



Nottingham Voice

'RALEIGH ROBOTS' WALK OUT

RALEIGH WORKERS walked out on 16th November. Their indefinite strike is an attempt to force management to bring their wages to a realistic level. Management had failed to respond to an overtime ban and one day strikes.

They want about £15 a week extra. The management refuses to pay more than 10% on the total wage bill - only about £3 extra on basic pay. The unions claim this offer only amounts to 8%.

The low wages and high speed of the production line mean that labour turnover is very high.

This fact is used by management to suggest that the cost of training the never ending flow of recruits means that they can't afford to pay higher wages. Another excuse is that wages must be low because it is a labour intensive industry.

Basic pay at Raleigh starts at about £40 (including supplements) for unskilled workers to about £52.50 for the top-skilled rate.

There is a bonus which works out at £5 for "standard performance". One complaint is that 7½p per hour (or more) is deducted from over-

time payments to "offset" pay supplements.

DROPPED

Jack Hallam, District Secretary of the National Society of Metal Mechanics, - the largest union at Raleigh - told us that between 1974 and 1976 the company's manual workforce dropped by nearly 1,000 from 5,616 to 4,690. The workers had to incr-

Some comments made by Raleigh workers on the picket line:

"They call us Raleigh Robots because of the speed we have to work"

"The wage system's so complicated 80% can't work it out"

"We're Nottingham's Grunwick as far as wages are concerned"

"The government has worked out its 10% limit on the nat-

ease their productivity by 12% to maintain production. This brought in an extra £2,234 per worker per year, he said, but the extra incentive for each worker was only £90 a year.

He accused the management of "slowly killing the goose that lays the golden egg". Figures showed that wages have slipped well behind - average manual earnings at Raleigh were £13.78 less than the national figure in 1974 and £27.70 behind now. "The company has done very well", he said.

CLAIM

The shop stewards' claim would mean about £15 extra for the lowest paid and £18 at the top end. It would mean around £10 on the basic and an increase in bonus from £5 to £12.50 for "standard performance".

Management refused even to discuss the claim. All they offered was a new monthly payment based on increased productivity since August - but they haven't given any details and none of the strikers thought it would amount to much.

They circulated a "confidential" document to shop stewards which tried to prove that they couldn't afford to pay more than 10%.

"Profits have now to be earned at a level which produces 25% per annum return on capital", it says, "It will be seen that we only achieved

ional average wage rate. They should make the lower paid up to that - then add 10%"

"This is one of the best companies for committees. We've got safety committees, wages committees, lots of committees - but when it comes down to doing something....."

"The company will listen to anything as long as it doesn't cost money"

a 15.5% return on capital in 1976".

But a careful look at their table shows that this 15.5% refers to the whole of the cycle division of Tube Investments, the multinational which owns Raleigh.

What it doesn't point out is that Raleigh Industries makes a return of almost 25%. This makes it one of the most profitable sections of Tube Investments whose overall return was less than 14%.

SHORT-SIGHTED

The difference between these two figures does not mean that Raleigh is any more efficient than its parent company.

The picture that emerged when Voice reporters spoke to several workers and shop stewards on the picket line was of a short-sighted incompetent management which is causing serious problems for the firm.

So many skilled workers have left that the company is having to contract work out to backstreet non-union shops.

Items like press tools, moulding tools and jigs are made in this way - at a much higher cost than if they were done in the Raleigh factory. Often the work done has to be modified by Raleigh craftsmen.

TROUBLE

Jack Hallam said that the company has a full order book for 1978, but may have trouble in reaching its targets because it couldn't recruit enough labour.

Raleigh returns have been higher than the rest of the Tube Investment group because their workers are so poorly paid. For this reason they deserve their £15.

The company can afford it. Their £7.7 millions profit last year is at least £15 per week per worker.

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COUNCIL ADMITS LEGAL ERROR

THE HEATH GOVERNMENT Housing Finance Act 1972 gave council house tenants the right to make representations against proposals to increase their rents.

Even after reconsideration, councils could not increase rents without the approval of an independent rent scrutiny board.

The Housing Rents and Subsidies Act 1975 repealed the part of the 1972 act which laid down a fair rents scheme for council houses.

In its place, it stated that "A local authority shall from time to time review rents and make such changes.... as circumstances may require.

One might suppose that the change in the law would lead to council tenants receiving greater consideration. Far from it: Nottinghamshire County Council have used the name of the 1972 act, or something like

it, to obtain rent increases to which they were not entitled.

In October 1976, the Director of Administration obtained approval for a review of rents of some 40 cottages owned by the council.

LETTER

The rents of these were not controlled and the Director did not seek instructions either for the basis of the new assessments nor for the date the new rents were to take effect.

In March, a tenant of one of the cottages, who had lived there since 1927 and was aged 84 received a letter from the Administration Department.

It said that "in future, all rents will be assessed on a fair and reasonable basis as provided for under the Housing Rent Subsidies Act 1975 (sic), which deals with the assessment of rent of houses in the

Public sector. Your new rent will be £312 per annum with effect from the 1st April next."

FAILURE

The increase amounted to over 200%, but the letter went on to say that half the increase would be remitted until April 1978. There was to be a further review in October 1978 with a view to another increase in April 1979.

Although the Department purported to follow the 1975 Act, it failed to mention that the agreement of the tenant to the increase was needed if it were to take effect before 6th April 1978.

The Clerk of the Council was compelled to agree to defer the increase until 1978. In an aggrieved tone he wrote "It is significant that he is the only person who has raised any

objection". It is indeed.

The 40 tenants are all people who trust the officials and are not the sort to seek professional advice.

One old man could not read the letter because of defective eye-sight and happened to ask a friend who is a chartered surveyor what it was all about. As to the remainder of the tenants, they are paying up in ignorance of how, doubtless unintentionally, they have been duped.

The council, who seem to have been kept in ignorance of what their officials have done, should return the extra payments.

It is a matter not only of all tenants being treated fairly, and alike, but also of trust between the highly qualified official and persons who must be expected to be ignorant of their rights.

oliver lever

Court picket

BATTERED WOMEN and Nottingham Women's Aid will be picketting the County Court on St Peter's Gate on Thursday November 24th at 10am.

They are complaining that the Domestic Violence Act is not being implemented by some judges.

They say that some judges won't put a police power of arrest on injunctions. This means that if a violent man disobeys an injunction ordering him to stay away from a woman the police are powerless to remove him until he actually assaults the woman - the thing an injunction is supposed to prevent!

Women's Aid is also complaining about a recent Appeal Court ruling. In this case the judges actually reversed a law designed to protect women.

They said that a common law wife does not have the same right as a legal wife to exclude her common law husband from their home if he is violent.

The law says that it applies equally to a man and woman living together as man and wife even though not married.

But the judges said that the property rights of the man must take precedence over the woman's safety.

CORRECTION

On the front page of Voice 71 we said Peter Shore had ordered councils to "increase rents by 60p in the pound". This should have said "increase rents by 60p".

Even this wonderful Labour government hasn't yet got around to increasing the cost of housing by 60%.

Fight the cuts

THE CUTS committee has organised a five hour open meeting as part of the campaign against cuts in public expenditure.

The main speakers are Bernard Dix, assistant general secretary of NUPE, and Dennis Skinner MP.

