

# LONDON WORKERS GROUP BULLETIN

## ANOTHER CHAPTER IN THE HISTORY OF THE WORKING CLASS

IN WHICH MEMBERS OF ASLEF AND COHSE (AND SOME UNEMPLOYED TOO) GO SAILING, AND END UP ALL-AT-SEA

" Looks like we're headed for Shit Creek now."

" Yer - and the paddles are all broke."

" Sling 'em away - were never any good anyhow. Let's abandon ship."

" What'll we do then?"

" Dunno, but it'll be good to get on dry land and think it over for ourselves. One thing's for sure - we've got to stick together."



(cont. on back)

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FEBRUARY 1983

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# PHYSICIAN ~ HEAL THYSELF

With the miners rejecting strike action and British Leyland workers accepting a package deal tying up pay negotiations for two years, the National Health Service strike proved to be the focal dispute within the public sector. (The waterworkers and firemen are still threatening to take action but at this stage it seems nothing more than the traditional noises made every year.) The significance of the defeat of the NHS workers--and it is a defeat rather than a sell-out--goes beyond the government victory of holding down pay rises. It is a stark illustration of the state of working class solidarity and of how and for what they will fight.

## RIGHTEOUSNESS IN DEFEAT

The NHS strike was consolidated in its early days, being kept from public attention by the Falklands war. It gained publicity as the euphoria over our brave boys flowed into concern for our brave girls. The dispute gained support as an, in the main, easy-going one. The unions were constrained by their 'code of conduct' drawn up to prevent another winter of discontent reflecting badly on the image of the 'labour movement' and Labour Party. The dispute gradually emerged as the acceptable face of public sector trade unionism :- made more righteous by the result. This acceptance was mainly due to the emphasis put on the plight of the angels, rather than the workerist overtones of the ancillary staff.

While the dispute involved nurses, ancillaries, and technicians, essentially it was a strike by the ancillary workers, not 'the NHS'. Taking the stance of moral responsibility, the nurses were carried by the ancillaries. In turn, the action of the ancillaries survived by living off the public sympathy given to the nurses. The ancillaries formed the picket lines, the nurses turned out to be photographed on the demos. This disparity of action did not arise from professionalism alone. The spur for action from the nurses was as much from bad conditions and appalling management attitudes as it was from low pay, which was seen as a precondition for starting the job. For the ancillaries it was simply a question of pay in a job with little glamour. Hence the limitations on joint action. Where militant action did occur it took the form of simple withdrawal of labour, in preference to the more positive occupations, disruptions of the administration, or the celebrated cases of picket lines deciding on admission policy.

## FIGHTING FOR A MORAL WAGE

The dispute was constantly seen by left and right as solely a matter of gaining higher wages. This led simply to a moral appeal for others to support. It was a fight for 'decent' wages, rather than a

linking of the common interests of the working class through a generalisation of the strike (---this is not a call to defend the public sector, but to realise the attack upon Capital.) Public support was manipulated into sympathy for sympathy's sake. The question of wages became a moral one--a 'fair' wage for the caring profession--rather than one based upon economic/wage labour analysis. The left, for all their rhetoric, simply took this one stage sideways : they were intent upon turning an issue of wage demands and working conditions into a campaign against government cut-backs.

Despite the final differential pay settlement, the remarkable fact of the dispute was the partial unity of nurses and ancillaries--both campaigning together for the same pay rise. This was ignored by the press, except on the occasions when the Royal College of Nursing was looked upon to sabotage the strike. The NHS is notorious as a disaster area for solidarity and unified activity. Militancy within the NHS varied widely from area to area and from hospital to hospital within each area. There is a fragile relationship between ancillaries and nurses, added to which is the uneasy co-existence of the unions : 'left wing' NUPE, 'genteel Tory' RCN, the relatively ineffectual COHSE and NALGO, plus the lumbering GMWU and TGWU. Despite the broad links of some of these unions, the publicity given to the dispute and the public sympathy given to it, it remained a predominantly insular one. In part this was due to the 'professionalism' of the nurses and the dichotomous attitudes of the ancillaries. Only in a localised and largely isolated way did the strike extend outside the NHS itself in an effective manner, that is, break out of the token activities proposed by the leadership within the NHS.



## SOLIDARITY. SENTIMENTALITY

nothing more than a protracted series of activities that the health service militants and political milieu-tants were able to force upon a reluctant leadership. The activity was uncoordinated, partly because of the role of the leadership but also because the dispute was regarded as unwinnable by the majority of those taking part. It was action for action's sake. Sympathy and effective activity were diffused by an uninspiring, unimportant and overall totally banal programme of events dreamed up by the unions. The left's prophecies of a popular explosion were channelled, as ever, into radical corporatism. Activity became increasingly dependent upon leads given by the unions, which in turn were responses to the progress of the TUC negotiating committee. All that remained were opportunist measures for meaningless gestures of sacrifice by sympathetic workers--the regional and national days of action. These doubled as activities that needed vast amounts of organising, thus managing to tie up the energies of NHS militants--a neat move by the TUC bureaucracy.

The strike was perhaps

in-hand with an unwillingness to lose a days pay--the essential obstacle to effective, unified action.

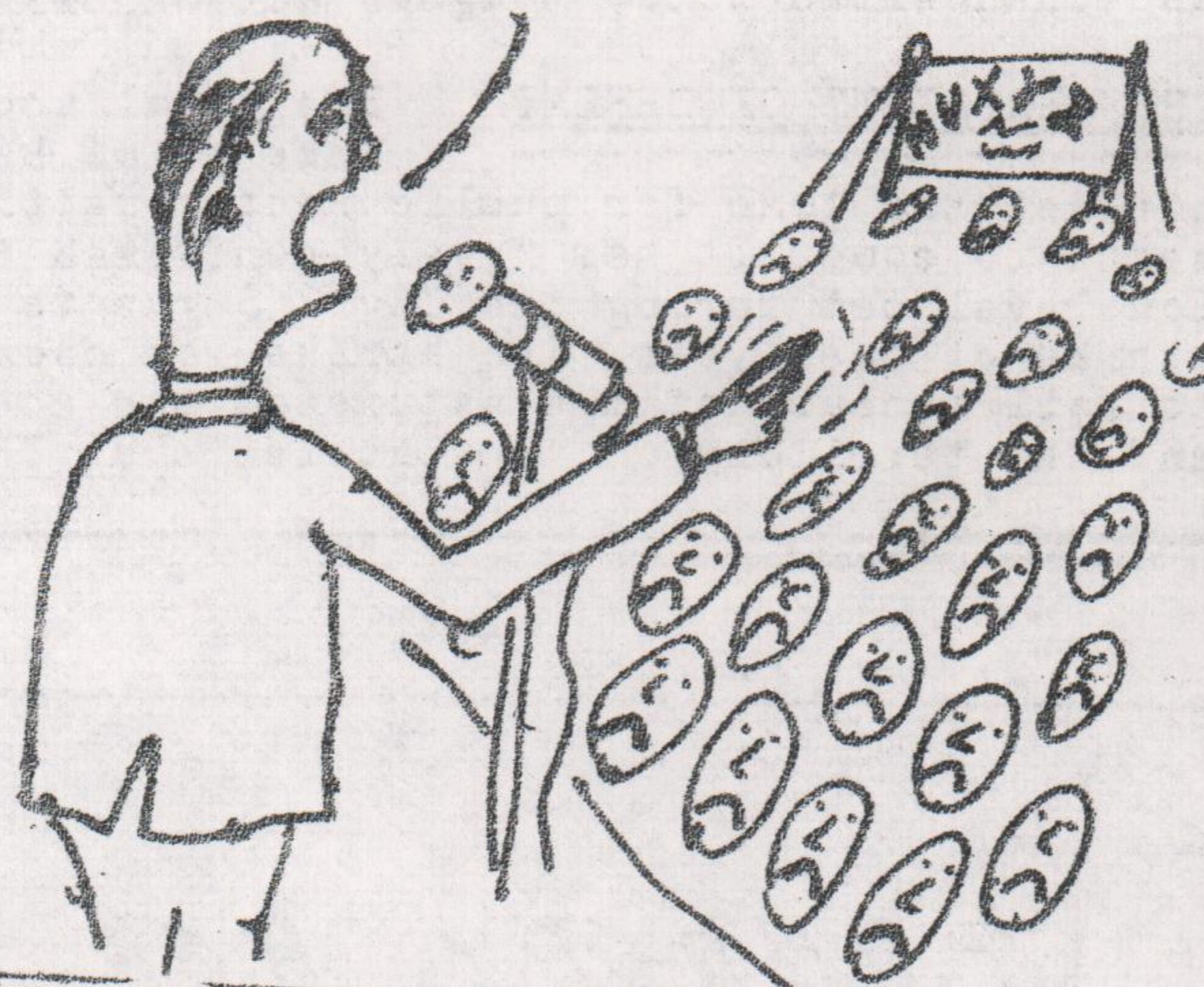
## SODDIT '82

The example of SOGAT '82 sums it up. The union leadership were reluctant to call for action on Sept 22nd and had to be pressured into it by union militants. A howl of protest then went up against the leadership, reflecting the passive discontent of the majority of the members over losing a day's pay. The 'action' that did occur was purely token; dissatisfaction remained the issue. As a result, in the run-up to the regional day of action the union leadership was handed a superb revenge on the left. Who would force their hand knowing full well that there would be no response to their call this time? With the first mention of proposed action--the left's usual strategic first step--the outcry went up from the membership. No action occurred, and in the process the left was forced into hopelessly defending their hypocritical and uselessly symbolic call for solidarity.

BROTHERS AND SISTERS, IF WE ARE TO WIN WE NEED MORE THAN A TOKEN ONE-DAY STOPPAGE!



WE NEED A ONE-AND-A-HALF DAY STOPPAGE!



The solidarity of those involved in the dispute--both within and without the NHS--should not be ignored. Nor should we be blinded by the sentimental illusion, that the overall response to the unions pathetic gestures were in turn pathetic. Even in areas of traditional working class solidarity, after an initially promising start (e.g., nurses going into workplaces encouraging walkouts), the response to the days of action was muted. Perhaps the most depressing aspect of the strike was that, after all, it is the only dispute for a long time that has had any degree of public support. But in order to make clear the reality of this public support, it should be measured not in positive but in negative terms: by the degree of passive hostility shown during the days of action. It was a commendable rejection of the call by union leaders, who were jumping on the bandwagon and pledging their willingness to go to prison on behalf of the nurses. Equally, the disillusionment with the token solidarity formulated by the TUC, and a rejection of their political manipulations, went hand-

SEPTEMBER 22nd A CONSE ENDING After calling off pay negotiations which were nearing completion so that the 'performance' could go ahead, the Day of Action on the 22nd. September was a double relief to the TUC. Firstly it did not prove to be quite as much of a fiasco as the steel workers demo of two years ago. Secondly, it was not a great success. Things did not get out of hand, i.e. out of the TUC's control. It simply provided a harmless outlet for militants to organise and for sympathetic workers to join in. This image of solidarity was of great importance at a time when autonomous forms of action were beginning to develop. The one problem for the TUC was what to do next. There had never been a successful one-day stoppage and the TUC therefore never had to think beyond its implications. The answer was the regional days of action--designed not to decentralise or advance the strike by creating more regional solidarity and activity, but rather to dilute the action. It was effective in that it managed to bring down the level of militancy in the

previously most responsive areas. While tying up the militants in their small-scale, stage-managed activities, the longer term effect and effectiveness was shown in the run-up to the planned second national day of action (November 8th.) There was a massive exodus of the previous, admittedly feeble, public sympathy resulting in widespread disillusionment among NHS workers. Seen in this light the calls for an all-out strike are less a revolutionary demand than a measure of desperation--that the attempts to formulate unified working class pressure had failed and this was the only action left to try--not to force a victory, but to show that something 'credible' had happened.

Having run down the dispute, there was no chance that it could be resurrected--even on a much smaller level than all-out strike. After over a year of negotiating and eight months of industrial action, the leadership of the TUC, through the TUC Health Committee, were finally in a position to accept an insulting but essentially face-saving settlement--as they put it 'reluctantly'--on behalf of the members. The offer accepted was little better than the one the TUC rejected in favour of pursuing the Days of Action. Despite opposition from some of the unions the settlement ran over two years. It thus dashed the hopes of a few NHS workers who imagined that discontent over this years pay negotiations would be a foretaste for, and channelled into, tougher action next year.

#### THE CERTAINTY OF DEFEAT

The final acceptance of 6% has not set the tone for public sector settlements to come. It has merely confirmed the low level set during the Civil Servants strike of last year. The strike was doomed to fail because of the nature of the action and the territory of the battlefield. The

government, increasingly faced with public opinion against them, gave a small increase on the original offer with the advantage of no action being taken next year. The strike had in fact bolstered the government's stance and saved the state money on wages not paid to strikers. The government has proved it can outlast any challenge to it over pay--be it from groups with industrial strength--steelworkers; public sympathy--nurses; or political significance--civil servants. The unions have proved they cannot learn. Even now, the civil servants are formulating strike action in pursuit of a 12% pay claim. More likely, though, is a rejection of pay campaigns in favour of one to defend the public sector--spending cuts and job losses--hoping that this emphasis will unite the unions and public opinion. This attempt to direct attention away from pay negotiations will have the full support of the Labour Party, who in election year will have to come to terms with an incomes policy.

The significance of the NHS dispute is as a barometer of the mood of the working class. Excuses about a betrayal of leaders and ideological gibberings about 'the classes combativity' being undiminished sound exactly what they are; stupid. Of course leaders and unions sabotage strikes, and of course a minority of workers will fight on to the end if given the chance. It is not just a matter of how strikes progress and if a progression of strikes occurs. Activity can always develop, albeit unpredictably, in a period of crisis and any dispute can become a political detonator. But over the last few years activity has become increasingly predictable and so the outcomes--i.e. defeats--even more so. The NHS strike is just one example.

Undertaker

**THIS IS THE  
AGE OF THE  
SLAVE**



# BARRIER NURSING

## DISEASES UNDER THE MICROSCOPE

### REPORT ON LWG PUBLICISED MEETING of 27.7.82

This meeting, publicised under the heading Rail and Health Struggles--how do we overcome Isolation?, was one of the most numerous attended ever, with about 30 people, all direct contacts. Charlotte began by posing the question of support and extension of the strikes. She had been active in the ASLEF dispute, and noted that the strikers were not properly informed of their Social Security rights by the union. Also, the propaganda about the strike being impossible to win, was difficult to counter effectively because of limited resources. What was possible had to be aimed at the immediate issues and not party building or disseminating anarchist ideology. Evidently, we were in a period where strikes were not enough. Nobody is indispensable, and the bosses have shown that they are prepared to invest heavily in strike-breaking. Papers and post were still getting out of London.

On the NHS dispute, Zelda complained of lack of information from the unions. Action was minimal, with only pickets by some porters. Workers involved felt generally that the strike was unwinnable.

Adam, fresh from the reconvened ASLEF conference that day, reported on the executive sellout which had shifted the blame to the TUC and let Buckton off the hook. The executive resolution carried at the conference stated that there should be no agreement to flexible rostering due to duress, and left branches and depots to demonstrate its impracticability. The threat of redundancies was particularly serious, since if ASLEF membership fell below 20,000 the union would no longer be viable. In the general discussion it was agreed that the role of the TUC is to collude in ending strikes at any price. Adam noted that disputes involving the defence of working conditions are hard for the general public to understand, and praised a pamphlet on flexible rostering by the British Society for Responsibility in Science, for setting out the issues clearly. In the miners strike of 1972 and 1974, public sympathy was aroused in the mass media by examining such issues, but this practise had now ceased.

A written report from a male nurse in Leeds described several pointers to success. A nurses action group had been set up for five months, with 20 nurses extended to 40 or 50 in the strike, including ancillary workers. Calls for support consisted of entering factories and offices asking for help with picketing and solidarity strikes. In one factory a third of the workforce walked out immediately. A mine shaft was entered to get support through leafleting, which an NUM official



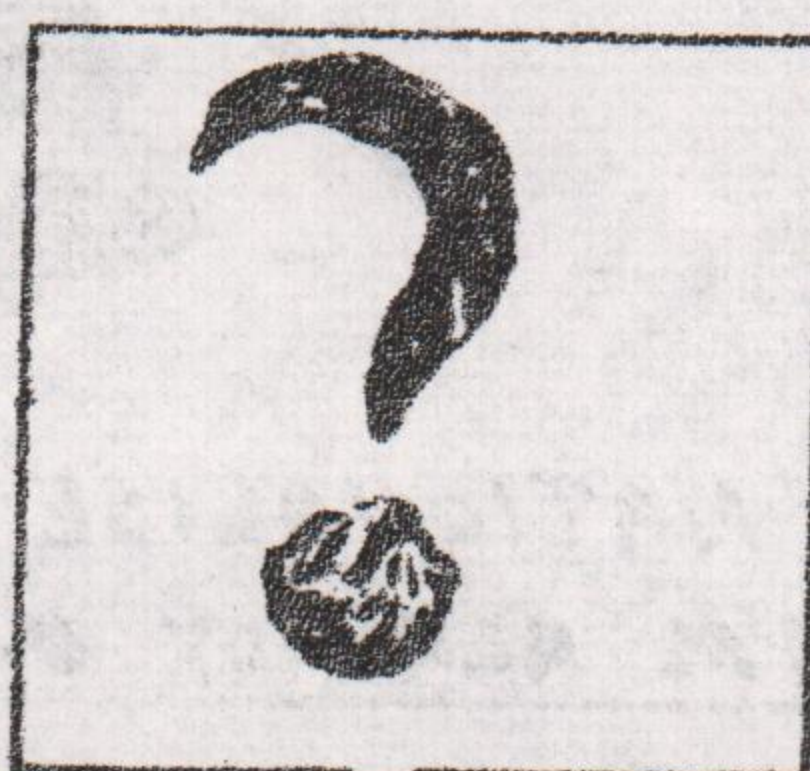
tried to stop. Finally the transport depot was picketed with the result that all West Yorkshire pits closed.

