

In a graphic demonstration of why they won the election but are losing the economy the Tories upstaged the last day of the Labour Party Conference with their plans to abolish the GLC.

The white paper appropriately proposes to abolish the GLC and the six Metropolitan County Councils on April 1st 1986. Interim administrations will take over a year before that when the present councils finish their terms. Most municipal functions will devolve down to district or borough council level. Those functions requiring regional co-ordination — police, fire service, transport, education etc — will come under new joint boards made up of nominated representatives from the boroughs and districts. These will be under tight central govt. control over finances and 'freed' from 'political interference'.

The plans were greeted with widespread shock and dismay by the political factions in the various authorities to be axed. But even the most vocal protests by Labour Party placemen are riven with fatal contradictions. Ken Livingstone accurately called the plans a "pigs breakfast", but then implausibly claimed that no sensible politician would swallow them.

For the Govt. the proposal to abolish the

7 Labour controlled authorities is a "manifesto commitment". In other words a popular vote winner with few unfortunate strings attached. It is presented as a means of benefitting ratepayers by eliminating bureaucracy and waste. We shall see what if any these reductions in rates amount to. But its clearly designed to detract attention from Tory failure to abolish rates — a manifesto pledge in 1979.

It stamps on a conveniently vulnerable sector of the welfare state. From the start the Tories focussed on local govt. cuts which didn't involve arguments with their own civil servants. Their failure to achieve them through financial controls alone (the philosophy of the 'free market' and 'non-intervention') has compelled them to intervene politically. This failure of monetarism is being presented as an attack on entrenched bureaucracy. Deliberately unstated, but understood clearly, it is also meant as an object lesson in stopping Labour councils from preserving or extending their 'Welfare Empires' of social services, cheap fares, local investment etc etc.

Over the next 18 months Livingstone, Blunkett & co. will call it an attack on socialism, while the Tory wet and SDP

councillors call it a centralist attack on democracy. It remains to be seen whether the howls of the dispossessed ring louder than the noise of designer monkey-boots on marble corridors as rats abandon the sinking administrations. But for all the disunity in the ranks one message will be coming over loud and clear — that the interests of the working classes affected by the job losses, cuts in services, higher fares, rents and probably rates, decline in housing stocks and so on, are the same as those of the bureaucrats and politico's who will be forced back into business, parliament or the media. Perhaps most pernicious of all the 'public' debate over the form of capitalist state management will be used to reinforce the lie of 'democracy'.

Popular yarns of class war

INSIDE: Demand Struggles/Niggling Disputes/EETPU-SOGAT Dilemma/BT/YP/Our Reader Writes/More Appalling Subheadings/Jargon/etc e
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It's worth putting the abolition of the GLC into context. Local Government in its modern form arose in the mid 19th century. It was imposed by central government because of the need to force corrupt local oligarchies to provide adequate police forces and to administer a repressive poor law. These measures were designed to help create and manage a dispossessed working class, as available factory fodder. As cities grew up around the factories the need arose for sanitation and roads. Later still for education, health and housing measures to keep hold of the working classes packed into urban slums.

From the start councils were a focus for a conflict between 'conservative' and 'progressive' interests. These weren't divided on party lines - Birmingham was a model of municipal enterprise under a Tory administration. But by the end of the century the rise of socialist ideology among the managerial classes focussed this 'progressive' view of the production, education and allocation of workers on the Labour Party.

Once capitalism had extended its domination over the whole of society, the role of the 'progressives' in developing local management was achieved. The arguments since have been over the sort of management and the level of services, within the constraints imposed by the ability of the capitalist economy to generate enough profits to pay for it.

In the fifties and sixties, in conditions of relative economic boom, the debate was over the nature of management. This period saw the creation of the GLC and the Metropolitan County Councils in 1963 (by the Tories), and eventually local government reorganisation, accompanied by a corporate management revolution in the town halls, in the early seventies. Its ironic to recall today that when both Labour and Conservative govt.'s in the fifties took functions away from the boroughs and gave them to the county councils, there were shrieks of rage from councillors about this 'attack on local democracy'. Today we see the same accusations as powers are shifted back to the boroughs, in accordance with the need to reduce spending faced with a relative economic slump. The moans of the bureaucrats don't change. The working classes have no control to lose, only a place in the cheap seats at the 'democratic' charade. That doesn't change either.