There will be local speakers from the NHS, local government, and the Chilwell ordnance depot.

A film, "Fight the Cuts" will be shown and there will be a performance by the Broadside Theatre Group.

It is on Sunday 20th November from 2pm to 7pm.

Local trades unionists will be supporting a national lobby of parliament on Wednesday 23rd November. Block train bookings are being organised by NUPE.

HAND-OUTS

EVEN THE Nottinghamshire Chamber of Commerce, it seems, is prepared to swallow its principles for the sake of monetary gain.

The title of one article in the November edition of their journal "Industrial Nottingham" is called "Are you cashing in on government hand-outs". Ronald Walton, Director of the Chamber of Commerce, has hitherto been renowned for his outburst against public expenditure.

Anyone wishing to complain against this latest outburst of scrounging from the welfare state should contact the Department of Trade and Industry.

FERNLEIGH FIASCO

FERNLEIGH childrens home was recently closed by the County Council. The official reason is that the superintendent was ill and his deputy was away.

A likely story, you may have thought. Suppose Chief Executive Ray O'Brien was ill and his deputy away - would County Hall be closed and staff from around the county sent home?

Fernleigh was only opened in January so what is going on?

Some light is shed by a letter in the local newsletter of the National Association of Field and Residential Workers. The letter is from a practising social worker.

It suggests that the whole project was an administrative balls-up from the start with neither staff nor children being taken into consideration.

Fernleigh used to be an old peoples home. It was shut down unceremoniously by the Labour County Council last year for "economic reasons". Old people were moved out whether they wanted to go or not.

BEWILDERED

Two small childrens homes were closed and all the staff and children moved into Fernleigh. The letter comments: "no-one thought they may have thrived in a small home but be lost in a large one. No-one considered the need for a period when both staff and children could adapt to a different environment, learning

the new survival skills necessary in a large residential setting... The result is that both staff and children are bemused and bewildered at what has happened".

It is hardly surprising that the new superintendent became ill.

The children have been moved to various assessment centres - their third change of home in less than a year. Because these centres are short-stay they will be moving soon to their fourth home.

Will there be an inquiry to make sure this sort of thing does not happen again? Why not? The ruling Tory group has nothing to lose. The blame will be squarely put on the last Labour council and the officers.

The social worker's letter ends: "In the words of one lad now in an assessment centre 'What am I doing here?' Perhaps the management and committee would like to tell him".

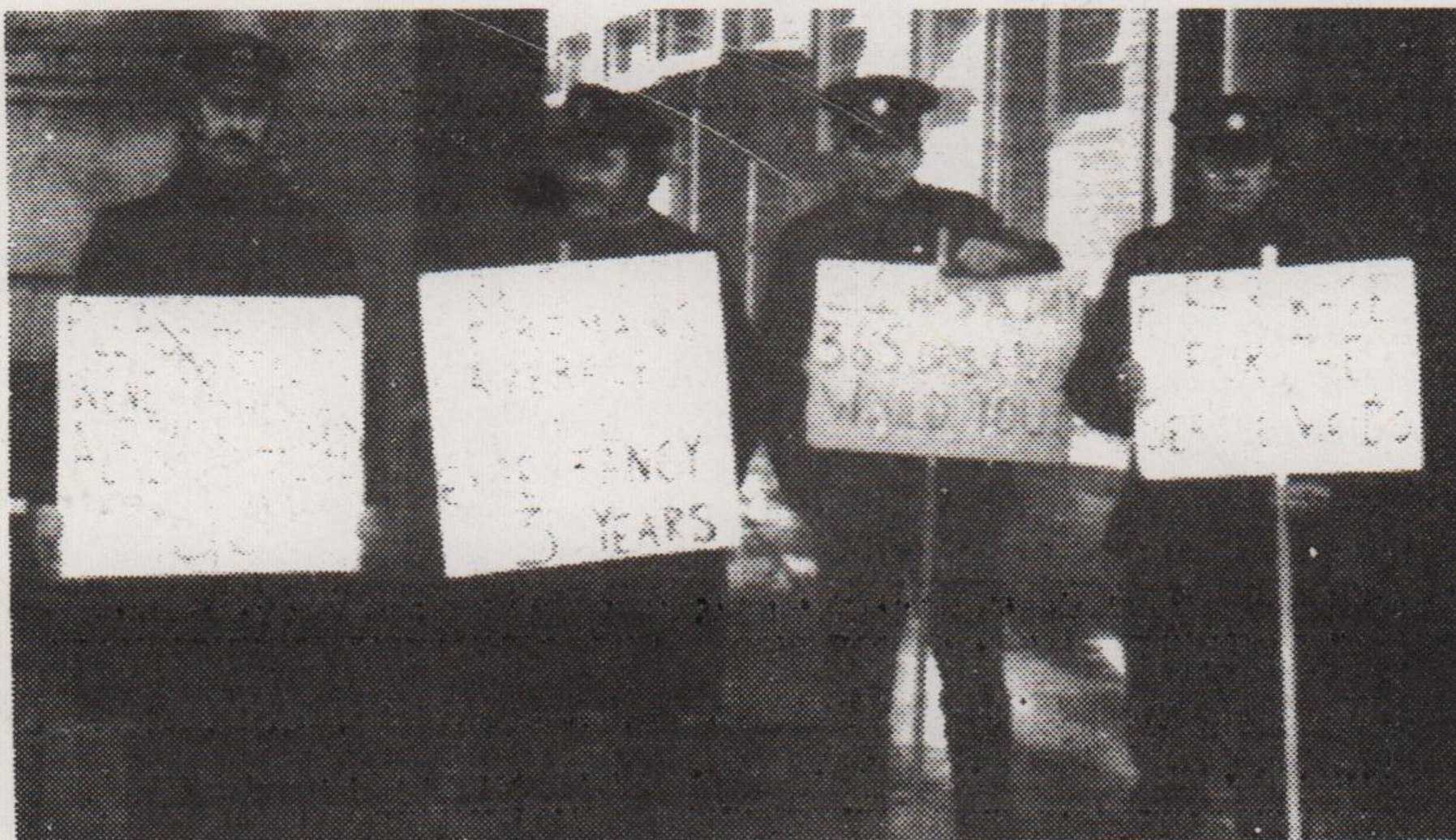
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Please contact us with any information you would like to see in the next issue.

This will appear on Dec 17th. Deadline for contributions Dec 5th.

Voice editors are to be found in the Peacock Hotel, Mansfield Road on Wednesdays from 12.30pm onwards. Readers are invited to join us.

SPANNER IN THE WORKS



Firemen picket central fire station.

Support the Firemen

FIREMEN want an agreement that they should be paid average male earnings plus 10% to take account of the element of danger and skill. That is for a 48 hour week which includes two fifteen hour night shifts.

Tying firemen's pay to average earnings would mean they would never again have to resort to strike action to keep up their wages.

Ian McKelvie, vice chairman of the city centre FBU told us that in the central station they had at least one injury a week to their 77 active firemen. Every man has had some injury, he said. The life expectancy on retirement was only three years.

The response from the public had been very good, he said. People passing the picket had signed a petition and donated to their hardship fund.

But Mr McKelvie said the County Council and the Chief Fire Officer had given no

backing at all. Other brigades, for example Lincoln and Derby, had been supported by the authorities.

