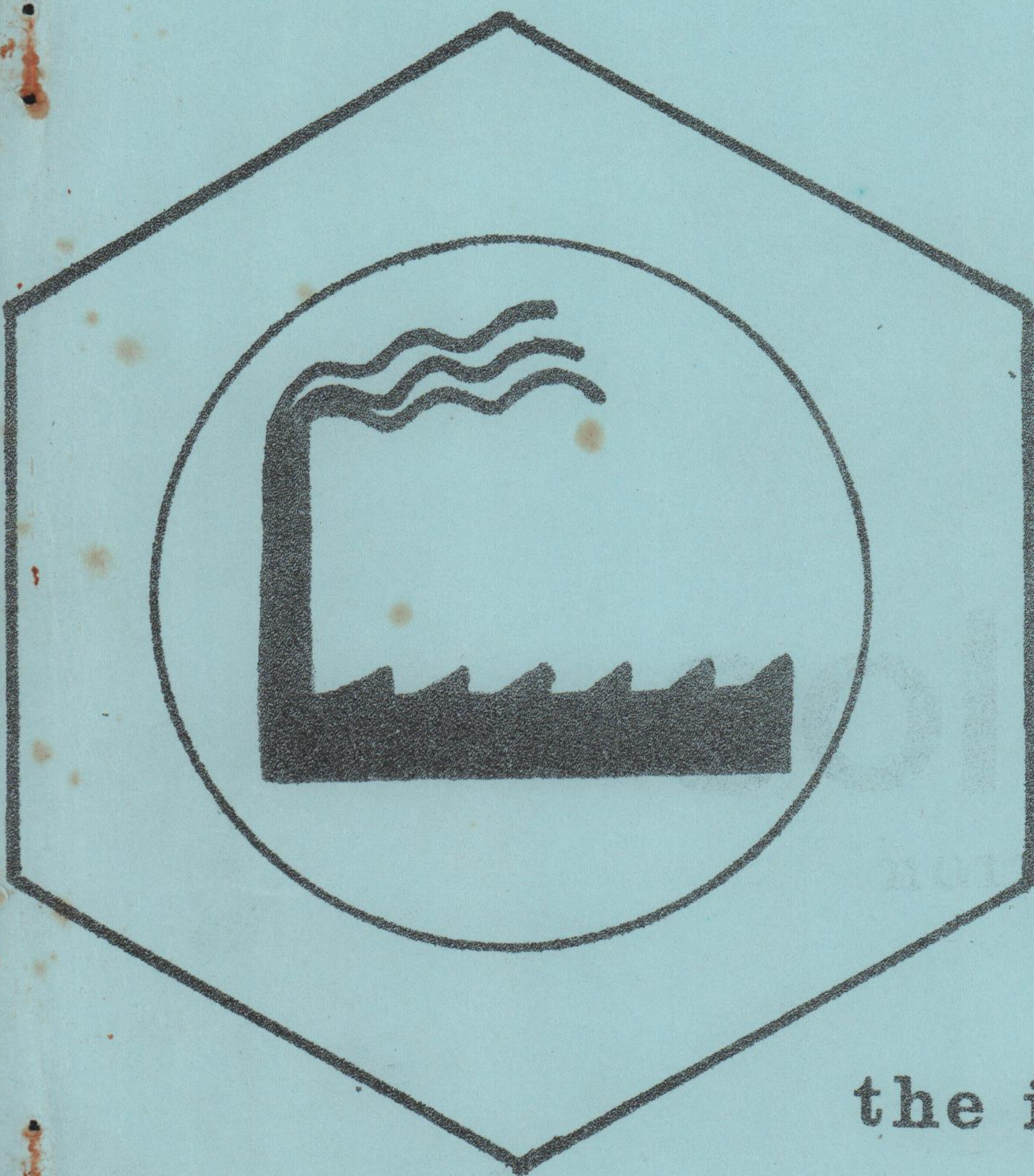


solidarity

north west



lancaster
the lansil strike

manchester
slum clearance

bolton
comprehensives

liverpool
new militant paper

springboks

the italian struggle

volume 1 no 2

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about solidarity - - - -

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This is issue no 2 of Solidarity (North West). Our group is concerned not with building up a big membership as much as spreading the ideas of Solidarity. Our aim is to encourage people to form their own organisations, rather than try to force them to adopt the organisational forms and leadership of others. Solidarity is about workers power. We produce this paper in order to spread our ideas and inform as wide a public as possible of the real truth of the struggles which are daily taking place all around us. The North West Group, which is based on Manchester, Lancaster and Bolton, with links in other areas including Merseyside, takes a particular interest in the building industry, in which we have deep roots. In our first issue we wrote about the probability of a wage agreement being signed which would be against the interests of the workers in the industry. Our worst fears were fully realised. The new agreement, which came into force on February 2nd is so bad, and so far reaching in its implications, that we have just produced a pamphlet which goes into both the agreement and the background to it. Many of the most elemental principles of Trades Unionism have gone out of the window in the interests of progress, (whose progress you can judge for yourself.) This pamphlet is now available price 6d + 4d postage from Solidarity (N.W)

Solidarity (North West)

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OTHER AUTONOMOUS SOLIDARITY GROUPS.