Since there was no all-out strike, meetings were held in canteens to involve more workers. 50 picketers staged a 10-day occupation of the sterilisation unit due to scabbing.

At the Whittington Hospital in North London an all-out strike by Irish nurses forced management to toe an emergencies-only line. It was felt that occupations were more likely to win support from nurses. Joe reported that SOGAT 82's executive were falling back on a by-now familiar line of calling for support and promising backing. This response was partly cynical, in view of the known immobility of



the rank and file due to union restructuring at local level, involving the amalgamation of the old SOGAT and NATSOPA. An NHS march in London which Joe attended found its best support from ASLEF members, but Barts, a hospital much used for Fleet St. industrial accident victims, was receiving good support from printers on its picket lines. It had proved possible for print workers to panic the Sunday Telegraph into removing an anti-union editorial, although the editors forgot to remove the reply to the editorial by print workers! In general in Fleet St., there was a need for a long period of education and building of autonomous workers groups.



Nurses felt that unions were useful only for such things as legal support. They were hopeless as fighting organisations. In the general discussion it was argued that 'public opinion' is formed by treating people as atomised individuals, where they are weakest. Therefore the need to organise apart from, and break from, the trade union structure was the only way to raise consciousness and generate effective action.

A report from a CPSA member told of the need to wear masks to give lunchhour support to the NHS dispute, due to sacking threats. It was felt that what we are going through is a repeat of the 30s attack on workers, with the only optimistic prospect being that sooner or later there would have to be a fightback, where one victory would lead to a sense of the tide turning. There was a need to go beyond the old forms of trade union struggle, so the fightback would need time to develop. More disruption was needed, such as happened when the unwaged involved themselves in picketing at Islington hospitals, and entered hospitals to pull staff out in support. This raised the question of the political regime of the workplace, which reduces peoples self-confidence and willingness to think for themselves. Hospitals were run for the glory of the consultants who were antagonistic to the strikes because porters knew better who needed emergency treatment. In the lorry drivers strike, the old rules of struggle were ignored so that strikers could co-ordinate with local communities and start to take control of their own activity.

Martin argued that all reforms were worthless anyway. What was needed was for atomised individuals to start taking collective responsibility. There followed some speculation as to the current ebbing in the level of militancy. The present economic crisis produces more discontent, but paradoxically less open class confrontation. Was it just a matter of letting things get so much worse that people would just explode and make an insurrection spontaneously? The barrier to this seemed to be that people hesitated to engage in a struggle which would only deepen the crisis and so ultimately make them worse off again. The tendency for revolutionaries to take a waiting attitude had to be resisted.

This is just an outline of the way the meeting ran. No clear idea of how to overcome isolation emerged. People seemed to have come to the meeting without having thought out positive proposals. Many questions were asked but few answers were suggested. Perhaps we should urge people more to leave the floor to those who would suggest solutions once the report stage of meetings is over? A circulating chair could also have led to more continuity and development of the discussion. But it was very encouraging to hear so many people with genuine passionate concern for the future of class struggle and with an intelligent approach to the huge problems.

Peter Freeman.



**NATIONALISE THE TOP 200 COMPANIES? JOLLY GOOD SHOW!  
I'M ALREADY ON THE BOARDS OF 15 NATIONALISED BUSINESSES.**

# THE RAIL STRIKE

## 1 UNIONS DERAILED

The failure of the engine drivers to win their struggle with British Rail over their proposed introduction of flexible rostering of driving shifts, is not only a serious defeat for the workers concerned but also shows clearly that their union--the Associated Society of Locomotive Engineers and Firemen--is no longer able to organise their defence. The attempt to introduce flexible rostering which has succeeded, wipes out the great gain which ASLEF achieved in the 1920s, when it obtained a drastic cut in engine drivers hours to 8 a day and regular driving turns of duty.

With the principle of flexible rostering now to be introduced (generally in September), the saving to the Railway Board will be small compared to the enormous losses which the railways are making and which the government has indicated they will not subsidise out of public funds. So ends the dream of the railway unions and the general labour movement that nationalisation would lead not only to improved wages and working conditions but also to a profitable transport industry which would benefit, so it was claimed by the first post-war Labour government, not only railway workers but also the travelling public at large and even more importantly the transport interests of capitalist industry as a whole. The sorry story of Labour's state capitalist schemes was, in reality, introduced to stabilise the bankrupt industries, i.e. to modernise with new technology, reduce wage labour costs by reducing the number of workers and to mute class struggle by a complex system of conciliation and arbitration.

Such is always the role of reformist Labour governments and is basically no way different from that of the Tories when they administer

the affairs of the capitalist state. Indeed the Tories have shown no inclination to de-nationalise the railways when they have been in office, for it is not a sector of the total capitalist economy in which substantial profit can now be made. If it were, then a Tory government would take steps to privatise the industry, as it is attempting to do in the case of Telecommunications.

The railway unions have failed to face up to the fact that nationalisation can never give railwaymen a decent standard of living, nor ensure that the railways are run in the interests of the people as a whole. True, in the early 1920s, following the growth of syndicalist ideas just before and after the first world war, led the National Union of Railwaymen to include in its long term objects the idea of "workers control" of the railway system. So long ago was this idea mooted that most ASLEF, NUR and TSSA members today are completely unaware that the NUR once stood for such a policy.

With its 70,000 odd staff in the 1920s now reduced to some 20,000 odd, dieselisation, electrification and the massive closure of 'unprofitable' lines under Beeching and subsequently, the future under nationalisation is bleak indeed. There is no solution to the problem within the framework of the capitalist system, whether it be private or state, or in a mixed economy. The future of the railwaymen is intimately bound up with the class interests of the working class as a whole, transcending capitalist reformism and the complete rejection of social democracy: the need now is to once again begin the task of the re-education of the class in revolutionary terms.

S.O. Gatt

## 2 FIRST BRITISH LEYLAND NOW THE BRITISH RAIL WAY

It is only too clear that the NUR (National Union of Railwaymen) are happy in seeing the industry contract, and members whittled--or, at present, hacked--away, and thrown to join the unemployed masses (who still make the reactionary demand for the right to work and be exploited, rather than the right to well-being.) This behaviour is an attempt to make the railway industry a financially buoyant one, therefore maintaining domination over the workforce.

The workforce is greatly influenced by the prolific amount of propaganda put out by the management (British Rail Board and Unions)

talking about the need for a more productive and effective system, and how nobody's job is safe from the clutches of this economic crisis. This obliges, or forces, the union into considering political and financial restraints--more often than not due to their co-operation and participation in running the railway--which are imposed upon the railway by 'higher beings', and then selling out their members in accordance with this. For instance, flexible rostering and the 'open station' concept were only superficially opposed because the NUR understood that for a railway to survive in a capitalist society, radical changes were needed. Some have been implemented and there are a lot more on the way.

## NUR STRIKE

The NUR 1981 Annual General Meeting (AGM) decided that the pay award for 1982 should be a substantial one, and one with no productivity strings attached. The NUR executive, in response, submitted a claim and proceeded through the machinery of negotiation only to find their claim rejected by the BRB, who said they could only afford a 5% pay increase from September (which meant 3.1% overall), and this on condition of better productivity. This was too much for the NUR executive, who instructed their members to withdraw their labour on the 28th June until further notice.

This, at Willesden No.1 NUR branch, caused a small amount of confusion as it had been such a long time since the previous NUR strike, also our chairperson was away on annual leave.

A special meeting was called for all NUR members in the Willesden area to sort out problems and discuss the strike. The feeling at the meeting was one of uncertainty as to whether the strike would be a successful one and whether there was any truth in the stories put about the BRB, saying members returning to work after the strike had finished would be confronted with station closures, workshop closures, reduced services, a new, more repressive contract of employment etc, plus union reprisals for those who didn't strike. The chair announced 'The strike is on regardless.'

It was decided (predetermined by NUR officials) that because the Willesden area was so large and incorporated workers who were in Willesden No.1,2 and 4, Harlesden and Old Oak branches, a joint strike committee would be formed. This solved their problem of interbranch communication and also centralised all activity.

## STRIKE COMMITTEE

People who wanted could opt into this strike committee. At first it was said that only union officials and local departmental committee members could do this, but ordinary members were soon granted the privilege (much to the disgruntlement of the older LDC members and union officials who like their authority and having a kind of 'mystique' as to their movements and behaviour).

The first day of the strike on Monday June 28th. was 'pretty solid' in our area. Only a couple of guards turned up at Willesden Junction and the odd few at the Traction Maintenance Depot

and sheds at Stonebridge Park. The Permanent Way and Signal and Telecommunications were practically all out, as were the signal boxes. But scab management (Gannet and Co.) were responsible for operating whatever boxes were necessary to move blackleg trains.

What few trains there were, the BRB managed to gain excellent publicity for, from a more than willing media, showing trains running up and down the country; one from Euston, one from Watford, one on the Western Region (there were so many I can't remember where they were all being run to and from!) In fact the media coverage was so good I had people coming to Willesden to catch trains, thinking things were nearly back to normal. When it was explained that 'Yes, there was a train 12 hours ago', they seemed shocked! The real point of this media propaganda was to convince the public that the BRB was supposed to be winning.

## IN THE END...

Picketing was sporadic in the Willesden area, though I believe Old Oak was well-covered. Some people worked very hard and long at it, there was a little spontaneous flying picketing but the strike committee was quite positive that Head Office instructions and rules should be adhered to. Most people just stayed at home and watched the World Cup!

Meanwhile in Plymouth the 1982 AGM was in session (the executive of the NUR is dissolved for the duration of the AGM.) By the evening, news had been fed to the media that the strike was to be called off at midnight Tuesday 29th. The AGM decided that the pay decision should be taken to arbitration and pondered over by Lord McCarthy.

On Tuesday the strike was still officially on, but a lot of the workforce saw no point in staying out 'just to lose another day's pay', and many drifted back to work, as urged to do by a jubilant Peter Parker. As to why the AGM took that decision I am still not sure, as our strike position was very strong, what with London Transport out as well and London at a standstill.

After a three-month wait the McCarthy report has been published. It recommends we are paid 6% from September and should be more productive. As a result of this the AGM has been recalled to consider the next move, the NUR executive wants a strike recall decision. We will have to wait and see. //

## 3 BACK TRACKING

### NOTES ON THE ASLEF STRIKE

8/8/82 How did the Executive Committee manage to sell us out and get away with it?

--By blaming the TUC Finances and General Purposes Committee. Did we ever expect their support, and why was it accepted in retrospect?

--By blaming it on the scabs (2% of the membership). The Executive Committee was obviously prepared to lose from the beginning. A sense of hopelessness was subtly

engendered, in league with the media etc. There was no sense of spreading the strike--its only hope of success--although scabbing did have an effect on morale. The operation of alternative transport gave bosses the upper hand, morally.

29/8/82

After our humiliating defeat at the hands of the BR management, the TUC Finance and General Purposes Committee and the ASLEF executive committee, we are told that our union leadership is to shift its priorities from defending principles to securing rewards for any impending changes in working practices, i.e. more money for more productivity.

Gone already is the fundamental principle of one rate of pay for all drivers, with the introduction a couple of years ago of the distinction between the shunt driver and the train driver. Now gone is the fundamental principle of the guaranteed 8-hour paid day, and with it our bargaining power of the threatened national strike, as we lick our wounds and sit tight in expectation of the bosses onslaught.

While health workers continue to step up their campaign, using methods that come to hand from what would otherwise appear a futile struggle, it can be seen how the traditional stance of ASLEF, formerly a union to be reckoned with, was just not up to the combined force of

management, government, media, TUC and Labour Party pressure.

From the start of the July strike it looked like ASLEF were prepared to lose this one. They were in no way prepared to fall foul of the law or TUC directions. Where they could have officially called out all its members on London Transport and fouled up London's roads, they preferred to call in the LT branch secretaries and refuse to lead them (which in my experience is as bad as leadership in general). ASLEF has done a lot of this equivocation lately. While making sure they are our leaders, they have consistently let down the militant sections by leaving them stranded--our only choice is to obey them in the end--like lose the strike.

**trouble in mind -  
or just laying  
your head  
on the line?**



## 4 SABOTAGE!

### IT'S NOT AS EASY AS IT SOUNDS

London was infested with scab coaches bringing workers in during the ASLEF rail strike. Outraged by this, two intrepid revolutionaries, armed to the teeth with a very sharp bradawl, set out to sabotage them.

The slashing of tyres, quick and reasonably quiet, seemed a good easy beginning, but alas the meaning of 'steel radials' became clear when the bradawl would go in no further than  $\frac{1}{2}$  inch.

Back to the drawing board. 'What about a bradawl backed up (as it were) by a 24 oz. claw hammer?' Off they set again--but were foiled as the drivers were by then back in force.

The next day loomed and our intrepids felt their street credibility was at stake, two trips out and not a coach grounded. They had been given advice by the bus load, everyone, it seemed, was a proficient coach saboteur. Except in the field. It became clear that the advice had been largely theoretical and did not stand up in broad daylight with drivers and passers-by about.

And so, clutching their tattered revolutionary pride about them our intrepid two sallied forth again armed thus:

1. A bradawl
2. A 24oz. claw hammer for use with 1.
3. 1 Kilo of granulated sugar should petrol tank be accessible.
4. Key for initial lock of 3, picked on an earlier sortie.
5. Square of foam for placing against headlights prior to hitting them with 2 (this seemingly brilliant and not too noisy idea was never put into practice due to lack of privacy.)
6. 1 tube Superglue with which to fill locks (this had to be purchased as due to its dangerous qualities in the hands of children it is kept behind the counter. This kind of responsible thinking is giving shoplifters a hard time.)

In all, these two made several trips a day, sometimes in other areas, over a six-day period during the strike. They managed to put out only one coach and a possible second. The moral to this tale is: if at first you don't succeed, try harder, but don't listen to the bar-room experts. They will raise your expectations unrealistically.

Hissing Sid.

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Asst. Gen. Secretary:  
D. K. PULLEN

Re: No 16/1982

23rd July 1982

Dear Branches and LDCs

Fellow Members

### SELL OUT 1982

In Head Office Circular Number 15/1982 dated 20th July 1982. Branches and LDCs were informed that due to non support from the TUC and in order to save the Union, strike action was called off. It has been suggested that this was a bureaucratic sell out by union officials to our members at a grass roots level. This is of course nonsense.

You may well be wondering why you were asked to strike and suffer loss of pay - scurrilous attacks in the press, the difficulties of persuading fellow members not to scab, for two weeks only to be ordered back to work with flexible rostering accepted, no pay rise in the offing, redundancies looming and loss of morale. Well, you have to understand that there are sometimes more important issues at stake than your working conditions, pay and morale.

Some might say I am only out to protect my job, for instance, that my pension was at risk if the union were to be smashed. What would the consequences have been regarding my inclusion in a future Honours List, if I was heading a union that defied a sacking notice and brought out other workers in sympathy?

That was not why we had to go to the TUC - talk to other leaders, men of ability like Moss Evans, who are practised in organising solidarity with fellow workers; and experienced negotiators like Tom Jackson, whose record speaks for itself. You need leadership and I am proud to lead you.

To those of you shocked and dismayed at what has happened I can only say: What did you expect? To those of you demoralised and no longer proud of your responsible job, redundancies will give you an early escape from further wage slavery.

We must face up to our responsibilities as Trade Unionists to the trade union movement. That means being clear-sighted about the purpose of strike action. As Rail Workers we are all angry and frustrated about the intransigence of the Board and the Government. We must channel this anger into responsible activity not become an undisciplined mob. Strike action today is a matter of expressing that anger without putting obstacles in the way of negotiation and agreement between labour and management, which is the point of our activities at the end of the day.

The industrial situation today is not what it used to be. The days of the long strike to allow us to vent our anger without damaging reasonable discussion are over. It can only occur when

From the days of the Luddite death threats to employers bringing in machinery one of the favourite weapons in the proletarian arsenal has been the anonymous letter. The enormous growth in capitalist bureaucracy and the circuit of paper has made new openings for mischief. Inside offices there is generally an informal circulation of jokes (mostly sexist or racist) as people relieve their frustrations at the expense of fellow proletarians). Much of it is of the "You don't have to work here but it helps" school of humour, helping to defuse discontent with the job into self mockery. (Humour is a political act, geddit). Occasionally it crosses the fine line between that and challenging the status quo - turning the joke onto the boss for example. A few issues ago we published a letter that was circulated in Lambeth council offices signed by Ted Knight but actually produced "on his behalf" by disgruntled workers. The text of that had in fact been taken almost word for word from a similar letter circulated "on behalf" of Michael Edwardes inside BL. But it's possible to go beyond jokes into actually trying to cause trouble or screw things up. The above was written after the Rail Strike sell out and sent to delegates to the recall conference which had to ratify the sell out. Buckton was speechless with rage at having to explain it was a forgery. Then the Guardian diary got hold of it, thought it was real and quoted it as Buckton's own thoughts. Correspondence about this went on for some time and the letter was referred to the TUC general council, Moss Evans said he thought it was a "professional" piece of sabotage. There's obviously endless scope for the creatively malicious. For example a couple of years ago NUPE dissidents circulated fake caucus briefings to right wingers at the union congress with fake instructions on which way to vote. The forgery had to be exposed from the platform - in turn exposing the real behind the scenes activities "organising" the vote. Whatever your situation the possibility for a little destructive fun are there - relieve the boredom.

management are prepared to adopt a sensible attitude to negotiations. When they use sheer muscle to force us to accept a wage freeze and worse working conditions we have two choices - we can descend to their level and reduce industrial relations to sheer anarchy or we can refuse to descend to their level - confident that if we suffer humiliating defeat at the end of the day the reasonableness of our position will be clearly seen.