"For the kind of job we do it's disgusting that the men are on this sort of pay", he said. They were willing to stay out indefinitely.

FRIGHTENED

Ken Smith, vice chairman of the local FBU told the November Trades Council that the role of the fireman had changed drastically. For example they have to know how to deal with chemicals and keep up with fire prevention legislation.

He said a formula on pay was about to be agreed when the government stepped in to stop any rise above 10%.

The FBU executive "got frightened to death", he said, and proposed "a very weak document" to their conference. But the members "threw it out resoundingly". "It was quite clear that all the delegates were mandated to strike", he added.

Mr Smith complained that the miners union locally was refusing to take action against miners who were doing part-time firemen's jobs and had refused to join the strike. If the miners came out on strike, no fireman would go into the pits, he said.

Asked about the firemen working at the West Bridgford station he said they would have to shut it with mass picketting if necessary. The nearest full-time station still open was in Torquay.

Money and support to: Terry Manifold, 108 Park Hall Road, Mansfield Woodhouse.

BLACKING SUCCESS

STRIKERS at E H Architectural Products of Langley Mill are beginning to have some success. Mass picketting of the factory is continuing.

This is the factory where members of the Furniture Timber and Allied Trades Union were dismissed after going on strike to demand union recognition. That was over three months ago.

Support has come from trades unions in Liverpool and Birmingham at the main customers of E&H. Valor of Liverpool and Berrys of Birmingham are totally blacked. This led the chairman of Valor, Michael Montague, to arrange a meeting between the union and the E&H directors, Malcolm Hitt and Allen Eyre.

But Eyre and Hitt just arrogantly told Montague what good businessmen they were, how they had built up their firm, and refused to do anything to end the dispute. Valor was their main customer.

Appeals are being made to black the firm's other customers, particularly schools in Notts and Derbyshire.

Local unionists are continuing to support the fortnightly mass picket of the factory.

Nearly 100 turned up on 19th October and spread across the road to stop cars going into the factory. One car turned round after talking to pickets and refused to cross the picket line.

HITT AND RUN

But then director Malcolm Hitt arrived in his new yellow jag. He just turned on his headlights and accelerated very fast towards the picket line. When this failed to scatter the pickets he slammed his brakes on at the last minute and forced his way slowly through the line. One picket ended up on the bonnet and was carried into the factory.

A second car driven by director Allen Eyre's son tried to catch up Hitt and

banged into a picket who was standing on the pavement. She was knocked over and had to have hospital treatment to an ankle injury. She was not seriously hurt.

Pickets surrounded the cars and shouted at the workers inside.

The police were going to prosecute the drivers for dangerous driving. But their superiors decided to delay prosecution by putting it in the hands of the Director of Public Prosecutions. That was because they don't wish to be seen "favouring one side rather than the other". In other words, like at Grunwick, the police favour the employers.

100 POLICE

As if to prove this point, at the next mass picket on November 2nd one hundred police were used to control just over a hundred pickets. Even so the directors and workers didn't dare show their faces.

Shop steward Dennis Paine told the pickets they would still be here this christmas and next christmas if necessary.

Joe Whelan, Notts district secretary of the miners union, told the pickets that he looked back to the support for the miners when they were on strike. He believed in the principle at stake - the right of trade unions to negotiate and represent their members.

On November 16th the turnout of pickets was more disappointing. Brian Simister, vice president of the Nottingham Trades Council reported on this to the November Trades Council. He said mass picketting had to continue - it was important in keeping up the morale of the strikers.

He said extending the blacking was the key question and asked people in the unions involved to put pressure on.

Next mass picket: Wed 30th Nov, 7am. Transport and details: Brian Simister, 608688.



Police intimidate pickets at Langley Mill.

contact:

**NOTTINGHAM
VOICE**
phone 411676

for

**letterheads, leaflets,
and all
printing**

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KOUNCIL KUTS

CANE 'EM ALL

THE LAST MEETING of the County Council Social Services Committee decided to allow canings in community homes.

This means that it is possible for social workers to remove children from their family home because their parents are beating them, only for them to still be beaten by council fiat.

The hard line attitudes of Nottingham Tories are becoming nationally known, as is their nauseating hypocrisy. Both these characteristics were fully revealed in the debate which preceded the decision.

Many of the councillors vied amongst themselves to describe the terrible conditions of their youth, and the beneficial affects of corporal punishment upon them in those tender years.

'FATTY'

Councillor Howard 'Fatty' Noble almost burst his red jowls and sagging stomach in claiming to have had a more deprived childhood than any-

one else in the Council Chamber.

Judging by his present weight problem 'Fatty' has more than made up for any calories he lost in youth.

Perhaps it was humanity he was deprived of?

RAMBLED

Anyway, he rambled; the people who opposed corporal punishment were the same ones that stood on the Grunwick picket lines.

Clearly, strong action is required from Chairperson Brenda Borrett to stem the verbosity of this pompous fellow. Poor old Charles Borrett, the mild-mannered husband of Bossy Brenda, should be a warning to Fatty of the power she has within her.

Alas, her ineffectiveness in chairing the Committee makes such an outcome unlikely.

First she made a serious procedural mistake, then she

panicked at a searching question from the Area Health Authority representative, who asked whether mentally or physically handicapped children were to be beaten.

In her confusion, Brenda suggested that the matter be referred for investigation but was rescued by Director of Social Services, 'Oily' Ted Culham, looking more like an ageing spiv than ever, who suggested that the matter be left to the "common sense" of Heads.

Congratulations, though, to the Labour members of the Committee who presented a rational and well-argued case.

Labour spokesman Alf Burton claimed to have evidence that levels of violence have not risen in the community homes. Even if canings were allowed, he said, many of the staff would not make use of it anyway.

NAMES

Alf even named names, in sharp contrast to the attitude of Brenda who claimed substantial support for the Tory policy but refused -

for "obvious reasons" - to say who from.

Councillor Haynes summed up the weakness of the Tory case when he said: "you don't get a child in the right direction by knocking him there". The Tories have put forward no evidence at all, whether from psychiatrists or workers from the homes, to justify the need for this change. The truth is that they have turned the clock back 10 years just to appease the more barbaric elements in their party.

And what have they achieved? Nottinghamshire is fast losing a reputation for being a (relatively) progressive Social Services Department - it is now the only authority which allows girls to be caned in homes. Many social workers, both inside and outside the county, have been disgusted at the change.

All of this has happened so that the staff in six community homes can cane the children in their care - a "privilege" which it seems unlikely that many of them will want to use anyway.

JACK GREEN LIES TO COUNCIL

TORY LEADER Jack Green lied to the City Council in May. This was proved by figures in a Progress Report presented to the November Housing Committee by Chief Executive Michael Hammond

Green told the May Council meeting that they would rehouse an extra 1,032 families from clearance areas this year in addition to 1,386 already planned.

But the Progress Report figures show that the total number will be about 300 less than the original 1,386!

FIGURES

The actual figures given by Hammond make it look as though the number to be rehoused will be increased from 1,386 to 1,526. But that is because the new figure of 1,526 is not the number to be rehoused but the total number leaving clearance areas. About 400 of these will have to find their own accommodation.