After the initial phase of forcing local interests to adopt responsible management policies and to pay for them, the burden of finance began to shift. Early Govt. grants were only for such things as magistrates expenses in remanding prisoners and the wages of workhouse doctors and teachers. The first grants for sanitation weren't made until the 1870's. Today, by

contrast, the bulk of council finance comes from central govt. and from loans raised on the money markets. As the range of functions to be managed has grown, so have the sums of money involved. The main concern of central govt. switched from forcing local co-operation to restraining local spending. This has been a central govt. priority since the First World War.

Alongside this juggling of management roles is the steady development of single welfare services away from local govt. to being centralised state institutions in their own right. This has been a constant process since 1918 due to the need to

'depoliticise' these functions (ie. bring them under tight bureaucratic control).

Over the next 18 months all sides will be trying to persuade us of the necessity of their brand of "efficient democratic" management of our lives. The public debate will try to "involve" us in the decisions being made according to capitalist priorities. We may not be strong enough to get rid of them but we must refuse to be conned by any of it, and refuse to accept the extra burden of it. When they ask what form local govt. should take, tell them : a row of unmarked graves.

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ALL THIS WEEK IN YOUR TERRIFIC TEARAWAY TOILER !

TOILERS' PAPER

THE LABOUR MOVEMENTS OWN DAILY 'of the wankers, for the wankers, by the wankers'



Workers Playtime is produced by some members of the London Workers Group. It is not the public face or theoretical journal of the LWG. Articles reflect the thoughts, fantasies and inadequacies of their authors (in no particular order).

Playtime is intended as a forum for discussing the reality of class struggle. If you have something to contribute—news, feedback, whatever—we would like to hear from you. There is no editorial line—but that doesn't mean we don't know what we disagree with.

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The LONDON WORKERS GROUP is an open discussion group involving autonomists, councilists, anarchists and anyone else interested in workplace class struggle from a revolutionary point of view. It meets every Tuesday at 8.15, upstairs at the Metropolitan Pub, 95 Farringdon Road, EC1 (2 mins Farringdon Tube). Anyone is welcome to join in, except party recruiters. If you want to know more but can't face meeting us, or if you want a copy of our free bulletin (a stamp would be nice), write to the address above.

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Niggling Disputes

The strike in the Highland Fabricators oil rig construction yard at Nigg, which began on August 18th (the "Orange Juice" or "Hot Showers" strike depending on which bourgeois paper you read), is of interest as a classic example of a strike being used by the bosses as a means of getting rid of excess labour without having to pay redundancy money.

The Nigg yard owned by Highland Fabricators was one year behind on the construction of a hull for a tension leg oil platform for the Conoco company. The instructions laid down by Conoco for the welding work on the platform legs specified a very high temperature inside the legs. For this reason no one could work in this environment for more than half an hour at a time and free showers and orange juice were provided.

On returning to work from holiday on Aug. 8th the welders were told that all existing agreements were ended and that as a result they would lose many of their "privileges" — orange juice, showers, travel allowances etc etc.

The welders refusal to work under these conditions led to the company sacking them which in turn caused them to strike — the rest of the workforce (2000 or so) quickly followed suit.

Shortly after the strike began the bosses announced the sacking of the entire workforce and then offered 1600 selected workers re-employment under worse conditions.

The company then tried to re-open the yards using the workers who had individually accepted the new conditions. Attempts to bus in the scabs were frustrated by three days of mass picketing (sometimes involving up to 1000 pickets) which was supported by the wives and families of the strikers. One useful tactic involved distracting the police with the legal 6 pickets then, as the buses approached a whistle blew and a few hundred more rushed out of a nearby carpark and blocked the road.

On the 5th September a mass meeting

rejected a deal between the national union officials and the company (the strike still wasn't official) involving the withdrawal of redundancies but not much else.

Although rejection of the deal had been recommended by the shop stewards at this meeting, within a few days the stewards had "consulted" with the national officials and at another meeting on 16th Sept. recommended that the workers return to work with the threat of redundancies lifted but the other "details" "still to be negotiated". On Sunday 18th the night shift was back at work.

In cases like this it is common for rhetoric in support of the strike from the Left wing (of Capitalism) to involve some kind of moral outrage against the bosses "provocation". This just serves to reinforce the idea that strikes are things to be avoided, the result of "bad" management (and therefore should not be provoked by anybody) and that workers must accept their role as passive "victims" protected only by some kind of Code of Conduct setting out the rules of the game of capitalist exploitation.