In face of this total refusal of management to indicate any willingness to compromise we were forced to assume that they meant what they said. We took the decision to cut short the strike even though members had not been able to fully vent their anger before an agreement was reached. ASLEF are not bully boys or wreckers - we are not prepared to jeopardise British Rail even if management and government are.

We cannot conceal the fact that we have endured a massive and irreversible defeat. But in this context I think that the membership should reflect with pride on the sensible attitude they have adopted towards strike action. No destructive and irresponsible actions were taken - members did not circulate unauthorised inflammatory leaflets explaining their position to the public, engage in irresponsible confrontation on picket lines, or refuse to return to work when instructed to by the executive. I am confident that no members will take unofficial action in the weeks to come, whether refusing to work rosters, working to rule or going slow thus prejudicing what will be very hard negotiations to arrive at satisfactory formulas on new working conditions which the Board intend to impose on us.


I am confident too that when members have considered the facts objectively they will realise that we have adopted the only position available to us. That we have not, as the press would have it, prostrated ourselves and allowed management to walk all over us, but have taken the action necessary to allow further negotiations to take place. With this in mind I believe that delegates will ratify the action we have taken at the re-call conference on Tuesday 27th July and will not allow bitterness to surface in hasty decisions to replace executive members or negotiators whose familiarity with the negotiating situation will be vital if a sensible outcome is to be reached in all the similar situations that will occur in the hard days ahead.

Yours fraternally

R W BUCKTON

GENERAL SECRETARY

# whose benefit?



There is a great deal of political concern over the 3.3m unemployed, or rather it is over the 3.8m. More to the point, it is with the nearly 5m unemployed ... These various attempts to formulate the 'real' number of unemployed arise from the government's conjuring of the figures. This act was a small part of a series of changes in the Social Security system -- for which the LWG has produced a leaflet intended for widespread circulation. These changes have mainly gone unnoticed or ignored, and opinion polls show a majority of those unemployed having little hope for the future.

The unemployment problem is manifesting itself as a problem of the unemployed : how and why has their lack of activity resulted in them simply being passively counted?

## DOLEFUL PROSPECTS

The significance of the reorganisation and "rationalisation" of Social Security payments is more than the bureaucratic and political alterations, the state control of unemployment.

With 3-million plus unemployed, it is financially expedient to statistically reduce the number of unemployed. But more emphasis should be placed on how the changes capitalise on, or may have resulted from, the inactivity of the unemployed and unwaged, given their economic and social position. There has been no active and direct opposition to unemployment, the number of unemployed, the level of unemployment and supplementary benefits. The acceptance of the first two could be understood, were it not for the third aspect. The new regulations have been introduced on the back of this apathy, and for the government the timing has proved correct given the lack of response, tempered by ignorance, to the results.

Attitudes towards their situation vary among the unemployed, which consists of three mainly distinct groups. Firstly those on SS benefits--traditionally claimants due to family circumstances, illness, invalidity etc. For them unemployment is not an issue--they are unlikely to want or get a job. Secondly there are the long-term unemployed--people in the industrially depressed areas, those with redundant skills or no skills at all who cannot be retrained, and those over the age of

50-55. (Retirement virtually begins at 55 for those without a job.) By definition these people have been out of work for a couple of years or more, and will probably be waiting for a few more years--well into any economic upturn that might occur--before they have the prospect of employment. The third group is the short-term unemployed--those who, when made unemployed, can expect to get another job within three or four months. Most movement on and off the unemployment statistics is from this group. Studies have shown that the increase in unemployment results from an increase here: that more people are becoming "short-term unemployed" for longer stretches, more often.

### intimidation

While they do not affect the levels of benefit, the new regulations are aimed financially at the long-term unemployed and claimants : for example, the loss of cash in one's pocket because of Unified Housing Benefit. Politically, the measures are aimed at the short-term unemployed : with pressure to prove you are searching for a job and will take any one that becomes available (an attempt to reverse the refusal to take up badly-paid jobs), and intimidation to de-register through pressure from the Special Claims Control Units (also aimed at selected long-term unemployed and claimants). The overall direction is for the unemployed to be intimidated and comply rather than for the DHSS bureaucracy to attempt to enforce--at least until computerisation arrives.



# the frying pan or the fire??

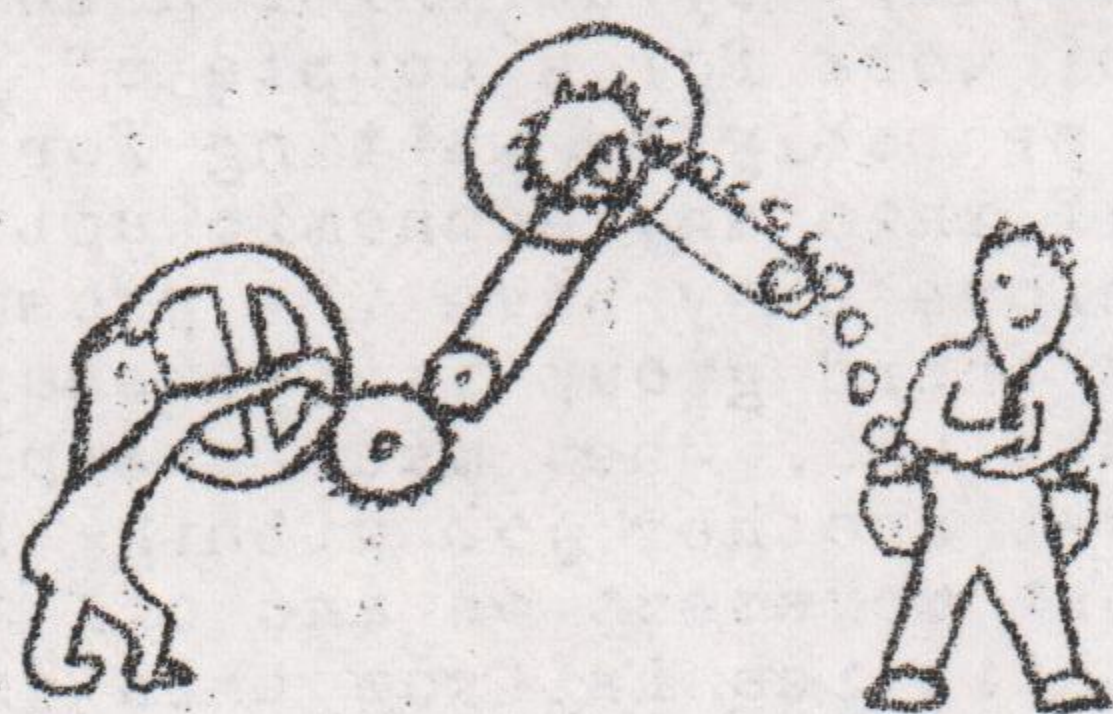
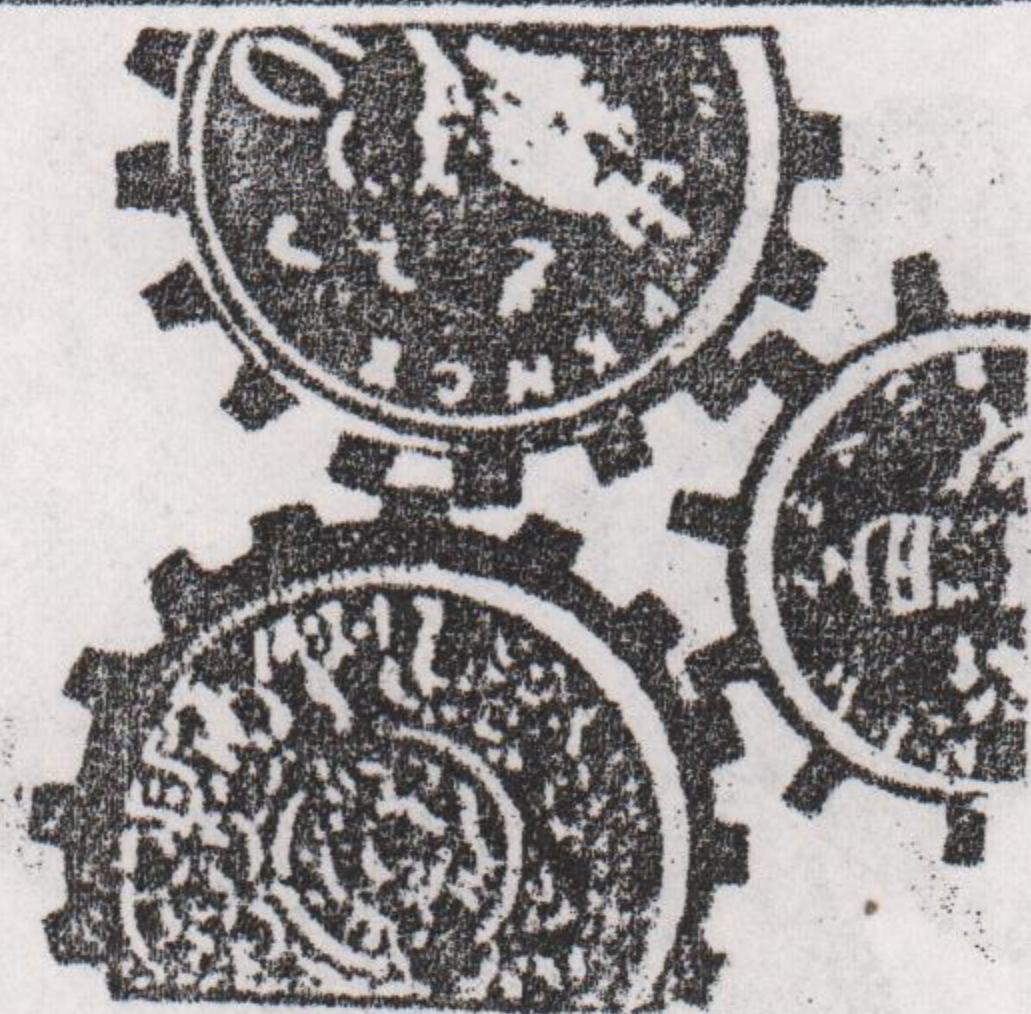
## WORK:forced labour

### SOME ADVANTAGES...

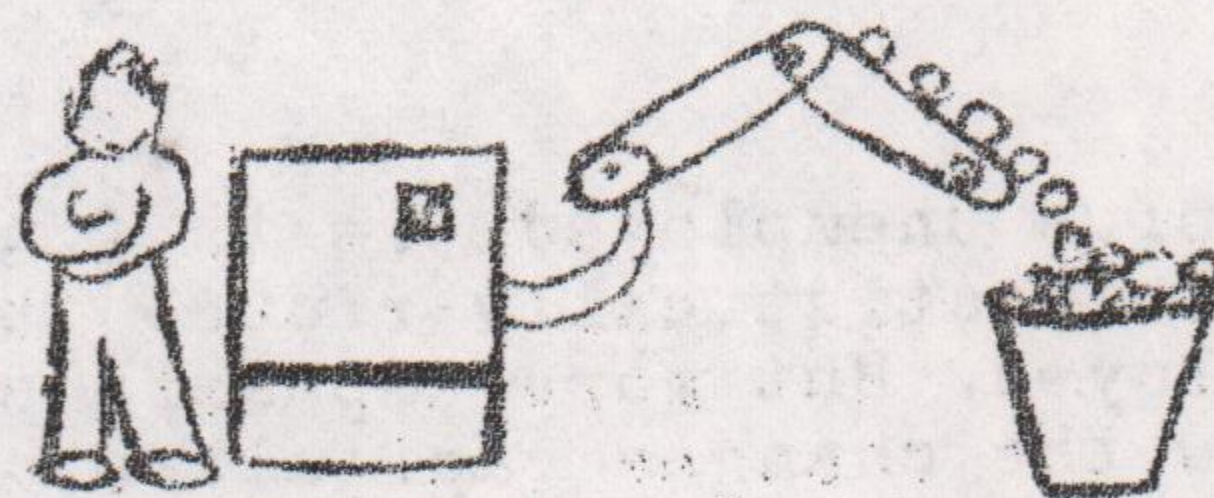
1. Lots of money, if you're lucky.
2. A sense of "doing something", being occupied.
3. Meeting people, getting out of the house.

### SOME DISADVANTAGES...

1. Up to a third of your life being stolen.
2. Being watched over hour after hour-constant pressure to work harder.
3. Not controlling your own activities.
4. Petty rules, regulations.
5. Doing the same, boring, routine tasks over and over again.
6. For many, doing things which mean nothing to you (only the bosses know what they're really for) and may actually be socially harmful, like making bombs, asbestos, hamburgers...
7. Getting up at the same time day in day out, rushing to get ready, using a packed, smelly, unfriendly bus or tube, or hassling with other drivers on the roads, or cycling with lungs full of fumes and the risk of being run over.
8. The money you get buys their wonderful commodities like cars, electric toothbrushes, tellys, most of which you only need 'cos you've got no time 'cos you spend most of it at work.
9. According to the government, 4% of workers would be better off on the dole!



THE BOSS NEEDS YOU



YOU DONT NEED HIM

## WHAT YOU CAN DO...

Give life a bit more meaning at work -steal back some of your own time: skive, take long breaks, fuck up production (spanner in the works), obey stupid rules to the letter (the Polish workers have led the way on this one. The media are always telling us how great the Poles are -lets start putting their ideas into practice!), nick from work, use facilities like photocopiers (good for leaflets, fake letters from the bosses, copies of secret documents).

Join together with other pissed-off people at work, at home, in the streets. Start to take control of your own life. Organise wildcat strikes, occupations. Turn strikes into "social strikes"; work but use the products of your labour as you see fit (free services ...)

Fuck up the bosses plans, their work, their economy. It doesn't mean anything to us anyway.

# DOLE:forced poverty

## SOME ADVANTAGES...

1. Lots of free time
2. No-one telling you what to do, most of the time (except when down the Dole, when watching telly etc)
3. Can organise your own activities.
4. Can do odd jobs/black work

## SOME DISADVANTAGES...

1. Boredom.
2. Feel isolated, away from other people.
3. Feel powerless, useless, on the sidelines of society watching the game going on.
4. No money and nearly everything must be paid for.

## WHAT YOU CAN DO...

Refuse the isolation and poverty of life on the dole. Get together with other pissed-off people in the streets, workplaces, homes. Share money, goods, washing machines, looking after kids. Why pay rent? squat. There's all sorts of fiddles you can pull: don't pay on busses/tubes, try ripping-off the goods all the adverts tell us to buy, but we can't afford (mass shoplifting, barging into gigs ...).

Why accept poverty -the people made all the goods, they belong to the people. If we're strong enough, we can start to re-distribute goods on the basis of need not profit (not a return to the law of the jungle, but the spirit of Robin Hood).

## SOME IDEAS...

Lets face it, life in this society stinks, whether you work or not. The only way to improve our lives in any real sense, is to start to steal back control of our own lives, by gathering together as groups and seizing control of whatever fragments we can, when we've the chance.

If this movement for real control of our lives grows, we can start to think about extending these struggles till we take back the whole of our lives. That means social revolution -setting up organisations through which people can control their own activities, without bosses, parties, unions or elites of any kind, where we can talk about and decide issues as equals, collectively. When everyone's views and desires are respected, we can all contribute. The exact forms will vary (maybe "workers councils", "assemblies", "communes", "action committies" etc) but the content -direct control by those involved- does not.

## DONT FOLLOW ANY LEADERS, NOT EVEN US...

The people who wrote and distributed this leaflet are not another elite who want power. We're not recruiting for some organisation. We dont want followers. We don't give a fuck for labels: "socialist", "communist", "marxist", "anarchist", etc, etc, just like brands of soap-powder.

What we do want is for you to take up your own struggles, finding your own power, creating with whoever you want to work with, your own organisations, making your life and those around you better.