Hammond admitted that in the last six months only 587 clearance families were rehoused compared with 756 planned before Green's promise to bring forward

clearance.

The "promise" came just three days before the Tory landslide in the County elections.

LYING

The May Policy and Resources Committee specifically asked Hammond to report on rehousing 1,032 families this year (instead of next), which he failed to do.

Tenants in the Radford East clearance area (REATAR) knew all along that Green was lying and repeatedly asked for assurances that they would be rehoused earlier.

But what exactly did Green promise them? He said in May: "...Radford East, which was not due to start until the second quarter of next year, we plan to rehouse about 350 families which is a good half of that project (this year)... we should finish rehousing next year rather than at the

end of 1980 as planned by the Labour Party".

And what are the plans now for Radford East? No-one is to be rehoused this year. Rehousing will start in the second quarter of next year and finish at the beginning of 1980 as planned by Labour (the Labour plans were to finish Radford East at the beginning of 1980 and not at the end as wrongly claimed by Green).

STATEMENT

Clearance was not the only thing that Green lied about. In the same statement to the May Council he said: "Nothing in our intentions will make more difficult the availability of transfers for genuine cases". And what has happened to transfers? They have been cut by 49% from 686 in the previous six months to 353 in the last six months.

The waiting list fared even worse. There were only 500 allocations of rented property in the last six months compared with 1,373 predicted in a Pro-

gress Report in May - a reduction of 64%. Not surprisingly Michael Hammond felt himself completely unable to predict how many people from the waiting list could be rehoused in the next six months. Under Labour, predictions for waiting list allocation were made five years ahead.

SHORTFALL

The picture is clear. In the last six months the Tories have managed to cut by more than half all offers for rented accommodation to the clearance, transfer and waiting lists - a shortfall of nearly 2,000 on their own predictions made in May.

As Voice readers are well aware, this is because the Tory council is giving total priority to people who wish to buy houses.

As a result nearly 1,500 council houses are standing empty in various stages of sale - enough to make up most of the shortfall on rented accommodation.

RATS AND RALEIGH

WHAT A JOB KEN AND MARY HALLETT HAVE HAD TRYING TO GET REHOUSED IN A COUNCIL HOUSE WITH A REASONABLE RENT.

They are just one of the hundreds of unfortunate families who are victims of the Tory policy of offering all available council houses for sale.

They lived in Butler Street in the Salisbury Street clearance area in Radford - right next to Raleigh.

Ken and Mary and their three year old daughter Kerry have been using a neighbour's toilet for the past six weeks after their own was stolen. They were plagued with rats. Mary has a chronic kidney disease which started to get worse a few weeks ago. It was six months since their neighbours started moving out. Only half a dozen houses in their street were still occupied.

"It's bad enough the smell, the noise, the filth, the rats, the mice, but now we've got no sanitation as well", said Ken, "I've lived in a lot worse conditions. But now I've got a child and another on the way".

They wanted to move to a house in the Aspley/Strelley/Bilborough area - not an unreasonable request surely. But almost all these older council houses are sold as soon as they become available.

In the end Ken had to take four days off work in two weeks to keep on at the staff in the housing office in King Street. It worked - he got an interview with a senior housing officer - Mr Auld - and made it plain that he wasn't going to move until he got an offer where he wanted to go. An offer in Aspley arrived shortly after and they agreed to take it.

HIGH RENTS

Just before this they had been offered a new house in St Anns. "I have several mates who live in St Anns", said Ken, "It's very nice, but high rents. We want to go where the rents are cheaper. We'll stay here until they pull every house down, if necessary, until we get where we want".

Shortly before this the Voice went round to interview Ken and Mary about the conditions they were living in.

Ken told us that apart from flats most of the places offered to their neighbours were new houses in Top Valley. "Not one of the families who I've spoken to likes it there" he said. "It's too far out, and the shops are miles away, and the bus fares are incredible".

"We can't afford £13 a week rent unless we live hand to mouth".

The house they have taken in Aspley is "only" £6.20 a week - the sort of house that is normally denied to clearance families because people who want to buy them are given total priority.

FLATS

Like other clearance families, the Halletts were sent regular lists from the Council of flats which few people want, partly because of the high rents and heating costs, and partly because of the problems of bringing up children in flats.

The Halletts have a three year old daughter and another child on the way. The council has a policy of not putting families with young children in flat complexes like those at Basford. But, surprise, surprise, many of the flats offered to the Halletts were in this category.

(Housing chairman Charles Borrett announced at the last City Council meeting that 87 families with children had been moved into flat complexes since July - in opposition to council policy to move such families out !)

Ken tried to get the council to let them have houses in Aspley which had been empty four months or more. But he was always told "no". The council even managed to offer a neighbour a house in Beechdale Road - where the Halletts wanted. The neighbour had asked for Snape Wood and turned it down. But the council refused to offer it to the Halletts.

RATS

Mary had lived in Butler Street five years. She said conditions had deteriorated rapidly. The morning our Voice reporter called she had come downstairs to find a dead rat in the kitchen - caught by one of their two cats she thought. One of the cats had a nasty gash on the side of its throat - probably done by a rat.



Mary said she saw a dead rat about twice a week. They have always had rats and mice from Raleigh but it was getting worse. When Mary's sister visited recently she was in the toilet when something jumped on her knee. She thought it was a cat. But it was a rat.

The "rat man" came nearly every day to put down poison. A health inspector said there was a rat run between the house and the Raleigh boundary wall.

TOILETS

For the last few weeks they had another health official coming every day to unblock the toilet. Because the drain was blocked they could only use the toilet once or twice - then had to go to the neighbour's five doors up until their own was unblocked again. It means that five adults and six children were all using the same toilet.

For three weeks they had no toilet at all because it was stolen. Theft and vandalism are rife in clearance areas and Salisbury Street is no exception. The landlord - Harlow Shelton - just told them to use a neighbour's toilet two doors down. But they moved and their toilet was stolen as well. So the Halletts had to move five doors down until the Health Department got a new toilet fixed.

RALEIGH

It wasn't just the rats and the toilet that made life difficult. Rain leaked through the kitchen roof into a bucket. A nearby Raleigh chimney quickly made any washing left out filthy. The yard was not fit for Kerry to play in. And there was an extractor fan in Raleigh which they could hear 24 hours a day which pumped out fumes from a paint shop over the houses.

What did they think about the council policy of offering all vacant council houses for sale, we asked.

"It's fair enough for people who want to buy", said Ken, "but why should they get priority over people who can't? Half the people buying houses are only doing it because they think that's the only chance of getting a house. When they buy they can't afford to keep it - except by living from hand to mouth".

EMPTY HOUSES

What did they think about there being over 1,400 houses empty waiting to be sold?

"It's unbelievable, incredible, when people are living in conditions like these. It's supposed to be a democratic society. There's no democracy in making you buy a house or live in conditions like this, no democracy in telling you where to move".

DISEASE

What did they think about what the Health Department was doing?

"The man who is coming to unblock the toilet is doing his best. The fault lies with the corporation, the landlord, and the health inspector. He should tell the corporation to move us. They can't do any more about the rats and mice. The fault is with the corporation. I suppose if the baby got a disease they may do something then".

Did they think the Health Department should do anything about the fumes, dust and noise from Raleigh?

"We can't get them to fix the toilet, so we're not going to get anything done about Raleigh".