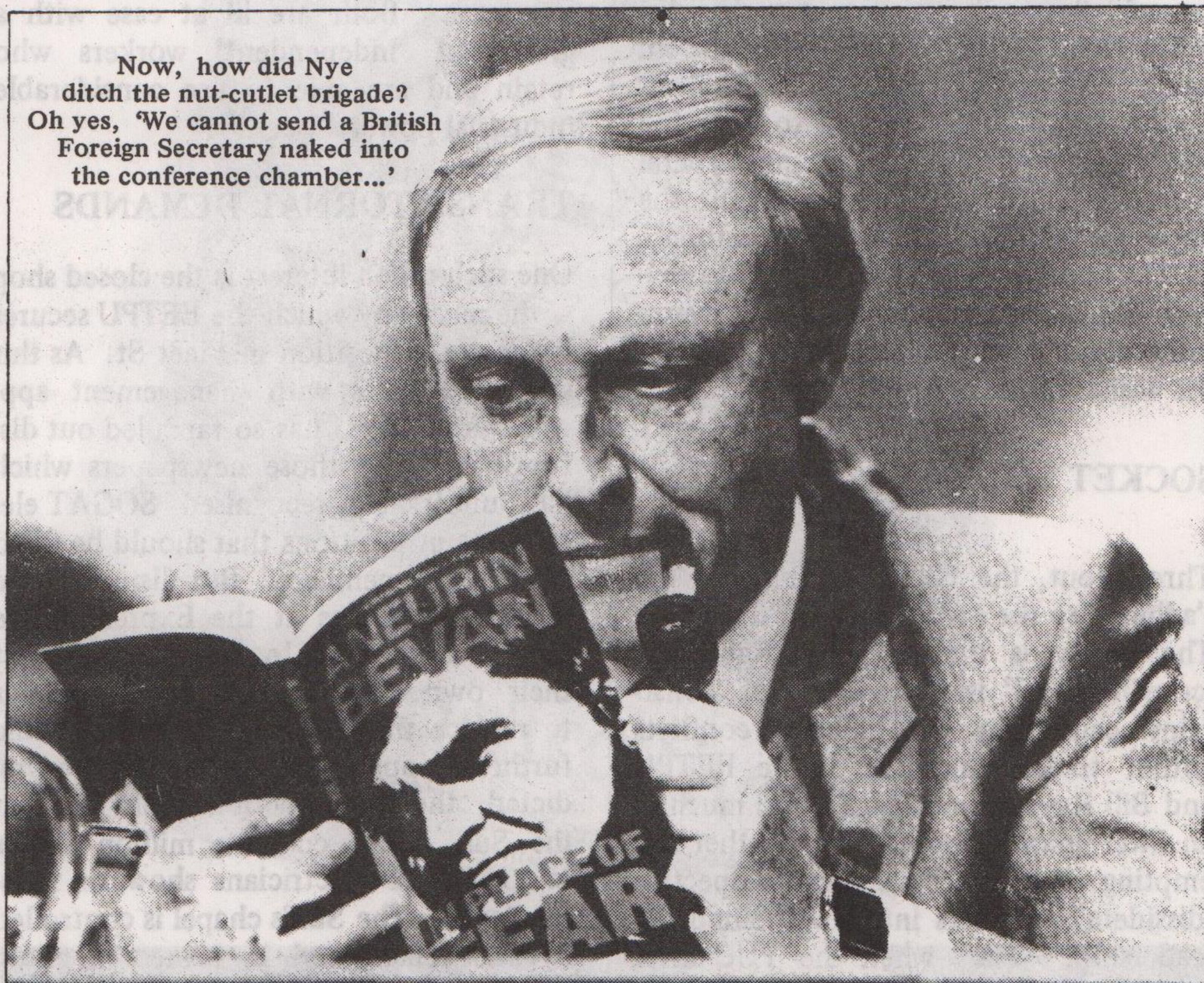
In reality bosses will do everything they can to increase the level of exploitation of their workforce, the only limits being the interests of the capitalist economy as a whole as enshrined in the laws relating to length of the working day, health and safety etc. (in so far as these are *meant* to be obeyed) and, more importantly, the extent to which workers will let them get away with it. The provoking of strikes is one strategy which is only to be expected.

In this particular case the bosses were faced with a collapse in the offshore oil-rig market and had nothing to lose by "trying it on" in this way. What is of interest is that this is one of the few occasions on which the workers were able to make some kind of effective response although in the time-honoured fashion the union was able to keep the struggle out of the hands of the workers and avoid any real confrontation. At least it didn't resemble the celebrated Jonestown massacre in which the workers quietly drank their orange juice before leaving on the bosses instructions.