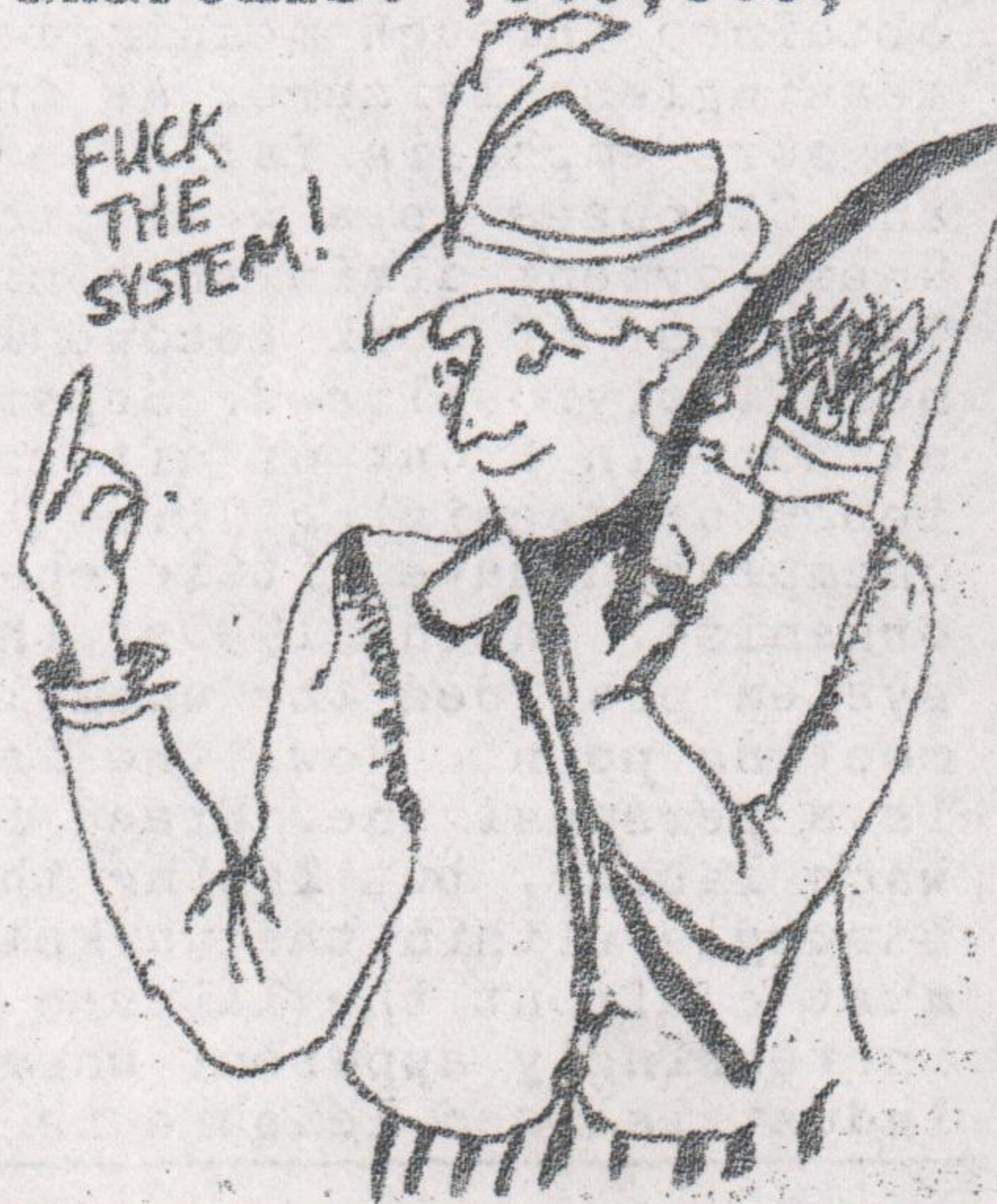
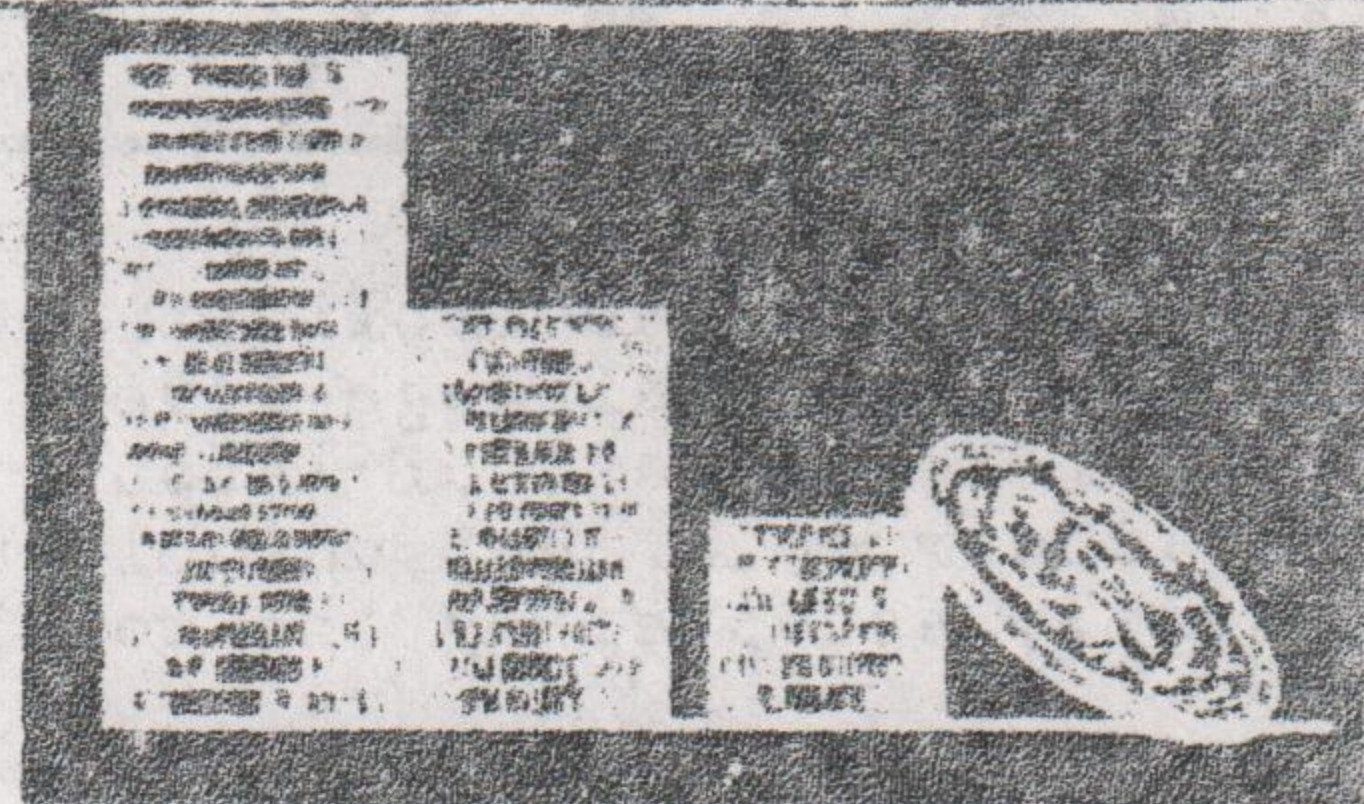
Some nice slogans...

WE NEED A NEW WORLD!

SEIZE THE STREETS, FACTORIES, OFFICES AND SHOPS.

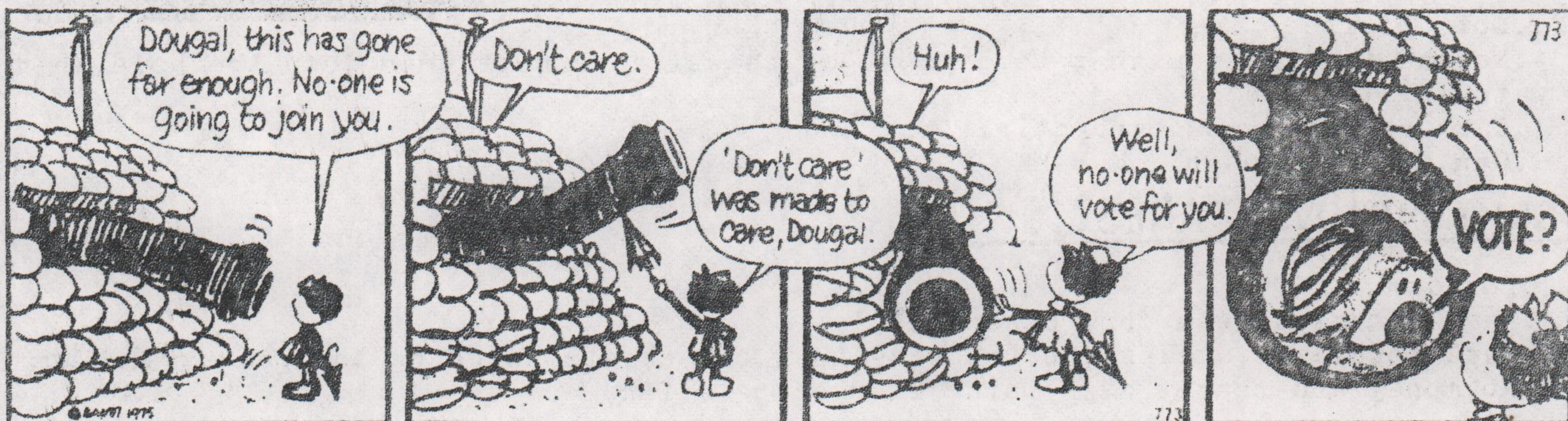
EVERYTHING IS OURS!

p&p Latter-day Robin Hood Group.



This pattern has implications for unemployment as a traditional wage-lever. Capitalism relies on a reserve pool of labour to keep the price of labour down. But unemployment has been tacitly accepted by the working class--to

unemployed cannot afford financially. Industrialised unemployment is something they cannot afford mentally. Hence the distaste for YOPS, unemployment centres, Rite to Work campaigns.



some extent bought off by redundancy payments --in contrast to the predicted clamour for jobs in return for wage-cuts. Redundancy remains a threat to those in work, but significantly not to those hoping to get back into a job. Vacancies remain for low-paid jobs: unemployment is preferred by many. This has occurred without there being a 'life of luxury' on the dole, and with low levels of benefit being seen as inevitable by the majority of those claiming them.

## illusions

There is an increasing unreality about unemployment for those in work. The contact they have with the unemployed is with the previously short-term unemployed--those who have not undergone the full financial and psychological impact of wagelessness. They view unemployment as transitional. Along with the need to break the work ethic by realising that unemployment is not the worst thing that can happen to you, it is equally important not to foster the 'good time on the dole' myth. (Even revolutionaries may not enjoy themselves, or put their opportunities to any good effect.) The need is to change one's outlook and perspectives within or without employment--not to see one as an alternative to the other.

The essential aspect is: policed employment versus policing unemployment. The problems of unemployment and employment are to be realised within this framework. Social stability is obtained through meaningless jobs and meaningless leisure. As the former declines, so more emphasis falls on the latter. Bread and Circuses is a well-proven solution. Unemployment diminishes class solidarity. Those out of work become less individual and more individualised. Separation is completed at home in front of afternoon TV. The convenience of receiving Giro's has meant that the unemployed have little chance to meet and organise. In the 1930s, the personal issue system provided the unemployed with a focal meeting point. Now, the issue of unemployment is a personal one. Freed from the control of wage-labour, but losing the solidarity of struggle within the workplace, the unemployed must confront the leisure industry and the increasingly apparent unemployment industry. Industrialised leisure is something that the

## crisis of solutions

The unemployed are becoming increasingly distanced from the traditional means of both political and economic control--trade unions, wage labour, the circulation of commodities. This has led to confusing attempts at recuperation. While the Right sees unemployment--that is, their attempts to control the unemployed--as a social problem rather than an economic one, the Left persists in seeing any manifestation of 'social' problems as simply an issue of unemployment. As recent By-elections have shown, there is an almost total lack of interest from the unemployed and employed to 'Unite for a Labour Victory' which promises only 1 million unemployed. The predominant theory (sic) is that if the working class won't fight for jobs they won't fight for revolution--a convenient means of limiting class and individual perspectives for struggle. The Left's solution to the crisis is nothing more than a crisis of solutions. One result of unemployment is to foster the disillusionment with political parties and the political system. But as of now, there is little movement towards a positive alternative.

## NOW ONE KNOWS

THE OLD YEAR ended with yet another ship-launching bottle of champagne failing to break at first or second fling. The *Daily Mail* caption writer said that the "combined strength" of Prince Charles and the Princess of Wales managed it at the third go.

"Strength" has nothing to do with it. Every wartime maker of "Molotov cocktails" knows that a deep, horizontal score made with a triangular file ensured that the bottle broke--and the rubber in tank tracks caught fire--at first fling.

U.K. PRESS GAZETTE:

## CORRESPONDENCE .....

Dear Comrades,

I would be grateful if you could send me a selection of leaflets and bulletins produced by the LWG.

I would also welcome your views and criticisms of the traditional syndicalist unions (SAC), anarcho-syndicalist unions (CNT)... and in particular the Direct Action Movement (DAM).

Personally, for the last few years or so I've considered myself to be an anarcho-syndicalist (always very critical, never a traditionalist) / 'class struggle' anarchist. Although in recent months, well, the last year really, I've tended to move towards a more 'autonomous class struggle' position. Much to the dismay of certain DAM dictators in the region. (To criticise DAM up here can mean the loss of ones knee caps! Honest!)

Anyway, I look forward to your reply.

Yours fraternally, A Northern Friend.

REPLY ...Thanks for the letter and donation. I've enclosed some bulletins and an article I wrote on 'Labour Organisation'--the end of the article kind of suggests the forms which autonomous work-oriented groups could and do take. If we can sort ourselves out, maybe one of us could contribute to the present discussion in Freedom about workplace organisation.

Anyway, for the record, we are a loose, committed collective of anarchists and council-lists and undecideds with strong views. Been going about five years, and about 3½ years ago helped to set up an informal federation around the country, especially with A-Syndicalists in Lancashire. This became the DAM but it took directions we could not agree with (so we withdrew). Structural: It became an individual membership/centralised organisation, rather than a federation or network of groups and individuals. Content: It became specifically anarcho-syndicalist, aiming to 'build' a 'mass' union-type organisation for unified action. We think that this is both an illusory aim, not possible in a modern social-democratic set-up, and also undesirable in that revolutionaries should not set up organisations to 'represent' people (people create such general meetings as and when they need and wish, under their control.) Also, rather than have a clear set of ideas which we go out and present people with, the relationship between revolutionaries and people, say, in workplaces, should be more open, less mechanised, recruiting. We should recognise we have much to learn also. One of our strengths is we do not respect dogma and there are discussions and disagreements about every aspect of this society and changing it without having to refer to 'our policy'.

One thing I am very strong about is that changing society doesn't just mean seizing control of the institutions and structures (such as the industrial superstructure), but dismantling and transforming society. In this respect both anarcho-syndicalist unions and also workers councils are essentially conservative institutions. Yet there is a contradiction in that opposition in the day-to-day sense will occur within the roles and institutions that do exist (i.e. as a rail worker, or within the civil service) and hence specific collective activity will inevitably

arise--the problem is to avoid institutionalising that opposition, and to reaffirm our autonomy and desires as human beings. Hence to be loyal to or identify with any ideology or structure means we become politicians or sorts trying to impose outside or simplistic solutions on peoples attempts to self-organise.

Every political group built on loyalty, ideology and membership acts to maintain discipline and control--hence your experience with the local DAM. But I'd also like to say that most people in DAM are probably acting with the best intent, but are either trapped by old forms or traditions, or just members for the contact it brings (and hence not necessarily anarcho-syndicalists.) Also, groups like us, LWG, do not necessarily have many of the answers, both in terms of theory and practice, or general attitude, but at least we are autonomous, open and not committed to a structure or rigid set of ideas.

I'll end now. If you'd like to reply, we can continue this discussion. You must have some interesting ideas and experiences of your own.

Keep well and strong and thoughtful,

In Solidarity, Dave M.

## .....ONGOING

Dear Dave,

Thanks very much for your letter and enclosures. I found the leaflet / statement on Workers' Autonomy excellent and the bulletins most informative and interesting. ( ... )

I wholeheartedly echo your criticisms of the Direct Action Movement. In actual fact I am a member of this organisation. Well in the sense that I have not officially resigned, although somewhat lapsed and disillusioned. I joined DAM in late 1979, and at the time it was great to meet other anarchists who recognised the existence of a working class and the need to organised class struggle. ( ... )

Since my joining of DAM I have seen the organisation become increasingly centralised and very much party-linish--'come and join us' sort of thing. Within DAM at the moment there seems to be a growing tendency towards traditional syndicalism. This suspicion was confirmed by a DAM activist recently returned from the AIT conference in Sweden. Ranting and raving about the Northern European unions, i.e. NSF (Norway), SAC (Sweden) and the FAU (Germany)--talking about the new direction for DAM, moving from the anarchist image to the more workerist image of syndicalism. The tightening up of organisation, the writing of a strict constitution and even the testing of potential members are a few new proposals floating around

( ... ) As an anarchist I see various areas of struggle and recognise that there are different ways to tackle the problems facing us. For example, the different interpretations of workplace organisation and struggle. I look around and see exploitation, oppression, poverty and helplessness everywhere. So in my own way I strive towards eradicating these evils by working towards the ultimate goal of a self-managed society--the only cure for the ills of nation, state and capital. I will act and work in co-operation with others according to the determined situation, and act in the best and most constructive way possible. Of all the areas of struggle I see the workplace as the most imp-

ortant. Of course this does not mean that every other area of struggle is just forgotten about--the struggle against authority is an ongoing thing. Wherever it raises its ugly head you fight against it.

The working class is the backbone and the workplace/industry is the soft underbelly of capitalism. The working class is also its own worst enemy. We ourselves ensure the state's continued existence by working for/supporting it. Act as a class and the state machinery and the capitalist system will crumble. To achieve this the working class must themselves control their own workplace, community and activity. Now I personally believe that the way to do this is to reject all unions and so-called workers organisations, that is, trades, syndicalist, anarcho-syndicalist unions, political parties and any others. And call for independent working class organisation and class struggle. Autonomous workplace groupings, councils, committees call them what you like; each one federating to one another. In the meantime, whilst working towards this goal of mass workers 'assemblies', I feel we should start by establishing a national federation/network of autonomous class struggle groupings whether their location be geographical or industrial. Each group producing their own propaganda, i.e. leaflets, posters, bulletins etc. Once established the federation could produce a national paper, totally uncentralised, content being of a theoretical/discussion/debate/analytic nature. Maybe produced on a quarterly basis with a rotating editorial collective. Or alternatively we could produce a bulletin similar to your own LWB but with wider circulation. ( ... )

I take it that some of the LWG are railworkers --if so, how do you come to terms with the closed shop policies enforced by the rail unions? When I'm working--I am currently unemployed--I usually join the relevant trade union, although I always contract out of paying the political levy wherever applicable. Obviously I join in the case of a closed shop to guarantee employment. See, we all must compromise with the system somewhere. My excuse is heavy economic and personal commitments. In the case of no closed shop agreements I still usually join for the following reasons. 1) To keep in the 'know'. It is always advantageous to keep track on union wheeling and dealing. 2) To avoid being ostracised by fellow workers upon commencement of a job. I also find it helps to get to know your work-mates before ploughing in with the political bit. ( ... )

Moving on to the question of unemployment. When unemployed, political and personal feelings tend to mix somewhat. Obviously in my case they do as I am. Yes we all know that by working we are supporting capitalism--and by fighting for the 'right to work' we are simply fighting for the right to be exploited, further delaying the agonies of this vile system. To say nothing of the ego-bolstering tactics of the popular frontist pathetic left. And yes there is only one real remedy to cure capitalistic ills--the revolutionary overthrow of that system. But in the meantime I think the initiation of some kind of campaign to alleviate the effects of unemployment--in some cases crippling--would be in order ( ... )

The kind of campaign I envisage is one for increased benefits and greater free social facilities for the unemployed and other

claimants. Involving maybe the setting-up of unemployed groups, independent from all political parties and unions, designed primarily to give support and solidarity; self-managed groups based on co-operation and mutual aid. I would also like these groups to become centres for political debate where those involved continually exchange ideas and experiences. Of course, these must only be looked upon as wage claims -- limited, short-term gains which are no substitute for revolutionary change and a new society.

