the Dutch journalists' union. It is also hoped that the European Social Policy Committee, controlled by the Socialist Group, will be applying political pressure on the Dutch management of Elsevier.

This year the anniversary march through Oxford was marked by the presence of national union banners from the NUJ, NGA, NUCPS, BETA, ACTT and NUT. Most other TUC-affiliated unions were represented at a regional or local level which made the 400-strong march one of the most impressive labour movement marches ever held in Oxford. But the most notable feature of the event

was the presence of French CGT/FILPAC printers, recently involved in a long-running dispute with Maxwell over the closure of their workplace. I'm told the FILPAC members didn't use standard French to describe Maxwell while chanting loudly with the rest of us in the centre of Oxford. Also greatly appreciated was the attendance of Port Of London dockers, NALGO Oldham Health records (recently on strike), Rochdale Labour Party (14 of them!) and

the Somerset Community Defence Campaign, amongst many others from near and far. Most interesting at the rally were the speeches of Steve Turner, General Secretary of the NUJ and Tony Benn. Whereas Turner delivered an incompetent right-wing speech calling for the next Labour government to bring back 'In Place of Strife' – a notorious piece of anti-trade union legislation introduced by Labour in 1971 – Benn drew confidence from the large

union presence and ascribed the cause of the dispute not to 'one evil capitalist' but to the evils of capitalism.

Outright victory is now much closer for the strikers but much hard work may still lie ahead. Donations are greatly appreciated, and will be used to continue the campaigning work.

The strikers can be contacted at the strike office on 0865 60762.

Support Group formed for sacked Ambulance Workers

On Tuesday 18th June, Bridgewater Ambulanceman, Tony Stokes – a member of the TGWU and Mike Wallburton of NUPE – were sacked for allegedly refusing an emergency call to Minehead Hospital on Friday 24th May. The men are vehemently denying the charge of 'gross misconduct'. The facts are that the patient concerned – a pregnant woman – had been picked by them previously that morning and left safely at Minehead Hospital with a midwife and doctor, while another patient was taken home at Porlock a few miles away. Just outside Porlock a 'Blue' Control Call came for the men to take the pregnant woman to Musgrove Park Hospital in Taunton, some 30 miles away. As the call was not an emergency, and the men had been on duty for 6½ hours without a break, Tony and Mike asked control for permission to take a short break. This was refused, and within two minutes the control officer had upgraded the call to a 'Red' emergency. Again the men asked for a short break, and also why the call had been upgraded, as

normally only the ambulancemen themselves, or a doctor or midwife, can upgrade. When control insisted that the men transport the pregnant woman immediately to Taunton, Tony and Mike, fearing themselves not fit to drive on without a break, had no alternative but to phone in sick. The temperature in the ambulance was 86F and they had worked for nearly 7 hours without a break. The woman was taken to Taunton by another ambulance and gave birth 7 hours after entering Musgrove Park.

It is obvious to anyone bar the Chief Ambulance Officer Richard Whiteland, that ambulance men with spotless records and a combined 37 years service would never fail to respond immediately to a genuine emergency call, which this was not. When the two men eventually came back to Bridgewater Ambulance Station they were suspended by the Station Officer Ian Childs, a suspension which was turned into three months notice of dismissal, on full pay, with an appeal set.

The staff at Bridgewater

Station, led by TGWU convenor Ken Parkin, responded immediately with an overtime ban, and a resolution of no-confidence in their station officer. They are seeking support to extend this ban over the whole of Somerset, and have some support for this, though the relative strength of the non-TUC 'union' APAP in East Somerset is a problem in getting effective solidarity action.

NUPE and TGWU have given practical and financial support to Bridgewater Trades Union Council which quickly set up the **Somerset Sacked Ambulanceman's Support Group** and launched a petition which already has 3,000 signatures. Should the men's appeal fail, Tony and Mike, their Trade Unions and the support group are determined to launch a National Appeal to the Trades Union movement and wider public to obtain full reinstatement for the Health Authority.

For more information please contact;

Mike Wallburton 0278 459112
or Dave Chappel 0278 450562

MEDI CUTS

by Peter Money

Domestic cleaning staff from Victoria hospital in Blackpool are fighting to get their jobs back.