THE BOOTS

THE PROFITS FOR THE CURRENT HALF YEAR, WHICH HAVE JUST BEEN DECLARED BY BOOTS, HAVE DISAPPOINTED THE STOCK MARKET - THEY HAVE ONLY RISEN BY 14%, TO £47.6M.

The profits for the whole year are expected to be well over the £100M mark. Most of Boots employees can expect to get, at most, a 10% wage rise to compensate for inflation - but the Stock Exchange is still disappointed with 14%.

Of course, they expect more from the company, because it has long been one of the most profitable enterprises in the country. It is also one of the largest, ranking 48th in the Times list of largest industrial companies, and well on the way to becoming a leading multi-national.

This is a far cry from its foundation by Jesse Boot in 19th century Nottingham. Boot, in the words of one of the company's biographers, "decided to enter the proprietary medicine business in 1874" (not 1877, so that the Boots claim that this is their centennial year is not strictly true).

Legend has it that Jesse was a self-made man, who pulled himself up by his own boot-straps. This is also untrue, for he inherited a thriving herbalists business from his father, John Boot. He had opened the shop after receiving a loan from his father in law, a prosperous lace merchant.

JOHN BOOT

John Boot was in many ways a more interesting figure than Jesse. An ex-farm labourer, who saw his herbalism as intimately connected with his Wesleyan, revivalist religious beliefs, he wished to use a "simple medicine" in order to help the poor.

Despite many respected figures, herbal medicine was falling into disrepute, partly because of the flooding of provincial cities with itinerant quacks who rejoiced in such names as 'Dr' Coffin.

However, conventional medicine was little more advanced in technique itself, its most favoured remedies for illness being bleeding, leeching, opiate based drugs and purgatives.

In view of the modern recognition that most of these herbal

remedies have much scientific validity, it is interesting to imagine what might have been if Jesse had applied his dynamic personality to herbal rather than proprietary medicine.

VISION

The vision he followed was that of the multi-purpose chemist, undercutting rivals by undertaking its own manufacturing and outflanking them by carrying a wide range of other goods (still the Boots way today).

Instinctively, he recognised the beginnings of a new stage of capitalism, based on high turnovers and low profit margins, and made possible by the growing mass market of industrial Britain.

Another feature of these early years which has remained constant is the heavy use of advertising. His first half page advertisement in the Nottingham Daily Express (which he later owned) sent his sales rocketing to £20 per week.

Then he moved on to the national press, often to counter the charges made against him by the various learned societies. Today Boots is the 15th largest advertiser in Britain, spending almost £5 millions in 1975.

DONATIONS

He gave large donations to the Liberal Party - and duly received his reward, with a knighthood in 1909 and a baronetcy in 1916 when he took the title of Lord Trent.

Once an aristocrat, the lure of money, combined with a desire to keep his son out of the firm, proved too powerful for Lord Trent: in 1920 he sold his company to American interests for £2¼ millions. Both press and public reaction was hostile, but adverse local effects were minimised by his ownership of the Nottingham Journal and Express.

In the end his wishes were thwarted for in 1933, two years after his death, the American interests were



bought out and his son, the second Lord Trent, ruled the company with an iron hand until his retirement in 1953.

In 1920 Boots had been an ailing company: it was the American influence which revitalised it and was responsible for the opening of the Beeston plant in 1932.

FAMILY CONTROL

After being returned to British and family control the company stagnated for several decades. Since the early 60's it has become notably more aggressive, swallowing up rival chemist chain Timothy White's and making unsuccessful bids for Glaxo (pharmaceuticals) and House of Fraser (retailing, including Harrods).

Today Britain does not seem to be large enough to contain the ambitions of the management. Like many other large companies they are investing heavily abroad, with £23 millions being spent in this

way in the current half year alone (a figure larger than the total normal investment in a FULL year).

COMMUNIST

Their overseas holdings include the Rucker Pharmacy Company, U.S.A. (acquired for £14.5 millions), Tamblin, Canada (acquired for £4 millions), a 70% stake in Technochemie, West Germany, and a 49% stake in Boots Galenika, a Yugoslav company which the company sees as the key to investment and increased sales in Eastern Europe. It seems that the profit motive is no respecter of regimes.

Company Chairman, Dr Gordon Hobday, makes it clear in his last report that this policy of overseas expansion is due to the present economic climate - and ignores the fact that more home investment by his and other firms could greatly

EMPIRE

improve the economy and cut unemployment.

As it is, the long term effects of this policy is to place in jeopardy the jobs of many of the 66,614 people who worked for Boots in 1976.

But then Dr Hobday is a very demanding Chairman. In the 1975-76 Report, for example, he gave out his message to the nation:

"We, like any other efficient company, must not be prevented by government measures or trade union power from making profits which are in line with our needs".

The needs of Boots must be great indeed, for the company is already one of the most profitable in the country.

PROFITS DOUBLED

In 1975-76 the company had a 35.4% return on capital employed, one of the highest returns in Britain and almost double the 1966 level. Profits also amounted to 13.4% of sales, ie 13½p on every £ spent in a Boots shop.

This prosperity is due to Boots position in two of the most prosperous industries there are - retailing and drug manufacturing and wholesaling. Between 1963 and 1972 the annual growth in sales of drug products was 9.7%, compared to 3.0% per year in all manufacturing industries.

One of the main reasons for this has been the development of new preparations, sold through extensive advertising. Many of these, however, turned out to be completely useless - the US Food and Drug Administration tested the 4,300 drugs which were introduced in the USA between 1945 and 1962 and found only 40% of them to be effective. The World Health Organisation estimates that a basic 100-200 drugs are all that is necessary to cure 99% of all ailments.

DRUG INDUCED

In Britain too, drugs are a major product. In 1975 the National Health Service spent £379m on them, which was 11.3% of its total expenditure or about £12,000 per doctor. The result is some staggering statistics: 1 out of every 10 nights sleep is now drug induced, 19% of all women

annually take tranquillisers.

There are many reasons why the drug companies are able to make such huge profits. One way is through charging high prices for branded products - Hoffman La Roche, makers of Librium and Valium, found to have made excess profits of £12m on sales of these tranquillisers to the NHS between 1970 and 1973. Another is the 16 year monopoly which the present patent laws give to companies who introduce new products (soon to be increas-

ed to twenty under EEC regulations). Finally, there is the heavy advertising, amounting to £38m in 1975, and aimed largely at the medical profession (£570 per doctor). Boots cannot be directly compared with most of the drug companies because so many of its 5,000 lines are non-pharmaceutical or other firms' branded products. Nevertheless, through its own manufacturing facilities and the fact that it is the largest dispensing chemist in the country, it shares in the NHS drug bonanza.

CLOSE LINKS

With about 11,500 employees at its Nottingham headquarters and Beeston plant, the company has a great influence over Nottingham life, especially through its close links with the University.

The University campus and older buildings were donated by the first Lord Trent. His wife, Lady Boot, established and financed Florence Boot Hall. Today no less than four professors are financed by either the company or the family - the Sir Jesse Boot Chair of Chemistry (endowed for £20,000), the Lady Trent Chair of Chemical Engineering (£50,000), the Lord Trent Chair of Pharmacy (£50,000) and the Boots Chair of Clinical Therapeutics (£100,000). The second Lord Trent was Chancellor of the University whilst Chairman Hobday also doubles as President of the University Council.