London(West)	c/o 15, Taylors Green, London W3.
London(North)	c/o H.Russell, 53A, Westmoreland Rd. Bromley.
London(South)	c/o J.Shreeve, 44, Sturgeon Rd, London S.E.17
Romford	c/o Tony Reed, 26, Seamore Gdns, Ilford, Essex
Aberdeen	c/o N.Roy, 138, Walker Rd Aberdeen.
Clydeside	c/o D.Kane, 43, Valeview Terrace, Dumbarton.
Dundee	c/o F.Browne, 444 Perth Rd, Dundee.

The three London Groups and the Aberdeen Group all produce their own issues of Solidarity. Copies can be obtained from above addresses price 10d (including postage).

all out at lansil—

Lansils is a synthetic textile mill in Lancaster, producing mainly artificial silks. It employs 1850 people, several hundred of whom are women. Since 1962 it has been wholly owned by Monsanto, the giant U.S. chemical company. Monsanto is a world wide concern, with 22 subsidiaries in Britain alone. The managing director of Lansils is J.G. Seddon-Browne, who is paid £13,015 a year; last year he got a pay rise of £23 a week.

Compare with this the conditions of Lansil workers. Before the strike the basic rate for men was 6/1d per hour, and for women 4/5¹/₄d. a small premium for shiftwork, and a tiny, fiddled bonus, were added. Heavy overtime was thus necessary to earn a living wage. Working conditions were far from ideal, with some departments working in temperatures getting on for 100 degrees. There was no tradition of militancy. There hadn't been a strike for 33 years, and half the workers weren't even in a union.

Lansils is typical of industry in Lancaster, which is a small non-expanding town of 50,000 people, dominated by a few large firms. It is generally suspected that these big firms operate a wage ring, trying to fix rates as low as they dare. This would not be difficult in a town where there are twelve unemployed men chasing every vacant job.

Two months before the strike began, the spinners imposed an overtime ban in protest against the management's refusal to improve working conditions. (They had promised to provide showers and overalls, and then quietly forgot all about it). Negotiations had been going on to try to improve and clarify the bonus system but the management were using delaying tactics. The last straw was their announcement that they wouldn't alter bonuses until they'd introduced time study throughout the mill.

The workers realised that without strong job organisation the time study men would run rings round them. The demand for 100% union membership began to be made.

THE STRIKE BEGINS

In the early hours of Friday October 17th the spinners' nightshift, their patience exhausted, walked out. Throughout the day, other departments came out, until by Saturday afternoon production had stopped. (Though staff and amintenance workers consistently refused to come out in support).

A strike committee was set up, and a programme of demands presented to the management. 100% union membership was at the head; this had now become even more important, to prevent the victimisation of militants. General increases in basic rates, shift and overtime premia, and bonus payments were demanded. Hundreds of workers were signed up for the T.G.W.U., and soon almost all the production workers were members.

The first meeting between the strike committee and the management broke up after ten minutes, as the management refused all the workers' demands point blank. Strikes were so

unexpected in Lancaster that they probably hadn't got over the shock. But the workers were determined, and the first two mass meetings voted almost unanimously to stay out.

A round the clock picket was organised, which succeeded in preventing raw materials from going in and stocks of finished products from going out. Dockers at Liverpool, Preston and Manchester were contacted, and expressed their solidarity by blacking Lansil products. as did many lorry drivers formerly supplying the firm.

There was no trouble with blacklegs. Half a dozen women at one stage made a pathetic attempt to go back; they were let through, only to be sent home by the management five minutes later. Since the strike was not made official for two weeks by the ineptitude of the penny-pinching national headquarters of the T.G.W.U., no strike pay was received until the day the strike was called off. That the strikers stayed solid under such financial pressure is itself a fine achievement.

THE WORKERS HAVE ALLIES

Socialist students from Lancaster university were asked to join the picket, and added to its numbers, especially overnight and on early morning duty. The student federation voted £100 to the strike fund, only to be banned from giving it by the university authorities. (This is believed to be not wholly unconnected with the fact that Lansils give an annual four figure donation to the university).

SO HAVE THE BOSSES

Student support for the strikers was the occasion for a vicious attack from the local press in an attempt to destroy the strike. The "Lancaster Guardian" accused the students of meddling in things that didn't concern them, but had themselves nothing to say about the strike except to praise the feeble "Peace" efforts of the local M.P. They ended their editorial by telling the student students to get back to their studies.

The workers, who appreciated the students' help, were not taken in. Jack Birkett, secretary of the strike committee, made a press statement thanking the students for their support. relations on the picket line remained very friendly.