In similar vein some of the workers involved in the Britains toy factory strike in East London recently (a strike sold out by the TGWU in circumstances paralleling the Aire Valley strike we wrote about in the last issue of Playtime), are said to have blamed the strike's defeat on "Over-zealous" enforcement of the picketing laws by the police. What they should have been talking about is how to organise the physical defeat of the police in the future.

There's no Geneva Convention in the Class War !

Now, how did Nye ditch the nut-cutlet brigade?
Oh yes, 'We cannot send a British Foreign Secretary naked into the conference chamber...'



Pulling the plugs on Fleet Street

The actions of a 'rebel' group of Fleet Street electricians in attempting to break away from one union - the EETPU - in order to join another - SOGAT - continue to create sparks in the TUC. These throw some light on the nature of Trade Unions, but more importantly lead onto the limitations faced by workers within the concept of unionism.

As outlined in the last issue of 'Playtime' between half and threequarters of the EETPU's Fleet Street membership have 'resigned' from the union, and have been given cards by the London Machine Branch of SOGAT 82. The EETPU has refused permission for the electricians to switch unions. Claiming that SOGAT had 'poached' their members, the executive pushed, with the help of Len Murray, for the expulsion of SOGAT from the TUC. The disputes committee have agreed that this should happen if SOGAT continues to accept the electricians who, in turn, have been ordered to rejoin the EETPU.

This, the electricians say, is out of the question. The London Machine Branch has said they will not accept such a directive from either the TUC or their own union. At the moment the SOGAT executive have actually voted to defy the TUC, against the wishes of the General Secretary Bill Keys. He maintains the hope that his executive will capitulate to TUC pressure. "I just happen to believe the movement stands above everything else..." which presumably includes the wishes of the workers.

