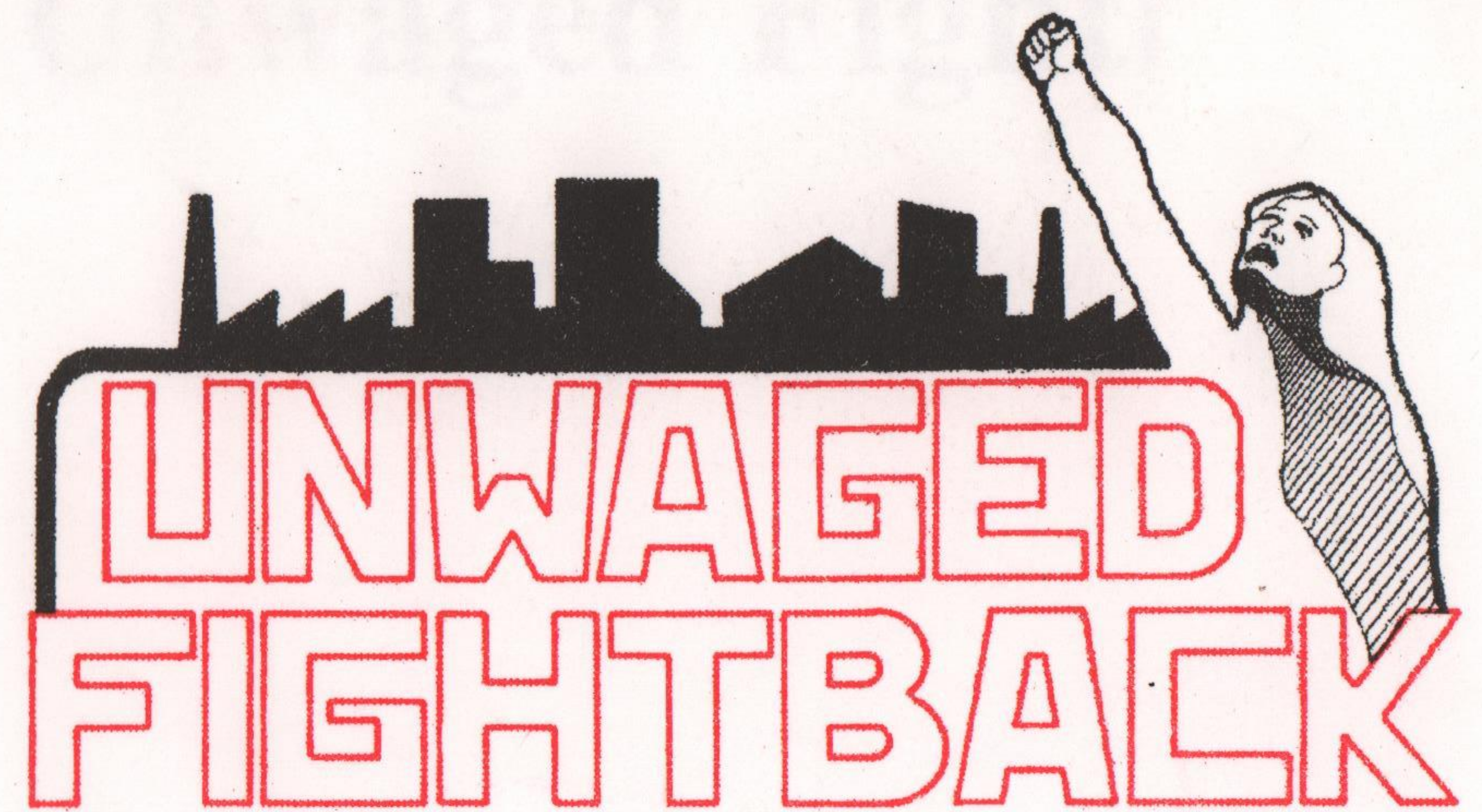


What happens
when a group of unemployed
trying to organise for themselves
has to take on not only
the benefits system, but the
entrenched interests of
the trade union hierarchies
and the local council?

Unwaged Fightback
is a firsthand account
of an unwaged workers' group
in 1980s London, its efforts to
establish and run
a centre for the unemployed
and its relationships to
the Miners' Strike
and other struggles of its times.



A
HISTORY
OF
ISLINGTON
ACTION
GROUP
OF THE
UNWAGED
1980-86



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Unwaged Fightback

a history of
Islington Action Group
of the Unwaged,
1980 - 1986

past tense

Published by past tense

first published October 1987 by the Campaign for Real Life

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introduction

What follows is a history of an unwaged workers' group in 1980s London, its efforts to establish and run a centre for the unemployed and its relationship to the Miners' Strike and other struggles of its times.

This is a reprint of a pamphlet produced in 1987, by the Campaign for Real Life. We've re-typeset the text, otherwise it's unchanged, except for some explanatory notes at the end. The examples of the group's leaflets and posters, and newspaper articles appear as in the original. The original author's views have changed some since writing it; past tense don't entirely agree with everything here either, but feel there's some value in putting it out there again.

At the time of writing we're facing an onslaught of austerity, cuts, and savage 'rationalisations' to many areas of our lives. As numbers claiming benefits rocket, the largest scale 're-organisation' of the benefits system in 60 years is also underway. The aim of this program is undeniable - to drive down the living standards for working class in this country as possible, and force people to work for less, live on less and work harder. Gains fought for long and hard over decades are being clawed back: ruling elites the world over agree that if anyone has to pay for the current economic crisis, it should be the plebs.

The only real alternative is to make the rich pay, permanently.

Our motive for reprinting this text, as with all past tense projects, as struggles around the dole are likely to become hugely important, but to take lessons, inspiration, ideas from struggles and movements of the past. By this we don't mean slavishly following old models, but taking what's useful and adding to it with our own experiences.

Islington Action Group of the Unwaged's attempts to organise themselves for themselves, were unacceptable to trade union structures and politicians of right and left alike. When workers refuse to

be pawns, but think and act for themselves, they turn their potential threat into real threat, and all the forces of manipulation and control unite to bring them back to heel. Already in 2011, as a movement 'against' the cuts program develops, union bureaucracies, Labour hacks, and 'left' parties are, as always, jostling to head the movement and keep it under control, on their terms; diverting anger and potential for change into pointless 'days of action', 'one day strikes' and other nonsense. In Islington itself, Labour councillors implement savage cuts to services one day and lead the 'anti-cuts' marches the next. During the 1980s rate-capping struggles many people invested much support and hope in their elected representatives; disillusion was probably bound to follow, partly because brave lefty leaders get cold feet, or end up sacking workers and making cuts in the end ('with a heavy heart'), usually on the grounds that it's better for them to be in charge than someone worse, they have no choice. In reality they do have little choice, because their real room to manoeuvre is limited, by central government funding, legal obligations, and so on, even more now than in the '80s. It would be great to have an independent workers movement, that answered both austerity and attempts to co-opt rebellion by Labour councillors, union full-timers, and professional lefties with the proper politeness: occupy the lot, strike, not for a day but for good, and let's run the world ourselves. Time will tell as to if that develops, and how.

Now times have changed mightily since the days of the Greater London Council, and 'leftwing' Labour boroughs funding alternative groups and centres, as was commonplace in the 1970s and '80s. Thousands of advice centres, childcare groups, adventure playgrounds, women's groups, organisations campaigning for rights, equality etc for various minorities, and numerous other causes, which often started out organising voluntarily, gradually accepted funding from local, regional or national government. This allowed them better facilities, wider reach and stability, enabled many groups to run from better premises, open longer hours, and produce better printed materials, help people directly. There's no doubt that official funding for broadly progressive projects improved the lives of large numbers of people.

However it was a double-edged sword: it also brought them under official control and tended often to hamper their independence. Their reliance on this funding could lead to toning down any challenging of state structures, campaigning against council or government policies and so on. When the money was withdrawn, people could no longer operate on without it, and projects collapsed. More radical projects could also be bought off and neutralised in this way. Of course, if like Islington Unwaged Centre, you attempted to combine union or council funding with a revolutionary critique of how those groups basically are part of the problem you're fighting, then eventually they'll stop giving you the dosh - that was only a matter of time.

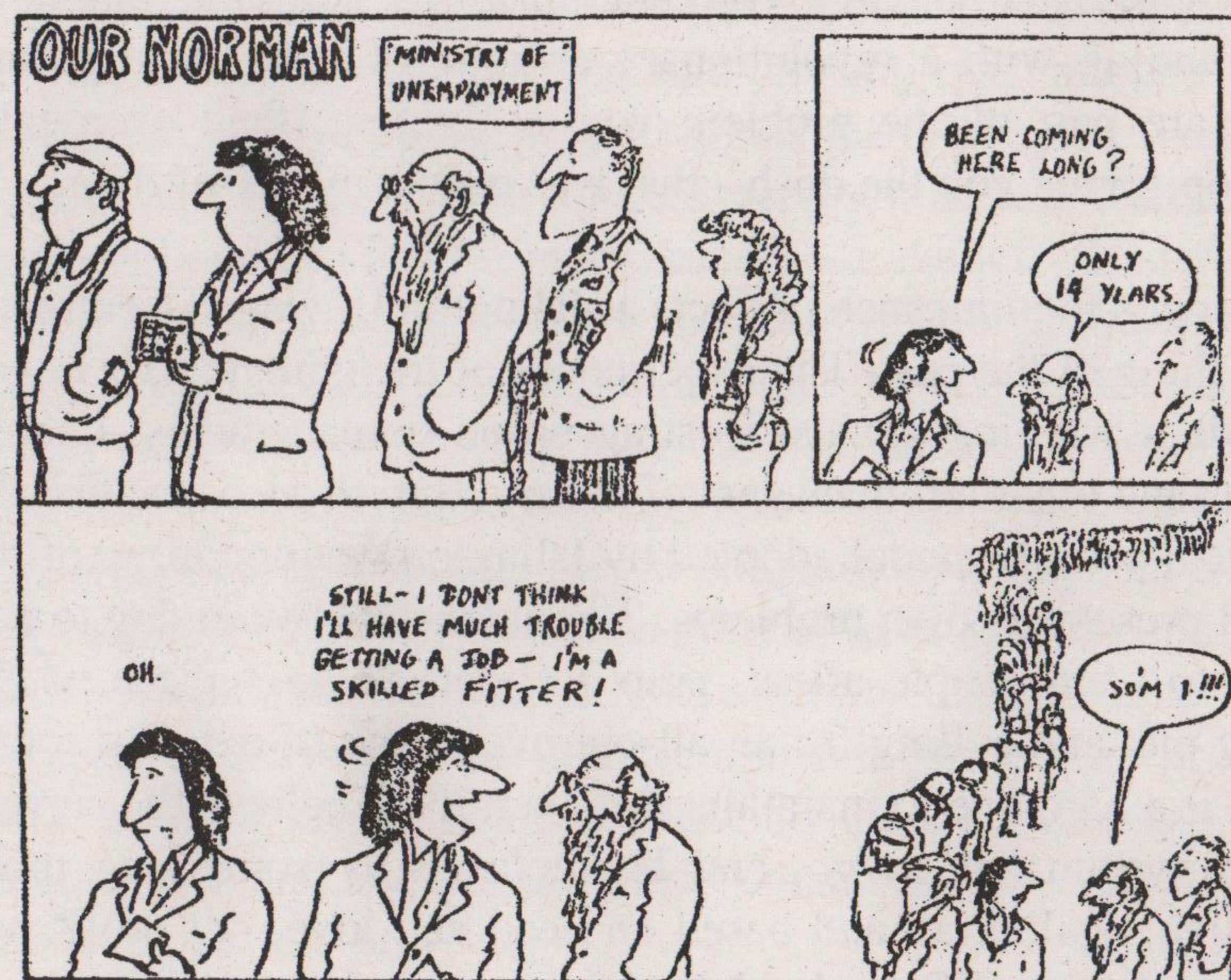
Local councils funding such projects as Islington Unwaged Centre are largely a thing of the past. The experiences of the Islington Unwaged do provide a warning against trusting union bureaucracies, Labour politicians and other left managers of misery. But it's also true that the ultra-radical activist model adopted by Islington Action Group of the Unwaged present its own problems. The balance between day to day activities to keep people afloat, grab a slightly bigger piece of the economic pie, and calling for an all-out overthrow of existing social relations, is a hard one to maintain. But even if we believe the current economic system has to go, and be replaced by something more co-operative, egalitarian and based on need and love, not profit, we still have to face and fight the daily battle to survive, collectively as well as individually. Experience of numerous activist collectives (including ones based around the dole/benefits) suggests that sometimes you have to tread a fine line to avoid a kind of theoretically correct isolation on the one hand, and unpaid advice or social work, on others behalf, on the other. We don't really have a trite solution, and some of us at past tense have tended to swing from one end of that spectrum to another: too much ultra-left posturing and you feel like a bit more practical work, sometimes, and vice versa.

As we said we're not offering answers, just contributions to debate. We hope reprinting this text forms part of that process.

Harry Lynch, past tense, Islington, October 2011.

OUT OF WORK

AND ANGRY!



WHAT CAN YOU DO?.....

COME ALONG TO THE CO-OP HALL, ACROSS THE ROAD
ON TUESDAY 9th DECEMBER FROM 10 A.M TILL 1P.M.

—MEET PEOPLE FROM GREENWICH WHO ARE DOING SOMETHING ABOUT IT

—MAKE YOUR VOICE HEARD

—TEA, COFFEE AND SANDWICHES PROVIDED FROM 10 A.M.



R.T.O

Unwaged Fightback

1) Setting Up

In October 1980, workers from Islington's welfare rights organisations, and one local unemployed man got together to try to set up an unemployed group. Unemployment was rising rapidly and the welfare workers felt that just telling the unemployed their rights was not enough - that something had to be done to extend these pathetic rights, and they recognised that this could best be done by the unemployed themselves.

Unemployed groups were forming in various parts of London, and someone from the Greenwich group, which was already active, was invited to speak at the inaugural meeting. The meeting was organised at the Co-op Hall and the dole office nearby was leafleted for two weeks before, with new people gradually joining in the leafletting.

About five new people turned up to the meeting, plus a guy from the NF [Note 1] who was quickly thrown out. It was decided to start meeting weekly, to try to get more people involved, and to try to get up a centre for, and run by the unemployed.

But despite the belief that unemployed people had to organise for themselves, it wasn't until some months later that the group was angered into taking themselves seriously, and taking control of their dealings with the authorities. Up till then they'd sat back and watched the welfare workers deal with the council, trades council etc. - they seemed to know what they were doing, while the group had no experience and were intimidated, less by authority than by all the forms, codes, behind-the-scenes deals etc. Instead the group was just trying to keep going, believing that when they got the centre they could take control. They were leafletting, flyposting and meeting, new people were joining, and a few dropping out.