Then the police stepped in. The picket line had been a complete success, and at first the police did nothing to hinder it. In the second week of the strike, the management called them in, and they escorted a few lorries in the mill. After the strike was made official at the end of the second week, they gave this up. (In any case, the firm couldn't have used any supplies they might have got through). The police incurred the pickets' contempt and once, when a police car went into the mill, it came out to shouts of "Staff Car - let it through"!

THE END OF THE STRIKE

After two and a half weeks, the strikers were still solid; orders were being lost, and one particularly big order was being threatened. Now the management weakened. At a meeting on Wednesday 5th November, they agreed to 100% union membership, and to start negotiations on pay. On Friday 7th a mass meeting voted to go back to work. Shortly afterwards, a basic rate of 7/6d an hour for men, and 5/10¹/₄d for women, was agreed. Not princely, but a step forward.

LESSONS OF THE STRIKE

Lansil workers still have a tremendous fight on their hands if they are to bring wages and conditions to a level with those in less depressed areas. Undoubtedly the struggle has only just begun.

The production workers felt badly let down by the staff and, in particular the maintenance workers, who stayed at work throughout the strike. There was no actual scabbing, but it was cold comfort for the strikers to receive messages of solidarity from local branches of one or two craft unions whose members were still receiving their pay from Lansils. Greater unity is essential in the future. As for the staff - perhaps a visit by Clive Jenkins is rather overdue ?.

In the meanwhile, some important lessons emerge from the strike. The neutrality of the state in industrial disputes is a sham, as the action of the Lancaster police, admittedly only half-hearted, shows quite clearly. Many lorry drivers who will gladly refuse to cross a picket line will be unable to return home with a load after refusing a police escort. This is plain harassment.

The press, too, is always on the side of the employers. In this strike Justice was so clearly on the side of the strikers that the "Lancaster Guardian" didn't dare to attack them directly. Instead it did so by getting at the student sympathisers - not the first time that students have been used as scapegoats by the gutter press.

The strike did show that workers will gladly accept student support when they need it. There was no evidence of the hostility which is often supposed to exist between workers and students.

One question which students might be wise to raise is the advisability of accepting money from big firms with strings attached, especially when the strings concern a student union's freedom to spend its own funds.

Jim McCann.

springboks - rugger off!

Now the Springboks have departed I want to take a look at just one of the numerous incidents which took place on their tour. On Wednesday November 26th well over 4,000 people to demonstrate against apartheid in general and the South African Rugby team in particular. The events of the afternoon included three marches, two sit downs and one full scale battle with the police. This article is an attempt to describe what happened from the demonstrators point of view.

The march started from All Saints, Manchester at about 12.45 and set off to march to the appropriately named White City Stadium three miles away. The vast bulk of the marchers were students (since it was on a weekday) with a leavening of vicars, anti-apartheid supporters, liberals, trades unionists and Special Branch Police.

Everything was peaceful until we reached the Chester Rd/ Talbot Rd junction about $\frac{1}{2}$ a mile from the stadium. The police had refused to allow the march near the front of the ground, and were out in force with waggons and horses to turn the march down Talbot Rd (We had already agreed to go down Talbot Rd since we saw little point in having a purposeless punch up half a mile from the stadium.) At this point the liberals peeled off from the centre of the march, as a block, and sat down, blocking Chester Rd. (One of the busiest roads in the city.) The rest of the marchers, who had decided against a sit down, stood around or or ran through to join up with the front of the march.

The Police Attack.

At this point the front sector of the march was standing peaceably facing down Talbot Rd (i.e. the way they should have been) and waiting for the rest of the marchers to join up. Then, without any warning, the police attacked the front of the march. A wedge of police drove in from the right about twenty yards from the front rank, attacking individual marchers and smashing the Black and White coffin which had been the march figure head.

Utter confusion spread immediately. Somehow people reorganised themselves and the march got moving away from the trouble-spot. Any chance of the march holding together and defending itself against a new police attack was gone. Ranks were broken up, groups and individuals scattered. At the second confrontation down Talbot Road. When we had a go at the cordon we just didn't have the power left to break it. From that point on the much publicized plan to take the march into the ground was a non-starter. True we pushed the police 120 yards down Talbot Road. And came within 40 yards of an entry point to the ground but it never really looked possible. The rest was just a postscript. Inside the ground various attempts but no successes in terms

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of stopping the game, outside more scuffling, sitting down, standing up, head bashing and then everyone hounded round town with policemen everywhere. - 300 arrests, 70 people charged.

Several points of interest were raised at the demonstration which have political importance for everyone - whether they are 'demo regulars' or not.

1. The overall police tactics were far rougher than they have ever been. We have no knowledge of a march which was keeping to the route and breaking no laws being openly attacked by the police - usually they like to seem to keep to their own rules, this time they openly ignored them. As far as we in Manchester are concerned we now plan on the basis that any march may be attacked anywhere whether it has broken any law or not - and next time we'll be ready to defend ourselves.