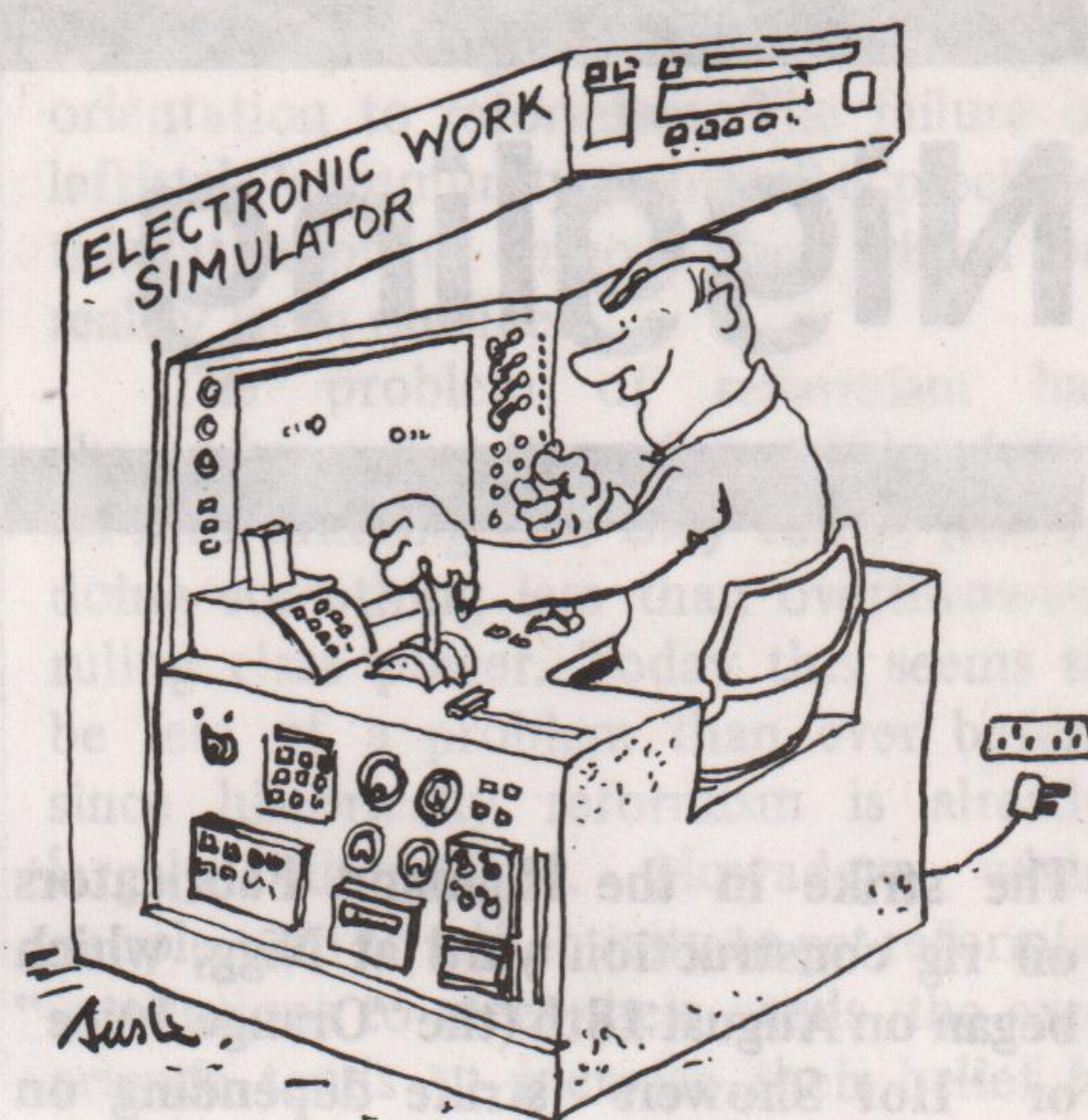
SOCKET TO 'EM

Throughout, the EETPU claimed it has "adhered to the constitution of the TUC" The reality is that it is not fighting a 'constitutional' issue but one of 'constraint' caused by the inherent conflicts within trades unionism. The EETPU and Bill Keys are not engaged so much in an inter-union dispute but are rather attempting to push back their respective 'dissident' members into line behind the leadership. Thus when the TUC disputes committee state it is in the best int-

erests of the electricians as *trade unionists* to rejoin the EETPU they mean that it is in the best interests of the EETPU and SOGAT leaderships that they do so. (The interests of the electricians as firstly union members and secondly, and distinctly as part of the working class will be discussed later.) Eric Hammond, due to take over from Frank Chapple as General Secretary of the EETPU has stated "We don't want to face up to the possibility of the electricians not rejoining our union. The consequences of them not doing so are too horrendous for Fleet Street". Too horrendous, that is, for Fleet Street management and the union leadership. Both are comfortable dealing with, and have vested interests in maintaining, a highly defined union structure. Both are ill at ease with a group of 'independent' workers who retain and are able to use considerable industrial power.

TRANSISTORNAL DEMANDS

One such union interest is the closed shop - the means by which the EETPU secures its powerful position in Fleet St. As this situation exists with management approval the EETPU has so far ruled out disruption against those newspapers which have unofficially recognised SOGAT electricians in positions that should be filled by EETPU members. But disputes have occurred, such as at the Express where trouble arose when loyalists tried to elect their own chapel (workplace) officials to replace the elected rebel ones. While further stoppages of this nature are predicted, the major action took place at the Sun, which cost 2½ million copies in a SOGAT electricians show of independence. The Sun's chapel is controlled by the rebels, and in protest a group of loyalists walked out of a chapel



meeting. Les Stevens, the new loyalist secretary of the EETPU London Branch decided to investigate. The rebels then 'pulled the plug' - stopped production - in protest at his interference in what they regarded as the affairs of another union - SOGAT.

CURRENT AFFAIRS

With the recession in print, the fate of the electricians could become significant to the future of print unionism. SOGAT has already readjusted its old largely skilled status in the merger, last year, with NATSOPA to become a more general print union. The continuing introduction of new technology and printing methods, plus the coming dispersal of Fleet St. to the Isle of Dogs means that an electrical branch of SOGAT, containing key workers in the production process, would confer greater and more flexible industrial power. Paradoxically though, the SOGAT machine room branch currently in dispute was formally NATSOPA and proud of its militancy. It has become disillusioned since the merger, realising that it can do, and has done, more on its own than as part of an 'industrial union' run by SOGAT officials. The NGA, the print union suffering most from redundancies and new work procedures (see the analysis in the last issue of 'Playtime'), has made it clear that it intends to recruit electricians if SOGAT is allowed to do so.

KEEP PLUGGING AWAY

These manoeuvrings by the unions, the usual desire of getting a larger membership, tend to detract from the manoeuvrings of the electricians. (For example they have hinted that if SOGAT gives in to TUC pressure they will try to join the NGA; thus playing on the rivalry of the unions.) The breakaway resulted from the rebels' differences with their union leadership; both in party/political terms and their seeking of more branch independence from the executive. The

limit of their rebellion is to challenge the power of local and national union officials above them. The form and character of unionism remains, essentially intact. They wish to retain the chapel/branch structure and all that it embodies: the elitest and defensive attitudes towards their craft status, a rigid control of jobs with the employment register in the hands of branch officials. The electricians in defending them against the EETPU executive wanting more control are doing so simply by seeking to attach themselves to another union which promises to allow them the 'independence' they require. This requirement is in order to carry on demand struggles within the narrow confines of their 'privileged' position in Fleet Street.