Then in April there was a meeting in the area organised by the South East Region Trades Union Council (SERTUC) to talk about unemployment and setting up a centre. Most of the group were there, sitting at the back, listening to how the bureaucrats were going to set up a centre, how they'd been doing lots of things for the unemployed, but the unemployed weren't interested, and so on, until finally the group started shouting that they were organising for themselves. The union hacks weren't interested and didn't like their meeting being disrupted by plebs. The welfare workers said nothing.

The next meeting with SERTUC was on better terms - one of them among a conference of the London & South East Federation of Unemployed Groups. He was there to sell the TUC/government line on unemployed centres he failed [2]. Nearly every group there totally rejected the guidelines, the imposition of paid, workers, and political control. The SERTUC guy felt so rejected he was desperate for friends, and after a few kind words on the way out, he agreed to write some nice letters for IAGOU. This was June '81. The conference had been set up by the Greenwich and Southwark groups and was attended by 16 militant groups. There was a feeling that things were just starting, that the movement was going to grow, and be a vehicle for real change. Brixton and St Pauls had exploded [3] - in many areas the cops were careful not to provoke more trouble, and people on the streets were becoming confident. Mass unemployment was something new, at least for white males, and included many who were looking for a lot more than a job. Unemployment and the riots seemed to be the crack in the system that people had been waiting for.

A week later there was a national conference in Leicester, with over 80 people from 25 unemployed groups, plus individuals and some union reps. Everyone was excited at going national, but the question of how to organise caused major arguments. Leicester and most of the other Midland groups were controlled by Socialist Organiser (a trot group in the Labour Party) [4] who had met a couple of weeks before to organise their position. The constitution they came up with was centralised - the conference would elect individuals onto a committee which would run the 'union'. Their proposals were sent out a week

before the conference, and IAGOU immediately prepared an alternative. They argued that electing individuals was absurd because they might get jobs or drop out, or their group might disband or conflict with them, leaving them outside the real movement. They wanted local groups to be the basis for organisation, and the structure to be kept as informal as possible to allow each group and individual as much input as they wanted. Instead of creating a committee to decide what should be done, IAGOU wanted a structure where each group could come up with ideas for struggle, and develop them with the others. And there was deep suspicion of giving an individual a position from which to speak 'on behalf of' the unemployed or to impose a political line, as S.O. seemed to want.

IAGOU took their proposed constitution to the conference and handed round. Most of the groups not controlled by S.O. called for the decision on the constitution to be postponed as they had not had time to discuss the new proposals and had no mandate on them. IAGOU agreed, but when a compromise was put to them at lunch, they copped-out and withdrew their proposals. So a committee was elected, and before long the organisation was in the hands of a few people - or at least the name was, the organisation ceased to exist when everyone went home. Still, IAGOU came back inspired by the fact that the movement was national, whatever a particular organisation might do, or fail to do.

Meanwhile, conditions in the dole offices were getting intolerable. The rising number of unemployed was not matched by an increase in staff or facilities, meaning long queues, crowded dirty offices and stress on both sides of the counter. Added to this, the staff were taking action over a pay dispute, which closed down various dole and DHSS [5] offices. IAGOU supported the staff, practically organising the strike at one dole office, giving out union leaflets to explain the dispute to other claimants, but they also put forward their own demands for improving conditions, particularly at the Medina Road dole office.

On July 7th IAGOU held a public meeting near the dole office, and the next day held a demo. They wrote their demands on a chalkboard

ISLINGTON ACTION GROUP ON UNEMPLOYMENT

IMMEDIATE DEMANDS FOR IMPROVING CONDITIONS FOR CLAIMANTS AT MEDINA ROAD

- 1) The Hornsey Road UBO office should be opened immediately as an independent fully functioning UBO (is not as a sub-branch of Medina Road) to relieve pressure on claimants and staff at Medina Road. We want to receive plans and full information relating to the operation of this office (particularly if it is to incorporate any new features - eg introduction of any of the Rayner recommendations).
- 2) All giroes must be paid in full on time. If giroes are not received, replacements are to be paid over the counter immediately. When certain elements such as Earnings Related Supplements are not paid by the computer - as happened recently - they should be written out by hand at the local office and paid on time, not retrospectively.
- 3) Child-care facilities should be provided on or near the premises for claimants and staff at Medina Road and the new Hornsey Road office. During every period of signing dozens of children are subjected to the appalling conditions and long waits inside the office. In addition, many claimants are put to a great deal of trouble arranging for someone else to look after their children while they are kept waiting for ages at Medina Road.
- 4) Toilets should be available for all claimants at UBO offices. There is no excuse for not providing these. Claimants and their children are humans and we refuse to be treated like animals waiting in the equivalent of a cattle shed for ages with no facilities at all.
- 5) All queues should be short. Management should arrange for there to be enough staff and space to enable the queues to be cut immediately. The average wait for Enquiries during signing is two hours. Some signing-on queues take over half an hour to reach the counter and claimants are jammed in a totally inadequate space. Fresh claims often take several hours. Enough seating should be provided for those waiting. No-one should have to queue outside the office. The atmosphere and decoration of the office should be pleasant, well ventilated and not like shed it is at the moment. Refreshments should be provided for those having to wait because of management's inefficiency and inability to give prompt service and keep appointments made with claimants.
- 6) Enough counter and other staff should be appointed to provide an efficient and reliable service. We do not blame the staff. They are asked to work in intolerable conditions. There should be around 20 more to cope with the number of claimants.
- 7) Management of Department of Employment and the DHSS should ensure that their staff are able to communicate easily and speedily with each other by phone and not send claimants with enquiries unnecessarily backwards and forwards between Medina Road UBO and Archway Towers DHSS when problems can be sorted out by phone.
- 8) A detailed notice should be displayed in all languages explaining which enquiries are dealt with by DHSS (Archway Towers), mentioning rent queries etc.
- 9) Everyone should again be given notification of the exact date when they should next sign on, an explanation of why there is not a return to fortnightly signing, and the exact date when regular fortnightly signing will recommence. Up-to-date notices should be placed inside the office in all languages giving information concerning future signing, and written confirmation should be sent out with giroes, again in all relevant languages.
- 10) All forms and leaflets should be produced and readily available in all

appropriate languages - eg Bengali, Greek, Gujarati, Hindi, Punjabi and Turkish. Notices should explain the availability of those that are already produced - eg form B1, leaflet SL18. Leaflet racks should be prominently displayed near Enquiries and Fresh Claims containing relevant leaflets.

11) Individual claimants and Islington Action Group should be consulted about all changes in procedure and notified well in advance of any proposed implementation - eg variation in frequency of signing and payment (such as from fortnightly to monthly) and introduction of any of the Rayner recommendations.

12) Islington Action Group should have its own noticeboard inside the office. If the union representing staff can have a noticeboard so should the organisation of claimants - recognised by the local authority (Islington Council), Islington Trades Council, South East Region of the TUC.

NOTE

We regard these as absolute minimum demands needed to make the administration of the system slightly more tolerable and believe they can be implemented by the civil service management of the Department of Employment. We are not on this occasion making the demands we have of a more political nature, but we would like to state that we are fundamentally opposed to such measures as the taxing of benefits, the phasing out of Earnings Related Supplement, the very low level of benefits and the cut in annual increase, the ineligibility of many groups of people for benefit, the unfair practices of unemployment review officers and fraud sections and the overall degrading procedure claimants have to endure which makes it look as if we are scroungers rather than recipients of a public service we have paid for.

outside the office, and painted slogans on the pavement where the queues ended - some of them quite a long way down the road. Then they went in, about 50 of them, but the office was already packed and it looked like everyone was demonstrating. A couple of them got up on the counter (this was before shatter-proof screens) and started shouting out their demands and calling for the manager. Both claimants and staff showed support, so eventually the manager agreed to meet a delegation. She was totally patronising and obstructive (not knowing that one of the delegation was an unemployed councillor) but gave in to some of the demands:

- Some notices were put up in Urdu, Gujarati, Greek and Turkish. but this only lasted a few weeks;
- A toilet was made available to claimants, but only in emergencies (as defined by management);
- A slip was sent out with giroes saying when to sign on next. An extra bench was put in, for two weeks.
- Some replacement giroes were handed out over the counter instead of being posted.

- a few more staff were taken on, but nothing like the 22 lacking according to their own calculations.

Another public meeting was held shortly after, followed by another demo about the continued delay in receiving giro. About 70 claimants took part. When somebody shouted out "What are we supposed to do, pawn our gold jewellery?" the manager replied "well, you can pawn your furniture" which did nothing to calm the situation. IAGOU demanded another meeting. At first this was refused, but then a date was set for July 24th. To avoid any 'trouble' Regional Management made the manager close the office for the whole day creating even more chaos and aggravation.

At the same time, IAGOU had been contacting unions and the council to try to ensure that claimants were not cut-off or evicted due to delays in payment caused by the strike, and were successful. They also went over Hackney [6], to demand emergency payments from the council, and the council agreed immediately, rather than have hundreds of angry claimants while the riots were in full swing. If you were willing to queue up twice you could get two payments, or more. While there, IAGOU helped a Hackney unemployed group get going.

With the end of the strike much of the chaos continued, and some improvements were taken away again by management, so IAGOU held another demo on August 24th, again at Medina Road. But eventually the chaos was reduced by the opening of another office nearby, and the introduction of monthly signing instead of two-weekly.

In this period of chaos, IAGOU brought out their first newsletter called U.B. Press [7]. It included articles explaining the situation and struggle at the dole offices (with a half page by one of the workers), proposals for setting up a centre, a section from a book by Wal Hannington (an unemployed leader of the 1920s) [8] on the occupation of an Islington library [9] as an unemployed centre in 1920, reports from the two conferences, and more. And all for only 2p!

There was also a benefit at which everyone had a good time and IAGOU made 70 quid. It was called Bop Against YOP, but unfortunately those affected by the Youth Opportunity Programme, 16-18 year olds, couldn't get in as it was held in a pub that the cops kept their eye on.

On October 22nd Norman Tebbit, Secretary of State for Employment (as they say in Newspeak) visited Barnsbury dole office in South Islington. Informed of the visit by a mole, IAGOU organised a demo to welcome him, and sent out a press-release. When it arrived, Tebbit was jostled by a crowd of about 30, hit by an egg and chased into the building. ".... the egg was thrown from two feet away, hitting him on the crown of the head. It burst and the yoke (sic) dribbled down his neck onto his clothing." (the Times) "A spokesman for the Department of Employment said, 'he was not hurt.'" (Morning Star) Because of the press release, it was attributed to IAGOU, which upset the SWP [10] because the egg was actually one of their members.

Relations with the SWP were not particularly good anyway. During the civil servants' strike, IAGOU and the local SWP branch organised a joint meeting, except that the SWP had organised it as their branch meeting, at which they told IAGOU to disband and join the Right to Work Campaign - one of their front organisations, which they disbanded about a year later. Then IAGOU tried to discourage a bunch of local SWP students and lecturers from trying to occupy a Job Centre 'as a stunt'. They went ahead, gave out a few leaflets, were ignored, and went to the café.

2) The Fight For a Centre

One of the main aims of IAGOU from the start was the setting up of a centre for the unemployed. The most obvious way to do this seemed to be through Islington Council and the Greater London Council [11]. They were both willing to fund 'community groups', especially when they expected political support and good publicity in return. Also they had property to spare. But of course it wasn't as easy as going along to the council and saying "we're unemployed and we want a centre".

There were forms to fill in, bureaucracies to deal with, support to be lobbied for, internal politics to deal with and constant pressure to apply, to force action instead of just words.

Getting them to accept that the centre would be run and controlled by the users was at that time comparatively easy. To start with it was a lot cheaper for them not to have to pay for workers. Also at that time the only existing model for unemployed centres was the MSC [12]/TUC guidelines which were not particularly acceptable to any of the parties involved; the council were not keen on the lack of campaigning imposed, because they expected that any campaigning would be effectively pro-Labour, the unions were against the MSC rates of pay, and IAGOU were against these, and the control being in the hands of the various authorities. Both Islington Council and the GLC liked to appear radical, and anyway they would have control in the long term, through controlling the purse strings.

In May '81 the council agreed in principle to funding a centre, and IAGOU had to go away again and produce detailed plans and a budget, which was a bit hard without having a building to base their plans on. The council were not particularly helpful over this, but eventually IAGOU found an empty council-leased shop and decided it would be the centre. It was at 355 Holloway Road on one of Islington's busiest roads for shopping and traffic, almost in the centre of the borough and close to Medina Road. It had been empty for some time since being used as a housing advice centre. The lay-out and conditions weren't particularly good, but they were told money would be available for alterations and improvements.

In June the council's Employment Committee agreed to give the group £4,000 to equip the centre, and by September Finance and Planning had approved the handing over of funding and the building 'as soon as possible'. The Valuers, Architects and IAGOU drew up plans for the alterations and in November the Solicitors approved the group's constitution, after long arguments and delays. In December the money for equipment was handed over, and it looked like the keys to the building would follow shortly. They didn't.

In the new year, the majority of councillors either suddenly 'saw the light' at the same time, or else found a way to do what they had always really wanted, but without joining the Tories - they went over to the newly-formed SDP [13]. Overnight the Labour stronghold became the SDP's first taste of power, without an election. Those who had been spouting the Labour line could now do openly what they had only done secretly or negatively before. Grants were axed, staff vacancies frozen, plans made to increase rents and sell off 750 homes. A worker in the housing department was victimised, and nearly all the council workers came out on strike. On February 9th the Employment Committee met for the first time under SDP rule. They agreed to fund the local Chamber of Commerce to the tune of £16,500, and refused the £7,000 previously promised for the centre, and so the centre itself. According to the council leader, "A centre for the unemployed in Islington would only encourage people to stay on the dole". Most of IAGOU were at the meeting, and some had to be physically removed. That night the town was painted red, with demands and threats. The next full council meeting had striking workers, threatened tenants, IAGOU and others demonstrating outside at the start while inside the meeting had to be stopped at least once, due to screaming, chants of "Unwaged Fightback" and rolls of bog paper flying from the public gallery.

As a (not very successful) publicity stunt a few of them went down to the first SDP national conference at Kensington Town Hall. Two of them got in with borrowed press cards and borrowed clothes, and were meant to let the others in through a side door. They couldn't find a side door, but anyway they hung out a massive banner, which had been cleverly disguised as journalistic fat and shouted a few slogans and insults before being led out very politely. All the press were there, but only one of the local radio stations bothered to mention it.

Before the SDP had come along, IAGOU were already getting sick of waiting, and were making plans to occupy the centre instead. They told the Employment and Valuers Departments that they needed to look over the centre again to prepare the next year's budget and other things. Both departments said it would be alright, but due to illness

and holidays neither could send anyone along, so IAGOU would have to pick up the keys and go on their own.