2. The ordinary police who had little or no experience of demonstrations were on the whole pretty reasonable. There were incidents of real brutality but most of them just behaved like normal blokes in a bewildering situation. Nevertheless when it came later on to rigging evidence against those charged or the illegal forced photographing of everyone arrested, they showed every willingness to perform.

3. Paradoxically the power of the state is nevertheless still much more on our side than on that of the Springboks. The monopoly press, despite its usual hysterical lies about the actual events in Talbot Road has given the liberal campaign a fair degree of support. The courts so usually bent the other way, were for once fiddled in our favour, fines were small and the atmosphere benevolent. It becomes quite terrifying in this situation to consider what would happen if they really put the screws on - the capacity of the state to bend justice can only really be appreciated when they bend it in your favour.

After the Manchester demo the Springboks were hounded from match to match. They were never actually stopped from playing a match but this **is** not of prime importance. The number of 'Liberals' on these demos was vast. For all of these the confrontation with the power of the state, the assertion of solidarity in the situation, the lies in court and in the press afterwards leaves a lasting impression. This is not to say that liberal + bashed head equals revolutionary, only that the combined effects of the demonstration contribute to a higher interest in, and a higher awareness of the horrors of apartheid.

Pete Halstead.

This is the first of a series of articles on the various 'unofficial' papers which circulate in the North West. We do not necessarily agree with the content of these papers, but we feel that it is important to know what is going on in the area and to be aware of what others in our area are saying. The first paper we are reviewing has not actually come into existence yet, but is in an advanced state of preparation. We wish all the best to :-

MERSEYSIDE RANK+FILE PAPER.

Three months ago about ten people came together to talk about launching a rank & file/community newspaper on Merseyside. Since then they have been collecting funds and articles. Even more important they have been going round seeing people and getting them interested in the idea of the paper.

There are now about thirty people involved in one way or another about half being workers and the other half students. The main idea is that the paper should be a real rank and file paper with the bulk of the articles being written by workers, and distributed by them in their own work-places. The intention is that the paper should be a real instrument which can be used by workers to further the struggles in which they are involved. It is hoped that the paper will make it easier to link up, and pass on information about, all the different sections of the workers on Merseyside. In many ways it should also help to counter the information put out by the established press.

Certainly in view of the historic militancy of the Merseysiders such a paper should provide an invaluable service. It is vital that the dockers, the car workers, the building workers, the tenants organisations and so on should be fully informed of the real truth about the various fights they find themselves involved in. More and more sections of society are finding that they are all involved in the same struggle and any means for disseminating information is something all socialists should support.

The format of the new paper will be offset litho printed with four sides about as large as the Daily Mirror pages, appearing fortnightly and costing 6d. At first only a limited edition will be printed, this being sold in places where there is already a fair amount of support. Then a public meeting will be called with the intention of getting more people involved. An editorial board is to be elected, but the ultimate control of the paper will lie in the hands of those who write for, work for, produce and sell it.

Messages of support, ideas, advice, offers of help, funds, articles and requests for the paper should be sent to:-

The Paper (no name has yet been decided)
78, Clarendon Rd,
Wallasey,
Cheshire.

the italian struggle.

The following article has been received from France, from some French comrades who have in their turn received it from Italy. It was a document distributed in Paris calling for two meetings in support of the workers' struggle in Italy, 12th and 15th December 1969.

we have decided to print it because we consider it to be of particular interest to us and especially relevant to our cause. It is about strikes: - but not ordinary, wage-demand strikes, of there are dozens (happily!) every week in Britain. No, these form part of a real revolutionary struggle by the workers of Italy - the workers' demands go far beyond those for pay increases, although these are included; in fact as far as demands for workers' control...

On 1st December 1969, the Director of "Potere Operaio" (Workers' Power, an Italian left-wing paper), Francesco Tolin, after a trial lasting four hours, was sentenced to seventeen months' imprisonment, under the following charges:

Accessory to crime, i.e., the workers' violence in the recent struggles, and particularly: "private violence, destruction within the factories, resistance to the forces of law and order".

Incitement to subversion, i.e., the offense of organising outside the existing, officially recognised, political and trade union organisations: "incitement of workers of all Italy to the revolt against the State and especially of workers of Fiat in Turin to destroy the vehicles inside the firm's premises".

The prosecution has pointed out that the offenses were of "an exceptional gravity, for they directly foment disorder and create a revolutionary climate in the country".

This sentence, clearly political, was passed just at a time when the workers have decided to begin using class violence as a strong weapon for struggle outside the institutional mechanisms of parties and trade unions.

"By the thousands the workers stop work, leave the factories, and march to the offices in order to expel the black-legs among the clerical staff; they surround the factories and prevent anyone from going in; they swarm over the roads and block

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the traffic in the towns; they forcibly enter the bosses' offices, in order to ransack them; they go into the factories to paralyse production by means of "wild-cat" strikes, hard and lasting; they dismantle or break down sections of the production line.