In May last year when the hospital cleaning contract was put out to tender it was won by a company called Mediguard. As a result the cleaner's pay went down by £20 per week. Earlier this year the cleaners decided to take industrial action when the company refused to even discuss a claim for improved pay and condition. Mediguard's response was to sack its entire workforce of 150 staff, and replace them with untrained, mainly young, unemployed workers, some from as far afield as Manchester.

The standard of cleaning service that these people were able to provide was so poor that the hospital management appealed to the sacked cleaners to come in and clean the hospital on the promise that they would try and sort some thing out with Mediguard to get them their jobs back. They agreed to do this because of the concern for the health of the patients in the hospital. However, on 12th April, after a week, the cleaners were once more dismissed and Mediguard were brought back in.

The sacked cleaners feel that they have been very shabbily treated by both sets of employers and are urging the Blackpool and Fylde Health Authority to sack Mediguard and reinstate the original workforce.

The sacked cleaners are winning a lot of support for workers in the area and are determined to continue their fight. They are asking people to write to the Health Authority.

Contact :
c/o Steve Holmes,
NUPE Branch Secretary,
Victoria hospital,
Winney Hay,
Blackpool.

Free all Poll Tax Prisoners

The struggle continues to defend the right to demonstrate and to stand by those arrested and imprisoned

Most trials have now mostly ended, and despite some success in court obtaining 'not guilty' verdicts (for example, not a single jury has convicted for 'riot'), vicious sentences have been meted out. For the Trafalgar Square Defendants' Campaign it has been a year of continuous practical and political support for hundreds of defendants, gaining the backing of the whole APT movement, and calling conferences and protests. Now we have the responsibility of organising systematic practical solidarity for

all the prisoners (including some of the 35 so far jailed for non-payment). We call on organisations and activists to send cards and letters, to pass resolutions of support and affiliation, and to raise urgently needed money (£700 per month just for welfare). But most importantly, along with prisoner support groups in Avon, Birmingham, Sussex, Nottingham and elsewhere we have launched an AMNESTY NOW campaign for the prisoners, and call for protests around the country on the first Saturday of

each month. They defended our demonstrations – they need our defence now. We have a new office and phone number, and will be looking into ongoing monitoring of the police, legal back-up for protests, video-making and related activities.

**Self-defence is no offence.
Free the prisoners.**

Trafalgar Square Defendants' Campaign: c/o Brixton Law Centre, 506 Brixton Road, London SW9. (071 738 7586).

Building on the successes of the Poll tax struggle – there is life after debt

The Poll Tax has been made uncollectable (over 18 million now not paying) and a political dodo. The main thrust of the campaign now is to get all the debts written off, the tax scrapped this year, to defend non-payers against collection threats, to demand an amnesty for all protestors jailed, and to oppose cuts in local services. The fight goes on.

However, this is a difficult phase in the campaign – with the many successes behind us, a number of activists are exhausted or moving on to other struggles, and public involvement is lower than in early 1989. This is being seen as a time to evaluate our struggle, and to look forward and beyond it...

The virtually unprecedented success of the APT movement, has been generated by an independent community campaign, created from scratch and largely without backing from established working class organisations. The strength has been the local, open APT groups/unions with a street-level

presence, (street reps. stalls. door-to-door leafletting etc). But we also need to fight against other bills, harassment and evictions, as well as for community facilities, to support strikes and to establish the spirit of solidarity, self-organisation and resistance. How do we build on the APT community solidarity we've worked so hard to create? Why should we start from scratch on each issue? Why create separate networks for each campaign?

Our local plans in Haringey

In Haringey, we've started to discuss these questions. About 25 of the local APT activists have set up the Haringey Solidarity Group, formed to promote and defend working class struggle against all form of oppression, to spread ideas and to encourage initiative and mutual aid amongst people.