While the actions of workers to take control of their own struggles and interests from the hands of politicians and Trade Union bosses must be encouraged, this must also meet the need to challenge the sectional interests implicit in trade unionism itself. Workers in Fleet St. are already in a position to challenge or disregard negotiations undertaken by their union officials. This is in contrast to the ease with which officials sell out workers elsewhere. Because of their position in the production process, the historic strength of print unionism, and the nature of the industry itself (news is a very perishable commodity, and a few hours disruption can cost thousands of pounds in lost production), the electricians have secured a strong hand in negotiating the sale of their labour power. The move from the EETPU to SOGAT or the NGA is intended to give them a greater degree of self management in this sale.

This is their vested interest in the continuation of unionism. Unions are the embodiment of the control of labour,

they bargain for the continuance of capitalist relations. They are reformist, and for groups such as the electricians are accepted on that basis, for the quite genuine reason that their 'best' interests are served in this way.

In this society based on exploitation, people are obliged to fight for what they can get. There is nothing wrong with screwing capitalism for all that we can get out of it. The problem is that minor 'successes' can lead people to convince themselves that things aren't so bad. Or worse, that 'militant' struggles from unions or those 'prepared to fight' — or even the 'theories' of a new 'socialist' way of organising society — can benefit everybody without the need to challenge the basis of capitalist relations.

In Fleet Street reformist struggles (for higher wages, flexible working practises etc.) have in the past been won more than lost. While various sections of the working class can at times win various reforms, workers cannot win reforms for themselves *as a class*. Reformist unionism under the guise of 'social democracy' cannot benefit the working class *as a whole*.

For actions such as those of the electricians — a highly paid and industrially strong group of workers — to have relevance to other workers, a skirmish with the authority of union officials needs to become a battle against the tyranny of 'reforms'. And from that point on the final engagement of the class war is in sight — the battle against the ultimate authority, which is the authority of capital over our lives.

As yet it remains to be seen if union leadership is taken on. We are probably spectators in another variation of Fleet St.'s favourite game — not bingo but brink-

manship. The EETPU and TUC threatening to expel SOGAT, who in turn are willing to defy them to do so; the electricians threatening the closed shop and thus putting their jobs in jeopardy. But signs are of pulling back from the brink. Many electricians for example are holding dual membership of EETPU and SOGAT, waiting to see how the situation resolves itself. Few are totally committed to staying with SOGAT and never returning to the EETPU. And John Mitchell, secretary of the London Machine branch and vociferous in his support for the rebels will soon be tempering his stand now he is in the running to succeed Bill Keys on his recently announced early retirement.

The situation does, though, offer some interesting scope for speculation, for example the electricians forming their own independent union. While from the sectional point of view of the electricians this prospect is infinitely more favourable than being shackled to a union led by Hammond, who three years ago took a busload of trade unionist scabs through the GMWU picket line during the Isle of Grain strike, or Keys who three months ago was forcing the NGA back to work at the Financial Times, with, ironically, threat of expulsion from the TUC, this course of action offers no real answer. Trade Union history is littered with examples of breakaway groups, albeit usually conservative, who have been isolated in simply moving from their trade union to a 'union' based on sectional or local interests. The real necessity for the electricians is to break away from their narrow defence of status at work.

WATT A SHOCKER!

The other prospect is for the machine room branch to exert enough pressure to compel the SOGAT executive to stand firm in defiance of the TUC, and thus be expelled. This could open cracks in the TUC, which along with the crumbling away of the Labour Party could undermine the whole edifice of reformism in this country. But the TUC and reformism have survived the expulsions of unions in the past: SOGAT, no less, was expelled in 1972 over their acceptance of Heath's Industrial Relations Act.

The position of some craft workers in Fleet St. is virtually unique, as regards the industry and the unions. It is difficult to draw general conclusions from what happens there, either from common disputes with the management or from the specific confrontation of the electricians with unions. But the nature of reformist demands and attitudes can be pointed out, and the problematic attachment to unionism shown. The solution does not lie in a move from Chapple to chapel.

And from
the
Daily Mirage

CHAPPLE AND THE FAITHFUL

IT'S entirely possible that electrician FRANK CHAPPLE, chairman of this year's conference, would prefer not to be quoted on the following snatch of conversation over Clive's shoulder.