The Boots interest in the University is not wholly philanthropic. One of

Jesse Boot's strongest motives in making his original bequests was to ensure a supply of trained pharmacists who would be independent of the established pharmacological societies, that he had crossed swords with. Today the company obviously benefits from its access to research carried out at the University and still retains an experimental research station on the University grounds (which many of the academics would like to get rid of).

£42,000 SALARY

Locally Boots has a reputation as being a reasonably good employer. It certainly treats its Board well enough - in 1976-77 Chairman Hobday received £42,000, whilst the 13 directors received £314,000 remuneration and £18,000 in fees between them - an average of £26,000 each.

Below these giddy heights, however, wage rates are by no means so extravagant. Basic rates for engineering craftsmen range from £42 weekly for the lowest grade to £52 for the highest.

These figures should be compared with the national average weekly earnings of £71.50, the weekly average earnings of £77.20 in chemical and allied industries, and the £70 average weekly earnings for manual workers in the East Midlands.

LITTLE KNOWN

It is interesting to note that these rates include an award of £4 which has been recently made under the little known section 11 of the Employment Protection Act. This allows wages within a company to be raised to the "recognised" or "general" level of "terms and conditions" in the industry, if there is a difference between them (such awards can be in addition to the 10% pay norm). It follows a recent report by consultants which found that many of the Beeston wage rates were 10% below those in comparable companies or industries.

Similarly, the wage rates paid to workers in the Boots retail establishments, despite the advantages of high staff discounts on purchases, are well below the highest rates of

pay in the retail sector. This may well explain the past hostility of the company to the unionisation of the section of their labour force.

RIP-OFF

But these employees do share in the profits, receiving, under a profit-sharing scheme, the princely sum of £1.69 weekly. However, they may care to think about the profits which Boots earn and which are kept for the shareholders. In 1976, this amounted to about £1,200 per worker, or about £25 per week, a figure which will probably rise to nearer £28 per week in the current year.

Perhaps someone needs to put the boot behind Boots?

The Voice is hoping to do a series on local companies (they have been warned).

Plessey will be next, followed by Players, Raleigh, the breweries, the Evening Post, Radio Trent etc.

Any information from employees or others would be gratefully received (and treated in confidence). Ring 411676 or come to 33 Mansfield Rd.

NOTTINGHAM PEOPLE'S CENTRE

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the silly bit

FROM HERE TO MATERNITY

THE CITY Fathers' Spokesman and Chief Apologist, Councillor Fishell, confirmed that "baby fever" (sprogomania nervosa) is "sweeping the city and parts of Tollerton", following the birth of yet another heir to the throne.

There has been a rush of enquiries at most city clinics, and the Women's Hospital on Peel Street, reports that many of their beds are now booked 10 months in advance.

"It's a real Jubilee treat", said Mr Fishell.

In honour of young Irving, as it is rumoured the royal child will be called, Nottingham has rallied to the flag;

Shipstone's Ales are brewing a celebration "Mother's Milk Stout", to be sold in $\frac{1}{2}$ pt bottles, with rubber teat.

Co-op film theatre to re-run "Love on the Dole".

Two Corporation buses are to be painted pale azure with two gules Ruperts passant, sable quartered astride rampant Goofy.

And why not?

A BAD TASTE

I would like to apologise to those of a nervous disposition who found my suggestion for an alternative use for NSM cigarettes "in bad taste". Presumably the original use for which cigarettes are intended is not "in bad taste", despite lung cancer, bronchitis, emphysema.

HOT DOGS

Chapan Pincher will be revealing in the Sunday Express that the government is working on a way to provide a full-scale fire service without actually strike breaking.

Pincher, contacts at Alder-

shot and RAF Abingdon have reported increased activity in the dog handling units, and phone calls to the Ministry of Defence have brought guarded confirmation that dogs are being trained for fire-fighting duties.

Details are difficult to come by, but it is believed that handlers will "control" the dogs who will actually approach the fire with hoses strapped to their backs. Police and Military dogs are obviously very suitable, as they are able to climb ladders and have been conditioned out of fear of fire.

"FIREDOGS"

The "Firedogs", as they will be called, will have special respirators available for smoky work, and although there are no plans for helmets for them, they will be sprayed with a borax solution before each alert, to reduce the risk of their fur catching fire.

The RSPCA is believed to be "concerned", but Chilwell Ordinance Depot have so far made no comment.

P J GROB WORTH

Letters

Refuges

required

Dear Nottingham Voice,

In the October edition Women's Aid Week has asked for more refuges. As a battered wife having spent many months in them they are urgently required.

Yet the Nov 11th edition of the Evening Post reported that both Nottingham Women's Aid and Midland Women's Aid pleas for cash and help were turned down by the City Council Housing Committee.

Do these women have to stay to take more beatings, and live in even more fear? Perhaps the Council hope that the wife will be murdered, the husband sent to prison, then they'll have yet another house to sell.
(Name & address supplied)

Be sure to visit the

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Trade Unions

Trade Unions under Capitalism
Tom Clarke & Laurie Clements (ed).
Fontana.

THIS TIME of the year sees the book trade turning out those most artificial of literary products, the coffee table compilations and the drawing room dossiers.

A just published Fontana book of readings provides dubious decoration in the above environment, but should certainly grace every militant worker's snap tin. It's "Trade Unions under Capitalism", edited by two Trent Polytechnic lecturers, Tom Clarke and Laurie Clements.

A bold claim perhaps, for much academic writing on trade unions consists of microscopic examination of rule book minutiae, even more boring than the branch meetings these constitutionalists contemplate. Or else they statistically divide workers and their opinions more inhumanely than the capitalist division of labour alienates their work lives.

UNEQUAL

This book documents a very different standpoint. It shows that trade unions are not one more boring but worthy interest group, happily holding their own in a pluralist society, but organisations forged by workers in a wildly unequal struggle to limit their exploitation by capital.

But even the best conceptual scaffolding can only help build if the material is at hand. What of the current consciousness of workers? In an area where miners have recently voted in a Conservative MP and a Communist district secretary its contradictory character should need little stressing.

SALTLEY

In an important contribution Laurie Clements advances beyond the big bang May 1968 theory of working class flowering. How workers see their needs and aims varies widely. At one extreme there is incredible short-sightedness, at the other a support of united working class struggle for socialism.

Clements argues that changes in the economy, new bargaining structures and the radicalisation of new elements contributed in the early 1970's to a significant extension of workers' horizons. The high spot was perhaps the action of Birmingham engineers in closing the Saltley gates for the miners.

ROLL-BACK

He suggests that although capital has been able to partially narrow and negate these gains, all has not been lost. The strength and breadth of the support for Grunwick shows this.

The capitalist attempt at "roll-back" is taking many forms. One of the more subtle, as Tom Clarke points out, is the Bullock Report on industrial democracy. Despite hysterical CBI noises, this is an attempt to replace unilateral shop floor control over capital with an employee/employer co-operation in seeking goals which are necessarily determined by the capitalist structure of society. And even this co-operation would be largely cosmetic.

NECESSARY

Particularly valuable are the extracts dealing with the World War 1 shop stewards movement which fashioned the concept of the rank and file movement.