"In a press conference, Agnelli asserted that this year Fiat would reach its production target of 1.5 million cars. However, now he is claiming that the strikes have provoked a loss in production of 172,000 cars. The workers are firmly determined to ensure, by means of violent strikes, that he doesn't get his million and a half cars, and to smash the present work organisation" (Potere Operaio N° 7: "we say YES to the workers' violence", one of the articles for which Tolin has been imprisoned).

At a time when the trade unions want the employees to accept some agreements which clearly fall short of the workers' present demands, those workers have to undertake violent action as an instrument of mass struggle to back up their own objectives.

Let us look back on how all this began:

"In July 1969, the workers of Fiat (Turin) built up barricades during the trade unions strike against high rents. After two months of struggle, they were still demanding an increase of 150 lire (2/-) per hour and the abolition of all worker status below category II. In Petrolchimica of Porto Marghera (Venice) the aims were: an increase of 1,000 lire (13/-) per day, a 36-hour week for the work-teams, total equality with salaried staff. In Pirelli (Milan) abolition of piece-work and a monthly increase of 15,000 lire (£10). These workers' demands have arisen from their own struggle and nobody dared to question them.

"Before the annual holidays, the trade unions presented a contractual compromise: the most 'advanced' claim - that of the engineers: 75 lire (1/-) an hour increase, 40-hour week immediately, total equality with the clerical staff - was already one step backwards.

"The workers' strength improved with the mass struggle, and the ministers, employers, trade unions and coppers have now started to stir." (Potere Operaio N° 9: "Comrades, let us recall how it started", another of the articles in question).

The workers demanded acceptance of the agreement with no bargaining. Under the slogan 'Everything, now!', Fiat was occupied on the 10th October. "The agreement is a worthless piece of paper and we shall tear it up when we feel like it."

In the face of such an impressive manifestation of workers' autonomy, the trade unions began to accept token offers: on 10th November they gave in on working hours, wages and total equality, as far as the building workers were concerned. On 15th November they gave way to the offer of Donat Cattin (Minister of Labour) for Pirelli, and now they are giving way even more concerning the engineers and chemical workers.

But the workers haven't finished yet. The workers of Fiat (Turin) are just starting a new wave of "wild-cat" strikes, hard and violent, to put forward the workers' claims from before the holidays.

While the Government, the trade unions and the press of all different parties are not conditioning public opinion in order to end the struggle, while they persist in making us believe that all that the workers are now looking for is the end of the struggle, while the PCI (Italian Communist Party) is now trying to carry out the priority task of repressing the autonomous initiative of the workers, in order to present itself as a potential governmental party, we need now to intensify the organisation in order to keep open every possibility of starting up the mass struggle again.

"In the face of attempts to break up the workers' demands, in the face of attempts to prevent the unification of all the struggles, there is only one answer: SPREAD THE STRUGGLE FROM THE FACTORY TO THE STREETS. BRING THE STRUGGLES OUT FROM THEIR ISOLATION; UNIFY ALL THE STRUGGLES IN EVERY SECTOR. APPLY STRONG PRESSURE ON THE STUDENTS' MOVEMENT SO THAT THE STUDENTS' STRUGGLE TAKES ONCE AND FOR ALL THE CHARACTER OF A MASS STRUGGLE AGAINST THE EDUCATIONAL ESTABLISHMENTS. It is only under these conditions that the students' movement will interest the workers: in its role as one of the components of a social confrontation of the masses..

It is necessary in these struggles to consolidate and to enlarge the autonomous organisation of the workers. And this is now possible through some practical initiatives of organisation built around the objectives the workers have expressed during these struggles.

"A first step in such a direction has to be made by enlarging the co-ordination of all the autonomous workers' forces which have been expressed during recent years. By the end of this cycle of wage struggles the working class must find itself stronger and more organised." (P.O. N° 7: "workers' co-ordination", another of the articles in question).

This article, however, was not written by *Proletto Operaio*, but is a motion approved by workers in the Factory Committees of Turin, Milan, Porto Marghera, Bologna, Ferrara, Rome etc.

--by a foundry worker

Don't let Friday come so quick,
 the sight of my pay packet makes me sick
 Fuming and outraged I drop in the pub
 to drown myself in the tax-man's blood.
 Work, Work, Work, - that's all I do,
 and nothing to show when I'm through.

* * * * *

By day and by night the prison gets stronger,
 Are you going to wait much longer?
 Can't you see into the future
 your children in clutches of Capitalistic crutches?
 Haven't you had enough of this bleeding gang of toughs
 of their stinking society based on propriety?
 Steal! Cheat! Connive! against
 hard working people who find it hard to survive.
 This so-called civilisation,
 this industrial monstrosity full of atrocity,
 Fakers, why don't you come down to earth
 and see yourselves for what your worth.
 You think yourselves sent down from God, I say from Hell!
 for every decent instinct you repel.
 Tooth and nail I'll teach you the truth, tyrannical power,
 I'll work to lay your ghost every minute, day and hour.