Union delegate to Mr. Chapple: "What's that motif you've got on your tie?"

Mr. Chapple, who has a few animals on his smallholding in Kent: "Sheep."

Delegate: "How many sheep do you have?"

Mr. Chapple, evidently



seized by a mood of light relief, replied: "Four hundred and twenty thousand."

This, they will be unhappy to have confirmed, is the approximate number of Mr. Chapple's total complement of union members.

Class Struggle - or just a Phoney War?

Recent howls of protest by trade unionists against the 'privatisation' of state-owned industry have focused on British Telecom. On 18 September a special conference of the Post Office Engineering Union voted for a 'flexible package' of industrial action to prevent the sale of BT to the private sector.

The rapid development of microelectronics and computer technology in recent years has changed the face of telecommunications. BT has become a clear target for a thorough rationalisation. As the pressure increases on national capital to raise productivity, businesses such as BT which have been relatively good places to work — offering a job for life at high rates of pay — will be forced to streamline their operations. The new technology makes this possible, and as usual it is the workers who will have to suffer for it.

Within this context, 'privatisation' cannot, as the union leaderships claim, be seen as the cause of the redundancies and speedups which have already begun. It is more a question of the particular strategy of the present government, in a given set of circumstances. As BT's chairman, Sir George Jefferson, recently stated, "Privatised or not, the future for the staff will depend on our performance in a very competitive market". We can take this future to mean increased exploitation for those staff 'lucky' enough to hang on to their jobs and the dole for the rest. When bosses talk about facing up to a competitive market, they invariably mean that when the shit starts to fly the workers should be facing the fan.

Competition in these infrastructural industries operates firstly on the national level. If they are not profitable, they become a burden on other firms' ability to create surplus value. The present government is hoping to increase profitability by breaking the monopoly of BT and opening telecommunications contracts to competitive tender: the firms which succeed in exploiting their workers most ruthlessly will be the ones that survive. That is why the govt. introduced the Telecommunications Bill. Since then a private telecom network, Mercury, has been set up,

and others are looking for licences by 1985. By that time the nationalised industry will have cut staff by 15,000.

Once the rationalisation has been carried far enough to make it a good business proposition, BT will become one firm like the rest.

The radical noises being made by the leaderships of the POEU and CPSA have as usual been in sharp contrast with the ineffectiveness of their actions — especially against Mercury and their backers (Cable and Wireless, Barclay's and BP). These actions, you may recall, were suspended just as they were gathering in momentum to allow workers to devote their energies to the more important business of Labour's electoral debacle.

EXCHANGE VALUE

At the time of writing an anti-privatisation work-to-rule has seriously disrupted BT's international section. BT is threatening 1,600 engineers with a lock-out if they do not break the work-to-rule, and persuading junior management to take over their duties. Management have already taken control of the two London international central switching offices. It remains to be seen whether the union will tolerate a widening of the dispute in response to British Telecom's tough line, and how far BT itself can exploit the dispute to impose rationalisation.

But the preoccupation with the dogma of Thatcherism obscures what is actually going on. Capitalist enterprise does not distinguish between 'state' and 'private', but only between good and bad business. The nationalised British Rail has already signed a deal with Mercury allowing it to lay its optic fibre cables alongside BR tracks. Money does not smell — it is only measured in quantitative terms. What

is happening at BT is just one particular expression of a much wider assault, which is being carried out in private and nationalised industries, under both conservative and socialist administrations.

The article which follows was sent to us by a BT worker, about how management are cracking down at Yellow Pages, which is being prepared to be sold off.

PHONE AND GAMES AT YELLOW PAGES

BT's relations with its employees used to be governed by a complicated and extensive system of rules and codes of conduct which made life fairly secure for the staff. That cosy and comfortable environment is fast disappearing now that BT has entered 'the competitive marketplace'.

Against a background of deskilling through computerisation, rationalisation and tightening control of the workforce, a young worker named Martin Shafer was recently sacked at Yellow Pages when a mistake appeared in a customer's advertisement. The word 'furs' in an ad for a fur trader was processed onto the computer as 'farts'. For some reason management decided that this was a deliberate attempt to bring YP into dis-

**NEARLY 34
MILLION PEOPLE
WALK THIS WAY**



**LET THEIR FINGERS WALK
TO YOUR ADVERTISEMENT**

repute — even though Martin had made no secret of the fact that he had put the ad into the computer, and even though the mistake could just as easily have been made by the key operator at the computer centre. There is in fact no conclusive evidence either that he did it, or that he did it deliberately.