An activist/political collective is a good step, but just as important is to be able to build on the local networks developed by the APT movement. In Haringey this

involves 5 independent local groups, 20 neighbourhood co-ordinators and over 500 street reps. Hence a further proposal has been floated to launch a local Solidarity Network based on individual and group affiliation, with street and workplace reps/volunteers. The idea is to attract hundreds of residents who would not necessarily be able or willing to attend meetings, to contribute and spread information throughout the group. This proposal has widespread local backing, and is at discussion stage. It has enormous potential and may take 10 or 20 years to really take hold. It will especially come into its own during times of need and crisis. It should've been done years ago, lets do it now!

In this way, the experiences and strengths of the mass non-payment campaign can serve as a guide for future battles and a warning to the authorities that their power over us will be undermined and eventually defeated the more organised and confident we become. **Dave Morris Tottenham APTU.**

National Finsihing off the Poll Tax Conference in the autumn, contact TAPT for details (081 802 9804).

Community Solidarity and self defence

The statement below was agreed by the final session of the Solidarity Conference called last February by the TSDC, on the theme: **Against Police Attacks And To Defend The Right To Demonstrate.** Despite the most atrocious weather for decades sealing off half the country, nearly 200 people from 70 organisations attended. There were discussions groups groups on black struggle, the labour movement, Irish solidarity, anti-poll tax movement and the lesbian and gay community – and also on organising demonstrations, legal back-up and monitoring the police, defence campaigns and prisoner's support.

The aim was to bring a wide section of community-based groups and activists together, not only to share ideas and experiences, but also to encourage practical co-operation and initiatives. There were useful and wide-ranging discussions in an atmosphere of determination to organise ourselves to fight State attacks.

It has so far proved difficult to effectively set up the practical initiatives (such as the networks of prisoner support groups and defence campaigns). However, a fuller report is being produced (available on request, donations welcome) and the aim is to continue the groundwork and goodwill achieved by the holding of the conference.

The purpose of organised groups, campaigns and protests is to encourage resistance to oppression to remain firm, to spread and to become ever more effective. For this reason such groups must always be aware of

hostility and harrasment form the police and the need to successfully combat this.

Solidarity Statement

Through our experiences we are aware of, and oppose, oppression in our society. It is deep rooted and exists in many forms, and is upheld by repressive institutions, laws and the police.

We recognise that wherever there is oppression, there is resistance to it. We support all those who fight back – their self-expression, self organisation and self defence – and support those grassroots campaigns, organisations and movements, temporary or long lasting, thrown up in such struggles by those affected.

Our aim is to build up the awareness, confidence and strength of our communities to enable them to effectively withstand and overcome state aggression, and to be able to win their campaigns and struggle for justice.

We are committed to encouraging and developing practical solidarity amongst all working class and oppressed people, both within our own communities and across the whole country and continent – especially to those engaged in self defence against state oppression.

Specifically:

- 1) We advocate, encourage, and support protests against, and defiance of, oppressive laws, policing operations, or bans/restrictions on our right to protest.
- 2) We resolve to work towards a network/alliance of – defence campaigns – prisoner support groups and we encourage organisations to support each other practically (for example, by affiliations, distribution of each other's information, etc.)
- 3) We urge that all those who call or organise protests take seriously their obligations to defend those participating, especially if people are arrested, tried or imprisoned.
- 4) We support similar local/regional/national initiatives called by organisations and activists to share their experiences and develop solidarity, where these have a genuine commitment to grass roots/community struggle.
- 4) We resolve to produce and circulate a report of today's conference and to call another National Solidarity Conference next winter.

Poll Tax Prisoner's List

Paul Jacob, RA0711
HMP Wandsworth, Heathfield Road, London, SW18.
Arrested March 31 in Trafalgar Square. Charged Sections 1 & 2 Public Order Act (POA) and GBH.

Brian Tavares MV3239.
HMP Wandsworth. Arrested March 31, Section 2 POA.

Tim Donaghy, MW0105
HMP Belmarsh, Western Way, Woolwich, London SE2. Three years Section 2 POA. Accused of shoving a scaffold pole through police van window.

Darren Healey, RA2183
HMP Wandsworth. 2 years and six months Section 2 POA.

Matt Lea, MW 1054
HMP Featherstone, New Road, Featherstone, Wolverhampton. 30 months Section 2 POA.

Steven Lynn, MW1028
HMP Ford, Ford, Nr Arundel, W.Sussex. 12 months Section 2 POA.