* * * * *

Work, Work, Work, - that's all I do,
 and nothing to show when I'm through.
 I pay the rent, the light, the coal,
 Life just seems one bloody deep hole.
 Who has dug this pit for me
 this labyrinth of deformity?
 O, Capitalistic pigs, arrogant swine,
 Devil's architects for the blind.
 You have trained me well
 "work for us - or go to hell".
 Work for you, what does that mean?
 slave at one of your machines?
 You stole the life, blood, sweat of the poor
 the time is coming when we'll have it no more.
 You've made my life an impossible proposition
 so I must down you from your position.
 I'm getting fed up with this state of affairs,
 It's getting so bad I've even tried prayers.
 Maybe we should do something drastic about these parasites,
 something to teach them wrong from right,
 something that'll give them a hum and a glimmer
 and teach them what's natural and what's a sinner.

Len.

* * * * *

bolton schools

The following letter was received from a Bolton Schoolteacher in response to the article on Comprehensive Schools in Bolton in the first issue of Solidarity(North West).

May I add a footnote to Paul Harris's excellent article on Bolton Tory Council's refusal to reorganise secondary schools on comprehensive lines?

He comments that the teachers who approved selection and segregation at 12+ instead of 11+ (the scheme later rejected by the Secretary of State for Education) "ought to be ashamed of themselves." In fact, most teachers were not in favour of the plan which he rightly describes as ludicrous.

In the first place 2/3 of the working party which supposedly approved the scheme consisted of secondary head teachers and their nominees. Only a small minority represented the teachers' unions. The working party was not allowed to elect its own chairman, the meetings being presided over by Mr Selley, the Chief Education Officer. No minutes or records of the discussions were kept. No votes were taken until the final meeting. No discussion of straight-through 11-18 comprehensive schools, or two tier arrangements was allowed by Mr Selley, who said that the council had already rejected these. (Yet it was clear that many of the teachers were prepared to accept some kind of comprehensive arrangement.)

It is little wonder that the resulting report did not even reflect the views of the working party, let alone teachers generally. Indeed, when a belated vote was taken it

appeared that only a minority was definitely in favour; but the voting was hurried and of course no announcement or record of the voting figures was made.

When complaints about all this were made to the Town Clerk, he implied that he agreed that the proceedings had been unconstitutional, but suggested that no action was necessary because Mr Selley was due to retire soon through ill-health. He's still there -- four years later -- helping the Tories to resist comprehensive reorganisation, even though the result will be that Bolton's secondary schools will be seriously overcrowded very soon because the government will not grant the money for new building.

Yours etc.

BOLTON TEACHER

HAVE YOU READ

"MAIL ORDER MILLIONS" ?

An account of working conditions in the Mail Order business in Bolton.

Price 6d + 4d post from

Solidarity (North West)

slum clearance in manchester.

15.

by Dick Sheenan

This is an attempt to look into the way slum clearance and rehous-
ing are being tackled in Manchester. The problems are in some
respects common to all industrial towns, but overspill is pecu-
liar to the larger cities. In smaller towns at least people are
not faced with the prospect of being rehoused anything up to
twenty miles away from the place they grew up in.

The first thing to ask is what is the purpose of slum clearance
anyway? The answer may seem obvious but is it? It sometimes,
in fact often, seems that those who benefit most are the big
boys in the building game, and their shareholders. Of course
the end result is supposed to be a better life for people who
have previously had a pretty raw deal. The idea was originally
intended to provide good quality, low rent accomodation for the
working class, but the way things are working out it is clear
that something has gone very, very wrong along the way. Why is
it that so many families greet the prospect of clearance and
rehousing with either fear or resentment, instead of delight at
the chance of a new home?

Physical environment

The obvious facet of slum clearance and rehousing is the bring-
ing up to date of the actual fabric in which people live.
There are of course vast areas of unfit housing in the country,
a legacy from the industrial revolution and the Victorian build-
ing speculators. Many of the houses in which people are forced
to live are clearly unfit for human habitation and no one in
his right mind would oppose the principle of slum clearance.
The trouble is that many of the properties which are being
literally thrown up are, in many cases, almost as bad as the
old houses which are being pulled down. For instance, a family
living in a two-year-old maisonette in Hulme cannot use the
built-in wardrobes because their clothes turn mouldy. On the
estate in Chorlton-on-Medlock an eighty-year-old widow fell
through the bedroom floor in a recently built flat. The boards
were rotten! There have been endless complaints of dampness in
houses on the overspill estates at Langley and Hattersley. In
at least one case the Ministry of Health for Hyde certified a
dwelling at Hattersley as unfit for habitation due to excessive
dampness.