I am particularly impressed with the remnants of the Solidarity groups--Wildcat and Subversive Graffiti. I am all in favour of their political stance. I have heard them criticised from the direction of the 'World Revolution' camp (no specific group) that they are too parochial and do not analyse events on a world scale. To simply say that all our problems will be solved by bringing down the whole system of world capital, although true in essence, is a bit silly. To use it as an argument for not getting involved in localised grassroots politics is a proper copout. You know, to some extent it is possible to revolutionise oneself completely out of existence. Local interventions and actions can be co-ordinated and linked to the same or similar struggles in other areas. Autonomous groups working in co-operation with others through a well-organised network can themselves develop an internationalist stance and link up with comrades overseas. Of course the class struggle is worldwide, but you don't just sit around doing sweet FA calling for world revolution whilst fellow workers are getting picked off daily by the state! Action and solidarity must start somewhere--so why not on a local level or in a specific workplace or industry? I am sure you will agree with me to some extent? What are your views on the former network of Solidarity groups, what they are today, and indeed my own observations? ( ... )

Look forward to hearing from you.

Yours in struggle and solidarity A

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Dear LWG.

I would like to congratulate you all on the inclusion of the article 'Industrial Technology --would we be better off with less of it, or even without it?' in the latest bulletin.

I was impressed with the obvious depth of research that had gone into analysing the problems we face and the path we must tread to moving away from the present hi-tech, dangerously alienating 'society' that we exist in, onwards and upwards to a slower, safer and more satisfying alternative.

So often when people try to analyse this important question they make the mistake of plumping for easy targets and simplistic solutions. Or, they adopt the stance of preacher/teacher and blast the reader with arrogance and patronization.

To escape all this and still be entertained and educated was bliss indeed.

We need more of this!

Solidarity,

Sheena Easton.

# UNWAGED-THE OTHER 50 %

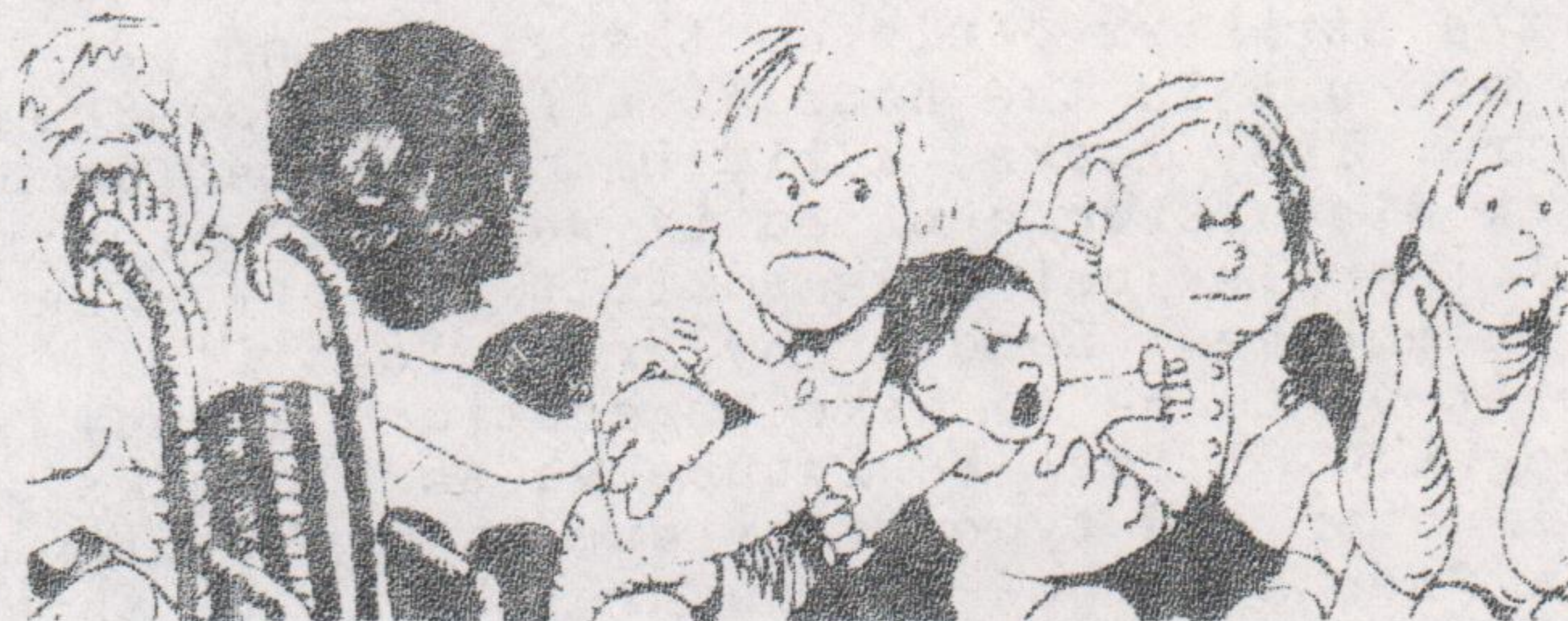
## PART 1: DISCUSSION AND ACTIVITY

By April this year, after 6 months not employed, I'd not managed to find or create any worthwhile activity to get involved in in Tottenham where I lived. But a series of free films put on by Islington Action Group on Unemployment (IAGOU) caught my eye, and after seeing 'Rosie the Riveter', 'Blacks Britannica' and 'The Wobblies' I decided to get involved with the collective, originally aiming to set up a similar group in Tottenham (now I aim to move to Islington instead.)

Quite a few people joined (only unwaged people can) as a result of the films, and there were about a dozen of us all ages, nearly all blokes unfortunately, and mostly working class or ex-students. None were active in political parties (some had lapsed membership) as the group had been going a couple of years and had fought hard for its independence and broadly libertarian attitudes.

### A CENTRE

A great deal of effort has been put into getting a funded centre for the unwaged in Islington, without compromising the autonomy and activity of those involved. In fact, strenuous lobbying tactics were able to embarrass Islington Labour Council into agreeing in principle in Sept. 81 --but when they realised we were determined to refuse to have paid workers or any control by the Trades Council/Social Workers etc (in line with the 'management of unemployment' intentions of the TUC/Councils/Trotskyists)



they began to block the opening. The pressure continued until the number of so-called 'technicalities' dried up and we finally got the keys on August 31st.

The group received £4,000 from the GLC for centre activities, which has now been saved except for financing the free films. We're due for another few thousand for rent, alterations etc.

### OTHER ACTIVITIES

Due to arguments and frustration in long post office queues on dole cheque cashing days we briefly leafletted the queues and staff encouraging people to take out their anger on the system, not each other.

We also started a campaign for free (or reduce services and resources (e.g. council, sports, cinemas, fares) for all unwaged people and handed out 2,000 copies of a free paper called 'Free Time' with information and ideas--largely as a result of 'lobbying' council committees, the council has now (end of Sept.) announced a 6-month trial period of free sports facilities for all adult unwaged people (and their children.)

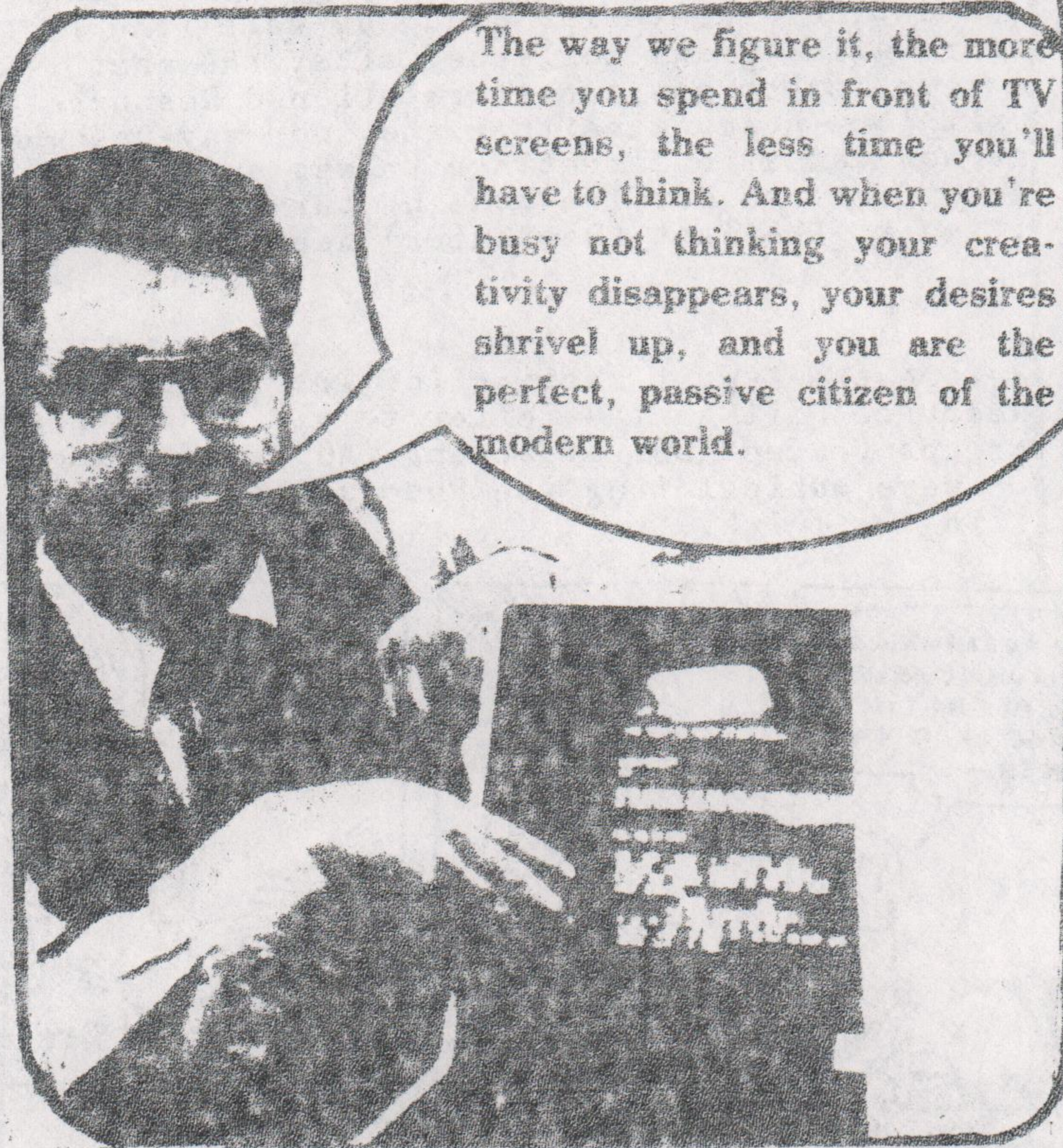
The way we figure it, the more time you spend in front of TV screens, the less time you'll have to think. And when you're busy not thinking your creativity disappears, your desires shrivel up, and you are the perfect, passive citizen of the modern world.

Over a period of 2 weeks in July we prepared and distributed 4 or 5 leaflets, a total of about 7,000 copies handed out mostly in Unemployment and DHSS offices, as well as stuck up in launderettes, community centres, parent & toddler clubs etc. They were on different aspects of the coming changes in benefit rules: -- racist checks, availability-for-work testing, etc. All advertised a local public meeting to discuss these significant changes, but only 6 or 7 new faces came along.

We also helped Islington Wageless Women (IWW) distribute 1,000 leaflets encouraging women to join their newly-created group and we organised creches at their meetings. The idea was that the centre should be shared with IWW and any other local independent unwaged groups

### WORKPLACE STRUGGLES

At around this time we supported the health workers picket lines at the Royal Northern and Whittington hospitals. We tried to be supportive and not manipulate the very



inexperienced picketers (unlike the left groups which only turn up to sell papers, recruit and dominate). We half-heartedly handed out the only leaflets available to passers-by (produced by the Unions and Labour Party), and I suggested the strikers could do their own and get it run off within the hour at a local resource centre. They looked a bit blank, but after a quick discussion decided it was 'the union's job'. People just have so little confidence in themselves. Some of my group felt it wasn't up to me to make suggestions anyway. I disagreed. I feel in future we should take our duplicator and typewriter etc to picket lines as a free service--our centre should be thrown open to strikers too.

We also went on local health workers marches, but got sick of it as all the lefty councillors and TU officials were on them, and Tony Benn even spoke (to a sychophantic reception) at the end of one.

Attempts to support the rail drivers were derailed when we failed to track down the Kings Cross picket line.

## THE FEDERATION

All this time we had been very active in trying to strengthen the London & South-East Federation of Unemployed, Unwaged and Claimants Groups (LSEFUUCG !), which grew up 18 months ago and is still developing. Of the 70 contact addresses, maybe about 15 groups are strong, active or interested enough to attend. Our group has become known as uncompromising on the principles of autonomy--that only the unwaged should attend, that the Federation should be libertarian in structure, based on group autonomy, and that we should see ourselves as part of a movement for social change, not just make demands for reforms or jobs from the system.