Neil Bremmer, MW0216
HMP Coldingley, Bisley, Woking, Surrey. 30 months Section 2 POA.

Tim Paine, MW0231
HMP High Point, Stradishall, Newmarket, Suffolk. 16 months Section 2 POA.

Steven Murray MW0218
HMP Highpoint. 12 months Section 2 POA.

Robert Wray, MW1242.
HMP Feltham, Bedford Road, Feltham, Middx. 21 months Sections 2 & 3 POA and criminal damage. Hoping to take exams inside.

Keith Wray, MW1241
Rob's brother. HMP Feltham. 21 months Sections 2 & 3 POA.

Alan Clarke, MV2254
HMP Coldingley. Arrested from the demo against Hackney's setting of the Poll Tax. Tried for GBH, a frame-up, for which he got two years.

TSDC Prisoners Support Group, c/o Brixton Law Centre, 506 Brixton Road, London SW9.
Tel: 071-738-7586.

LETTERS PAGE

Norman Laws: Political Prisoner

71 year old Norman was jailed for two months on 17th May 1991 at South Shields, Tyneside for refusing to pay the Poll Tax. The Council that jailed him is a Labour Council, and the Bench at the Magistrates Court was a retired full-time union official and Labour Party member. Norman is a life-time long socialist. This letter was a reply to one by Councillor Brian Smedley (Sedgemore DC) on behalf of Bridgewater Anti-Poll Tax Union.

Dear Brian, Thankyou for your interesting letter. It's good to know that Labour Councillors somewhere have the responsibility and the guts to oppose this evil, vicious Tory legislation. My attitude, which I told the court, was to conduct a campaign of civil disobedience against what I called Maggie Thatcher's war against the

working class. I always maintained that OAP's should lead the battle. They were better placed to put themselves in the front line because of their relative freedom for liabilities at home. Also, if they were harassed by jail threats this would have a greater damaging effect on the authorities. A few more like me, for instance and the balloon could go up.

We still have some way to go. Poll Tax is dead, maybe, but we still have to incinerate it and the Tories along with it. Next we must operate a local income Tax. But obviously there will be no peace until this large minority is appeased, and history shows when such a sizable body of the population refuses to accept such legislation, it must be removed from the statute and replaced by something agreeable to that body of people.

My own plan, lets 90% or so off the workers off the hook completely. An income of, say, £200 and under per head is tax free, or a Personal Allowance £10,000 of you want it expressed that way, that's my idea of socialism for starters.

Then a steepening escalation, so that by the time we have £100,000 per head income they fork out £6,000 per annum. In other words, the fat cats, yuppies, Managing Directors of large firms are supplying the bulk of the money into the Council kitty.

When all that is settled the main battle begins - where we left off in 1945, we thought we had it all wrapped up and sat back and let the traitors bust it up. This time only red hot working class socialist fighters will be acceptable as candidates and then roll on the Brave New World (that'll scare the pants off Kinnock).

A letter from a lady in whitby "I am a 51 year old housewife who is taking the same stand (as me) I am waiting to come and join you in jail". Great stuff! Salt of the earth. She has more guts than all our council rolled together. Housewife? She's a bloody angel!

That's only one of 70 letters received. How can we lose.

Norman Laws
Civil Prisoner CK0163
HM Prison, Old Elvet
Durham

The above letter initially appeared in The Somerset Clarion, and is reproduced with their permission

Zebediela strikers

Dear Solidarity Network,

Thankyou for covering the Zebediela Strike and for sending us the copies of your magazine. The strike ended on 10 December 1990 with an interim wage increase of 30 Rand per month, while management will negotiate with the National Union of Farmworkers on a settlement. All 1500 strikers have been re-instated and have been given their full December Pay, their annual bonus and leave pay. The union has now been officially recognised and if by the end of this month no settlement has been reached, independent mediators will be called in. Because of the determination of the strikers and the publicity given to the strike not only have the strikers won this settlement, but management has also spent an extra 1.5 million Rand in upgrading the accommodation facilities.

Yours in the Struggle.
Andre Schott Secretary,
City of London
Anti-apartheid Group

sent to the address below.