So on a Friday there was a special planning meeting to sort out all details, the weekend was spent at the local resource centre printing leaflets and posters to publicise the occupation and Monday the shopping was done, bog paper, tea etc, and everything was set for Tuesday. But late on Monday the head of the Employment Department rang, saying "what happened at your meeting on Friday? We know you planned something for tomorrow, what is it? I need to inform the councillors". Of course he was told it was none of his business and as they didn't know how much he knew, the plans went ahead.

The key was picked up with no problem, and everyone was in place across the road in Sainsburys, a few cycling up and down the road and the rest in a cafe up the road, plus 12 from the Student Union were waiting at their college round the corner. But the building had been boarded up and a cop was standing outside. The worst thing was not knowing who had grassed - everyone was under suspicion so it was impossible to try again. One of the people at the planning meeting was involved in setting up another unemployed project mainly for basic training which was also after funding. He never came to another meeting.

Council elections were due at the start of May, and the Labour Party promised the keys to the centre 'within 24 hours of getting re-elected'. This didn't make IAGOU rush round campaigning for a Labour victory, but the campaigning they were already doing, along with all the other struggles going on, must at least have given the impression that things had been, and would be slightly better under Labour.

Anyway. Labour got back into power with only a few of the defectors keeping their seats. The next day the Labour leader said that IAGOU could have the keys the day after they officially took office, a week later. Nothing happened. One problem was that shortly before the

election the council sold off the lease on the property, but the new lessees were just speculators and gave the council a sublease. It was the freeholders, who the council had supposedly dealt with months before who kept being a pain. Meanwhile the council kept raising questions that had been dealt with before the SDP took over but after a lot of pressure the centre was finally handed over in August '82, over 3 months after the election, and over 11 months from the first promised date.

3) A Centre Finally

The idea that once the group had a centre as a base, they would be able to consolidate and really start moving was soon shown to be an illusion.

The centre was there, but it didn't run itself. Whereas before they were running around without a base, now they found they couldn't run around so much because they were stuck holding the base. The centre had to be open every weekday (the fact that for a while it wasn't was later used as an excuse to close it) so people had to be there even when nothing was going on. Idiots who wandered in had to be treated sympathetically. Receipts had to be kept for every pen bought. And possibly most destructive, the building alterations had to be arranged.

The building was made up of two rooms, plus the toilet. The front room was long and thin, with a lot of space taken up by the entrance, which was a sort of glass passageway leading up to the door. This was intimidating and stopped a lot of light. The back room was square and housed the crèche, TV and cooking facilities. The back wall was damp and collapsing, and each time it rained the damp spread another inch across the floor.

The plan was to make the front straight, re-divide the rooms more evenly, close off the cooking area with a serving hatch, add a disabled toilet and a couple of room dividers, and generally do the place up. The effect would have been to make the place attractive, safe, and spacious enough for various things to go on at the same time.

WOMEN WITH CHILDREN

WHEN THE NEW RAYNER REPORT IS IMPLEMENTED FULLY (IN OCTOBER) YOU'LL HAVE TO PASS AN AVAILABILITY FOR WORK TEST BEFORE YOU'LL BECOME ELIGIBLE FOR BENEFIT.

"It was put to the (Rayner) team frequently in local offices that many married women who were not available for work were nonetheless drawing benefit (unemployment benefit). It was claimed that many had small children and did not wish to work, but had realised that claiming U.B. was an easy source of money for a year."



SO NOW YOU'LL HAVE TO PASS THE TEST.

In order to pass the Availability Test and so be eligible for U.B., women with children will have to prove that they have access to childcare provision AND THIS IN A TIME WHEN MORE AND MORE STATE NURSERIES ARE BEING CUT.

FIGHT THESE ATTACKS ON WOMEN.

FIGHT FOR AN INDEPENDENT INCOME.

COME TO THE MEETING TUESDAY JULY 13, 11.00 a.m.

ANDOVER ESTATE COMMUNITY CENTRE (FREECHE available)

IAGOU - Islington Action Group on Unemployment is a group of unwaged people fighting for the rights of the unwaged. Meetings, Thurs. 2.00 p.m.

IWW - Islington Wageless Women is a group of unwaged women fighting for our rights. Meetings, Fridays, 11.00 a.m.

(All meetings weekly at 1 Tollington Place)

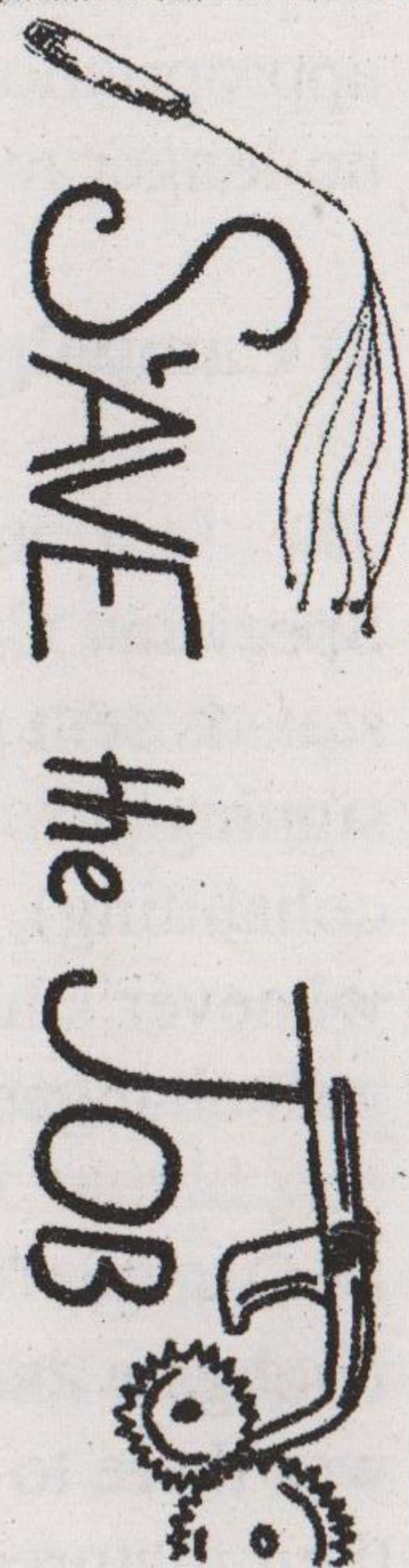
First they had to work out what they wanted, then the architects and builders were brought in to draw up proper plans and estimates. The GLC then had to agree to fund the work and the council had to give planning permission. And once all that had been arranged, and it took a long time, the head landlords decided they didn't like it, and wouldn't allow it. It was discovered that they could be taken to court for being unreasonable, but this had to be done by the council as sub-lessees. The council thought about it for a couple of months, and then said they would do it if the GLC would cover any legal costs. The GLC thought about for a few months, and then said no. So after many months of hard work, the group were left with a damp, dingy intimidating building.

Still, it was there, and people dropped in, for advice, to watch films, to join the campaigns, the occasional workshop, the meetings or just for a chat or for curiosity.

IAGOU had its meetings on Thursdays, and Wednesdays were Wageless Women day. Islington Wageless Women had been meeting for over a year, organising women's events, campaigning against the cohabitation laws, for nurseries etc., a London & South East Wageless Women conference, exhibitions etc. and intervening in IAGOU and the rest of the movement, to struggle against sexism and illusions. In terms of theory Wageless Women were far more together than IAGOU, but when it came to practice they had greater problems. They didn't want to be an 'unemployed' women's group, but based their analysis and struggles on the role of women in the reproduction of capital - on the unwaged work that women are trained for from birth, and perform every day whether they also do waged work or not. Their basic demand was for a guaranteed minimum income for all, to allow women (and men) more choice over what work they do, and giving women independence without them having to take on waged work as well. They criticised IAGOU for basing their campaigns around the dole office, which excluded many unwaged people not signing on as unemployed. This was correct, but the problem then was where else to organise. IAGOU's best struggles were waged at the dole office, because there were already large numbers of people there - something

would have happened there anyway, without IAGOU. To have used the centre for organising all unwaged sectors of the proletariat would have required far greater organisation, publicity, imagination and resources than they had. Of course they could have tried harder, but while accepting the criticism, and making the Centre open to all the unwaged, IAGOU remained essentially an unemployed group.

The change of name from Islington Action Group on Unemployment to Islington Action Group of the Unwaged, which happened around the time the Centre opened, caused disagreements with various authorities. The change meant not only a change in who could be involved, extending outside the terms and analysis of the 'Labour Movement', but signified also a change in self-definition; instead of defining themselves in terms of jobs (ie not having one) they defined themselves in terms of resources (ie not having any). Of course the two are directly related, but the point was to try to change this - to end the poverty - while pointing out the historical (and so changeable) reasons for it. The poverty of the dole is a tool to enforce work - we work because "we have nothing to sell but our labour", but to some extent we choose what conditions we will work under. Mass unemployment and benefit cuts restrict our choices - they restrict our ability to struggle over conditions through the need to keep, or get a job. So instead of joining the campaigns for jobs, where the unwaged were treated as the 'reserve army' of the labour movement, IAGOU struggled to improve their conditions as unwaged people, and so improve their (and others') choices, alongside the struggles of the waged. But the struggle was meant to go beyond merely improving conditions, a constant struggle with more or less success according to conditions;- it was meant to strike at the basic poverty of our class, on which our exploitation is based. The resources of this world that we have created have been stolen from us, and we can only get the means to a decent survival by selling our labour power, to be used by the bosses and state to produce more riches and means to exploit us. This exploitation can not be dealt with by demanding more of it, but by attacking its roots and its myths. We now live in a world where the bosses can only continue to impose their role, to impose labour and poverty on us, through creating artificial shortages, through

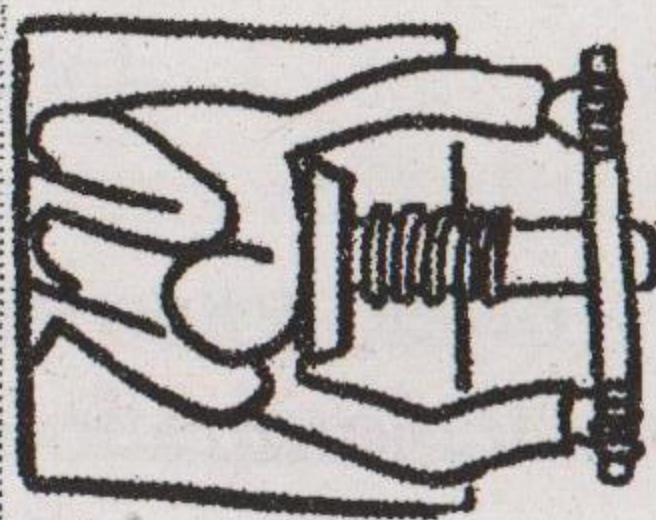
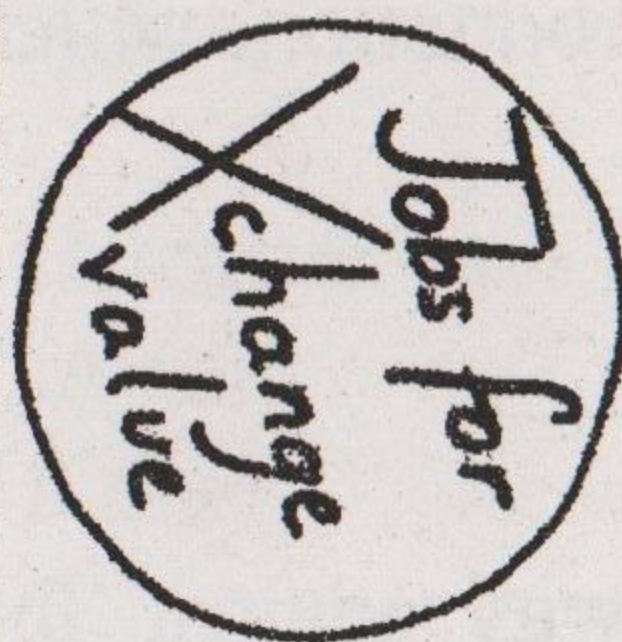


The GLC has dedicated 1985 to an endangered species - the job.

The poor old job is being squeezed out by, on the one hand the bosses who want to cut wages and conditions to make bigger profits, and on the other hand us, 'whom have nothing to sell but our labour' and so want to get a decent price for it, and decent conditions.

The government is trying to make the job more attractive by cutting the living standards of those without them. Each year's increase in Unemployment and Supplementary Benefit hides the multitude of little cuts that push us deeper into the shit. Now they plan to cut off all 16 and 17 year olds to get them onto Youth Tramping Schemes or to live off the ever-decreasing income of their parents. But still people find ways of getting by, a bit of work off the cards, a bit of shoplifting, fiddling meters etc. and so manage to keep themselves for that special job that turn up some time.

The GLC likes to dress up the job as a workers co-op. Great, no boss! Instead everyone is a foreman/woman, watching all the others because their income depends on everyone doing their bit. At least with a boss you've got someone to hate - in a co-op you've only got each other.



What to do if you've got a job

You must learn to appreciate your job, and as they say, absence makes the heart grow fonder, so don't turn up too often. When you do turn up don't work too hard or you could put someone else out of a job. And remember your doctor - they also need to keep their jobs so drop in and check they're alright. If you get to use a computer, make sure it's programmed for games so your unemployed friends don't get an advantage. If you work shifts, remember that even when not in the office, the boss wants to know what's happening so give him a ring when you've a free moment. Whenever you feel strong enough, go on strike - don't wait for the boss to choose the time, and don't tell him what you want, he's more likely to panic and offer you extra.

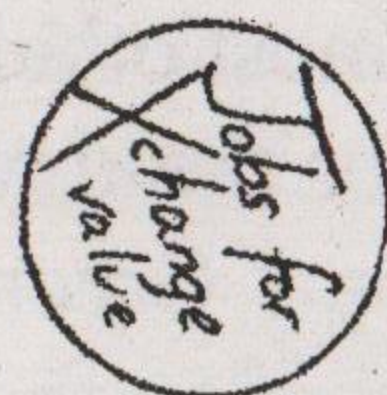
What to do if you haven't

If after the show is over you still haven't found yourself a job don't worry, it doesn't make you a failure. There's plenty of other things to do for 8 hours a day - there's concessions on sports and entertainments, there's people to meet, at the Unwaged Centre 355 Holloway Rd 1-5 Mon-Fri, Molly's Cafe 287 Upper St 12-3 Tue-Fri, on the streets in summer and the tube in winter. There's people to annoy - shop assistants at Fortnum & Masons or Harrods, cops, MPs, visiting dignitaries. There's parks, streets, tubes, building sites, empty factories to explore and use.....

As for money, there's banks and insurance companies which wouldn't miss £1000, and cheque books can easily go missing (if you steal from people in the same situation as you, they'll just continue the chain until it gets back to you - we can not escape poverty on each others' backs!) There's plenty of goodies on show behind fragile plates of glass and plenty of bricks around waiting for use.....