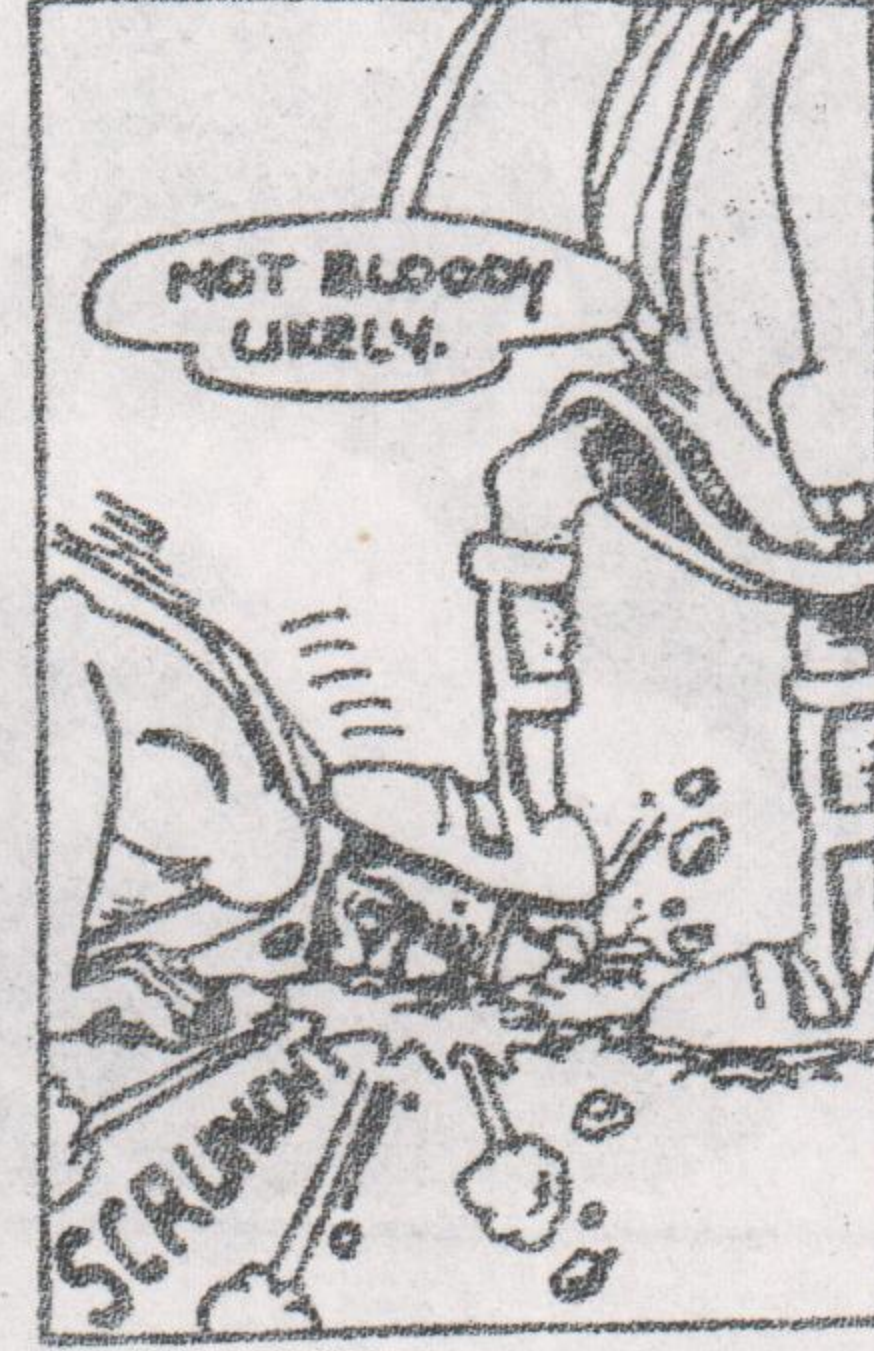
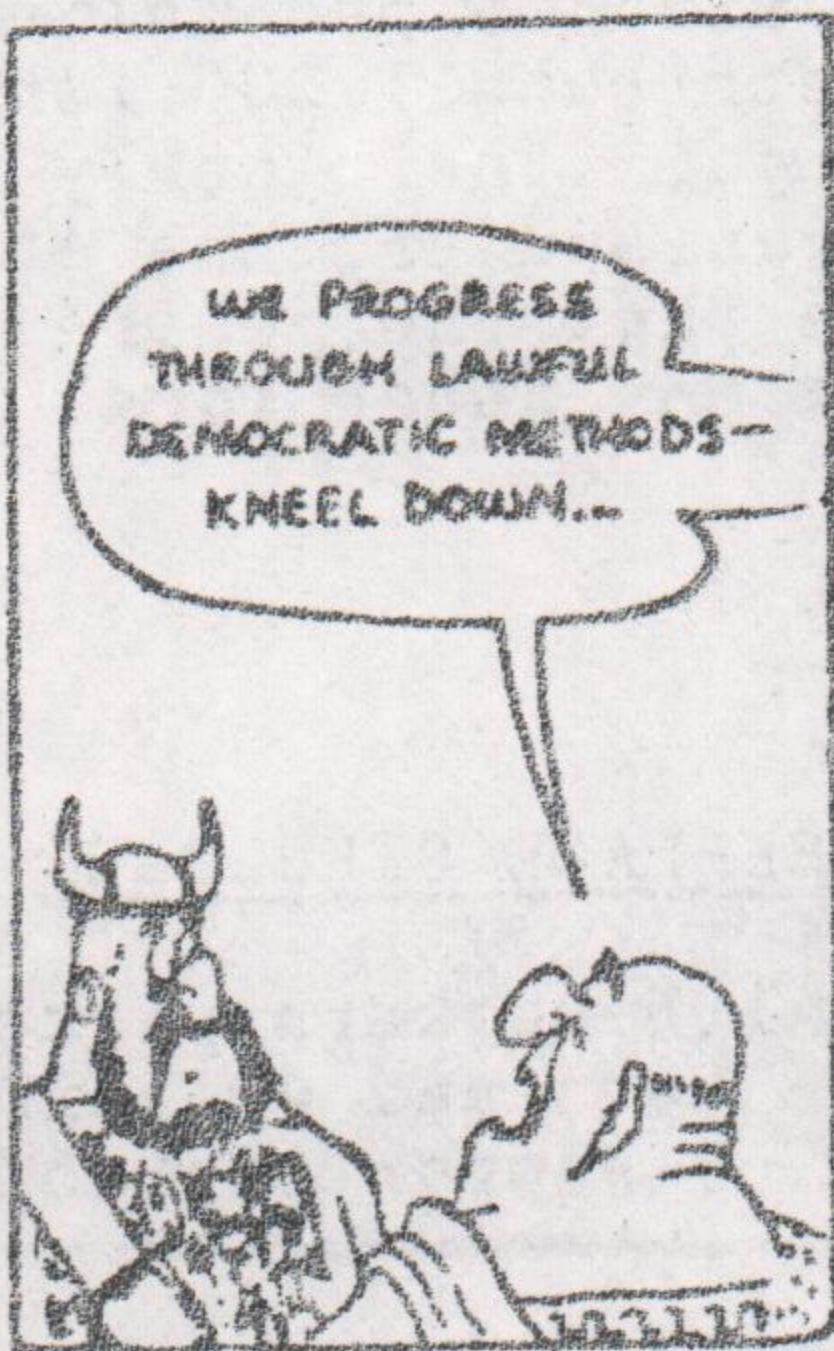
But each group is of different size, ideas and experience. This diversity is exciting and challenging, and also often frustrating. Mutual respect between groups is essential if we are to gather greater strength and understanding. A big problem is isolation (and poverty too).

However the major problem of the last 6 months has been Government funding and infiltration of unwaged groups. (Centres, community and social workers, political party fronts, etc.) In particular, a 'community worker', behind our backs, applied for a full-



time job in his 'resource unit' to 'help the Federation' (and also the National Unemployed Workers Movement--an organisation fairly widely supported a year ago by groups around the country, but now just a small front for the Trotskyist Workers Socialist League.) This attacked our autonomy, and divided and disrupted the groups. Many were attracted by such a 'carrot'. After much argument, confusion and bitterness, the 'help' was rejected. Lately a £750 grant (no strings attached) from the Natwest Bank (!) has eased money problems, and we are doing a newsletter for the Federation now. We have been the treasury group and lately the acting secretarial group as well (the last secretariat group collapsed after the most active member got the aforementioned Resource Unit job--however neither she, nor any unwaged person can attend meetings unless authorised.) We offered to devolve most of our responsibilities at the last (September) meeting.

Before the August meeting (of 11 groups) the Resource Unit sent a letter to all Federation groups (except us) attacking IAGOU, implying we were manipulating the Federation. A last fling we think.



## RECENTLY...

we changed our name to Islington Action Group of the Unwaged (still IAGOU) to make it clear it was poverty and oppression we are fighting, not lack of jobs, and that we are open to all unwaged people (not just UB40 holders), e.g. unwaged women, pensioners, children ...

After 3 of us went to the Federation of Claimants Unions (FCU) conference, we learned a lot about coming Social Security and Unemployment Benefit changes, and met groups from all over the country. 10 of us from IAGOU, IWW and Haringey & Islington Claimants Union (H&ICU) went together to support a demonstration on August 23rd. called by Norwich CU against the arrival of a squad of Special Claims Control Units (SCCU, or 'Supersnoopers'). About 80 people took part, and partly due to us lot, 25 people surged into the administration section of the DHSS and demanded to meet the SCCUs, saying that this was a 'public inspection'. This was great fun, and a great feeling of power. Most of us were eventually blocked on the 3rd. floor, and after half an hour of argument/negotiations inside, we agreed to meet 2 of the SCCU and the SS manager, and chose 4 delegates.



Anyway, we resolved to organise a London demo/reception on Sept. 15th, when the SCCU squad arrived in Islington (Archway Tower). Organised by the three Islington groups, we publicised it widely, leafletted Archway claimants, did graffiti etc. On the day about 70 people came and picketed for about 5 hours. We got some photos of the SCCU. We felt that a lot more opposition and protest was necessary, and so continued the leafletting each day up to the 11th. October, for the next demonstration there.

Out of this common activity with the H&ICU and on their initiative, a 'benefits liaison group' was called with delegates from the 3 groups invited, and all the DHSS and UBO office workers. Despite a promising response from 6 offices (mostly shop stewards), there were people sent uninvited from both Islington and Hornsey Labour Parties (both thinking of setting up 'Labour Unemployment Groups' as front organisations.) We opposed their presence and it was decided at the next (September) meeting that a vote on the subject would be taken and that we would withdraw if they stayed. Which we did, after losing the vote. We don't intend to let ourselves be used and manipulated.

We are, at the time of writing, preparing our centre, the alterations, equipment etc. in association with the IWW. However, a big argument has blown up in recent weeks over our

general attitudes to the group, activity, relations with IWW and anti-sexism, policy and constitution.

## PART 2: SOME THOUGHTS

This all sounds, and is, very exciting, and involves a very high and profound level of commitment for me, and all of the group. Living in the same area (I hope to move there soon) helps. All the activity has been accompanied by long and involved discussion and of course argument, and strains in our personal relationships. Continuing problems are how to make decisions collectively and fight elitism and sexism the class and age differences, whether we are too closed or removed from most unwaged people's lives and problems.

Are we, in spite of being conscious of and generally opposed to it, becoming absorbed into leftist campaigning attitudes and activities, aiming to substitute ourselves for autonomous activity or 'represent' the unwaged? Our conflict with Islington's 'Socialist Council' has been educational and protected our autonomy, y the funding we have screwed out of the GLC is

danger and a contradiction. There are tensions in the group and differing ideas as to how the centre should be used--a campaigning or social meeting place? Open to all or to those who wish to be involved with our campaigning activities? We have decided that there will be a well-run playgroup for children in the centre. Many of the women in IWW feel it may become a male-dominated place.

## MAJOR ARGUMENTS

The recent arguing has been quite intense and hopeful. We are strong enough to resolve or at least respect some of our differences--I feel that what I call 'constitutionalism' has gripped the group lately, leading to some dogmatism and coldness and political (in the worst sense) infighting. Others feel that formal structure and policies should be decided, which I think will lead to a Party-like identity.

2 people have been expelled and rightly so from our group. One, a founder member whose continuing and abusive sexism came to a confrontation. The other was a former long-standing member who'd returned after being involved in setting up a classic front organisation for the Haringey Labour Party--'Haringey Labour Unemployment Group', and using his former involvement with us to speak in our name and to con people.

The 12-year-old H&ICU help each other and others to know their 'rights', and fight the DHSS bureaucracy. They're also a supportive and libertarian collective, and occasionally campaign, mostly against DHSS changes and for a guaranteed minimum income for every individual.

We however prefer to be a campaigning/resistance/support group, and to encourage other like groups especially in Islington to form and oppose the work-and-pay society and its structures of oppression and repression. At the moment we have our feet on the ground (on tip-toes), and in some ways feel responsible and answerable to those unwaged in our area who dislike or hate their oppression and poverty--who feel solidarity with others, are sensitive to their problems and struggles, but who are as yet isolated, confused or disillusioned. If we lose this relationship we will just become another political group 'educating' or 'leading' the masses. It is this responsibility to each other that is so important to me and which has been almost destroyed by capitalism's colonisation of all lives, culture and relationships in the community, and by the Left colonising working class resistance.

We have to develop responsibility by fighting elitism, isolation and ideology as an end in itself, which is too widespread amongst some Anarchist groups and also the London Workers Group. I hope IAGOU can deal with all this.

## THE FUTURE

For these reasons, and also because of the development of unwaged/unemployed activity and ideas in general, I am very much involved and committed to such struggles.

I WONDER WHAT IT WOULD BE LIKE  
TO LIVE THE LIFE I REALLY WANT?



Revolutionary workers groups (like the LWG) as well as ecological and antimilitarist collectives like the London Greenpeace Group are also important in contributing to the development in this part of the world of a revolutionary and libertarian current springing from peoples lives and struggles against this System. But who knows what lies buried in the hearts and minds of people? Ultimately, as the ruling class continues to increase its power over society, and its repression and destruction (maybe final) of this planet, it is the vast majority of people acting for themselves and coming out of their long sleep and fear, who will change and reshape society. We are making our contribution.

Dave.

IAGOU and IWW, Unwaged Centre, 355 Holloway Rd. N7 Tel. 607 8271/2  
H&ICU, c/o Crouch Hill Recreation Centre, Hillrise Rd., N19 Tel. 272 7569  
FCU, 296 Bethnal Green Rd, E2 Tel. 739 4173  
(We can also provide addresses of nearest known unwaged groups to anyone contacting us.)

## UNEMPLOYED/ UNWAGED GROUPS

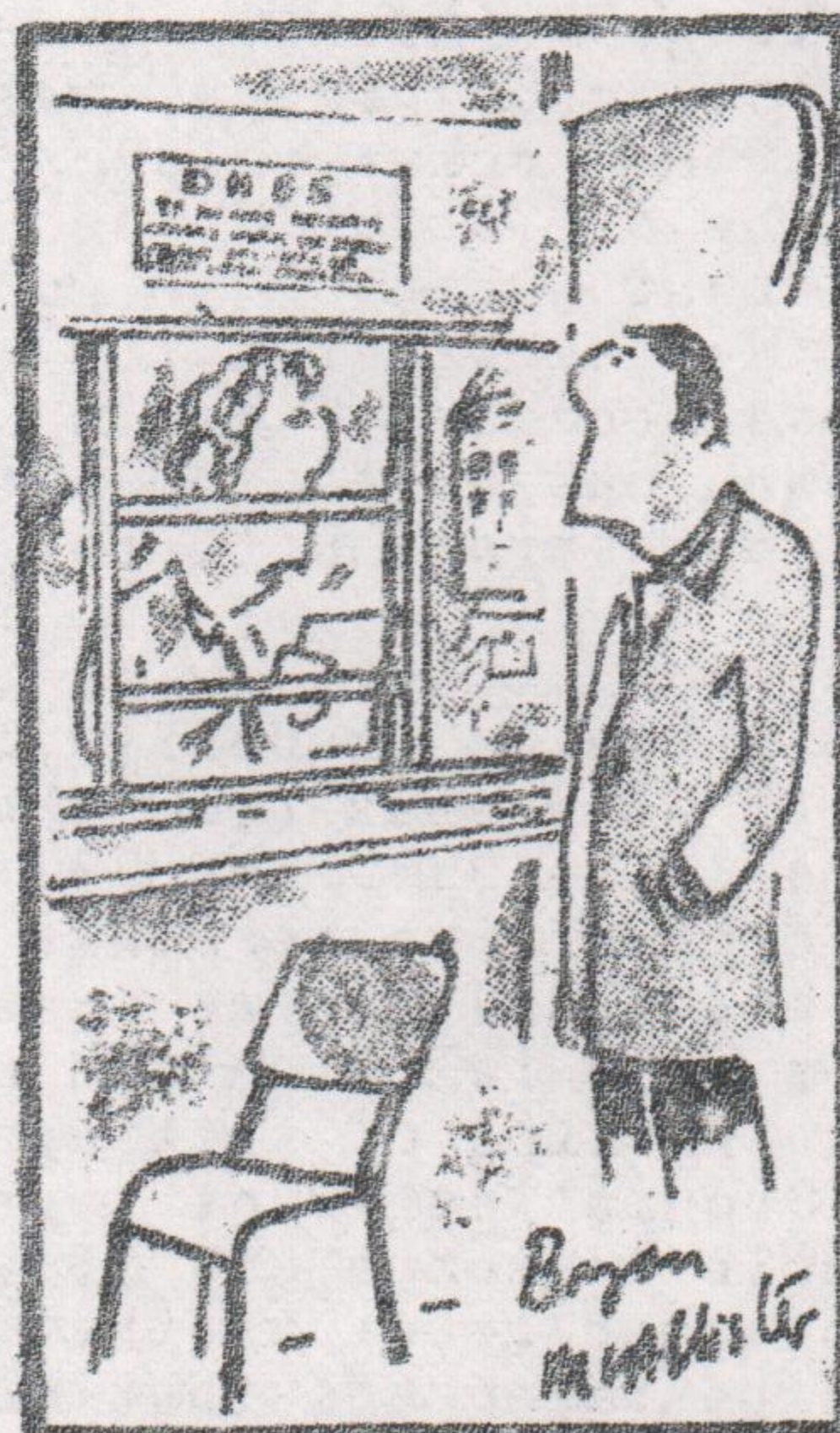
FOLLOWING ON FROM THE ABOVE:

Between 16th-20th October I displayed the above article in the unwaged centre so that anyone who had been involved in the activities and discussions mentioned could make comments (but no-one did), with a guarantee of publication--as I suggested and all agreed at the previous IAGOU meeting.

The next Thursday I wasn't able to go to the meeting as I was busy moving house. The following week (Oct 29th) I turned up at the weekly general meeting. Only about 5 of the group were there, but I was told that the previous week they had discussed me in secret, and decided to expel me from the group. I knew that the group had been going barmy lately, but this left me incredulous. I was given 'reasons', and when I said I'd reply at the end, I was told that this wasn't a discussion but a 'collective statement'. After hearing it, I said it was a load of old rubbish but that I didn't wish to stay in a group who didn't want me--so I left.

They also aim to ban me from the centre, which means they now consider it their property. It isn't, as we'd always agreed it belonged to active unwaged people and groups in the area--so I don't accept their ban.

Later that day there was due to be a joint meeting between IAGOU, IWW and H&ICU. The first Claimants Union member to arrive (previously involved in IAGOU until he got a wage, and also an anti-authoritarian) was told he also was expelled, permanently, from IAGOU (despite no longer being in it!) and 'banned' from the centre. When he asked why, he was told 'we don't have to give reasons'. When the rest of the CU arrived they refused to go in, and since have decided not to be involved with the centre unless and until the situation there changes.



"I'm sorry, but according to Government statistics you've got a job."

### AUTHORITARIAN

It seems that what I had written before, above, was sadly accurate in seeing the growing authoritarianism of the group, although I underestimated both the speed and the strength of the degeneration.

The 'reasons' given for getting rid of me were (with no examples given and no discussion allowed): 'divisive', 'always acted against group', 'no intention of collective work', 'total disagreement with group', 'denied existence of constitution', 'don't agree with the collectively decided constitution' (the wording of which

had never been discussed by the collective, and when it was originally mentioned it was said to be needed 'only to satisfy the various bureaucracies funding us'), I 'had not tried to act in an anti-sexist way', and lastly I was 'only in the group because it "will do for now".'

Anyone reading the above article can judge for themselves the accuracy or absurdity of these accusations.

## OUTSIDE PRESSURES

I think there are a number of reasons for the 2 of us being expelled, and for the group's turn for the worse. In general, the structures of Authority on society, are also inside each individual and group of people. The struggle to change society means constant awareness of that and a commitment to fight it.