The vast new Hulme development consists mainly of four- and six-
storey maisonettes which are incredibly small and crowded, with
acres of dull concrete and shoddy plastic panels, which are

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downright ugly to look at. The general standard of both design and building is appalling. Of course a great deal of the blame can be laid at the Labour Government's door, with the housing cost yardstick which lays down rigid limits within which houses must be costed to qualify for subsidy. The Parker Morris Standard was originally set out as the MINIMUM standard to which a dwelling should be built but in time this has been made instead the MAXIMUM. Even within this limit much more could be done but unfortunately Manchester Corporation doesn't seem to understand that NEW housing is not necessarily the same thing as BETTER housing.

The Quality of Life

Something which is much more important than the bare fabric in which we live is the overall quality of life we have. Physical surroundings are only a part of this, although an important one. Those who are carrying out the slum clearance and rehousing programme in Manchester pay hardly any attention to this however. Old established communities and family groups have been broken up and destroyed for ever. Tony H---- who was moved from an old house in Hulme to the Partington overspill estate was asked how he liked it after five years. He said he hated it at first, but now he had got used to it. Further questioning brought out the fact that he is not as happy now as he was before his living standards were improved for him by those in authority. He is, in fact, less happy as a result of the slum clearance programme.

A very important part of environment, particularly for women, is the facility for shopping. Women who have been moved from districts which had excellent shopping centres complain bitterly about the lack of decent shopping facilities on new estates. The pattern is usually one of small precincts with one shop of each type, creating virtual monopolies. (More on this below).

The sad truth is that as a direct result of being rehoused the living standards of thousands of families drop drastically. People are not only faced with far higher rents, but also in many cases with high bus fares, higher prices in the shops and a loss of leisure time because of the hours spent travelling to and from work. Of course in time new communities will grow up on the new estates but this will take years, and meantime life is slipping by.

One of the effects of transporting families to new estates is the tendency to adopt a middle-class suburban outlook, where neighbours become people to avoid instead of friends to turn to in time of need. Many tenants on the Brunswick Estate found that the organisation they formed to fight a rent increase,

though failing in this particular object, had brought them together as PLOPLE. There seems to be a conspiracy to persuade city dwellers that if their aim in life is not a suburban semi with a garden then there must be something wrong with them -- yet at the same time there is a growing tendency for the middle classes to move back into the city centres again. This is especially noticeable in certain London districts such as Islington, but it is beginning to happen in the North as well. Perhaps it has something to do with the fact that the heavy traffic of today has taken a lot of fun out of commuting to Cheadle.

Problems

Of course there are no easy answers to the problems entailed in tearing down acres of old property and rebuilding, but the use of a little sensitivity and simple intelligence could make the thing far less painful, even under the present authoritarian system. It seems reasonable that when someone's whole way of life is to be radically changed then that person should be involved in the decisions which are to be taken -- but not if you live in Manchester. The policies of the corporation seem to be decided on a basis of party politics, personal vanity, self interest and sheer bloody stupidity. At one time the City Architects Department had a Housing Development Group which consisted of a number of go-ahead young architects, interested in creating environments instead of just warehouses to store workers in. This group was specially recruited from various sources to examine the housing policy and find out what was wrong with it. Somebody, somewhere, didn't like the answers they came up with and the speed at which the group was phased out of existence was positively indecent.

Even at the very lowest level of administration there is an incredible lack of simple humanity and intelligence. Take the case of a woman who lost two of her children when her house was burnt down. She was rehoused in a flat next to a fire station. Can you imagine the hell that she goes through several times every day as she hears the fire engines screaming past her window?

In the Bradford district of Manchester many people, who were reluctant to accept the first house offered by the corporation were actually served with eviction notices threatening to turn them out onto the streets. This occurred at the very time when the Chairman of the Housing Committee was boasting about the humanity of his department. In one case a man was asked to take a flat, which he didn't want, on a temporary basis to allow the demolition programme to go ahead. As soon as there was a house available, he was told, it would be his. He took the flat, but a couple of weeks later when he went to the

Town Hall to ask about his house he was greeted with, "House, what house? Are you mad? You've just been rehoused in a lovely new flat!"

Vested Interests

The foregoing must be viewed against the background of Manchester Corporation as a whole. For instance Manchester has the biggest, and unquestionably the most efficient, Direct Works Department in the country. Over 3,000 men are employed and the quality of building is of the very highest standard. None the less, the policy of the Tory-controlled council has been to run down this department and give more and more work to private contractors. The pressures of vested interests here cannot be ignored. Recently a valuable contract for the Brunswick Health Centre was awarded to a private contractor (Simms, Son and Cooke) "against the advice of both the City Architect and the City Treasurer"(1). The Direct Works Department could have done the job cheaper.

At the October 1969 Council Meeting the Chairman of the Town Planning Committee, Douglas Edwards, said quite categorically that there is no place in the new developments for the small shopkeeper. The trend is towards bigger retail businesses with many branches, which are more efficient and economically viable. Very nice too -- especially if, like Alderman Edwards, you happen to be a director in a very big retail butchery firm!

Skeffington R.I.P.