This world is ours, built from our sweat.

Take it, and use it!



p/kp IAGOU 355 Holloway Road N7

destroying part of the abundance we produce and leaving the means of production to rot. The abolition of labour is the task before us, the appropriation, by all, of our products and means of production, which no longer require our sacrifice.

4) Campaigning

The first major campaign run from the Centre was against the Specialist Claims Control Unit (SCCUM), one of the specialist fraud squads sent round different DHSS offices to intimidate claimants into signing off. They tend to pick on single parents (who they accuse of cohabiting), people with skills that 'could be used off the cards' or whoever's name comes out of the hat. Like the SPG [14], their name gets changed regularly to put off resistance.

In October '82 the SCCUM were sent into Archway Tower, home of Highgate and Finsbury Park DHSS offices, and a large demonstration was there to meet them. As they arrived they were photographed, and their pictures and car numbers flyposted around the area, with advice on how to deal with them. This was also put on the front page of the local alternative paper. They have met similar resistance in most other places, and the ordinary DHSS staff will often walk out for the day when they come, and refuse to co-operate with them. Bethnal Green Claimants Union were so successful at disrupting their visit to the area, that one of the claimants was taken to court for 'intimidation', but was quickly found not guilty. Outside the court the SCCUM were further 'intimidated' by having a camera pointed at them, so they ran off down the road with the lens-cap! It's interesting how such anti-social elements project their own obnoxious habits onto those at the receiving end - a primary symptom of paranoid schizophrenia. A claimant was once being harassed for 'suspected cohabitation' and asked IAGOU for support when the fraud officer came to visit. When he came in and saw a group of people with a tape recorder, he asked her "don't you regard it as a private matter?" as though IAGOU were the ones interested in her personal relations.

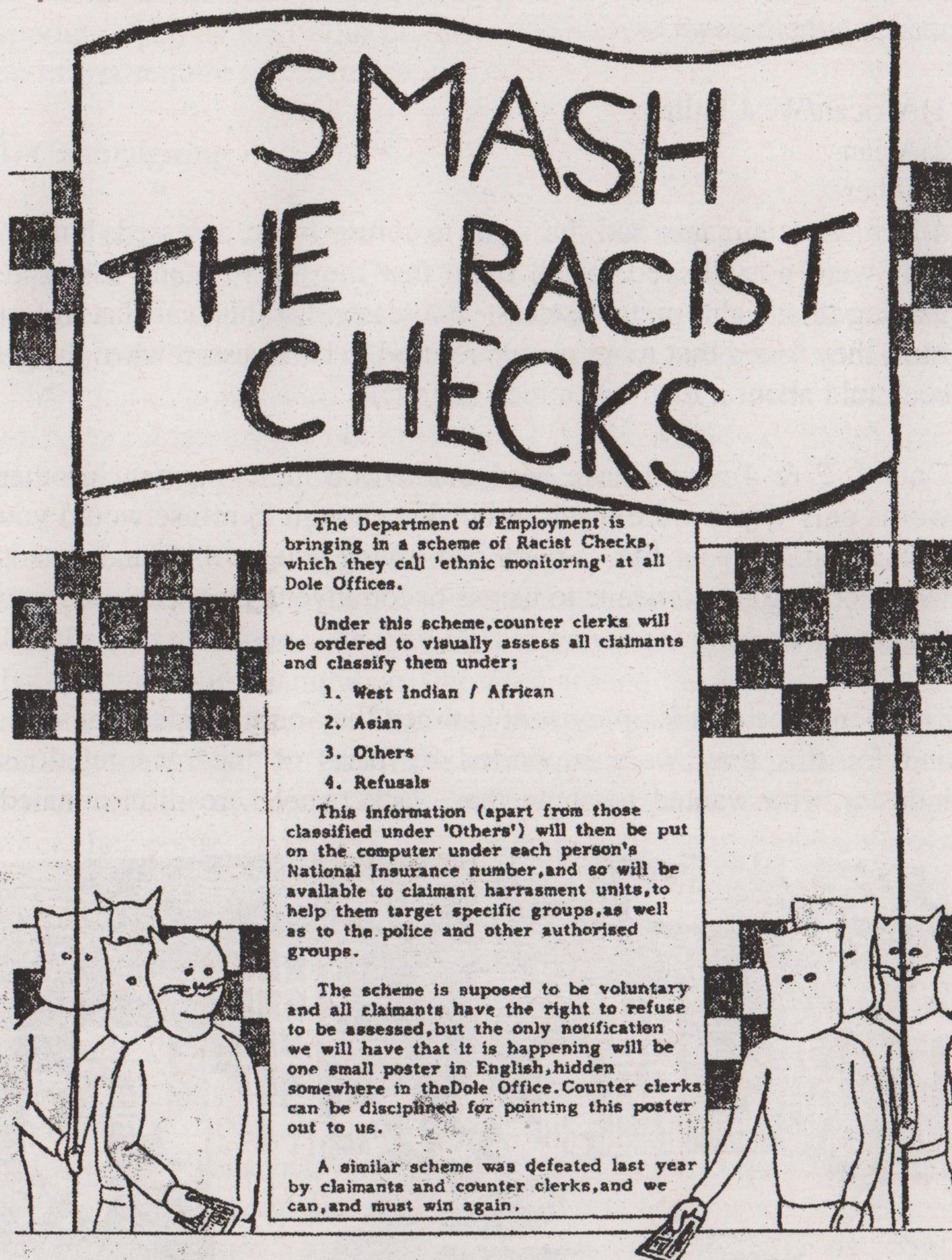
Then came the struggle against race-checks at the dole office. Staff were to be ordered to fill in a computer form for each claimant, marking them down as;

- 1)African/West Indian
- 2)Asian
- 3)Other
- 4)Refusal (claimants had the right to refuse to be assessed, but the staff were not allowed to tell them that they were being assessed, making this 'right' pretty useless. The reason for this was that in test runs, they found that more people refused to be assessed when they'd been told about it than when they hadn't!)

Only 1, 2 & 4 would have been marked on the computer, in other words only if you were black or bolshie enough to refuse would you have a mark on your file - a mark identifying you for the fraud squads when looking for someone to harass or for anyone else with access to the computer.

The Department of Employment claimed they only wanted statistics, and for this they were supported by parts of the race relations industry who wanted to show that black people are discriminated





against in employment. But anyone who didn't already recognise this fact would be among those, journalists, government ministers etc, who would no doubt use these same statistics to 'prove' the opposite - portraying black people as 'scroungers', as the problem. Employers are the problem so they're the ones who should be hassled and assessed. Race statistics have always been used to promote racism, never to fight it.

In March '83 IAGOU produced leaflets on the checks, including a tear-off slip to hand in when signing on, saying "please note that I refuse to be monitored for my ethnic origin.". At this stage the government postponed their plans, but by the end of the year it seemed they were ready to try again. So after a lot of leafletting, flyposting and visiting other groups, the inaugural meeting of the Islington Campaign Against Racist Checks was held at the Centre in December, with guest speakers from the Black Healthworkers and Patients Group and others. The turn-out was appalling - most of the black groups contacted had said-good luck, but had their own agendas of struggle and many people leafleted outside the dole offices expressed anger but felt nothing could be done until the checks started - and the campaign remained the work of IAGOU. The publicity continued, including a live interview on Radio London, and soon the campaign spread, so that in February '84 the London Campaign Against Racist Checks was set up, made up of unwaged groups, dole staff and others. Much of that summer was spent leafletting at various festivals, and the meetings, when held in Islington, would often go on till the early hours of the morning (but business was always finished in time to pop over to the pub) and generally campaigning was combined with having a bloody good time.

In August the government decided to have a test run of the checks at various dole offices - they had already done test-runs so it was obvious that what was, being tested was the amount of resistance. Demos were held at Holloway, Peckham and Brixton dole offices when the tests were supposed to be carried out there. About a year later they tried again - again there were demos-and a one-day strike by

the staff. Another year on they tried it in the Job Centres, where for many reasons people felt less threatened by it so there was little resistance, but now that the Job Centres and dole offices are to be re-merged, the struggle is being taken up again. [15]

At various times there were attempts to campaign against the Youth Training Scheme etc, against benefit cuts, and for concessions at council sports facilities - (successful) and at cinemas, Arsenal, public transport etc (unsuccessful). Some fun was had at a show put on by the government as part of their 'review' of benefits. They held a public (though practically un-publicised) series of discussions between representatives of the government, business and a few liberal organisations. The result of this farce was a foregone conclusion, so IAGOU and some of the Claimants Unions booed the show off stage, drowning it out with whistles and loud conversation. Unfortunately the performers were allowed to leave the stage unharmed despite being outnumbered.

The question of how to effectively campaign over the level of benefits, our standard of living, was always a major problem. Obviously the unemployed (as opposed to other sectors of the unwaged - ie 'housewives') are not in a position to strike, but can still be very disruptive to the system. Our current level of income is due in part to past disruptions, and the state's attempts to avoid them in future. What would most encourage the state to increase benefits would be a situation where large numbers of the unwaged (and waged) were already directly taking more, through mass looting, mass fare dodging, rent strikes etc. in which case demanding increased benefits would be irrelevant - the important thing would be to extend this real power instead of legitimising the state by making demands of it. On the other hand there is the possibility of waged workers taking up the demand, especially when fighting redundancies, but IAGOU do not seem to have directly suggested this to any workers. Instead the idea of an increase, or of a Guaranteed Minimum Income were used in effect as a way of explaining other campaigns and struggles (we should get more/a GMI because... so we're demanding/doing X) or as an alternative/opposition to the demand for jobs. Meanwhile they

encouraged shoplifting, benefit fraud, squatting, careful tampering with meters, eating the rich etc.

5) Change of Members

By the first anniversary of the Centre's opening there was only one person left running it, it was opening very irregularly and there was no money as the GLC grant was late as usual. Some people had actually found jobs while others had just got sick of putting in a lot of work for little return, and waiting for funding to come through, or had their time taken up with other struggles. Fortunately two new active members turned up within a couple of months and helped get things going again, while some of the less active members returned once the Centre was opening regularly again. But when the last of the original activists left, in early '84, all continuity had been broken. The new members had to gradually discover the group's history, contacts in other groups etc, and deal with the bad relations inherited from past disputes. Having not taken part in the long struggle to get the Centre and funding, the new members tended to take them for granted, and took the threats from the council and GLC less seriously than they should, while they also lacked the experience of fighting these authorities. And as they had not been part of the original collective process of deciding what the Centre was for, and because of the need to get more people involved, they often felt unable to impose their views on those who wandered in, meaning that at various times the place was a centre for local kids to wreck, or for the propagation of ultra-leftist ideology, or whatever. The film-shows, which were originally chosen for their political and social content, to encourage discussion and activities, degenerated into showing whatever it was felt would attract the most people, although the best attended showings were actually on Nicaragua and the Amsterdam squatters riots. Also there were the ever-present problems - that the activists became a group of friends who tended to mould the centre and its activities around themselves, making it more accessible and attractive to their friends than to the majority of the unwaged; that the smallness of the group always limited its actions, so putting off more people from joining in; and of course the many people who came along

NO MORE CUTS!



We are gathered here today to complain about the government's latest round of benefit cuts and to listen to speeches from people who have never come under the boot of the D.H.⁴⁴ but pretend to represent us who suffer it every day. And the whole show has been arranged by a bunch of concerned liberals to pretend that things are being done for us.

Those of you who bother to talk to your MPs will no doubt find that they are not at all surprised that we don't like money being taken away from us, and that despite their facade of concern they will do nothing for us. The government doesn't need liberals to tell them that we want more money, and we don't need their preprofessional patronising concern.

We had to fight for everything we get now, and we do not get enough. Most of us have some fiddle to get by; the point is to resist together and effectively. ⁴⁴fraud squad officers, bailiffs and those sent to cut off gas, electricity and phones must not be left free to walk the streets and make our lives miserable. Shop security guards and ticket inspectors can be dealt with easily when we act together.



We will not be forced into the degradation of accepting shitty jobs just to be able to survive, of undercutting the wages of those in work or being used to threaten striking workers' jobs.

The only cuts we will accept are to the throats of those who would see us as slaves

In Spain, especially Madrid and Barcelona, shortly before the Civil War, workers used to go around with pistols and nobody dared ask them for money - free food, free transport... But then Franco & his cronies decided it was time to put the workers back in their place, and brought along bigger guns much to the delight of the bosses. Then in Italy, in the 70s, they didn't need guns - they'd all storm in together, take what they wanted and storm out again before the cops came. Everyone who happened to be in the store at the time would join in, and anyone who got in the way would just get pushed aside. By the time the cops arrived, the only people left would be the Maoists who would be standing on tables explaining why people should pay for the 'real' value of the goods but not for the bosses' profits. This time it was mainly the 'Communist' Party that put the workers back in their place, bringing tanks out on to the streets of Bologna, where indiscipline was threatening the profitable running of business.

In some of the most militant mining areas, where the miners have been unable to pay their bills for 7 months, fuel workers have refused to go in and cut off supplies, some out of solidarity and some out of fear of the reception they'd get. In Glasgow, a group of unemployed workers cut off the mains to the Electricity Board Office to give them a taste of their own medicine, and organised an 'Instant Response Unit' to intercept employees going to cut off working class households.

DON'T LET THEM GET AWAY WITH IT!

Among those organising this day of passivity is the South East Region T.U.C. who are currently playing a manipulative and reactionary role in a dispute between users of Southwark Unemployed Centre and the Management Committee, over which they have certain power which they want to keep. They are totally against unwaged (or waged) people running their own affairs.

Won't pay? Can't pay!

MORE than 2,000 blacks were arrested for non-payment of rent yesterday when South African police swept on compounds near Johannesburg. The blacks said they could not pay because they had burned down the rent office.

"After a number of meetings and considerable discussion it proved impossible to reach a reconciliation with the Islington Action Group of the Unwaged, who proved consistently adamant in their view that the (Islington Unwaged) Centre should be run and controlled by the unemployed. Unfortunately this is not a position that the TUC or regional TUC is prepared to accept.

T.J.Stevens
organiser, Services for the Unemployed
S.E.R.T.U.C."

These people are only worried about the fact that long dole queues mean less members for them to control. They even talk about unionising the Youth Tramping Scheme instead of destroying it. All they demand for us is, 'bigger cages, longer chains'

We don't need cops like this to tell us how to run our affairs or to mediate between us and those in work. If we want to get anything done, we must do it ourselves, in solidarity and direct contact with others in struggle, and with those who will be told to put the cuts into operation.

ASTMS News

ANDREW LEWIS, aged 16, a YOF trainee was killed whilst operating a bag-flattening machine. He had been taken on as a laboratory trainee but the company asked for his programme to be changed to include general factory process work. In compensation for their son's death his parents received a cheque for £78. The firm was not prosecuted.