Thanking your for your support.
Yours Faithfully,
J.Hunter. Box BM 1734.
London WC1N 3XX

Bands appearing on the day include; 25th May, Soho, Five Thirty, Honey Chile and Joi Bangla Sound.

Unity Carnival is already supported by; Jeremy Corbyn MP, Diane Abbot MP, Mildred Gordon MP, Brian Sedgemore MP, Hackney NALGO, Hackney Council for Racial Equality, Hackney Trades Council, Hackney Joint Shop Stewards Committee, Hackney TGWU/ACTSS 1477 Branch, Alf Lomas MEP, National Union of Students and TGWU/ACTSS 1/1148 Branch.

UNITY CARNIVAL

Dear Solidarity Network, Anti-Fascist Action is organising a Unity Carnival at Hackney Downs, on Sunday 8th September between 2-7pm. The Carnival is an important part of our campaign against the rising level of racist attacks and fascist activity in East London.

The increase of racist violence has been widely reported, nationwide it is estimated that there is an attack every 26 minutes, and East London has the highest level of attacks in the Country. The fascist British National Party have made their work in East London a national priority. In the St.Peters ward

election in 1990, the BNP's 1 in 8 vote represented, in a ward evenly divided along racial lines, some 25 % of the disillusioned white working class vote.

We believe that the Unity Carnival will get the anti-fascist message across to a wide audience, especially young people. We are working with Cable Street Beat, the anti-fascist music organisation, to approach sympathetic bands/performers and have had an encouraging response. Unity Carnival, apart from giving anti-fascism a popular and positive profile, will be used educationally through exhibitions, stalls, (available on

the day at a cost of £30).

Inevitably the Carnival is costing a lot of money. To get popular bands is expensive - even at benefit rates, on top of that we have to pay for staging, publicity, P.A., toilet facilities, publicity, etc. We desperately need money to ensure the success of the Carnival and urge you to support it. We are asking organisations to sponsor Unity Carnival for a minimum of £40. This will mean your organisation's name will appear on publicity if you require it. All other donations are extremely welcome. Cheques should be made out to Anti-Fascist Action (Carnival) and

Company Information Service

Do You work in Private industry?

If so, then would you like to find out about your companies profits, directors wages, dividend to shareholders . . .

YES?

Then the Solidarity Network may be able to assist.

Obtaining reliable and up-to-date information can be an invaluable aid for all those seeking to obtain a decent pay rise, fight redundancies and generally opposing managements aim to make workers pay for their problems.

The Solidarity Network is now able to offer company information searches at cost price. It is £1 if you work in a Public Limited Company (PLC), which is a company which trades on the Stock Exchange, or £3 if it is a Limited Company only, (money back if we don't get good information).

All information will be laid out in presentable, working class style which we can help you make into a leaflet for

the workers at your factory or site. An example, using Thames Water Company, can be seen below.

THAMES WATER PLC

ACCOUNTS FOR THE YEAR ENDING

MARCH 31st 1990.

SALES UP 9% TO £611,000,000.

PROFITS were down to £179,200,000.

PROFITS AS A PERCENTAGE OF SALES WAS 29%.

AVERAGE PAY PER EMPLOYEE (full-time equivalent) WAS £16,736 IN 1990.

PROFIT PER EMPLOYEE IN 1990 WAS £23,003 A YEAR OR £443 A WEEK.

SHAREHOLDERS DIVIDENDS WERE £38,700,000, A HUGE AMOUNT FOR A FIRM OF SUCH SIZE.

HIGHEST PAID DIRECTORS WAGE WAS £157,000. A rise of 282%.

TOTAL AMOUNT PAID TO DIRECTORS WAS £497,000. (ie £9,557 a week)

In addition, 4 directors have options to 455,000 shares in the future.

SOLIDARITY NETWORK,
74 Kingsland Road,
London E13

Interested?

Then contact the Solidarity Network as soon as possible. Of course, if you or your branch affiliates, then we will carry out the search for nothing. Lastly, if you are low paid and can't afford the £3 then don't worry, still contact us and we will work something out.

In addition, if you work in the public sector and are threatened by privatisation then we could also assist if you want to examine the pay, conditions & service record of a possible tendering company. Contact the Solidarity Network.