They avoided the trap of purely electioneering for left officials (the dreaded curse of broad leftery which has all but drowned these insights in a progressive Fabianitis).

The book is not merely a militants cookbook. Its authors are convinced that even the most militant of trade unions are negative though profoundly necessary organisations.

REVOLUTIONARY

To achieve the end of working class emancipation written into many union constitutions a revolutionary party is needed. The book ends with a valuable discussion of why and what that entails, using work by Marxist Historians Perry Anderson and Richard Hyman that take the debate beyond the ginger group formulas of the "British Road to Socialism".

Two dates should be put in every militant's diary. November 26th when in Manchester a Rank and File conference takes place (for which delegates from this area are currently being elected - details 600760) This can start to put flesh on this book's theories.

The second date is December 25th when every militant should ensure that in his/her Christmas stocking under the Arthur Scargill walk-on-water wellies there is a copy of this book.

george christopher

Battered Women

Battered Women and the New Law.

Anna Coote and Tess Gill.
Inter-Action Inprint.

I FOUND "Battered Women and the New Law" a very clear practical guide for both battered women having to take legal action against their partners and all those in the "helping" agencies who come into contact with them.

Reviews

Signed reviews or articles do not necessarily represent the views of the editors.

The women in the Nottingham Refuge found it interesting to read in detail what happens when their cases go to court - often solicitors are in too great a hurry to fill women in with background information.

ROOTED

I was also pleased to read the section "Beyond the Law" in which the authors attribute the problem of battered women to be a social one which is "deeply rooted in the way men and women are brought up to regard themselves and each other".

Legal changes are not enough - attitudes must be changed and women's position in society bettered before the problem of battering will begin to be solved.


A very useful little book - but what a pity it costs 60p. A lot of money for many women who may need help.

anne littler

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Mining mystey

Ashfield. What's going wrong?
Ken Coates
Institute of Workers' Control,
Pamphlet No 53

COAL MINING is still the major industry in Nottinghamshire, employing 40,000 workers. It's future is obviously of vital concern to the county - to the miners, to their children, to all working people who are already threatened by unemployment or declining job opportunities.

It would seem likely, then, that any projected run down of the industry would be made known to the miners' union representatives and the County Councils, allowing them to give their views, make contingency plans etc.

Not so, according to Ken Coates of the Institute of Workers' Control (and prospective Labour candidate for Ashfield). In his pamphlet "Ashfield - What's going wrong" he shows fairly conclusively that the NCB does envisage a large reduction in their labour force in West Notts. The County Structure Plan, for example, expects the numbers to fall from the 40,500 of 1974 to 32,400 in 1986 and only 25,700 in 1996.

SECRET

All this information, and more, is also available in a secret report sent by the NCB to the County Council Planning Dept - but not to the councillors themselves. Nor have any but senior officials of the local NUM been able to see it.

Coates sees a dark motive beneath all this secrecy: that the NCB are stalling on making the information public until the labour needs of the Belvoir coalfield are known, hoping eventually to transfer many miners there from West Notts. If the issue became public now there is the danger that miners whose jobs were threatened might start looking for other work or even that they may start fighting to alter the plans completely.

As Coates points out, the NCB attitude is exactly the opposite of what industrial democracy should be. If their plans were made public now people would have much more time to prepare themselves, alternative proposals could be presented and, above all, existing communities might not be wantonly destroyed as they were by pit closures in the Robens era.

Coates sees several bodies as being at fault over the issue:

1)The NCB, especially Area Directors Merrik

Spanton (North Notts) and Donald Davies (South Notts) and South Notts Deputy Area Director Ian Dowson, for the their failure to provide adequate information to interested parties.

2)The NUM, especially Area President Len Clarke. Even by May 1977, six months after the row blew up, some members of the Area Executive had not, according to Coates, seen copies of the NCB report.

3)The County Council. How can councillors be expected to carry out their duties, as several tried to, if information is withheld by the very Departments they are supposed to be in charge of? Even Environment Ctee Chairman Frank Higgins was at first suprised to hear about the report, although he later came to support the NCB.

4)Michael Cowan, Chairman of the County Council Finance Committee and the disastrous Labour candidate at the Ashfield by-election. Coates says that he never replied to his letters about the issue.

This is a very interesting pamphlet, and at 30p is excellent value. It also helps to explain the fiasco of the by-election. If the miners have friends like these in a Labour County Council and Labour-controlled nationalised industries, do they really need enemies?

Poor pay more

Why The Poor Pay More.
Frances Williams (ed)
Macmillan, for the National Consumer Council.

IN GENERAL, people are poor not because of any individual failings but because of numerous disadvantages heaped upon them - unemployment, bad housing, low wages, old age etc.

This excellent book, just published by the National Consumer Council, shows clearly that there is another way in which the economic system keeps the poor in poverty - "consumer detriment" which, in english, means that the poor pay more for goods and services than the rest of the population. In the words of the editor, "Poor people's money buys less than rich people's".

SUBSTANTIAL

Why is this? One reason is that bulk-buying can make the price of goods (especially food) much cheaper, but requires substantial funds to buy either the goods or the facilities to keep them eg deep freezers.

The Price Commission

found that 24% of average consumer spending (32% for single pensioners) is subject to variation in price according to the amount purchased.

This is compounded by the fact that foods and other goods are usually cheaper in large stores, which can often be reached only by car.

This is obvious enough in Nottingham. The Asda hyper-market in middle-class West Bridgford (the cheapest store in Britain, according to the Sunday Times) is practically inaccessible to non car owners in poorer parts of the city.

SCANDAL

Another scandal is the pricing policies of the nationalised industries, especially the Electricity and Gas Boards. Their minimum standing charges, together with price discounts for a greater use of energy, again penalise small users who are generally the poor.

Though some progress has been made here, such as the Electricity Board's 25% discount on one quarters bill for families on Supplementary Benefit or Family Income Supplement (which only has a 50% take up rate), the book shows that a typical poor family pays 63p per therm equivalent of warmth, compared to the 46p of an average family and the 40p of rich families.

The story continues with monotonous regularity - almost every good or service which the poor buy costs them more.

They pay high launderette prices because washing machines are too expensive to buy. They pay higher rates of interest to get credit. Building societies refuse to lend money on the only houses which the poor can afford to buy. Many of the goods they can afford to buy are of poor quality and cannot be made to last by repairing.

Significantly, council housing (with some exceptions) is one of the few things which does give the poor value for money - assuming that they can get in one and that rents don't rise at the speed which they have in the last few years.

Finally there are all the less obvious inequalities which the poor endure - fewer doctors, dentists or lawyers in deprived areas, lack of information about welfare rights, comparative prices etc.

The conclusion which the book reaches is that, excluding housing, "poor families have to spend about 11% extra to get equivalent

goods and services to average families".

11% means well over £100 per year for a typical family - nothing more than a tax on poverty.

Ultimately the answer to the problems of the poor is a greater equality of income. In the interim the authors suggest:

1)The need for more information for the poor (but the Tories have already decided to close down the County's Consumer Protection Units)

2)Revised pricing practices by the Nationalised industries.

3)State action, eg by providing Neighbourhood Law Centres, or low interest credit through the National Giro.

Punk Rock?