Daily Mail
Thursday, September 6th 1984

Youth training ban scuppered

A MOVE by the town hall union Nalgo to pull unions out of the Government's Youth Training Scheme was heavily defeated after Clive Jenkins, leader of white collar union ASTMS, said the TUC could not 'walk away' from youth. The scheme gives 400,000 youngsters work experience.

In September we were here for Norman Fowler's farcical 'Social Security review', which they were forced to abandon half way through. We are here again today with our anger, our derision and our will to fight and live.

This leaflet was written and produced by unwaged people from;

Unwaged Fightback, 355 Holloway Road N7
Molly's Cafe, 287 Upper Street N1
and others

Join us or organise yourselves to
FIGHTBACK !!!!!

Teenage benefit threat

Many Conservatives agree that a way should be found of taking teenagers off supplementary benefits, perhaps by extending the range of child benefit. They believe it would encourage school leavers to take steps in government training schemes and reduce their reliance on state-paid jobs. The move would herald a fierce political battle in the Cabinet with some Ministers unwilling to take such a radical step at a time of rising unemployment.

Review officials are believed to have made detailed proposals for taking hundreds of thousands of individuals off the supplementary benefit list.

A PLAN to take away from teenagers the automatic right to supplementary benefits is one of the radical options being considered by the Whitehall review into the social services, writes our political staff.

The review, announced by Social Services Secretary Mr Norman Fowler in April and expected to produce a report early next year, is also considering plans for means-testing child benefit above a certain income level and the removal of the housing addition to pensioners' supplementary benefit.

These proposals, not yet set to Ministers, indicate that the review is likely to suggest sweeping changes to the benefit system.

expecting someone to fight for them or organise them. But through the Centre being constantly kept open, and through constant campaigning and events, new people were attracted and the problems gradually confronted (to return in other forms).

By the summer of '84 the Centre had again become a real centre of activity, with the campaign against racist checks leading to meetings and actions all around London, the miners strike, with miners using the Centre as a base, and the group doing collections and visiting some mining areas, and the start of threats from the GLC leading to trips to County Hall to graffiti counter-threats and leaflet their festivals, and many other things.

But as the racist checks were postponed and the GLC threats went slowly through the bureaucracy, so losing their immediate importance, what was left was the political line and posture the group had taken on the miners' strike. This, along with the political affiliations of the two main activists had attracted a few ultra-left politicians from outside Islington, and for a while all that came out of the Centre was propaganda that had little direct relevance to the unwaged of Islington.

Meanwhile, another centre had been open for sometime in Islington. Molly's Cafe was a squatted centre in Upper Street, about a mile away from the Unwaged Centre, with a vegetarian cafe and various activities. It had been started mainly by punks who had been involved in previous squatted centres, the 'Peace Centre' in Roseberry Avenue [16], the anarchist bookshop in Albany Street [17] etc. and in 'Stop the City' [18]. For some time the two centres ignored each other, IAGOU sinking into isolation in its centre and opposed to the anarchism of Molly's, while the Molly's crew were put off by their expectation of another council-run community centre. But eventually they got to know each other and started working together – the Tavistock Square Claimants Union was set up at Molly's with publicity printed by IAGOU, together they set up the Islington Housing Action Group, and a day of videos, speeches and discussion on Ireland was jointly organised at the Unwaged Centre.

It was the day on Ireland that finally brought to a head the dispute between the ultra-leftists and the other users, including the activists from Molly's. In political terms the dispute was over self-organisation: in principle both sides were for it, but for the ultra-leftists this meant producing propaganda attacking manipulators, forms of organisation that restrain struggle, recuperation of struggle etc, so that the Centre and its resources were there for them to use as they saw fit, as representatives of this 'correct' ideology. But for the others the resources were for the direct self-organisation of the unwaged (and others) irrespective of political position, for developing our struggles according to our experience. Two of the ultra-leftists in particular were making the atmosphere unbearable – one was constantly critical of everything without any positive suggestions and easily wound up to a tantrum, while the other took pleasure in winding him up, hid the best paper for his own pamphlets, ignored most of the people coming in, and finally wrote stupid graffiti across a poster in the window for the day on Ireland, having made no attempt to take part and so express his views constructively.

At that time the weekly meetings had again stopped, as IAGOU as such was not doing a lot, except with the people from Molly's who, although they were using the Centre more and more, had not got directly involved in running it. To break out of this rut, a package was put together and put to everyone involved – expulsion of the two disrupters, and new activities for the Centre with meetings again. A special meeting was held for the expulsion and the result was a forgone conclusion, the expellers having organised the invitations to the meeting. One of the expellees recognised this and didn't turn up, having paint-bombed the front of the Centre the night before in protest, but the other tried unsuccessfully to justify himself. A new issue of Unwaged Fightback magazine was started and various activities organised to defend the Centre and restart campaigning, which gave new life to IAGOU, but with a new, informal power structure based around a few of the activists who were moving into a squat together.

6) Miners & Others

1984 was the year of the miners' strike, and IAGOU, like many other groups, joined in by collecting money etc, joining pickets and demonstrations, and encouraging solidarity among the unwaged (and waged) of the area. Two groups of miners used the Centre at different times, as a base for organising collections, meetings and trips to speak to other workers - first from a pit in Staffordshire, and when they found a less chaotic (and more officially approved of) base a branch from Sunderland moved in. The money collected by IAGOU went, at various times, to these two groups, to strikers at a Nottingham pit, a Women's Action Group (mainly miners' wives) in Derbyshire and to the families of miners imprisoned for their part in the struggle. This was always organised directly, rather than through official union channels - when the Staffordshire lads were met on a demo in the early days of the strike, their regional union treasurer was supporting the scabs and refusing to pass on money to strikers, while towards the end there was the fear of the money being sequestered, but the main reason was that the group wanted direct links, so that ideas and experiences could be shared, and so that the miners would know who the solidarity was coming from and why, rather than it appearing to be the work of the union bureaucrats. Collections were held at least once a week outside Sainsburys, two jumble-sales were held, and a large window display (made famous by the Islington Gazette) encouraged passers-by to come in and donate. One guy who came in said that he had just been interviewing Margaret Hodge, the council leader, and the only way he felt he could make himself clean again was by donating a fiver to the miners. An attempt to collect toys for miners' children for Xmas failed, but food and money were donated instead, and a couple of Islington shops donated toys without knowing it.

From early on in the strike it became obvious that the miners were not going to win on their own, and that the government was trying very hard to avoid any other important section of the working class entering into major activity at the same time. So IAGOU, like others, stepped up their encouragement of workers' activity, they joined a picket for a one-day dock strike, distributed a leaflet by Central

London post workers at the Islington sorting office, supported the local nursery workers' strike against understaffing, made a poster calling for real action on the TUC-called 'Day of Action' ... There was a lot of talk around of the need to open up-a '2nd Front' against the state, yet IAGOU managed to avoid the obvious conclusion of what they themselves were saying - that they should have been stepping up their struggle as part of the unwaged movement. IAGOU were fairly weak at this time, which to some extent explains why they looked elsewhere for the '2nd Front', but they were weak because they were constantly looking elsewhere. Once the racist checks were postponed they had little contact with the dole and DHSS offices, but instead waited for the masses to be attracted to the Centre by their extremist political proclamations. The reason for IAGOU's existence, that the unwaged must organise and fight their own battles as part of the wider working-class movement was effectively forgotten, and they relegated themselves to the position that the left had tried hard to impose on them and that they had always resisted, the position of individual supporters of the struggles of the waged and of a particular political line. Of course the unwaged movement must support the struggles of other sectors of the working class, and the miners' strike was a very important struggle, but the development of unity depends on each struggle becoming a catalyst for the others. The threat by the DHSS to reduce strikers' miserable benefits by the amount of any donations should have been fought at the Islington DHSS offices, along with more general threats against benefits. The state's attempts to make energy production more profitable should have been fought from the other end, through struggle for concessionary rates for (or free) fuel. Discussion should have been started among the unwaged on what the strike could mean for them. Despite having miners using the Centre, they were never asked to speak at a meeting there. The one aspect of the strike that IAGOU did take up and try to encourage to other sectors, was the necessity of using all possible means and force to fight our struggles.

Generally IAGOU made great efforts to support, and encourage support for other struggles, such as the Newham 8 (eight Asian youths arrested and charged for defending their community against racist

attacks) the nursery workers' strike, the struggles at Kingston and Southwark unemployed centres against their managements. But IAGOU seemed to have great difficulty in keeping permanent contact with other groups, partly through the turnover in active members, partly through the constant rise and fall of other groups and partly through quarrelling.

In the beginning relations with Islington Trades Council were fairly good, especially with the Labour left. The Trades Council was dominated by the Communist Party, not because they were in a majority, but because they were the ones willing to take responsible positions and do the work, and because they had contacts (and party links) with the regional TUC and other Trades Councils. On the question of the Unwaged Centre (as on all other questions) they followed the TUC line - that centres should be run by paid workers and controlled by a management committee dominated by the council and unions. But the Labour left were more supportive of IAGOU and used this, and other issues to depose the CP and take the leading positions. This was the time of the council's defection to the SDP, and when Labour won the new elections, these new Trades Council leaders had become councillors, leaving the CP back in control. Despite the differences, the chair of the Trades Council did a lot of work to get the centre and became a trustee of the building, but in April '83 he resigned this position and tried to stop the council funding because of his (and other 'responsible authorities') lack of control over day-to-day running. He claimed that as the money was controlled only by the users themselves, they would 'take the money and run'. This left relations rather bad. The Trades Council still had two delegates on the Centre's admin committee (with four from IAGOU) but for a long time meetings were very irregular, and a formality when they did happen. And IAGOU had two fraternal delegates (meaning they could only speak when spoken to) on the Trades Council, but they only attended to make sure they weren't being attacked, and to enjoy the outbursts of the secretary, who would explode at the mere mention of IAGOU. This situation suited the newcomers to IAGOU, not only because it left them free from any interference, but also because of their view of unions as bureaucratic

organisations, controlling workers' struggles and dividing them. Of course at local level most union delegates and officials are still workers, often radical workers critical of the leadership and bureaucracy, but as long as they see the union as the organ for struggle, and seek merely to reform it, they strengthen it, and so those manipulators and parasites most fit to run it, and sabotage the power of the working class, to spread its struggles across all imposed boundaries and fragmentation, and to directly seize power and the wealth we produce. Unions exist to mediate between us and our enemy (assuming and imposing their right to exist) and between us and other groups of workers. Those who run unions can never share the direct interests of their members, and do not even have to pretend to have common interests with those not in the union, who must therefore be kept separate.

IAGOU always saw themselves as an active minority, not as representatives of anyone, but to some extent this is also the true position of local union delegates. They are often elected to positions of 'representation' because they are active and willing to do the work - because they are an active minority. But as they take up positions in the hierarchy (on the grounds that it is better for them to be there than someone worse - the excuse of all reformists) they get caught up in the machinery of representing 'their' members (so requiring majority support before doing anything, no matter how important they consider it) representing the union's decisions and-actions to the members, mediating with the boss, more and more meetings..... To break with the union structure means not only to lose the restrictions imposed by it, but also the support for (some) struggles that comes from official recognition. The fact that support is dependant on going through the 'correct channels' shows how different this is from solidarity - in fact through 'replacing' solidarity, it represses it - although rank and file activists are constantly battling to create something meaningful out of the empty form of words and gestures behind which each union continues to carve out its own kingdom of separate interests.

Anyway, when IAGOU were forced to turn to the Trades Council for support against the threats of the council and the GLC, they found they actually had quite a lot in common with some of the delegates. Relations with activists from the DHSS staff were particularly good - IAGOU often joined their pickets and took up their campaigns, while they kept IAGOU informed of goings-on at their offices and were the most active in the struggle to keep the Centre open. There were also good relations with delegates from the 'voluntary sector' (council funded groups, advice workers etc) who were often involved in similar struggles with the council. While the Centre was finally being evicted, a housing advice agency was being victimised and then closed down because of its campaigning, and publicising of racism in the council's housing allocation. IAGOU also started getting involved in some of the Trades Council run campaigns, such as the campaign against the privatisation of the health service, which was effectively sabotaged by the health workers' union rep (a member of management!) who complained about the campaign being run by non-health workers, while ensuring that 'his' members could not get involved. Again IAGOU became one of the main issues dividing the CP leadership from the left majority, and eventually the chair and treasurer resigned and the secretary was voted out.

7) The End of the Centre

It was in May '84 that the first suggestion was made by the GLC that the funding would be cut off. At this point the only reason given was that IAGOU was not considered a priority, but when other groups started writing letters of support, a list of reasons came back - "the irregular hours that the Unwaged Centre opened" which had been sorted out eight months earlier, "the smallness and relative unrepresentativeness of the group running the Centre", whereas they now wanted centres run by a couple of paid workers, and control over spending (in particular money given to Wageless Women so that they could control their own struggles). IAGOU answered these points and started trying to improve the Centre, by redecorating (now that the building works weren't going to happen) more publicity and trying to get input from other local groups. Groups were invited to meetings to

MORE STAFF...

Today the DHSS staff are on strike as part of their struggle against their appalling staffing levels, so we won't get anything out of them today, but at least we don't have to wait all day just to be told they can't help us.

Like us, the staff have found the conditions at DHSS offices unbearable - of course they actually get paid to be there, unlike us, they don't have to wait for hours in crowded rooms with no facilities, and they don't have to rely on us to get their money, but the point is that whichever side of the counter you're on, DHSS offices are hell! and the government has plans for further staffing cuts (a benefit cuts) to make things even worse.

The staff are stuck between their employer - the state - which wants to give us the bare minimum (so we don't all go out and start taking what we need) while constantly harassing us so we don't start enjoying ourselves, and us, who obviously want to get as much as we can without being harassed.

The vast majority of the staff work for the DHSS not because they enjoy telling us that we can't have any more money or that our file has disappeared in a heap of red tape, but because they need the money. And like other workers they have little control over their work - their only real power being the refusal (individual or collective) to do what they are supposed to, like today.

Not that a one day strike or not answering phones will really change anything. An indefinite strike would worry the government, as they know that without giro's we're going to be even more angry and might get out of control, or if the staff started avoiding the red tape and just gave out giro's to those who needed them (all of us) it would hit them where it hurts - in the pocket, and would disrupt the discipline they want to impose on us.

BIGGER GIROS

If you want a job, then why not try for one at the DHSS. They aren't actually offering any at the moment, but it'll keep up the pressure for them to increase the staff, and you might be in with a chance. Write to:

Norman Fowler
Minister for Health and Social Security
Alexander Fleming House
Newington Causeway SE1

to complain about staffing levels and ask for a job.

Of course this strike is going to affect us a lot more than the government - its up to us to show that we won't accept the conditions they keep us under.