The Solidarity Network company information service is only one the practical services that we can of & in the nest bulletin we intend to detail some of the help & skills we can give to steward, safety representatives, branches & activists within the trade union & labour movement.

Victimized Miners - the suffering continues

by Terry French - Ex-Kent Miner

The final consequences of the 84/85 miners strike, are still not fully known either to the establishment or the Trade Union movement. The repercussions of the miners strike will reverberate throughout the whole of Europe for many years to come. But, for some, the consequences are known only too well. They were the first casualties of the struggle. The victimized miners and their families. The families of those murdered by the state and those who languish in gaol, some for many years. Thankfully with the release of Russell Shankland and Dean Hancock all the miners gaoled during the strike are now free. But what about the families of

David Gareth Jones and Joe Green, murdered on the picket line by the state forces? When will they ever be free? Will they ever receive justice? I think not. For my own part I was sentenced to five years for assaulting a policeman on the picket line and over two years in gaol. That time was hard enough for both myself and my wife Liz but the real suffering started on my release. I would sit in the Miners Welfare club with my friends and almost be a stranger to them. They would sit and talk about events of the previous two years of which I was not part of and all I had to talk about was prison and before. It took more than two years before I felt comfortable.

Liz and I love each other very much but for a long time she resented me being at home again. She had settled into a routine and I disrupted it. Today I give thanks that our relationship was so strong, it had to be! Financially we have stumbled from one crisis to another. Before the strike my house was always well maintained and I was proud of it. Now I'm forced to sit and watch it gradually fall into disrepair because we hardly have the money for the mortgage let alone paint and paper. I am unable to claim state benefits, they don't credit you with stamps whilst on strike or in prison, and that meant signing on for three years without benefits. Rightly or

wrongly I just couldn't face the prospect. It's been seven years since I last had meaningful employment and there are fifty more victimized miners like me. People call you a lazy bastard and say you don't want to work. When you have spent a year on the forefront of a major strike and over two years in gaol because of it, there are no jobs for you. We are in a state of suspension with no future or security to look forward to. Surely with an organized Trade Union movement, it should be possible to look after these fifty men, men who were once seen as heroes but now feel discarded and unwanted, the cannon fodder of a forgotten strike, Yours and Solidarity, Terry French.

Post Office counters dispute

A Union of Communication Workers (UCW) members in London writes about the importance of the counter staffs' pay dispute and the threat to all UCW members

Before the present round of pay talks began, Post Office Counters Ltd (POCL) were confident that they would meet no resistance if they were to reduce the pay of counter staff by 5%. In their opinion, which is largely correct, the UCW members on the counter are weakly organised, especially outside of the major cities. That is why they felt able to make an offer below the rate of inflation.

It is true that the actions which have taken place so far have not been impressively solid with between 60%-70% of the members taking strike action. However amongst the strikers is a large core which wants the Union to call an all-out indefinite strike. They are angry, not just about the pay offer, but also about changes in working practices, the closure of more than 300 crown offices and the impotence of the national union. From the failure of the campaign of one and two day strikes to defend the crown offices, they have rightly concluded that this type of action is inadequate. An indefinite strike with support from UCW members in other Post Office businesses is what is needed to win.

There is no rank and file co-ordination is the UCW. Everything is controlled from UCW house and the authority of the leadership is so great that it would be absurd to try and organise in active

opposition to them. But even the Executive Council has become cheesed off by the way that the Post Office management now treats its members and at the May annual conference the leadership appeared genuinely keen to take the lead in the surge of militancy represented by the strike ballot. So now they must rise to the challenge and call the strike. It will probably be necessary to break the law, a difficult thing to do for a leadership that almost boast how closely it follows the letter of the Tory legislation, but if flying pickets are to be organised to close the weaker offices and drivers employed by Royal Mail letter are to be instructed not to deliver cash to, collect mail from, the offices in dispute, there is no alternative.

There is more at stake in this dispute than this year's pay award for POCL staff. Defeat will mean the destruction of the UCW on the counters and it will also set the mood for the other sections of the UCW membership when their pay awards take place during the next few months, for nobody doubts that POCL and the Post Office board are acting under government instructions.

