

Solidarity Network Bulletin

Bulletin Number Four
November 1988
Twenty Pence

G.C.H.Q: Sacked



INSIDE:
BAe
NUM
NALGO
Defend Marion Gaima
VSEL/Barrow Support Group
plus... The Radical Face of Postman Pat!

Barrow-in-Furness: the town that went on strike

Judy Hale
Organiser, Barrow Support Group

Over the past 8 or 9 years this Government has made changes in legislation which, with the help of a friendly media, have been put to the General Public as not unreasonable. It is only when people are directly affected by these changes that they realise how much has been taken away. Nothing has been affected more than the rights of people involved in industrial dispute.

It is probably true to say that the vast majority of workers are not 'strike happy' as this government claims, but would prefer to sort problems out by negotiation. This is why we do not make contingency plans for strike action and thus, find ourselves outside the gates totally unprepared.

This is indeed true of the recent VSEL strike in Barrow.

Nine months ago nobody dreamed that the total workforce of the VSEL would walk out. It had never happened in the history of the shipyard. The staff and manual workers could never sit at the same table without falling out, and the management successfully played one against the other for years.

On June 8th 1988 the impossible happened. Twelve and a half thousand workers, from ancillary blue collar workers, through to management monthly staff, walked out on strike and remained almost totally united for thirteen weeks.

A retrospective analysis of the post-privatisation (1986) situation VSEL reveals that the dispute was probably inevitable. A new Yuppie-type higher manage-

ment replaced the traditional shipbuilding management, resulting in hardened attitudes and, as a result, hard won benefits were nibbled away. Pre-privatisation promises were forgotten, and frustration built-up a common bond of resentment of manual and staff workers towards senior management.

It is easy to see this in hindsight but the fact remains that on June 8th of this year 12,500 workers, or nearly fifty per cent of the workforce of Barrow-in-Furness were on strike, and totally unprepared for the consequences. The local Confederation of Shipbuilding and Engineering Unions (CONFED) acted quickly, and organised sub-committees to deal with different aspects of the dispute. Unfortunately they only drew from their own experience of previous disputes and failed to take cognizance of the lessons learnt in recent major disputes.

Things were not made any easier by the geographical isolation of Barrow, and the apparent block on media coverage outside the area, so it was not until the 4th week of the dispute that Barrow Strike Support Group was formed. Once in operation however, it grew into a highly effective unit and within 3 weeks we were distributing food parcels to over 500 people per day and covering Barrow and surrounding district up to a 25 mile radius affected by the strike.

The volunteers from the group came from strikers, men and women of all the different unions involved, plus partners of strikers. None had any real previous experience of disputes but soon found an outlet for their individual abilities, whether it was

bartering for discount on goods, counselling people with problems, speaking at meetings or simply driving. All jobs were equally important and to a large extent carried out with good humour and very little friction.

Initially the money coming in was mainly from local appeals to factories, business or other organisations but using personal contacts in the TU movement in the NW of England we began to spread the net. In this we had tremendous support from the TU centre in Hardman Street, Liverpool. Very quickly we established contacts covering the whole of Britain. It was during this exercise that we learnt of the Solidarity Network, and the help they gave us was invaluable.

The strike is over now, the workforce returned to work on what we believe was a cheap compromise engineered by the National Officers of the constituent Unions. We were not however defeated by management: we did not fragment and drift back to work divided, as the management hoped.

The organisation that was built up during the strike remains. The Volunteers who worked in the Support Group have realised that they have abilities they never before supposed, and have become more active within the Union movement. Most important is that the lessons we have learnt from the mistakes we made, should not be forgotten, and a National Network set up so that in the near future any groups of workers who find themselves in dispute will be able to find the help required to take on and defeat management with the minimum personal loss.

Eviction of Library Occupation

DAVID KEANE
Hackney NALGO library worker

On Friday 30th September at 1am Hackney council sent hired contractors and police to finally evict the library occupations. The books were taken into storage and shelving and equipment within the libraries smashed to ensure that no future library service could operate.

Earlier in the month a mass occupation and picket took place involving NALGO members, community activist, local trade unionist and the library occupiers. At around 7pm, bailiffs and police arrived at the Goldsmiths Row library only to be met by the large and angry picket. When they could not gain entry they withdrew. Similar events took place at Howard Road and Somerford Grove

libraries. A major boost was received when the manual workers unions refused to take part in the emptying of the libraries.