When a group is funded and acquires property, the pressures to conform (from legal and institutional sources) increase, and affect the internal relationships too. There are also increased pressures to integrate with the Left -- to become a 'representative' body. Left-wing campaigning, protests and attempts to 'mobilise' people, and having a credible 'image', take over from more fundamental and direct political activity and ideas. Anti-payment, anti-work and anti-repression struggles are gradually dropped, ignored or opposed in favour of negotiations with and appeals to trade union and political party and group representatives. The constant need for solidarity and direct discussion with interested unwaged people (and in workplaces) becomes less and less important.

In this atmosphere, middle-class members (often with degrees) increasingly become the organisers, and the group begins to identify more and more with political groups, officials and institutions. Unwaged people become a 'constituency' to be 'led' and 'educated'. (In a way, LWG has this problem partly--in the last 2 or 3 years we have tended to drift away from our original intentions of contact and involvement with people and struggles in workplaces. Most of our contacts are with political groups and individuals. However we are generally opposed to the politics and methods of Left-wing groups, and aware of the dangers of elitism and ideology.) But we should not underestimate the difficulties and contradictions of being an autonomous and principled group with strong ideas, who inevitably have the problem of isolation.

## ACCOUNTABLE

A group of people acting amongst a community (whether a local area, or in an industry etc.) must in some ways be accountable or answerable to that community in order to keep its feet on the ground. The main defences against elitism and isolation are the many and diverse horizontal contacts and direct involvements with other people. The development of formal structures and rigid ideology can only make more barriers.

As a group's identity gets stronger, its competitiveness with other groups increases. IAGOU, in October, began to get paranoid about other unwaged groups nearby (such as H & ICU, Camden Unemployed Group) although its relationship with IWW continues to be very close. Will the resources in the centre eventually be available to others as well?

The two previous expulsions, which were necessary, as some of us feared at the time created a sort of precedent. Independent groups

SOMEDAY



THERE'LL BE  
A WORLD  
WITHOUT  
AUTHORITY



WITHOUT  
BUREAU-  
CRACY



WITHOUT  
RULES



WHERE  
THERE'LL  
BE  
FREEDOM



AND  
SHARING



AND  
LOVE.



AND I  
STILL  
WON'T  
FIT IN.



ALB  
TAYLOR

certainly need to protect themselves from manipulation and authoritarianism (e.g. sexism). But to adopt constitutions and ideologies causes more problems, and eventually are used to suppress initiative and free discussion.

Some of the discussions of 'the last days' were over libertarian or authoritarian ways of opposing sexism, over whether we should employ the Direct Labour Dept. of the council to do the work on the centre on principle, or building workers more accountable to us (i.e. a co-op), over whether we should encourage and trust each other to take initiatives or only to act with official sanction.

## SUPPRESSION

For some reason IAGOU decided to suppress such open discussion. Nowhere was this clearer than at my final meeting--a tribunal worthy of a totalitarian state. The people in the group, while giving excuses for an expulsion, were unable to see the hypocrisy of their divisive, manipulative, even anti-constitutional (the summary expulsion is totally unconstitutional) attitudes. (In the last week or so, I've heard that some people in IAGOU are now saying we were got rid of for our clear anarchist ideas, and that they now feel the group is 'strengthened' by the purge.)

## MY FEELINGS SINCE

The strongest feeling at first was one of great sadness and confusion that such a promising group of people should have turned so sour. And that the opportunity for a resource centre for unwaged groups should end up in the hands of an elite.

Neither of us felt bitter, preferring to concentrate on more important things such as continuing effective activity (for example in the claimants union.) However, the more I thought the whole thing over, the more angry I felt that all my sincere efforts and commitment to build up the group and centre could be slagged off in such a way. These are the same type of self-appointed 'guardians' of the people' and of 'truth' who always try to speak for and take over peoples' struggles and ideas. It is this sort of 'politics' which is rightly so despised by all sensitive people the world over.

So what now? Many people have suggested I should have refused to be kicked out, should fight for my principles and express my anger. However, the most constructive use for such anger is to strengthen my resolve to continue the struggle against all forms of oppression, rather than pointless in-fighting. IAGOU is not the only fish in the sea. A lot was achieved in the time I was involved, but there is much more to be done.

In many ways they still have contributions to make if they don't allow themselves to become controlled by the council or the Left. No group can be perfect and I wish them well.

Since leaving IAGOU I have continued my involvement with H&ICU which despite spending much of its time on welfare rights is quite a down-to-earth group. But unwaged people need to be more active in opposing poverty and oppression at their roots. I have also gone along to Harringey Unemployed Group (now independent of the Labour Party)-- a fragile and small collective, yet with possibilities to grow. Rather than move to Islington, I think I shall now stay in Tottenham, the land of my parents, and see what can be done.

Dave

November 16th '82

## POSTSCRIPT

No group is perfect nor ever will be. Some people in IAGOU wanted to mould the group into 'their' perfect group and perhaps our expulsions were necessary for that reason. What had previously kept us together was that we were always busy doing good things and we liked each other and felt stronger through the solidarity. Politicians are talkers rather than doers and finally-- as no 'doing' was even discussed--the talkers took control: judging each other replaced trusting each other and it was horrible. I agree with Dave's comments and I hope that once the centre is established and the doors are flung open that it will become a centre for the unwaged, rather than for a few of us, and then we can stir up a lot of shit for the establishment and a lot more solidarity for ourselves.

Lots of love,

Dan

Nov. 16th '82

# PRESS GANG-ED

I work in the despatch department of a major Fleet Street news agency. The staff is composed of ten despatch clerks, a postal clerk, and a number of clerks in outside departments (racing, telecommunications, plus staff at the House of Commons and Law Courts); three Multilith operators, about a dozen messengers and five despatch riders. The despatch department clerks divide into an admin. clerk, two three-man shifts, a night-shift, and two float-shifts. I belong to the last category, which means I can be put on any shift in despatch (including post), or in racing or telecommunications. In effect I have to know four jobs, although most of the time I work in the despatch department. Here there are three main activities. Firstly, to despatch and collect letters, packages, newspapers etc. in the London area. This

means directing the messengers (mainly OAPs) and despatch riders. Secondly, to collate copy produced by the Multilith operators. Thirdly, to mind the teleprinters which provide file copy of the news and sport messages, wired to London subscribers, to provide photocast copy to subscribers whose teleprinters have broken down, and record such breakdowns, directing the service technicians. These subscribers consist chiefly of the national press and the London offices of the provincial press, the London offices of foreign newspapers and agencies (La Stampa, TASS, AFP etc.) and to the television and radio media. A more compressed news service is provided for government departments, the main financial and industrial institutions, the major London hotels and watering-holes of the rich and powerful.

## STUCK-UP BASTARDS

The despatch department is cut off from the rest of the building, indeed many employees may be only vaguely aware of its existence. This contributes perhaps to the warm atmosphere in the department, although there is not much inter-departmental rivalry which affects many jobs. There is resentment of the Telecommunications operators, because they earn so much more than we do, and of the journalists, because many seem to be stuck-up bastards who inhabit a different world (the despatch staff remain pretty well untainted by this middle-class world of journalists etc. upstairs), but there is little of the 'team spirit' attitude which personnel officers invoke to encourage you to direct your frustration at other workers outside 'your' team.

The work itself is stultifyingly boring and the aim is always to get out of the building as quickly as possible. Quite a lot of skiving goes on, but this is mostly known and tolerated by the management. This toleration is partly due to the nature of the job: working to meet deadlines means that sometimes you are kept busy, but much of the time there is nothing to do but stare into space and scratch your arse for what seems an eternity. No-one wants to do that all day for the money we're on. Some of those who have families to keep supplement their wages with odd jobs in their spare time. So time 'stolen' from the firm helps keep us quiet, and amounts to the unstated part of the 'net income' of our terms of employment.

The boring nature of the work is to a certain extent compensated for by the really good comradeship between the staff. This is better than any other job I have done. There is quite a lot of socialising outside work, in spite of the fact that we all work different shifts and live all over London and the surrounding country. No-one amongst us falls on bad times without some form of help or solidarity from the rest. For example, when I was off work in hospital last year nearly everyone in the department visited me, some regularly.

I have a good relationship with my workmates, although I do fall under a sort of social sub-group which is impossible to escape. I am not the only worker in the department with the supposed benefits of a middle-class education, and the attitude to the others is the same. Generally where people are not actively resisting their conditions of work, and are accepting the 'benefits' of capitalism, they also accept that competition between workers is the natural order. Those who try to stand outside this competition are therefore regarded as slightly eccentric. It is generally a cause of bewilderment that I do not try harder to use my education to 'get on'. But there is a growing number of workers in the firm who a few years ago might have gone straight into the middle-class professions who are now unwilling or unable to do so because of the recession. At the moment there is still something of a tension between the older and the younger workers, but this is diminishing.

## STICKING AN OAR IN

Politics is not a preferred topic of discussion at work. At first I was reticent about making any political utterances, firstly because of the attitude of the older workers 'he'll grow out of it', secondly, because once it was known that I had been at college it was (rightly) assumed that my head must be stuffed full of daft ideas. Now

I feel confident enough to stick my oar in when I feel like it. But being politically isolated, it is often difficult to sustain any argument. Sometimes it is better to drop a subject rather than appear pompous by keeping on about it--even when it comes to basic problems such as racism and sexism. People have sense enough to be impressed by actions rather than hollow words.

The department is entirely white and male. Whether this is the product of someone's conscious design, I cannot say, but it is an arrangement which seems to suit most of the staff.

Some feel that since their lives in the home are (so they say) ruled by their wives, women should play no part in their lives at work. A greater number believe that the presence of women at work would inhibit their self-expression (since women object to bad language, sloppy dress, etc.)

There would never, I think, be any question of blatant sexual harassment, but when women come down from other departments, they are treated either to old-fashioned 'courtesy' or to mild derision (expecting a giggly response) depending on age or rank. A lot of my colleagues simply think that a permanent female presence would destroy the 'matiness' which undoubtedly exists at present. But, especially for the younger, unmarried workers, this seems to perpetuate repression and alienation between the sexes.

A typical 'anti-sexist' response, quite apart from the inadequacies of feminism as a critique of society, is wholly inappropriate. The 'progressive' middle classes can afford the luxury of posing in all-women's organisations and 'non-sexist' mens groups with their 'radical' role-reversing. But when you are stuck in a world where the division of labour between the sexes is more or less a fact of daily existence all this is remote and frankly ridiculous. Sexism is a real problem, an obstacle to class unity at even a rudimentary level. But 'anti-sexist' ideology only reinforces these divisions by seeking to organise on the basis of 'oppression of women' rather than attacking the alienation between the sexes which operates throughout the class as a whole. In other words, it is one of the many traps of liberal ideology, and one we have to be aware of if we are to make a proletarian response in the workplace.

## NATIONALISM AND XENOPHOBIA

Many of the older members of staff are quite openly white-supremacist, although racial attitudes operate at a whole range of different levels, prejudices are never reducible to easy formulas. Partly it is a matter of a general xenophobia mixed up with anti-intellectualism and proletarian cultural defensiveness. When a dish on the canteen menu is printed in French, this provokes the same response as (say) Paul Boateng claiming to be English: a mixture of hostility and incredulity at the pretension of these clever buggers trying to pull the wool over our eyes. On the other hand, when it comes to personal contact, attitudes are more honest than that of the average middle-class intellectual (who attempts to disguise his guilty prejudices by being self-consciously liberal every time he opens his mouth.)

Recent events, such as the riots and the Falklands War, have shown how deep-rooted racism and nationalism are in large sections of the English working class. This presents an enormous obstacle to class consciousness, and has to be combatted. But the 'anti-racist'

factions in bourgeois politics make this task very difficult. The Labour left, which loves to trumpet its anti-racism at every opportunity, is just as nauseatingly nationalist as the Tories. Divisions within the class are reinforced by 'minority rights' activists and 'black community' leaders, who do all they can to portray the struggle of black workers as solely against racial oppression and therefore separate from the struggle of white workers. My view is that if you cannot denounce this rubbish, or at least distance yourself from it, it is better to say nothing rather than add to the confusion.

## THE UNION PROBLEM

Most of my colleagues couldn't give a stuff about the union one way or the other: if there is a prevailing attitude, it is that the union just robs us of a lot of money every month and gives sod all in return; as to the unions in general, the view is that, like politicians, union bureaucrats are a bunch of shits but an unfortunately necessary fact of life. They are quite capable of seeing that union manoeuvres such as the 'Day of Action' on the NHS dispute achieve

what they have rather than push their luck. Thus it seems that for the immediate future there will continue to be little shopfloor militancy, even within a narrow union chapel context. The chapel structure, whilst giving an impression of shopfloor control, will continue to keep workers divided between skilled and un- or semi-skilled and between firms; and so long as we are confined within the union apparatus, the possibility of broader action will be severely restricted. The best workers will continue to be drawn into union politics, seeing no realistic alternative, but for all those reasons they will have to choose between an increasingly cosy relationship with management, or the impotence of militancy.

## IN THIS REPORT

--I have tried to highlight just a small sample of some of the problems which an isolated revolutionary has to face in the workplace, if he/she is to make any impact. Some revolutionary groups talk glibly about forming 'factory groups' or making 'interventions', but grossly underestimate the obstacles and pitfalls which abound. On the one hand, there are workerists (including vanguardists such as the CWO, the ICC; anarcho-syndicalists and some councillists) who pay no attention to the way work has changed over the past decades. We don't all work in massive car factories. Capital is still in reality growing larger and more centralised, but for many of us, enterprises have been broken up, the division of labour extended and manipulated, tasks individualised in such a way that active unity seems more elusive than ever. This is even the case in the car industry, where, particularly in Italy, firms are successfully devolving their operations. Many of us work in paternal, 'enlightened' firms: workers perceptions are not that they have nothing to lose but their chains, (whatever the reality) and this perception appears to be daily confirmed by mass unemployment.

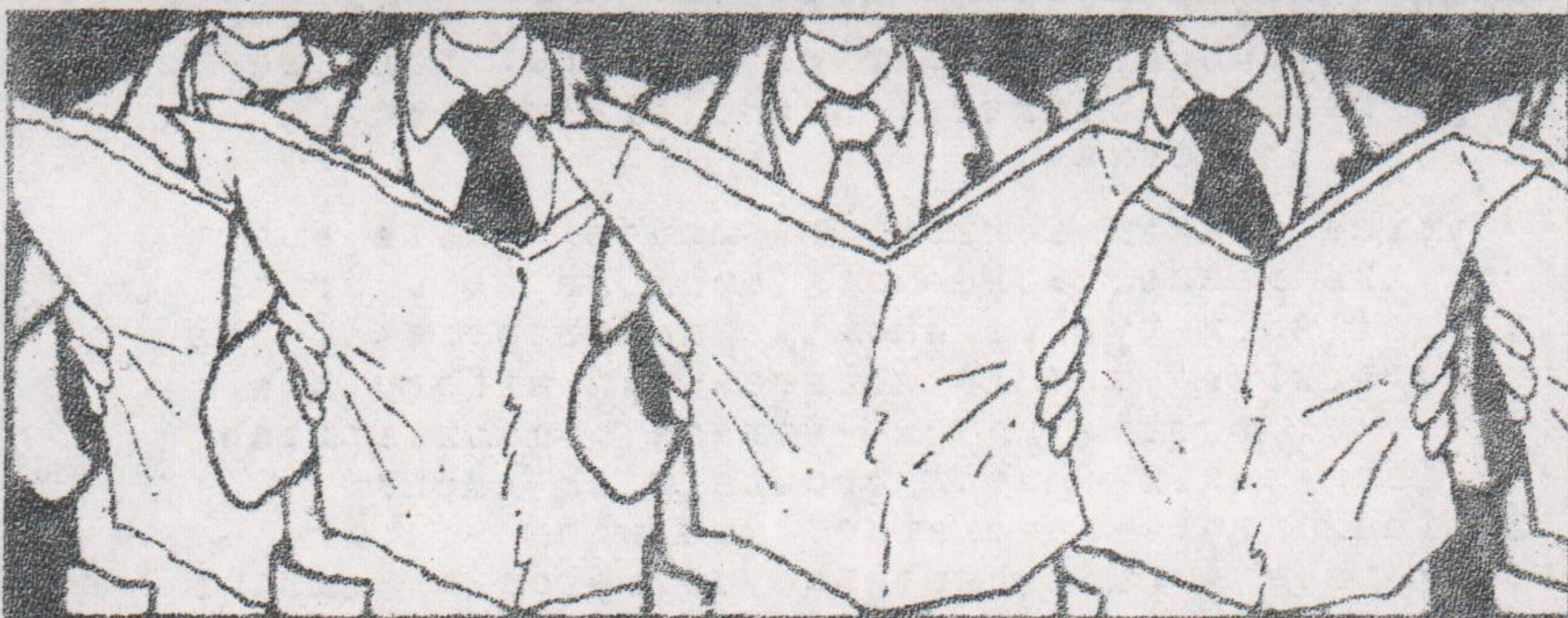
Although class unity is objectively more realisable because of deskilling, this has not yet materialised to any great extent. It has broken down the identification with craft or profession, but in spite of the recession, people still have the resources to throw their identities into various consumerist passions instead.

These factions have also shown themselves quite incapable of dealing with questions such as racism and sexism, as though they were simply capitalist ideology and had no real existence in the working class.

On the other hand, there are those who, partly because of the obvious shortcomings of workerism as well as the traditional labour movement, have been deflected from class politics. Usually this means tail-ending some variant of leftist 'liberation' politics--feminism; anti-racism; ecology; anti-nuclear; etc. It is understandable that when there is a lull in the class struggle, such as there is at the moment, peoples' attention is diverted to peripheral questions. It is also true that as revolutionaries, we are opposed to all of the shit that capitalist society throws at us. But losing sight of the central questions--the domination of our lives by Capital through wage-slavery and consumerism--only throws us into the dead-end world of democratic reformism, and we merely give a radical echo to the propaganda which is churned out daily by the capitalist media.