A victory for the UCW would be a major blow against the Tories public sector pay policy.

Since this article was written the 7% offer has been accepted by the Union.

Tubes' jobs defeat by an RMT Tubeworker

800 jobs have been lost on London's Underground. Two of the Unions representing tube workers, the RMT and TSSA had voted 2 to 1 for industrial action to oppose over 1000 job losses. But by the close of balloting and after London Underground (LUL) had called for ACAS, the Unions felt unable to implement the action. Two reasons for this were a massive and unprecedented campaign of management bullying and the splitting of the unions by ASLEF - the train driver's Union.

ACAS negotiations restored 200 jobs and instituted talks on rosters which could increase staffing. Proposals to cut another 800 jobs were withdrawn; working parties on staffing and pay levels set up after the 1989 strikes but abandoned by management were reinstated, promotion and transfer arrangements were reinstated and the protection of earnings for displaced staff was extended from 18 to 36 months. Large scale reorganisation of the Permanent Way and engineering departments remains. Management could move swiftly to implement the break-up of these departments. Individual line managers would control their own services with the option of putting the work out to private tender. However it is unlikely that any further major changes will be proposed for passenger services this side of the General Election.

For LUL, management is severely discredited in the eyes of the public, producing a £100 million deficit and worse services. The public want better and safer services with more staff. Only a new Tory election victory would give management a fresh mandate to cut back these areas.

ASLEF collaborated with managements plans from the start. They adopted a position that they would not fight for booking clerks or station staff. But worse, they did not even fight the loss of 272 train jobs - because there were no compulsory redundancies.

For the first time in living memory on LUL one Union negotiated a deal with management after the

others had registered a failure to agree. Their national officials stated that they would not support any of their members who respected official picket lines, their full-time local officials and officers fought against RMT & TSSA ballots and supported management plans to sack activists.

During previous ballots (in 1987 and three in 1989) management took no initiatives. Now threats of the sack were widespread, backed up by individual letters to the whole workforce. Also they imposed the package while the Unions were still balloting. Compliance with the anti-trade union laws meant that the new working arrangements were fully in place for four weeks before the ballot could be concluded. By the time the LUL management called talks at ACAS serious rank and file activists were concerned that a repeat of 1985 was possible. Then an all-out strike call by RMT against imposition of One Person Operation was ignored by the majority of the workforce, and had to be called off within 12 hours. In view of this the decision to call off the strike was unavoidable.

The immediate task is to deal with the problems of ASLEF. For ten years this organisation has been the 'tail that wagged the dog' of the Federation of Railway Unions. At the same time as consistently refusing to hold a ballot for full amalgamation, their organisation has poached members from the RMT at BR and LUL. The sham bureaucracy of the Federation must be broken up at this year's RMT AGM. Fighting for one union, the RMT, must be combined with consistent propaganda to defy the anti-trade union laws.

The RMT LUL District Council has an excellent tradition of mass leafletting both in-between and during industrial disputes. To this must be added a new tradition of assemblies of activists which alone can organise widely and deeply enough amongst the workforce to combat management intimidation and Union disunity.

EPIU going from strength to strength

After 2½ years of campaigning, self-denial and conviction among EPIU members for TUC affiliation their labours have been rewarded by the Finance and General Purposes Committee, who have agreed to welcome them in to the council. Congratulations are in order to John O'Brien and John Aitken for spearheading the EPIU and guiding the union along a delicate and winding road. Unlike 'Papa Doc Chappell' or 'Baby Doc Hammond' both John O'Brien and John Aitken will be accountable to the membership of the EPIU, the union will keep its interest to electrical and plumbing industries and will respect the Bridlington Agreement. The EPIU can boast of being the fastest growing union today, it has every reason to be optimistic of its future and has wasted no time in pouring itself into securing agreement with employers and representing its members.

The scaremongering screams

from the EETPU quarters were of empty vessel diatribe, recently we have seen an EPIU member awarded £20,000 for unfair dismissal by Bancocks at the Sellafeld plant and two members at Mossmorran winning their appeal also, much against the wishers of the EETPU shop stewards at these sites and most certainly against the predictions of the EETPU hierarchy.