Two weeks later hired bailiffs mounted an early morning raid on the three libraries and gained repossession. There was a protest rally on the Town Hall steps at lunchtime and some NALGO members struck for the afternoon. By the next day some community activists had reoccupied the building, and were again providing a library service. Smerford Grove library was similarly reoccupied over the weekend.

The dawn raid of the 30th not only involved the hired contractors and the police but was led by the Director of Leisure Services, Christine Pointon. Two arrests were made Goldsmiths Row.

Since that time the campaign committee has been meeting to consider their next step. There is a strong mood for further anti-cuts campaigns and NALGO members are also meeting to consider how they can push their union into a stronger anti-cuts position.

The last nine months on the library campaign must have shaken the council. It has proved that there is a large body of opposition to cuts and the damage inflicted upon local services by a supposedly Socialist council. Indeed few councillors can be happy with the fact that they have used the courts, police and bailiffs against their own workers and deprived local people of free and easy access to books, information and education.

Defend Marion Gaima

Despite a negative ruling by the High Court on Marion Gaima's appeal to stay in the UK, the campaign against her deportation is still in full gear.

Although it is likely that another appeal will be lodged by Marion's solicitors, the main emphasis of the campaign is to raise the demand that the Home Secretary drop deportation proceedings based on compassionate circumstances.

The campaign is urging individuals to write to the Home Secretary pointing out that Marion has lived in Britain for fifteen years. She has the support of a wide section of the community and should have a right to stay in the country she has

made her home.

As an expression of support, Marion's union, NALGO, has called a National Day of Action for November 3rd. Branches around the country will be asked to take some form of solidarity action, from taking time off work to get petitions signed to possible industrial action. In the Hackney NALGO branch a motion has been put forward calling for industrial action on the day.

Also on the Day of Action, a meeting at the House of Commons is planned to give MPs, clergy and community groups an opportunity to come together and publicly express their support for Marion's campaign.

Two weeks after the Day of Action, a vigil will be held at the Home Office while representatives from the defence campaign hand in the thousands of signatures collected on petitions demanding that Marion is allowed to stay.

"We hope that the rest of the trade union movement joins us in our day of action, especially in Hackney", said campaign activist Monika Dixon, "we are at a crucial stage of the campaign and need greater involvement from every section of the community."

She said that it remains essential that trade unions are seen to vigorously oppose deportations and racist immigration laws.

Preparing the pits for privatisation?

Daniel Parkes.
Yorkshire NUM

The super-pits of the Selby complex in North Yorkshire rather than being 'The dream pits' of the future are in fact becoming a British Coal nightmare of the present. Instead of producing millions of tonnes of cheap coal they are as a combine producing millions of tonnes of expensive dirt.

The CEBG has repeatedly rejected the 'coal' because of the a thirty per cent ash content, when they require cannot use coal that exceeds fifteen per cent. The North Yorkshire area, of 19 collieries, includes the six Selby pits that lost £12.9 million this financial year, and after capital charges are taken into consideration the losses soar to a staggering £130 million.

Albert W Tuke, Area director in his Annual report says "Once again, the dismal record of industrial disputes bedevilled us, and completely overshadowed the excellent productivity advance. Stoppages of work at individual pits, the NUM overtime ban and the NACODS wage dispute cost this Area 1.2 million tonnes of coal representing over £40 million of lost sales".

GCHQ

Trade unionists must support the victimised GCHQ workers. The TUC has called a 'day of action' in response to the sacking of four of the final seventeen who refuse to take the buy-out, and have stood in defence of trade union principles for the past five years.

Civil Servants in various parts of the country staged immediate walkouts when the sackings were announced.

During the year June '87 to March '88 the following collieries closed: Nostell, Wheldale, Woolley/Redbrook and South Kirkby/Ferrymoor Riddings with a loss of 4,604 jobs. Only three of the Selby pits began to produce coal, they are: Stillingfleet, ('Stalingrad'), Whitemoor, ('Strikemoor') and Riccall.

Interestingly Stillingfleet is the pit where they sacked the NUM branch official, Ted Scott.

The North Yorks area only employs 13,154 and yet despite the loss of 1.2 million tonnes of production still produced within a bucket full the same tonnage as the previous year. Overall output per manshift has risen since 85/86 from 3.04 tonnes to a disgraceful record of 4.45 tonnes.

Working on a cost per Gigajoule basis, and adding in the capital charges of £2.5 million per week, there are some frightening consequences for the Selby mineworkers. *This is the Nightmare*. The figures are just as bad for the other pits: Wistow £2.44, Stillingfleet £2.95, Riccall £2.80, with Whitemoor topping the league at a colossal £4.23. However these figures are meaningless until compared with others, such as Kellingly at only £1.50, Houghton Main at £1.63,

and an Area average of £1.97.