E.D.

## WHAT THE PAPERS SAY



nothing except losing everybody a day's pay. However, those who were sympathetic to the health workers and taking any action--a small minority--were those who do have illusions in unionism. The absence of any actual experience of sustained action outside the union apparatus is, as elsewhere, the real problem.

The union chapel (SOGAT '82) is composed of workers from a very large number of departments, many of these workers doing duties virtually on their own with little supervision. Tasks are divided in such a way as to devolve responsibility upon individual workers, so that the collective nature of the work, and consequently our collective strength, is concealed. Also, the union chapel includes a sizeable number of workers who are really under-management, or close to management (secretaries, personal assistants, etc.) The management is enlightened and paternalistic, giving occasional handouts from its position of strength.

The potential strength of workers in the press agencies--if they could cut across the barriers of individual firms and 'craft' status--is enormous. The agencies are the point at which the British press is centralised, and the provincial press is wholly dependent. However, the chance of even such a minimal level of unity being realised seems extremely remote. The central importance of the agencies will continue to cushion them from the effects of the recession. Most workers recognise that this puts them in a privileged position compared with other printworkers, and seem happy to hang on to

notes  
on the

# ECONOMIC CRISIS

In the publicised meeting of 27.7.82., comparison was made between the present economic crisis and that of the 1930s, when after years of experiencing worsening poverty the working class actually began to 'turn the tide', as if they just came to the conclusion that enough was enough. This is a false idea of what happened. In fact the reemergence of working class militancy in the thirties was the result of a picking-up of the economy. Workers were only fighting for a bigger share of the cake, so that their interests were tied to those of the bosses, as is always the case with reformist demands.

But I suggest that the economic crisis of the eighties is quite different, because this time there is not going to be any economic upturn. The restructuring of the system presently taking place, reestablishing the existence of a large pool of impoverished unemployed labour, solves the rulers' political problem by undermining reformist working class militancy, but only leads their system deeper into economic crisis, by reducing the spending power of the mass of consumers.

The underlying cause of the present, and still deepening, world economic crisis, is the drying-up of creative and imaginative energy which the essential passivity of consumerism engenders. The economic crisis began as a crisis in marketing. Around 1970, 80% of all new products marketed in the USA had to be withdrawn due to lack of interest. Without new outlets in sufficient mass quantities for new investment to yield higher and higher rates of exploitation, the capitalist system was already doomed. The collapse could be delayed, but not avoided. Today, the principle marketing problem seems to be lack of money in peoples pockets, and this undeniable fact causes the underlying subjective crisis to be generally overlooked.

For working class self-organisation, the practical implications of this somewhat esoteric process are considerable. Nowadays, workers have more sense than to take risks and make sacrifices in reformist struggles that they know they cannot win because of the economic crisis. Most rank and file workers groups now existing are mere ginger groups within trade unions seeking to sway the mass of workers to put pressure on the union bureaucracies through heightened militancy. This conception of rank and file groups is that of revolutionary socialists, who dream of coming to power by using the trade unions, which they consider to be the 'mass organisations of the working class.'

Our own conception of the trade unions, as an integral part of the capitalist system, with identical overall interests, leads us to posit the need for 'autonomous workers groups', acting quite independently of the trade unions, and antagonistic to them. In the coming period we are going to see more rank and file

groups of the type we prefer, and the decline of the type favoured by revolutionary socialist, because the continuing economic decline will increase working class frustration and decrease the possibilities for reformist palliatives. I shall illustrate what I mean by giving one example of each type of rank and file group.

On the one hand, the Ford Combine is a largely revolutionary socialist organisation, and has always concentrated on the reformist annual wage claim (20%--Fords can afford it! etc.). Its secretary recently predicted its collapse if there is no strike over the wage claim again this year.

On the other hand, the NHS dispute is generating strike committees acting independently of the trade unions. Here, the demands for a new way of life are beginning to emerge. The capitalist values of economic restraint are being flatly ignored in favour of human values about health care. As yet, workers cross picket lines at hospitals muttering 'you won't get 12%', but occupations and extensions of insubordination against hospital hierarchies could revolutionise workers ideas as to what the struggle is about. If people become conscious of the real issues, solidarity would blossom to an extent Len Murray can only dread.

Peter Freeman.



The following contribution was written as a discussion paper for a day-long meeting of London Workers Group in Brixton on December 11th. 1982.

L.W.G. Perspectives for 1983 : The Economy

The past weighs like a dead weight on the living. To understand 1983 we have first to grapple with earlier attempts to understand the system : those of Marx and the anarchists.

Marx defined capitalism as the transformation of money into commodities in order to yield a greater quantity of money by selling them (M-C-M'), as distinct from barter (C-C) and barter mediated by money (C-M-C). Since the motive force of capitalism is profit, for the system to continue to function economic growth is essential.

Marx's famous 'tendency to a declining rate of profit' merely shows that a given development of the productive forces (plant, technology, skills, number of hands employed, etc.) can only yield a fixed surplus product. Reinvestment of profits will then reduce the rate of profit, because more investment capital is chasing the same profitable outlets in terms of the amount and nature of the commodities produced.

Marx also speaks of 'contradictory tendencies to the declining rate of profit', consisting of raising the rate of exploitation, harder work, longer hours, more sophisticated capital equipment, etc.)

So all Marx is really saying is that the secret of successful capitalism, with economic growth, full employment, and a stable return on investment, is to constantly raise productivity. This banality aside, the fundamental significance of Marx's economic theories is to show that in the long term, sustained economic growth is vital to the system, and not just a 'fortunate' by-product.

In Marx's analysis, the compulsion to reinvest (the profit motive) without adequate development of investment outlets (i.e. raising the rate of exploitation) results in an 'overproduction of capital'. This produces cyclical crises, which destroy capital through a spate of bankruptcies and so restore the system to equilibrium, resulting in a renewed period of boom. But as long as long-term economic growth continues, the system does not collapse of its own accord. It is inherently unstable without being inevitably doomed.

For a cumulative crisis to occur requires not so much that the tendency to a declining rate of profit should operate, for this tendency always operates in capitalism, even during booms. Rather, what is required is that the contradictory tendencies operate inadequately, i.e. the overall economic productivity cannot be raised sufficiently. This is what is happening now, and later I shall try to explain why.

The anarchists in the First International, of whom the principal theoretician was Bakunin, rejected Marx's authoritarian approach to organisation, saying that it would result not in the abolition of capitalism, but in a society where the state was the only capitalist. Given the disastrous twentieth century experience of Marxism in action (U.S.S.R., etc.), this critique is very potent. Yet the anarchist view of society is equally marred by ideology, i.e. a one-sided approach to reality. In concentrating on the need to abolish the state, anarchism tends to suggest that the state is

autonomous. This is quite contradictory to all historical experience, which is that successive governments find their policies frustrated by economic reality.

As for the present cumulative international crisis of capitalism and state capitalism, I have tried to explain the reasons for this in my article "Notes on the Economic Crisis". I blame it on a crisis of creativity, and I shall quote the key sentence from my article : "The underlying cause of the present, and still deepening, world economic crisis is the drying up of creative and imaginative energy which the essential passivity of consumerism engenders." Again very briefly, the consequence of this for working class politics is that reformist struggles for a bigger share of the cake are generally speaking no longer possible, because the cake itself is no longer growing, or is even shrinking. Therefore the working class can only seek to overcome its discontents by revolutionary means.

Obviously these means will comprise the desire for a more human way of life. The cuts in the welfare state have been so little resisted because they were cuts in the state, something perceived as alien and hostile by most working class people. But we will fight for adequate housing and health care, not to be killed by radiation or germ warfare or ecological suicide, not to be raped or beaten up, for enough to eat and have fun irrespective of what work we do, if any, etc. So many of these struggles have been middle class dominated up to now because the working class family and the culture beaten into us are so much more authoritarian, and because our experience of work and relative poverty tend to be more brutalising as well.

The working class will have to learn a lot about love and tenderness to make its revolution. It will not be easy.

So much for the consequences of the crisis for working class politics, but there is also an attempt to overcome this 'crisis of creativity' within capitalism: the advocacy of co-ops and small businesses. These may overcome the essential problem of alienation between worker and worker, and between worker and consumer, but they do not overcome the crisis because they are characterised by lower levels of capital intensity, which contradicts the fundamental movement of capital to raise productivity. They could only prefigure a solution.

In 1979, speaking in the context of the Italian crisis, Guy Debord pronounced "Being for the moment the most advanced country in the slide towards proletarian revolution, Italy is also the most modern laboratory of international counter-revolution. The other governments born of the old pre-spectacular bourgeois democracy look with admiration towards the Italian government for the impassiveness it knows how to conserve at the tumultuous centre of all degradations and for the tranquil dignity with which it wallows in the mud. It is a lesson that they will have to apply at home for a long period."

Rulers have to believe they can solve the crisis; we do not.

The meeting started by my being asked to expand on my paper, which I did. Then a Wildcat member said I was clutching at straws. I still think reformist class struggle is a diversion, and the recession means we can say good riddance to it. Then a discussion of recent social changes :

1. The declining significance of trade unionism in the organisation of the state
2. Decline in the perceived significance of work.

I think 1. is only a function of the obvious decline in reformism already mentioned and 2, as I said at the meeting, is a phenomenon

more correctly associated with the long boom and the advent of the 'well-paid dead-end job'.

My overall impression of the discussion was that it was very out of touch with developments in working class politics. We still do not know how to think or talk about these, but...

We agreed to : 1. at Tuesday meetings, go into individuals' experiences of work and unemployment more thoroughly, and to leave untackled items on the agenda over to following weeks. 2. Develop more group projects.

Peter

Slough 12.12.82

With the Rail Strike occurring last July and the NHS dispute finishing in November, we thought it time to bring you the latest up to date and topical Bulletin. So ashamed are we that we've relegated the Aims and Principles from the inside front cover to the inside back cover. From vanguardism to behindism.

Anyway, congratulations to those who have managed to read this far. For those gluttons for punishment we now offer you 'Workers Playtime', our latest venture into general political agitation. Hopefully it will be more regular, readable and relevant than the Bulletin. The first issue is out now. (See, we can walk and fart at the same time). Available from

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Workers  
**PLAYTIME**  
Popular yarns of class warfare  
all week

FEBRUARY 10

all washed up?

[illegible]

from insuring the industry from lawsuits, to financing it from charging the full cost to customers. Indeed the government says this year to transform the water service into a tax collector by shifting charges to consumers a further 18% - which will make a profit for the Treasury. By contrast the waterworks will pay customers only 24% to

victims (over 400 workers, the  
civil servant, 1,400 workers) of  
grinding down the workers' power  
and national resources  
TORY FINE DREAM  
Once

Once again, the strike is being used for this purpose, which attention is focused on a position where the management side is led by an individual who is known and in a position to be the MP. The organization and the concentration of the movement will try to have plenty of time to connect the dots about old time, the Smith will right to work, being an effort to work, getting the off will put enough pressure on the workers to give up. To the, water workers will have to maintain the physicality of the old, and the from smoking on them.



DRAIN ON RESOURCES

government is playing the same game in such a way as to drain on public resources needed to maintain public health and safety. In reality, the opposite is the truth. Only when the workers have been defeated can the government's plans to restructure and cut back social services and the public expense be guaranteed. From the workers' point of view, the specifically workers' dismantling of the National Women's Council and diffusing those policies through producing three political fronts at local level.

It is true that certain changes have been riding on the government, which recent victories, high on the waterworks, are in the

The year has not proved possible to hold back the growing militancy of the water workers. The main reason for this is not difficult to see. Whereas in 1975 the waterworkers had approximately 10 per cent of the public utility workers, at present water workers are getting at least about £185 per week as against £154 for electricity workers. (These figures are for electricity workers — there is plenty of evidence which suggests waterworkers receive much less than this.) This is partly due to the water workers' own complicity during negotiations — but also to the fact that electricity and gas workers have been able to use modernisation programmes as a lever in pay bargaining.

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

The occupations which took place at a number of water supply and sewerage plants on February 6th were an excellent first move in this direction. If waterworkers can capitalize on the low pay offers made in the gas and electricity industries (both below 50c and extending active solidarity with the gas and electricity workers, this is a very good start.

**LONDON WORKERS GROUP**

The London Workers Group is an open group of militants working or unemployed in the London Area. We meet every Tuesday night (see details below.) All meetings are open and anyone is welcome to attend. That includes members of parties — but not party recruiters. Our aim is to establish and encourage communication between workers in different industries and workplaces in order to :

1. learn from each others experiences and develop our understanding of industry and trades unions within capitalist society.
2. encourage the establishment of autonomous workers groups within workplaces and amongst the unemployed. The purpose of these groups is to encourage solidarity and to work to spread and intensify struggles. This process implies working for a wider understanding of the need for a revolutionary approach to work and the class struggle.
3. seek out and maintain links with other revolutionaries. We encourage the formation of open regional groups of revolutionaries to complement workplace groups. The purpose of these groups is to overcome the isolation of individuals or groups of revolutionaries, in workplaces or unemployed, and thus assist them to strengthen and develop their activities as revolutionaries through practical solidarity. To this end these groups should :
4. produce propaganda including a bulletin covering industrial news, workplace reports, analyses and theoretical articles.
5. and provide support where asked for.

(cont. from front)

LATER ON, AT A MEETING ON THE SHORE.....

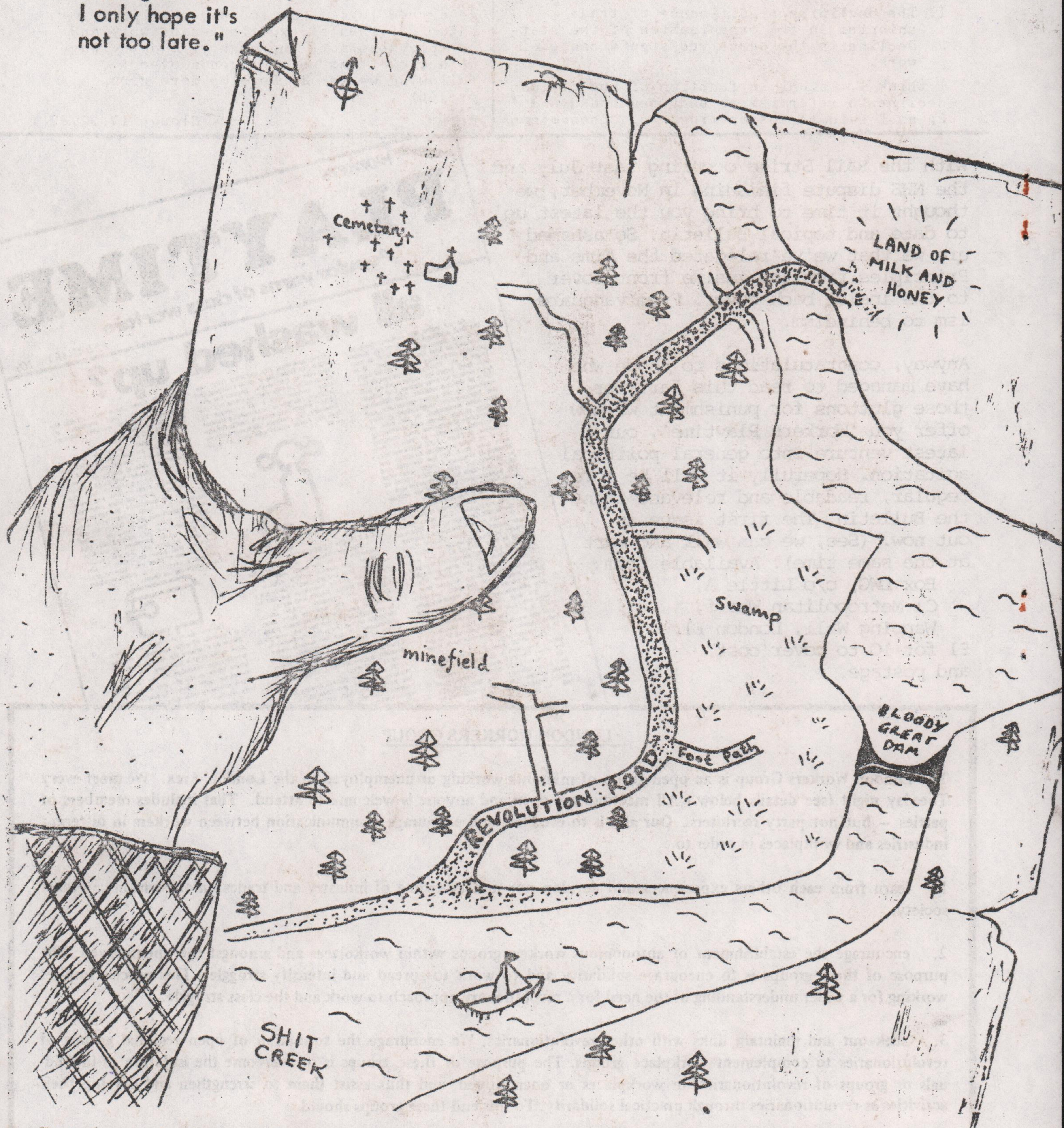
"OK - let's look at the map."

".....Fucking hell! We've been going the wrong way. It was a DEAD END."

"Yer. The only way to get there is by...er....Revolution Road."

"Let's get on with it."

I only hope it's not too late."



For those who have only an A-Z map, the London Workers Group can be found at  
The Metropolitan pub, 95 Farringdon Rd, EC1 (2 mins. from Farringdon Tube)  
We meet upstairs every Tuesday at 8.30  
or contact us c/o 11 Leyden St, London E1. (Correspondence only)