The Skeffington Report on public participation in planning called on local authorities to involve local people in the process of planning their environment. The report in fact was a very "liberal" thing which didn't do much more than scratch the surface of the problem of people being planned FOR. Still it was a tiny step in the direction of communal planning. Manchester's reaction to even this limited degree of public involvement was soon made clear. On the day following the publication of Skeffington a letter was sent by John Millar, Chief Planning Officer, to the Moss Side Housing Action Group telling them that on the instructions of the Chairmen of the Planning and Housing Committees there would be no more meetings between the planning officials and the action group(2). At the council meeting which discussed the Skeffington Report (October 1969) a sub-committee was set up to consider the report and since then nothing has happened.

(1) Cllr. Dean. Transcript of a debate in the City Council, September 3rd 1969.

(2) See "Moss Side News" Issue No 3.

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Not long after this the Housing Chairman, Sir Richard Harper, said in a radio interview that he could see no place for participation until AFTLR people had been rehoused.

The Role of the Councillors

The Skeffington Report anticipated some resistance by councillors to the idea of involving local groups and individuals in local affairs, as it might be seen as undermining their position as the voice of the people. It would seem in the event that many councillors are solely concerned with maintaining their positions no matter what. The reasons for them hanging on to their positions are various. The Chairman of the Planning Committee was mentioned earlier, but he is not alone by any means. The Lord Mayor of Manchester, Neil Westbrook, is a property developer. Only very recently he was prevented by a Ministry of Housing Inspector from improving(?) an area of Salford. His intention was to demolish a number of perfectly good houses and replace them with a six-storey office block, 22 shops and a supermarket. His cynical disregard for the people living in these houses doesn't give those about to be redeveloped in Manchester much cause to hope for humane treatment. The Deputy Chairman of the Planning Committee, Cllr. Lavin, happens to be a director of a demolition firm, George Robinson Demolitions. The list could go on and on. Before leaving the council members it is worth taking a closer look at the man who probably plays the most important role in rehousing, Sir Richard Harper, Chairman of the Housing Committee. When he was recently criticised over the lack of progress in providing amenities on the Gamesley overspill estate, near Glossop, he tried to pass the buck by saying that "the Gamesley development had to be done in accordance with the Cheshire County Plan". Poor foolish old Sir Richard. Now we know what caused the hold-up! He was in the wrong county! Gamesley happens to be in Derbyshire.

The past Record

If many Mancunians don't seem to have very much faith in the ability of their Corporation to rehouse them satisfactorily, well you can't really blame them. A look at the past record is enough. The vast Wythenshawe Estate was built in the thirties. Work on a Social Centre began in 1968, and the shopping precinct is only half built now, and the latest developments show no improvement. The overspill estate at Gamesley, which is about 13 miles out of Manchester on the moors near Glossop, is a classic example of bureaucratic muddle and incompetence. The first tenants moved on to the estate in August 1968. The first shops are due in February 1970. At the outset, when the Housing Department was trying to "sell" Gamesley to prospective tenants, the corporation promised a £16,500 cultural centre, but this was later quietly shelved. The local church then stepped in and agreed to build a social

centre. work on this was held up for over 3 months due to a quibble by the planning authorities about the degree of slope of the roof and the colour of the roof tiles! As a final insult the corporation tried to make the church pay £1,200 for the use of car parking facilities at the social centre.

A Ray of Light

The one ray of light in all this has been the recent emergence of a number of local groups who are organising themselves to fight tooth and nail to get the kind of redevelopment they want, and not the kind they are told is good for them.

The first of these groups to make any impact was one in the Bradford and Beswick areas of the city. This was organised by two local priests and if their long-term achievements were fairly small, they did take the first step. The publicity they gained was not lost on people in areas which were in the queue for the bulldozers. The Moss Side District has a Housing Action Group which has taken a much more militant stand. Demolition has not yet begun in this area but when it does the Town Hall will find itself faced with a strong and well-organised local movement; one which is well-informed enough to challenge every move the corporation makes. In the last few months other groups have emerged in such widespread parts of the city as Gorton, Ardwick, Harpurhey and Cheetham. These groups are still fairly small but they are growing. They are ready to fight for the right to decide how they want to live. It is time the right little, tight little group of wheeler-dealers in Albert Square were made aware that the era of battery cage council housing is coming to an end.

The Real Issue

what council housing is all about in the end is the class struggle. Those who have the cash to purchase mobility are able to opt out of the sub-standard rubbish which is considered good enough to store workers in between shifts. If you are a council tenant you are not going to be able to have friends to stay -- you won't have a spare room. All you will be offered is a shoddy little concrete box, with in many cases far less living space than a slum house offers. It has been shown, in Haringey for instance, that it is quite feasible to build estates for conventional two-storey terraced houses and still achieve densities high enough to allow people to live in town. what further excuse can be given for pushing us into high blocks of concrete rubbish in the towns or pushing us miles out into the wilderness. In the words of an Irish building worker at a recent Moss Side public meeting "The Town Hall is building stables for us on the moor and whipping us there."