After storming out of the TUC conference back in 1988 like some spoiled brat, Eric Hammond's attempts to find a surrogate trade union have failed, his only alternative would be to put his union up for adoption with the most likely candidate being the Tory Reform Group. Should any union consider cossetting the EETPU beware, like cancer the EETPU is capable of taking over and destroying the very fabric of the democracy of that union, prevention is better than cure, the EETPU can damage your TUC.

By John P. EPIU member

Solidarity with South African workers

The Sasol strike support co-ordinating committee which involves local branches of the following organisations (Pan Africanist Congress, Azanian People's Organisation, National Council of Trades Unions and community members of Zamdelia) hereby request material support and solidarity from your good offices.

Briefly this matter involves 800 workers who were dismissed in October 1987 following a legitimate wage dispute. Their matter was referred to the Industrial Court, and in 1989 the only Black Judge on the industrial court, ADV Bulbulia reinstated all dismissed employees with back pay. The Judge also castigated the old-fashioned union bashing approach used by Sasol. He lambasted the company for sleeping through an Industrial Relations revolution introduced by the Wiehan Commission of Enquiry in 1979. The company appealed the decision.

The Pretoria Labour Appeal

Division upheld the company's appeal, and made matters worse by refusing the Union leave to appeal.

Presently the 800 workers are facing eviction out of Sasol owned houses. The children are out of school due to financial problems. Some of the workers have died due to stress and malnutrition. We as members of the Zamdelia community launched a summer boycott which unfortunately did not bear fruitful results, trying to pressurise Sasol to re-employ these workers. Presently the South African Council of Churches is discussing the possibility of re-employment of these workers with the company.

We therefore request you show solidarity with the Zamdelia community by sending a letter to Sasol management urging them to co-operate with the South African Council of Churches in their endeavour. Their address is;

The Manager, SASOL LTD,
23 BAKER STREET,
ROSEBANK 2196,
TEL: 011 441 3111.
FAX: 011 441 3364.

In regard to material support of any kind, kindly contact;

MR. J.L.KEKANE
P.O. BOX 2661,
VEREENIGING 1930,
TEL: 016 21 2700 or;

The General Secretary, South African Chemical Workers Union, 8th Floor, Lekton House, 5 Wanderers Street, JHB, TEL: 011 29 8968/9 FAX: 011 29 8317.

We are waiting for details of the striker's Bank Account, in order to avoid delays in getting your donation to them. Please send all monies to the Leicester Trades Council, who will forward them as soon as they receive the details. Make cheques payable to 'Leicester & District Trades Council S.S.C.', and send to 138 Charles Street, Leicester.

Boycott Levi Strauss by Bruce Allen

Workers in Canada and the heavily industrialized U.S. Northeast long ago became accustomed to seeing unionized plants shut down and production moved to low-wage, non-union locations in the American sunbelt. But times have changed in this era of free trade zones and negotiation to reach multinational Free Trade agreements. Nowadays not even non-union shops in the U.S. sunbelt are safe from the global corporate drive to become more competitive and reap record breaking profits.

The 1,150 former workers of one of three Levi Strauss plants

in San Antonio, Texas, provide a revealing case in plant. In April of last year their non-union plant which produced Levis' Docker Line of jeans was shut down so production could be moved to Costa Rica. A spokesperson for Levi Strauss justified the close by maintaining that labour costs were too high for the operation to remain competitive. The workers earned an average hourly wage of \$5.57 an hour. The previous year Levi Strauss managed a paltry \$3.6 billion record in sales.

The dismissed workers put together a comprehensive list

of demands designed to address their basic economic needs in the wake of the closure but the company refused to reach a settlement. The workers launched a campaign to boycott Levi Strauss in response and it is still underway. The laid off workers are also asking supporters who own Levi Strauss products to remove the label and send it with a letters stating that you support the boycott and demanding that the company settle with its former employees.

Address letters to;

Levi Strauss (Attn: Bob Haas)
1155 Battery St.
San Francisco, CA. 94111.

Bruce Allen is a Canadian Autoworkers (CAW) Shop Steward.