*Millions of pounds of benefits go unclaimed each year because they don't let us know what we're entitled to. You could be entitled to a heating allowance, laundry grant, furniture or clothing grant and numerous other benefits. Check what you can get and claim for them (and maybe as they're so badly staffed, they won't have time to check up so much).

*The Special Claims Control Unit (SCCU), employed to spy on claimants and intimidate us have been made totally ineffective in many areas, by claimants getting together to disrupt their activities and staff refusing to co-operate with them. Other DHSS and dole office harassment can be dealt with if we can make sure that they can't pick us off one at a time. We all have to find ways of resisting poverty, and if the state doesn't approve of our methods, that's their hard luck.

There are many ways of surviving and resisting, but the state are stepping up their attacks and we have to find new ways of struggling, and join together to discuss tactics and make our struggle more effective.

To swap ideas and join forces, come to our meetings, Wednesdays 2pm or any weekday 1-5, or contact the Haringey & Islington Claimants Union, Crouch Hill Rec. Hillrise Road N19.

Islington Action Group of the Unwaged 355 Holloway Road N7
FOR EFFECTIVE DIRECT ACTION 607-82711/2
GIVE THE UNWAGED BLANK GIROS!

discuss the direction and running of the Centre, but none turned up (not even the Latin American groups which used the Centre for film shows and meetings) - when they were invited to regularly use the Centre (so freeing IAGOU from having to be there all the time) only the Claimants Union showed any interest, and eventually set up a new branch there, which only created confusion in the Centre. The local GLC councillor was invited round so that IAGOU could put their case to him, but instead he was only interested in putting the GLC case to them, showing who he really represented.

Then in September the Centre became front-page news in the local rightwing rag (and even got a mention in the London Evening Standard) when they noticed one word in the window display, and blew it up out of all proportion. Apart from the many inaccuracies (the most obvious being that about £40,000 was received, not £60,000, the group's accounts were already in the hands of the council, although a bit behind, and the "poster saying Suspend the Bosses" were actually stickers saying 'Support the Bosses') most of the group were pleased at the publicity, and thought unwaged people would be attracted by this image. But apart from a few people popping in to say 'if the Gazette is against you, you must be OK', this didn't seem to work. The identity of the man 'who visited the centre regularly' but claimed that 'people like me can not go in there' was never proved, but he was believed to be a member of the Socialist Party of Great Britain who was upset at being refused access to the duplicators for his party propaganda, and who was later seen at the Gazette office. There were some fears for the safety of the Centre, as a Gazette front-page attack on the Community Press a couple of years earlier had been closely followed by a fascist fire-bomb attack, but for some reason the Centre was left alone.

After this the council and GLC made it clear that they were really objecting to the group's campaigning;

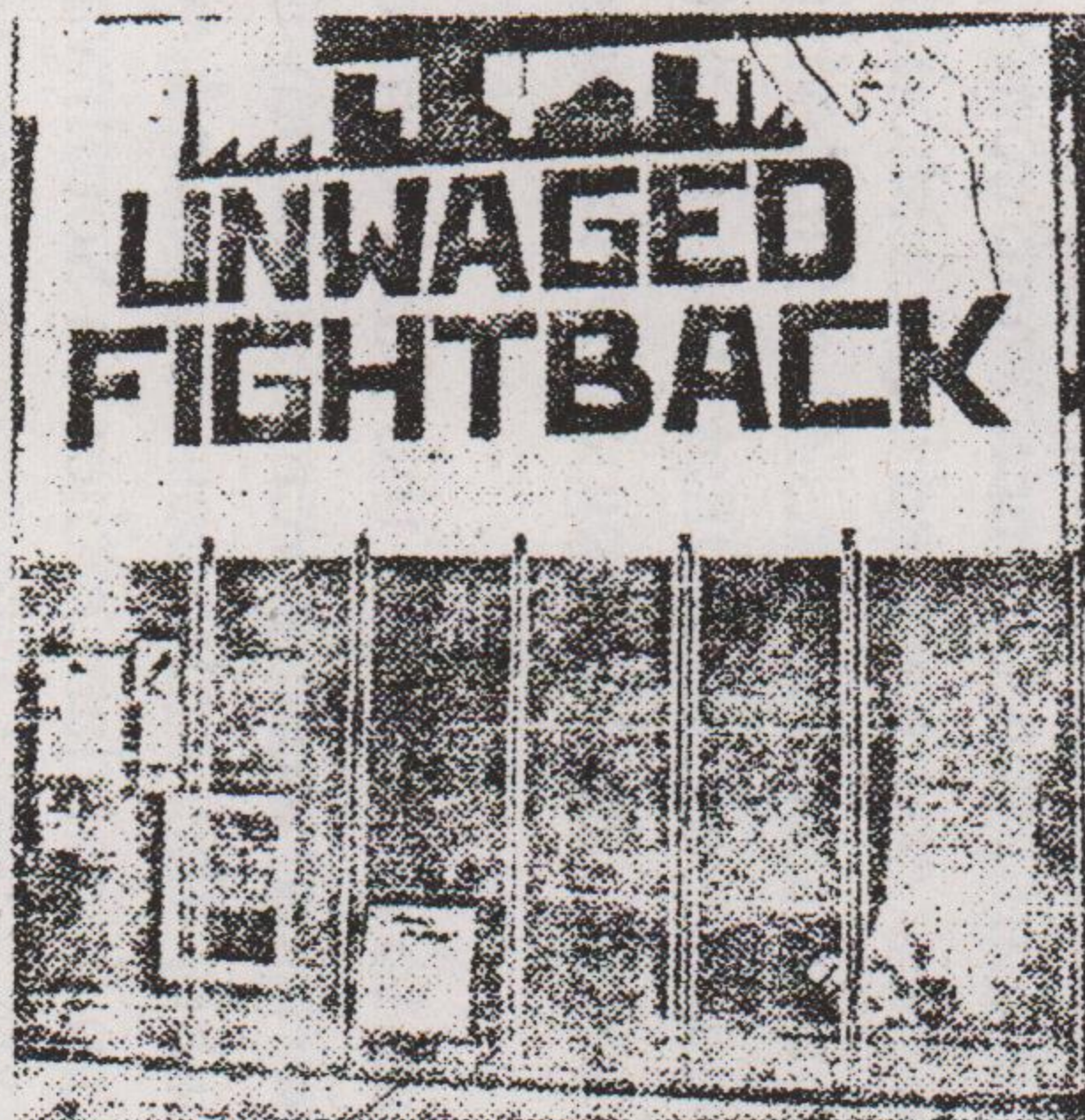
"You have a radical libertarian approach to the problems of society... the activities you wish to carry on are sometimes incompatible with receiving public money" (GLC)

"I am concerned that the philosophy of IAGOU is that of a political campaigning organisation rather than a provider of services" (Islington Council)

Of course IAGOU were not against services for the unwaged. They gave advice and support, cheap tea and coffee and-sometimes meals, somewhere to meet, films etc, but all this was seen as part of organising, not as servicing. The council wanted to be able to say "look what we're doing for the unwaged", IAGOU said "come and see what we can do for ourselves". Between April and August '84 a record was kept of visitors to the Centre - it varied from 3 to 20 a day (more for some films) which compared reasonably with other centres, and it would have been hard to fit many more people in, but the council were not impressed, or even interested. They decided to organise trips to other centres to see how they worked, first to the Reading Unemployed Centre. Any comparison with Islington was impossible; it had 24 paid workers, a lot of room and money and no facilities for campaigning - the delegate from the Chamber of Commerce was most impressed. Then to Southwark, where the centre was at that time being occupied by the users. There had been a long-running battle by most of the users and workers against the bureaucracy, manipulation, racism and sexism of the management committee, and when, in October '84, a black woman worker was harassed and assaulted by members of the management committee, they took over the building. But as far as Islington Council were concerned Southwark was a good example of how an unwaged centre should be run, and their report did not mention the occupation. The final visit was to Greenwich, which had a good centre but at that time no active unwaged group, partly because some of the leading activists had become workers there.

IAGOU had to admit that the other centres supplied a better service, but because they were given the money to do so. For example they were probably the only centre around without their own minibus, making them dependant either on Southwark for lifts (to mining areas, to support the Camel Laird occupation, to lobby the TUC, to demos etc) or on the council social services, who would not allow their minibuses for 'political' use (their office was only two doors away, so

**Council, GLC /
halt grants**



THE CENTRE in Holloway Road — a window display invites passers-by to donate bricks to striking miners.

Picture: Tony Gay

PROTEST FACTORY' IN CASH PROBE

AN EXTREMIST group which has been collecting bricks to donate to striking miners is in danger of losing the cash backing of Islington Council and the Greater London Council.

Islington Action Group for the Unemployed — which runs premises called Unwaged Fightback in Holloway Road — has received more than \$80,000 from the left-wing councils over the last two and a half years.

But the group has been dogged by financial troubles, political rows and personal conflicts.

And its latest campaign — an appeal to passers-by to donate "money, food, essentials, booze, fags, cars, bricks and anything else you can think of" to striking miners — has sparked fresh controversy.

Critics of the centre have dubbed it a "protest factory" — claiming it is a front for the production of revolutionary propaganda.

Now Islington Council and the GLC are saying: enough is enough.

They are threatening to withdraw cash support from the centre unless there are radical changes in the way it is run.

The group was set up to run the premises as a drop-in centre for

By CAROLINE HOLLAND

the unemployed — but now the centre is said to be guilty of over-spending and under-use.

A spokesman for Islington • Turn to page 2

• From page 1

question of an organisation being responsibly run.

"The council has certain ground rules which must be met by any group seeking public funds. There are certain fundamental points this group falls down on. There have been long and lengthy discussions trying to get some form of constitution which will meet the council's approval."

Michael Ward, chairman of the GLC's employment committee, said: "We shall wait for results of improvements suggested by Islington. This must include improvements in the number and representativeness of users and opening hours of the centre and satisfactory work on the building."

The group claims it is being victimised because it rejects ties with political parties.

Secretary Neil Arksey said: "We are accused of being loony left anarchists but we reject labels like that."

"We do not want the centre to be taken over by anyone from any political party. It's easy for party

birds to take over and dominate."

Mr Arksey admitted that some members of the group encouraged violence to achieve political ends but said the appeal for bricks was "partly tongue in cheek."

"Most of the people who use this place are not opposed to violence but that does not mean we exclude those who are," he said.

The group has received more than £14,000 from Islington Council and over £47,000 from the GLC, including £11,000 for building repairs.

Last year it had its Islington Council grant cut by nearly £1,000 because it had overspent its budget.

The council has now set aside a grant of a further £3,000 which will only be released if the group satisfies the council's employment committee that changes are being made. The committee considers the matter on Monday.

Speaking for the GLC, Mr Ward said: "We would be happy to reconsider funding if these changes are made to our satisfac-

tion, and we were confident the centre was effectively run."

The group has also fallen out with local trade unionists.

It lost the support of the Islington Trades Council because of disagreements over the running of the centre.

John Watson, a trades council official and a co-opted member of the council's employment committee, resigned as a trustee.

The group has refused to allow political parties to use equipment or display posters at the Unwaged Fightback premises — including the Revolutionary Workers Party and the Socialist Party of Great Britain as well as the Labour Party.

Mr Arksey commented: "One of the big problems this place has is that many people on the left have the attitude that if you are not in the Labour Party or a Communist then you are an anarchist and part of a conspiracy."

"We are not hostile to people who disagree with us, we welcome that. But I do not think it should be so hard for the council to find our politics in line with their own."

'Let's see accounts' demands SDP chief

ISLINGTON COUNCIL and the GLC have been accused of financing a "protest factory" at the Unwaged Fightback centre.

Islington Council SDP opposition leader Councillor David Hyams said: "From what we hear goes on there, the group can hardly be surprised that they might lose their grants."

"This protest factory is typical of the kind of tokenism on which Islington and the GLC splashed out ratepayers' money."

"But the second thoughts are a bit late in the day — after £64,000 has been spent."

Councillor Hyams has called for a detailed investigation into the spending of the action group.

He added: "Islington Council never keeps a tight check on how its grants are being spent."

"I hope a full set of accounts will be presented to the employment committee before any further outlay is contemplated."

**'They're
preaching
revolution'**

THE UNWAGED Fightback centre in Holloway was set up to provide an advice service for the jobless and to campaign against unemployment.

The Islington Action Group for the Unemployed's secretary Neil Arksey claims the centre deals with "streams of desperate unemployed people."

But its revolutionary propaganda has upset some users of the centre.

As well as appealing for bricks for striking miners, the centre has also distributed stickers saying "Arm the working class" and displayed posters saying "Suspend the bosses," which shows a man hanging from a rope, says one unemployed Holloway man who visited the centre regularly.

The man — who asked not to be named — said the group has only a small number of members and the centre was sparsely equipped, with little more than papers and photocopiers.

"I don't know what they could have spent the money on," he said.

"I am in favour of change — but I want to see it through peaceful means, through Parliament and the vote. They are pushing violent means of changing society. There is no doubt that people like me cannot go in there."

"It seems to me that the GLC and Islington Council have wasted a lot of money and it has taken them two years to realise they have made a big mistake."



when a minibus was requested "for a trip to Kew Gardens", they could see an advert in the window for a trip to a demo in Newham) and they were only allowed to specially qualified drivers, which IAGOU didn't have after March '84.

The council then started talking about setting up a new centre, which IAGOU certainly didn't mind - apart from the original problems with the building, the heating system had exploded with a torrent of boiling water, the damp was eating away the floor and wall at the back and the head landlords, having refused permission for alterations, were now demanding restoration work that had been included in the plans - but the important point was how the new centre was to be run.