Strange as it may seem two other mines were in the £2.37, £2.38 bracket, Ferrymoor/Riddings and South Kirkby, but if you've read this article carefully it will have registered that they are both CLOSED!

WHY KEEP LOSS MAKERS OPEN?

A further investment of £154.4 million was 'sunk' into the Selby complex this year! My train of thought, knowing British Coal from within, and knowing the bastards for what they are, leads me to conclude that they are investing tax payers money, yours and mine for the day when the Tories sell the Selby complex off to their fat-cat friends, privatising the industry and making a quick killing. Accidents are tragically running at 32.7 per cent per 100,000 shifts worked. Health and Safety at work should be a major campaigning factor for the NUM leadership to challenge the Boards right to manage hard line stance.

All figures are taken from the North Yorkshire Coal Annual Report, 1987-1988, sent to all the areas' mineworkers unsolicited. Mine will be continually put to use against British Coal.

lawing trade unionism at GCHQ it will only be the start, particularly in the civil service. They have already hinted that the ban may be extended to other areas where they chose to consider there is a 'security problem'. When William Waldegrave was asked by Labour in Parliament 'who is the next?', he would not answer the question, refusing to rule out any extension to the ban.

The Council of Civil Service Unions is balloting for strike action on November 7th and the TUC is calling a day of action on that day. With solidarity action now illegal under Tory laws, a determined lead and will from the top to defy those laws will be the only guarantee of a mass response outside the Civil Service unions.

It is a crucial issue for the trade union movement. If the Government is successful in out-

Postman Pat strikes back!

The following is the text of issue number nine of 'Communication Worker'; a leaflet that was distributed during the recent postal strike. 'Communication Worker' can be contacted via BM Box 3644, London WC1N 3XX.

As we go to press, union boss Alan Tuffin is making a deal with PO management. Any postal worker with a memory which can stretch as far as last Christmas will remember what UCW deals are like. The changing of the bonus system into a supplement was one of the things that led to this strike in the first place, and ten months on we still haven't got our one and a half hour cut, let alone the three hours we wanted.

Tuffin said at the TUC conference that the "record of my union is there for all to see - a responsible union with a responsible membership. This official stoppage is the first in 17

years." Last year postal workers were involved in 219 wildcat strikes. With the union officials stitching up deals with the management behind our backs at every opportunity and telling us to get back to work on various occasions.

The union bosses have done their best to fuck us up over as long as anyone can remember. From the 7 week strike in 1971 to Xmas 1987. There's no reason for them to change their attitude now. The dispute must continue until we get a decent deal. Now we are out nationally we cannot go back to licking Bill Cockburn's boots. The way for US to control this dispute is through mass meetings at every office. These meetings should decide on a strategy to win the dispute.

* The refusal of any crap deal which the ex-

ecutive comes up with.

* The spreading of the strike to the rest of the post office - counter staff and engineers must join the strike. Flying pickets are the way to make this happen.

Also we must decide on what we want:

* The withdrawal of the declaration to work normally, which they want us to sign on out return.

* The lifting of all suspensions.

* The scrapping of DRAs and the payment of the supplement to all workers.

* A three hour reduction and a five day week - implemented immediately - not next year.

This is the best chance we've had in years, let's win something and not throw it away!

British Aerospace Job Losses

British Aerospace (BAe) has been busy asset stripping at the expense of its workers jobs in two of its recent acquisitions.

In the Royal Ordnance division 2, plants, at Manchester and Renfew, are closing at the expense of 2200 jobs. When this was announced, both plants immediately struck in protest. Since then the convenors of all the Royal Ordnance plants have met, and agreed not to take any of the work from these two plants. Also local campaigns have been set up, consisting of local councils, Trade councils, Scottish TUC, etc.

Two hundred and fifty workers lobbied Parliament on the 20th October, in protest against closure.

In Austin Rover the situation is different, although the job losses are much greater. In Llanelli all 900 jobs are to be lost. In Cowley, Oxford, the local Trades council estimates 7000 jobs to be lost, together with a further 3000 in contracting firms, delivery firms and small engineering plants. Despite the scale of the job losses there have been no protest strikes, and overtime is still being worked.

The senior stewards of the two

plants in Cowley both argue for the campaign to be waged at local level, and not nationally in Austin Rover. So the obvious fact that the same employer, BAe, is cutting jobs and decimating communities is ignored. The local Trade Council in Oxford has tried to organise a town campaign. but up to the present, the senior stewards have even opposed this form of support.