THE END of Beeston civilisation as we know it is nigh. Punk politics have arrived. This alien wedge has inserted itself into a transformed Unity Club, Middle Street.

Now under the signboard Katie's it was, a couple of weeks ago, uniting rock and revolution. A committed, capacity audience was closeted in the club to hear the very much out-of-the-closet, gay Tom Robinson Band. The band is more traditional heavy rock than punk, but it weds punk alienation from dole queue Britain to a clearer confrontationist politics.

Robinson, a card-carrying supporter of Rock against Racism, opened with a warning of the very 'heavy manners' of a fascist 'Winter of 79'. Then "Whose side are you on", "Glad to be Gay" and "Right On Sister" left no doubt that Robinson is for fighting back.

Its a message that seemed to get through as clenched fists surfaced above the pogoing heads. (The clenched fist being the Band's adopted logo).

The music is as strong as the politics. So are the rest of the band. "Dolphin", the drummer, in particular, showed no evidence of a limp wrist.

Robinson shows signs of being able to offer the strongest revolutionary rock since the early Lennon solo efforts. And as he demonstrated with a precision accurate piss-take of an archetypal Tory councillor jobworthy he possesses a stronger humour than the tortured Lennon.

Robinson promised to be back in Nottingham soon. He should be supported - as should Katie's (Sundays or Thursdays). Be there - or be revisionist.

george christopher



MY LIFE AS A PITMAN

"MY LIFE AS A PITMAN", a one-man exhibition by Oliver Kilbourn, traces his life and times through 50 years of working down the pit.

He was born the son of a pitman in 1904. He started work when only 13 and had to support his family when an injury to his father stopped him from working again.

Kilbourn has lived and worked in Ashington all his life and started his painting in 1934 on a Workers Educational Association course of Art Appreciation supervised by Robert Lyon of Newcastle University. He says, "this was the foundation of the Ashington Group of painters, and art has been my main interest in life from then".

PRIDE

The Ashington Group has played a very important part in the history of painting in the North-East, establishing themselves as the only lasting

school of Working-Men-Painters."

Kilbourn takes a pride in the work of the collier: he sees the process of filling a tub as "like a matador with a bull: twist and let it go by. Awkward to do, but graceful, like a dance step, 1...2...3. Quite unique I think."

COMRADESHIP

His work is emotional yet subdued. No heaving, sweating torsos - just the plain and common day events of the life of a pitman: hewing, shoving the chummin (empty tub) in by hand, changing the points, drilling a shot hole, stonemen redding (clearing) mothergate canch (roadway roof) and showing how the comradeship of the miner underground is really ephemeral and fleeting - a lonely, personal solitude.

His paintings are a record of his personal world. The world of survival - a rich and

conscious desire to show how life in the pit is not one that should be glorified or romanticised.

"I never enjoy painting really, its a labour really, an effort". The works owe much to the social atmosphere of the time. The tenseness shows through, the attitudes and styles of Lowry, Yeats and Delaney are very apparent.

WRY HUMOUR

The shadowy world is revealed for what it is - hard and brutal, but tinged with a wry humour for he has spent his life in the mines and welcomes the opportunity to reveal this secret existence to other members of his class.

The pictures were painted over a period of 7 years - since his retirement - and he admits he has always wanted to put the record straight, to reveal the misery. And yet the

pride of this Northumberland man is so clear it makes one glad to have spent a time in his special world.

REALISM

"My Life as a Pitman" is Kilbourn's contribution to realism and in many ways the product of the community he lived in. Honesty and forthrightness were the rules to be obeyed and to lose sight of this is for him a desertion of the truth and the main aims of the Ashington Group.

steve humphries

MY LIFE AS A PITMAN, an exhibition by Oliver Kilbourn at the Midland Group Gallery, 24-32 Carlton Street (entrance on Warser Gate), open 10.30-5.00, Monday-Saturday, until Nov 26th.

SAVE Highbury Hospital

BULWELL RESIDENTS ARE FIGHTING TO SAVE THEIR LOCAL HOSPITAL. They have already formed a 'Save the Highbury Hospital' Campaign Committee and are gathering support in their efforts to halt the closures which are planned by the District health authorities.

It is policy in the Health Service to close down many older, smaller hospitals and to concentrate resources on larger and more modern facilities. The closures at Highbury, together with those at the Cedars and Ruddington Hall, have long been planned to co-incide with the opening of the £40 millions University Hospital (supposedly the most modern in Europe). The number of the beds will stay roughly the same: it is the nature of the health care which people receive that will change.

Brian Blisset sees all these changes as being the first step "towards a significant improvement in the health facilities available to the people of the Nottingham area". Bill Whitlock MP, whose constituency includes Highbury, supports the changes because of the age of the hospital (many people thought the General was getting on a bit, too). The South Notts Community Health Council thinks they are necessary because the University Hospital has gobbled up all the available resources.

The Community Health Council acknowledge Highbury's "advantages in terms of small size and friendly caring atmosphere created by the staff". In fact, almost all the staff, as well as a third of the patients live locally.

As the Save Highbury Committee says, "Highbury is an integral part of the community, with close links and relationships between staff, patients, relatives and the local people. This is an asset that should not lightly be thrown away".

Local residents are determined to save the hospital in the same way that action by staff and the public kept open the Elizabeth Garrett Anderson Hospital in London, and the Rhydylafar Hospital in Glamorgan.

The Save the Highbury Hospital Committee has already received support and financial aid from numerous unions and community groups. Their fighting fund now stands at over £200. Several thousands of people have signed the petition which is to be presented to David Ennals, the Secretary of State for the Social Services, at the November 23rd National Lobby of Parliament against the public expenditure cuts.

The Committee also has a stall on Bulwell Market on Saturday, 19th November from 9am to 3.30pm, and welcomes any assistance.

Anyone interested in helping the campaign should contact the Chairman, John Peck, at 21 Highbury Walk, Bulwell (271064) or the secretary, Mrs M Fowler at, 14 Millbank Court, Bulwell (272946).

SHORTAGES

Whatever the reasons, facilities at Highbury are to be cut over the next few years. First to go will be the general medical and surgical services, due to be axed in 1979/80.

Next to go will be the obstetric and gynaecological beds, to be closed as new beds become available at units in the University and General hospitals. However the exact timing of these closures is still uncertain as, in the words of District Administrator, Brian Blisset, "there are difficulties because the two obstetrics and gynaecological units will not provide enough gynaecological beds", ie there will still be a shortage.

IMPROVEMENTS

All that will remain at Highbury is a 90 bed unit for the mentally handicapped, soon to be supplemented by a new 24 bed unit (it should have been 48 beds but those financial shortages appeared again).

WHY NOT TWO?

This attitude misses an obvious point which is made by the Save Highbury Committee. Why can't Nottingham have both the University and Highbury hospitals? The District admits there will be shortages of geriatric and gynaecological beds for some years. Highbury will still be operating at half steam, with many of its overheads the same as they are now.

CUTS

It seems likely, according to Peter Rowe, Area Organiser of NUPE, that public expenditure cuts have quickened the demise of Highbury. The South Notts Health District admits that it has only been allocated £4 millions of the £7.5 millions extra expenditure which it asked for. This is despite the fact that the Trent health region is officially recognised as being the most deprived in the country.