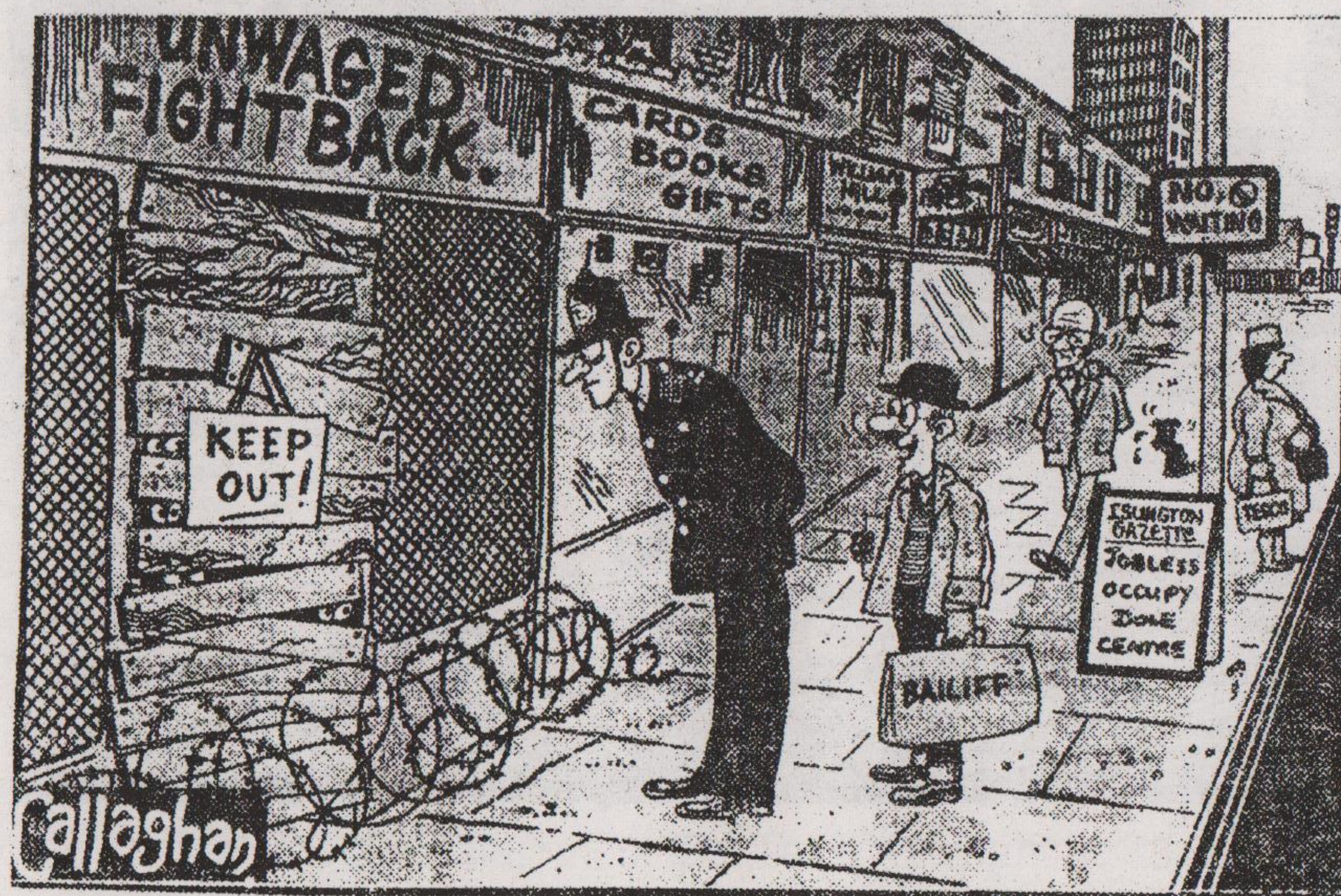
In May '85 IAGOU drew up a new proposed constitution, including paid workers, greater concentration on services and wider representation on the admin committee. The council ignored it and told IAGOU to disband, and in July gave them 3 months notice to move out. Then in October they invited IAGOU, the chair of the Trades Council and Starting Point (an unwaged youth project in south Islington) to a meeting to discuss the new centre. At this meeting they brought out their proposed constitution (which most people had not seen before), shrugged off all criticism with "it can be changed later", and effectively told those present that they were the management committee for the new centre. All the non-council members resigned these positions as soon as they returned to their groups to discuss it. The meeting also organised a trip to see possible sites for the centre, except that the council didn't organise their part, so that out of three proposed sites, only one was found, and even with this one nobody knew which part of the building was available, but it was totally inappropriate anyway. The council put their proposals, not agreed by anyone else, to the GLC and got £30,000 from them for the 5 months to the end of the financial year. £30,000 for a non-existent centre, and IAGOU were accused of wanting to 'take the money and run'. The Trades Council tried to get the constitution reopened for discussion, and the Centre kept open until the new one actually existed, but they only managed to get a statement that IAGOU might be allowed to stay until 31st December. The new centre of course never came about.



But IAGOU weren't going to disappear without a fight. On October 15th they held a demo outside the council meeting at the Town Hall. Only about 30 people turned up, plus 20 council workers who were demonstrating about something else but had forgotten their leaflets. Only one person from the other London unwaged groups turned up, and none from the Trades Council.

The best bit was that some housing association had supplied free food for the council as a bribe, and demonstrators wandered in to partake, as did some local kids attracted by the chant of "Islington cares, food upstairs". There was some heckling during the meeting, but a group of the activists managed to get locked out while trying to get permission to speak.

On the evening of October 18th IAGOU started their illegal occupation of the Centre with an all-night party, and from then on the place was occupied 24 hours a day, with a rota for nights. Posters from the original attempt to occupy the place were rediscovered and stuck up everywhere. A benefit gig was held at a squatted centre in Wood Green, which made some money, mainly on the drinks. The



"Don't worry officer, they'll be out soon — they have to sign on tomorrow..."

NICE FESTIVAL

Welcome to the last of the GLC's south-bank festivals. They've been quite fun, but of course the GLC wasn't all festivities - there was the serious business of running one of the world's largest cities, keeping things going as smoothly as possible, resolving conflict and sustaining order among a vast population. Behind the show, the wheels had to be kept turning, business had to continue.

'If (the police) gave up some of their pen pushing and bureaucracy, they could get officers back on the streets dealing with crime - including the sale of drugs.'

Red Ken July '81

In the Summer of '81 the authorities were stunned by the anger of the inner-city communities who took to the streets to directly confront their misery. They saw they were out of touch with 'their clients', especially the young, black and unemployed, who saw no common interest with the various structures of the state, and threatened to bypass their control. They answered with the Scamman Report, 'Racism Awareness Training' (a con designed to add an 'anti-racist' veneer to racist, oppressive institutions) and various forms of community policing.

'Black Kids support what I said about the police.'

Red Ken August '81

COMMUNITY POLICING

For the GLC and other local state bodies, the task was to integrate sectors of the community into their structures, so they could know in advance where peoples anger lay, and defuse it with harmless campaigns, as issues for them to firmly stamp with 'funded by the GLC' - to promote a benevolent face for the local state.

Ken & Co like to pretend that our problems are merely the unfair excesses of the system - ie that women and black people can't sell their labour on the same terms as white males, rather than the fact that we have to sell ourselves to survive, to constantly create a world outside our control. This way they can portray us as passive victims in need of their patronizing concern, like their modernized soup-kitchens for the unwaged, with workers to service and organise us.

At first some independent groups, formed from the daily struggles of women, black people, the unwaged and other sectors of the working class did manage to get funding, but were gradually either integrated or weeded out. Some were destroyed by the contradictions between the informal structures necessary for their struggle and the bureaucracy imposed by the funding requirements, others learnt to toe the

SHAME ABOUT THE UNWAGED

line as they became dependant on funding, others were taken over by those who could best deal with the GLC - those in line with policy. Those that remained openly independent simply had their funding cut off under some pretext, while with other projects struggles for control and autonomy are still blowing up.

'Being a spokesman for a generation is the worst job I ever had'

Red Ken Billy Bragg

The GLC, like other state bodies, tries to deal with autonomous struggles by posing as the representative of the community as a whole, as opposed to us plebs who are merely fighting for our own interests. Always the state fragments the community, and poses the fragments against a mystical whole - themselves. Of course they were elected, but with what choice, and we never had a chance to choose the structures, which work against us whoever holds office.

Now the GLC is going, its spirit passing on to the House of Commons and leaving us pretty much where we were when Ken & Co took Coughy Hall - unemployed, exploited, under attack from fascists and cops..... all the showbiz, committees, forests of glossy leaflets, and hot air have changed nothing. And now thousands of GLC workers don't know what's going to happen to their jobs, and hundreds of projects don't know what'll happen to their funding. No doubt the opportunity will be used to further weed out possible trouble makers.

Our struggles continue, whatever authorities, parties or other manipulators try to control and divert us. Ken and his friends do not know what it's like to be unemployed, black, gay, a woman, homeless, a GLC worker - those that did, have learnt to replace their experience with ideology. Only through direct struggle against our own particular and common oppression, can we learn our strength. Only when we fight for ourselves, against the mediation, fragmentation and lies of those who would keep us isolated as clients, voters and workers, can we join in common struggle to create a new world.

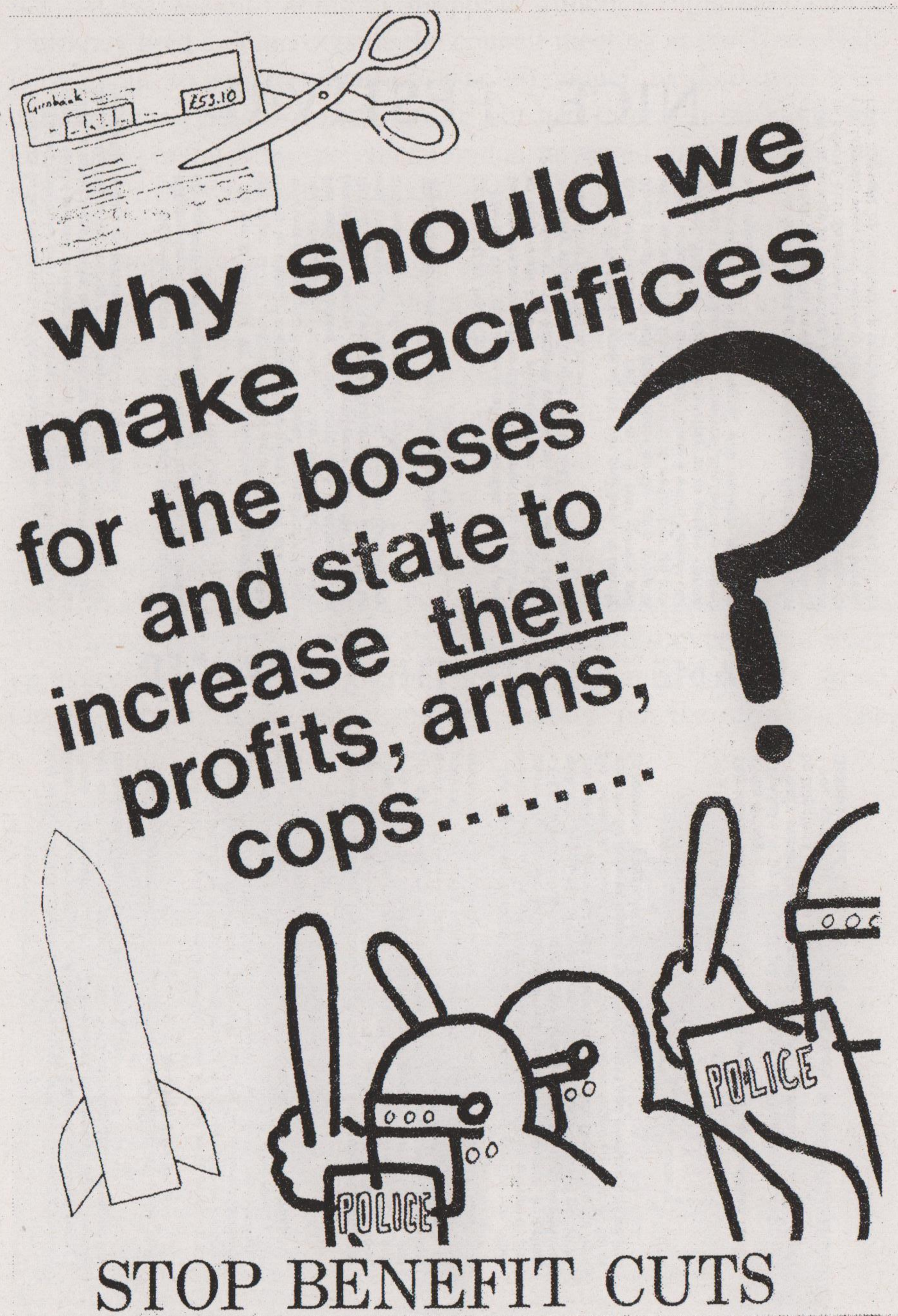
This leaflet was written and produced by the Islington Action Group of the Unwaged.

funded a bit by the GLC and Islington Council until March '85

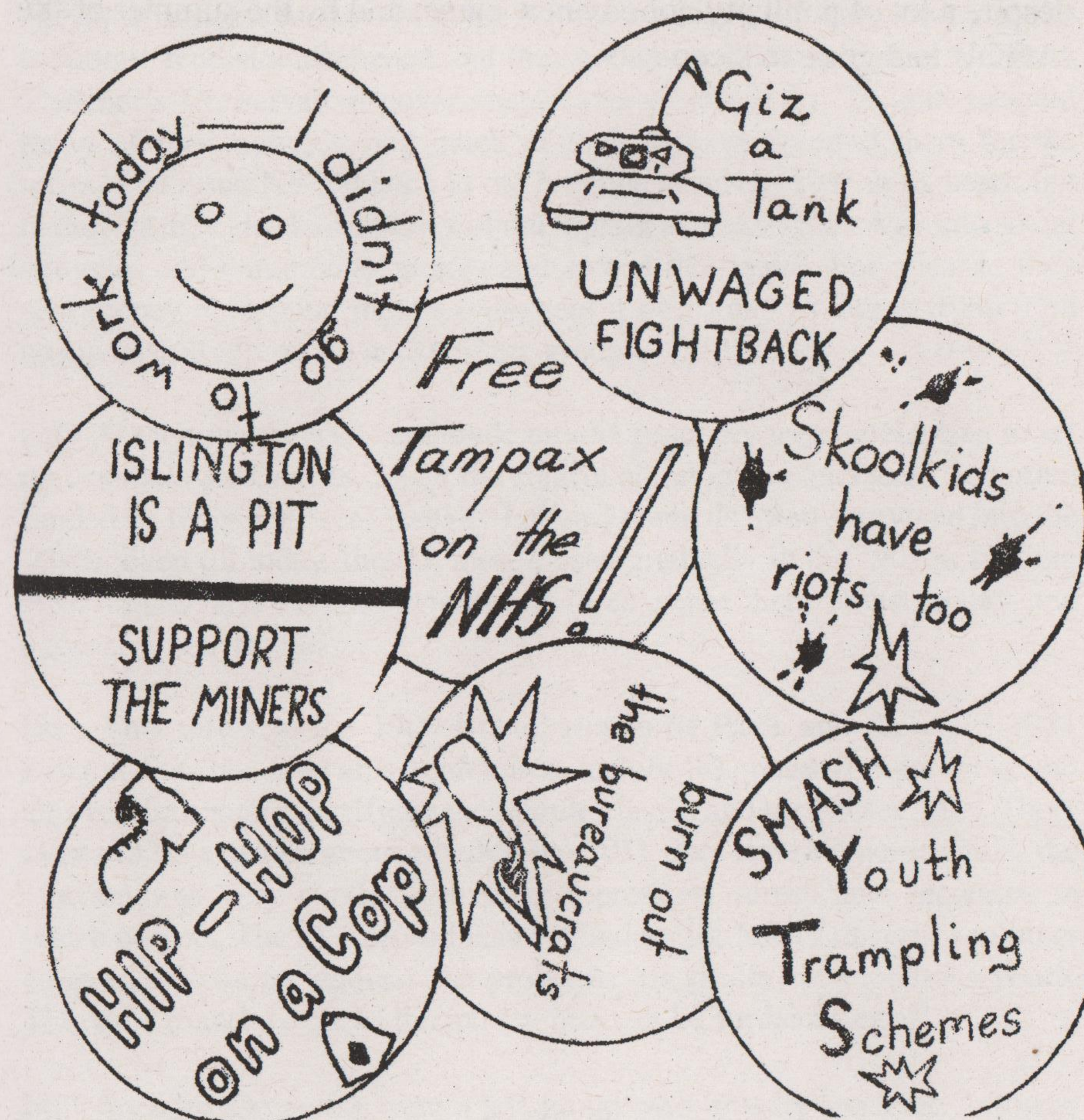
finally evicted from our centre (run and controlled by the unwaged) by Islington Council in February '86

you can write to us c/o 4 Cranworth House, Lavender Estate, Holloway Road, London N7 9SS

Islington Gazette 25/10/85



occupation raised people's enthusiasm for a while as publicity was organised and new campaigns planned. An 'unwaged Xmas Presence' was planned to attack the misery of the festivities, but as the time got nearer people lost interest. It became obvious that it would not be practical to try anything more than a symbolic defence of the centre and by the end of the year the important issues became where the equipment and meetings could be moved to, and selling off the equipment that couldn't be taken with. The idea of occupying the Town Hall or some other Council building when the eviction took place was discussed, but people were getting bored with occupying. The phones were cut off (with about £2,000 owed), the equipment packed up, and the occupation fizzled out. The Centre was finally



evicted in February '86. After 20 months the building is still empty.[19]

Meetings continued at an office in Essex Road, but most of the members had lost interest, including some of those who still came. Great efforts were made to attract new people and remain public - the GLC farewell festival was leafleted, a public meeting organised on the chaos at the DHSS (which nobody came to) and a demonstration was called on the night of the council election against whoever won, but the turnout was pathetic and everyone went straight to the pub.