The need is for the plants that are affected, in both divisions, to link up and push for the use of the strength of the unions throughout BAe in defence of jobs.

Seafarers support groups

The seafarers at Dover are continuing their heroic struggle against P&O management. The vast majority are still on strike and the picket of the East Dock continues on a daily basis.

The need for support and solidarity is just as urgent if the struggle is to be maintained.

Below is a list of support groups who are collecting for the seafarers, and a letter that we recently received from a strike support group set up in Woking:

"Dear Comrades,
P&O Strikers

A Strikers' Support Group has been set up in Woking in response to the P&O strike. For the Support to be effective we need to get people involved. If you live in Woking or surrounding area and want to help, please contact us. The Support Group is what we make it - so anyone is welcome. Please make sure this Group gets off the drawing board by telling your friends, your local union branch, political groups, etc. of our existence. Thank you.

Yours in solidarity
WSSG"

The Woking Strikers Support Group is contactable c/o Woking Labour Party Offices, Owen House, Heathside Crescent, Woking, Surrey GU22 7AG.

Other support groups are:

Aylesham Support Group, 61 Castle Drive, Whitfield, Dover, Kent; 0263 840202.

Canterbury Support Group, 75 Tenterden Drive, Canterbury, Kent; 0227 66768.

Deal Support Group, Magness House, Mill Hill, Deal, Kent; 0304 367840.

Dover Support Group, 210 London Road, Dover, Kent; 0304 214113

Folkestone Support Group, 7 Tennyson Place, Folkstone, Kent; 0303 51997.

Thanet Support Group, 147 High Street, Ramsgate, Kent; 0843 0587990.

Cheques payable to the groups named above.

Affiliation Form

The Solidarity Network was set up at a conference called in solidarity with workers in struggle and held in Leeds on November 7th last year. The conference sought to build on the kind of support movement organised for the miners and for the print workers at Wapping. Since November the Solidarity Network has met on a regular basis, has organised support for a number of disputes and helped to publicise their cases. It has worked with the Chesterfield Socialist Conference, held a joint rally in London with them in support of those in struggle, and helped to organise the Sheffield trade union day-school. The Network has begun the publication of a bulletin, the first second and third (and now the fourth!) editions of which have been published.

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

a) My organisation wishes to affiliate to the Solidarity Network

b) I wish to take out a subscription to the Solidarity Bulletin

Name/Organisation

Address

I therefore enclose

The affiliation fee for organisations is £10. Subscription fees for individuals are £6.00 waged, and £3.00 un-

NATIONAL ACTION CONFERENCE AGAINST THE POLL TAX

Sponsored by:



DECEMBER 10
11.00 - 5.30

NEWCASTLE UPON TYNE
MEDICAL SCHOOL

The following platform has been adopted by the Socialist Conference Organising Committee and will provide the basis for the National Action Conference Against the Poll Tax:

"We believe that the Poll Tax is aggressively regressive, a major threat to our civil liberties and the franchise, and further undermines the independence of local government. We recognise the need to examine alternatives to both the rates and the Poll Tax.

We believe that defeating the Poll Tax is essential for the defence of our liberties and we call for the broadest possible protest.

To this end we call on all those groups - local broad based anti-Poll Tax groups and unions, tenants, labour movement bodies and trade unions at every level, churches, political parties and groups, voluntary organisations - and all individuals opposed to the Poll Tax to join together and support the National Action Conference on the Poll Tax in Newcastle. We aim to gather together all these groups and individuals into a national network of resistance - to support each other, to exchange information and materials, to organise local and national demonstrations and lobbies.

We aim to unify and co-ordinate the various tactics of resistance and civil disobedience, from disruption of the register and payment, including mass non-payment, to public, trade union and civic non-cooperation."

Other Sponsors include:

MPs

Maria Fyfe, John McAllion, George Galloway, Jeremy Corbyn, Diane Abbott, Harry Barnes, Mildred Gordon, Harry Cohen, Bob Clay, Eric Heffer, Tony Benn.

Trade Unionists

Geoff Revell (NUR); Alan Quinn, Tom Hart, Mike Gibbons (TGWU)

Councillors

Joan Twelves, Steve French, Greg Tucker (Lambeth); Pat Waylett, Jon Lansman (Lewisham); Piers Corbyn (Southwark); Vince Gillespie (Haringey); Bill Dodds (Newcastle);

and

Rebecca Fleming (NUS London), Ernie Roberts, John McDonnell.

[all sponsors in a personal capacity]

SMASH THE POLL TAX!