They moved again, to a new squatted centre in Upper Street, but despite a lot of publicity nobody new came, and by the summer of '86 IAGOU had gone to sleep.

Notes

These notes were not part of the original text - we at past tense have added them to help people who may not remember the 80s, (shurely shome mishtake? ed.), or who may not have followed the intricacies of the politics of that fabled era... However, they are brief points, not detailed analyses of the group/policy/benefit to which they refer; apologies to anyone who knows all this and finds our explanations simplistic.

[1] - NF: The National Front, a rightwing nationalist group, pretty similar to the BNP or EDL of today (who in fact began as a splinter-group from the NF); basically blaming immigrants for all the problems in society and campaigning to "send them all home", as well as encouraging and carrying out racist attacks. In the 1970s the NF for a while grew very strong as the economic recession deepened, but they collapsed effectively after Margaret Thatcher's Conservative government came to power in '79, and adopted many of their policies, and much of their support deserted them for the tories. The rump NF fell back to the hardline neo-Nazi core at its heart; but in the 80s they also had a policy of attempting to weasel their way into social struggles and community groups and spread their shite. For instance they sent money to striking miners (who sent it back) and as late as 1989 tried unsuccessfully to set up anti-poll tax groups.

[2] - At the time the TUC and trade unions generally were attempting to set up Unemployed Centres, under the control of union bureaucracies, and often funded by them and local (usually Labour) councils. Many survived into the 1990s, even till today, though most closed gradually in the '90s as funding grew tighter and Labour's rightward lurch made them embarrassing and expensive anachromisms.

[3] - This refers to the 1980 Bristol riot in St Pauls and the April 1981 Brixton riot. Just after this conference, in July '81, massive riots broke out all over the country, terrifying the middle classes and the bosses alike. There seems to be a debate about whether the 2011 riots were bigger in scale; the reaction was very similar - massive repression, arrests and increases in police powers. The 81 riots did lead to funding for lots of measures in inner cities to try and to 'address the problems' (ie pacify) of rebellious youth. This time round we guess the money may not be forthcoming...?

[4] - Socialist Organiser were a left group who broadly speaking followed

the ideas of Russian 'revolutionary' Leon Trotsky. SO had a policy of organising inside the Labour Party at that time (as did many other 'trotskyist' groups); they succeeded in taking control in some local Labour party branches and thus came to run local councils like Lambeth in South London. The group were gradually expelled from Labour as it became New Labour and ditching the 'extreme' left seemed necessary so as to become electable/respectable to middle England. Socialist Organiser have now mutated into the Alliance for Workers Liberty.

[5] - DHSS: the Department for Health and Social Security, the central government branch running the Health Service and all areas of benefits and welfare at the time. In 1988 Health and Social Security were separated into two Departments; so the Department of Work and Pensions is the DHSS's modern successor. Many claimants in the 80s just called them the SS after everyone's favourite nazi unit.

[6] - Hackney: the London Borough next door to Islington.

[7] - UB Press: refers to Unemployment Benefit, now replaced by Jobseekers Allowance (via numberless changes in identity).

[8] - Wal Hannington was a leader of the National Unemployed Workers Movement, a national organisation of the unemployed (which existed 1921-46). After the first world war, Britain saw mass unemployment; the NUWM was formed from the upsurge in unemployed groups that sprang up to campaign for improved benefits and facilities, better treatment from the authorities, etc... Grounded very much in the socialist and working class movement of that had grown up before the war, it came to be dominated by the Communist Party of Great Britain. Hannington and other CP members, while clearly dedicated working class activists, undeniably steered the NUWM away from its early powerful locally based strengths towards a concentration on stunts like the hunger marches, and centralised the Movement to the point of sterility. Nevertheless, particularly in the early years, the NUWM achieved many gains for the unemployed. Wal Hannington's book, *Unemployed Struggles 1919-36*, is well worth a read; though for an objective account, read *We Refuse to Starve in Silence* by Richard Croucher; and for some unpleasant truths about NUWM and Hannington's tendency to manipulate and control working class people in the Communist Party's interest, check out *Sylvia Pankhurst*, by Barbara Winslow.

[9] - Occupation of a disused Islington Library: this was Essex Road Library, used as a meeting point by the local unemployed group, post World War 1 (see previous note). After being granted the use of this empty building, they were told to leave, but barricaded themselves in. The Council cut off power and water but food, candles and water were brought in. After holding it by force for a few weeks, in December 1920, E. H. King, Islington's first Labour mayor, ordered the police to eject them; cops stormed the library early one morning. King described the group as 'unemployables'. The growing radical disillusionment with the Labour Party was reinforced in September 1921 when the majority of the Labour Guardians voted to withdraw an increase in outdoor relief (the main benefit of the time) to which they had earlier agreed.

[10] - SWP: the Socialist Workers Party, a left group who are still around, (and unlike Socialist Organiser, see prior note, have not changed their name). Not orthodox trotskyists like S.O., much larger in numbers and more opportunist: they have had more front organisations than Michael Jackson had prescription pharmaceuticals. These days the SWP pretty much consists of students, though in the early '80s they had more working class members. What has not changed is the SWP hierarchy's basic policy of exploiting all struggles to recruit members above all other considerations, obstructing anyone else trying to get anything achieved who doesn't want to join the party, having the attention span of a distracted toddler, and attempting to centrally control everything.

[11] - Greater London Council: the old administrative body for the whole London area (replacing the old London County Council). In its day it had responsibilities broadly similar to the modern Mayor of London and GLA, but it also ran much of London's social housing and alot more besides. In 1981 the GLC changed hands from Conservative to Labour, and came to be controlled by the Labour Left, headed up by Ken Livingstone; they adopted a left program and increased funding for community groups and voluntary sector, especially organisations that fitted their broad socialist agenda. The press stereotyped the GLC as funding 'loony left' minority projects - "taxpayers money is supporting one legged black lesbian mothers against the bomb!" etc. These policies brought the GLC into conflict with the tory national government, not only because the GLC opposed the tories politically, but also because a central plank of tory policy was cutting back state expenditure, especially by cutting the amount local or regional authorities could both raise (in rates etc) and spend. Despite a high profile

campaign and a lot of public support, the GLC was abolished with other (all Labour-controlled) Metropolitan Authorities in 1986.

This really isn't the place for a debate about the merits of the GLC; its funding definitely allowed many projects to exist or continue that enriched life in London and improved conditions for millions of people, and its abolition was part of a process of restricting alternatives and closing down opportunities that have life harder in London for many. Much of this was down to social and economic changes, as well as political policies. On the flipside, some of its actual policies involved more posturing than effective change, and the 1980s GLC leadership had a record of backing down on them when it came to the crunch. The Council was not only bound by the restrictions of modern capitalism, but at the time those rules were being changed dramatically: Livingstone and co were on the losing side of the argument as to how modern capitalism should be managed.

[12] - MSC: Manpower Services Commission. An agency set up by the British government to co-ordinate training and employment in the UK, working with employers, trade unions, local authorities and educational institutions... The MSC promoted the idea that all these bodies had a role in improving training and education for people looking for work or while in work. In the '80s it was heavily involved in government employment programs like the Youth Training Scheme. It was replaced by 72 regional Training and Enterprise Councils.

[13] - SDP: The Social Democratic Party. In 1981 sections of the right wing of the Labour Party left, deciding that the party had become dominated by the 'extreme left' and by too close association with the trade unions. This was why they had lost the 1979 General Election and would be unelectable. In Islington council, Labour councillors defected en masse, so 'seizing power' for the SDP. The Social Democratic Party briefly became achieved popularity as a 'centre party' (as well as being promoted by the media as a stick to beat Labour with). Later they formed an electoral pact with the Liberal Party (then at a low ebb of support), with whom they eventually merged to form today's Liberal Democrats. Ironically the Labour Party did in the late 80s and 90s move very much in the direction the SDP had taken.

[14] - SPG: The Special Patrol Group, the Metropolitan Police's riot squads; basically, dealing with serious disorder and crowd control. Now called the Territorial Support Group; the name change became necessary Public Relations as the SPG became synonymous with violent police assaults,

killings of demonstrators, institutionalised racism, and invasions of 'trouble spots', eg Brixton, and systematic harassment of residents, especially black youth.

[15] - We're not sure, but we think DHSS race checks were never revived. If anyone remembers different please let us know!

[16] - The Peace Centre in Roseberry Avenue (in Finsbury, South Islington): one of, if not the, earliest anarcho-punk squat centres in London. Occupied 6 September 1983 as the Peace Centre/Alternative Centre, an organising space for the September '83 Stop the City (see below), it lasted a few weeks.

[17] - The anarchist bookshop at no 36 Albany Street, in Euston, was a successor to the Peace Centre in 1983, based in an area of mass squatting for both housing and alternative projects, around Tolmers Square and Drummond Street. The anarchist paper Class War was briefly based at the bookshop.

[18] - 'Stop the City' was a series of actions in the City of London and spreading elsewhere, roughly 1983-84, coming mainly (though not entirely) from anarchist punks involved in the peace movement, aimed at City institutions and corporations funding nuclear and other weaponry and war, but widening out to an attack on capitalism generally. Thousands would gather on one day for demos, occupations, graffiti, aiming to try and disrupt daily corporate life, at least for a day. While early on large numbers and new tactics caused chaos in the City, by the later actions the police just swamped STC and arrested or dispersed everyone they could. Stop the City as an idea continued to inspire others towards similar tactics for a couple of decades though, and many of those involved formed the backbone of many activist groups and projects over the 80s and 90s and till the present.

[19] - The building remained empty for some years, but is now (2011) a Dentist's Surgery; ironically, it's one of the few in the area that accepts NHS patients, among whom is one of our own past tense crew!

The Past Is Before Us...

Caps on Housing Benefit, cuts in Disability Living Allowance, Cuts in JSA, Incapacity claimants being cut off, proposed cuts in JSA... the list is endless and getting longer. We can accept cuts, cut our own throats, or fight back...

We aren't endorsing the politics of these groups, in whole or in part, and there are certainly useful organizations not listed here because we don't know about them... These groups can also put you in touch with others in your area.

London Coalition Against Poverty

A coalition of groups based on the idea that through solidarity and direct action, ordinary people have the power to change our own lives.

Email: londoncoalitionagainstopoverty@gmail.com

<http://www.lcap.org.uk>

Edinburgh Coalition Against Poverty

Formerly Edinburgh Claimants - organising around hassles with the Benefits authorities, bad conditions and insecurity at work, harrassment by sheriff officers and debt collectors, soaring electricity and gas bills, and rip-off landlords and housing problems.

<http://edinburghagainstopoverty.org.uk>

Boycott Workfare

Workfare - compulsory work for benefits - is being rolled-out across the country. BW call on public sector bodies, voluntary organisations and businesses being offered these placements as well as union branches to boycott the scheme.

Email: info@boycottworkfare.org

<http://www.boycottworkfare.org/>

Overheard at the Job Centre

A blog set up by claimants, unemployed workers and low-wage workers to share gripes and all the nonsense we get at the Jobcentre and from the welfare system. With record unemployment people all around the country are dealing with the same shit and getting treated badly on a daily basis. This is a place we can share our stories, work out ways to support, defend one another and develop a united voice.

Email: overheardatthejobcentre@gmail.com

<http://overheardatthejobcentre.wordpress.com>

Nottingham Claimants Action at

<http://www.afed.org.uk/nottingham/claimants/>

has great links to other groups, ongoing and upcoming struggles and more...

Welfare Watch

A blog for sick/disabled/elderly benefit claimants and their carers to campaign on issues affecting welfare and benefits.

<http://welfarewatch.info/blog/>

After ATOS

Atos Healthcare adminster the medical test for claimants on diability benefits that examine their ability to work, ie are aimed at forcing people off incapacity benefits.

Excellent insight into the impact of Atos on claimants can be found at

<http://afteratos.org/>

Benefit Claimants Fight Back

<http://benefitclaimantsfightback.wordpress.com/>

Diary of a Benefit Scrounger

Share information on welfare cuts

<http://diaryofabenefitscrounger.blogspot.com/>

Campaign Against Disability Benefit Cuts

Disabled people, those with long-term conditions and their families are being hit hard by cuts to the benefits and services they need to live their lives. The Hardest Hit campaign brings together individuals and organisations to send a clear message to the Government: stop these cuts.

<http://thehardesthit.wordpress.com/>

False Economy

Action map to find your local campaign against government cuts -

<http://falseeconomy.org.uk/campaigns/uk/all/t1>

Ipswich Unemployed Action

Fighting for the rights of the unemployed in Suffolk

<http://intensiveactivity.wordpress.com/>

And in Islington... the struggle continues

Islington Poverty Action Group.

Advice & campaigning on problems with the benefits system and poverty.

Email: islingtonpovertyactiongroup@gmail.com