DIAL-ECTICS OR THE PARTY LINE?

Staffing levels have been kept down in an attempt to impress the BT board (and potential buyers) with YP's efficiency. This has led to a tremendous backlog of work, the setting of unrealistic 'targets' and eliminating most of the vetting procedure before ads are published. Not surprisingly, the error wasn't discovered until the ad reached the presses. It was

amazing that it was spotted at all. After the text had been returned, copies soon filtered down to operations staff (to the immense amusement of all). No doubt this greatly contributed to management's outraged response when they found someone to blame.

It was treated as a 'serious offence' — usually reserved for such activities as stealing from BT, thumping your supervisor or screwing during work time. Of the range of penalties for such offences, dismissal is the most severe, and extremely rare.

After an interview with the personnel manager Martin Shafer was sacked. His department immediately walked out, and none of them turned up to do overtime that weekend. At a branch general meet-

ing of the CPSA on the following Monday (actually held to discuss a management decision to move the business to Reading from its present site in Holloway — a move which will probably result in redundancy for most of the clerical staff) demands were made for further industrial action such as an overtime ban and more walkouts. National officers of the union and some branch officials said no action should be taken as it could be prejudicial to Martin's appeal. Since the appeal is to the General Manager of YP — who undoubtedly approved the sacking in the first place — the idea that anything could prejudice it is pretty sick.

Staff at Yellow Pages are under no illusion about what this sacking means for

Contd. page 11

The Hierarchy Of Power Semantics

In the beginning was the Plan and the Strategy
And the Plan was without form and the Strategy it was void.
And darkness was upon the faces of the Level Ones
And they spake unto their Level Twos saying
"It is a crock of shit and stinks to high Heaven".

And it was the Level Twos and it was the HGs.
Now the Level Twos spake with the HGs saying :
"It is a crock of faeces and intolerably malodourous".

And it was the HGs and it was the HSs.
Now the HGs spake with the HSs saying:
"It is a bowl of excrement and its effluvium is very strong".

And it was the HSs and it was the HDs.
Now the HSs spake with the HDs, saying :
It is a vessel of fertiliser of overpowering strength".

And it was the HDs and it was the Directors.
And the HDs spake with the Directors, saying :
"It containeth that which aideth growth and strong it is".

And it was the Directors and it was the Senior Directors.
Now the Directors spake with the Senior Directors, saying :
"It promoteth growth and is very powerful".

And it was the Senior Directors and it was the BT board.
Now the Senior Directors spake with the BT board saying:
"This powerful new strategy will promote the growth of the business".

And the BT Board looked upon the strategy and saw that it was good.

Photocopies of this poem circulate mysteriously around the BT empire. The initials refer to the Clerical Executive grade structure which goes Clerical Assistants, Clerical Officers, Executive Officers, Head Executive Officers, Heads of Group (HGs), Heads of Section (HSs), to the Head of Division (HS) or General Manager responsible to the BT board (Directors, Managing Directors, Chairman). A parallel hierarchy exists on the engineering side.



**8 OUT OF 10
BT
EXECUTIVES
TALK
THIS WAY**

While we were putting the first issue of **Workers Playtime** together, we had a visit from some comrades in the French group "**L'Insecurite Sociale**". After looking through such articles as we had completed, they made the remark that they didn't get to grips with the question of the demands put forward in the struggles we were writing about.

A few months later, we got a copy of a pamphlet they've produced about "**Wage Labour and Demand Struggles**". We're printing a translation of the second half of the pamphlet, about **Demands** (the whole thing will be printed in the next issue of **Intercom** — an irregular discussion bulletin for the 'Ultra Left', which will be appearing shortly — 30p. from our address.)

The author of the pamphlet told one of our number that the inspiration for it was the bank strike he mentions in the article, which he took part in. This took the form of an occupation, and completely paralysed the bank. The strikers took charge of the strike from the first, and so much enjoyed the experience of occupying that the strike was deliberately prolonged by putting forward impossible demands. The union was only able to regain control of events, and obtain a return to work, when the momentum of the occupation flagged as workers saw things could go no further.

This article isn't the last word on the subject — far from it. But it does raise an interesting perspective on workplace struggle. We'd be very interested to hear what other people think about this.

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To be working class does not mean to be badly paid, or to work really hard ... behind all these surface phenomena is the constraint that forces us to sell our capacity as living creatures, in order to ensure our physical survival. It means seeing our activity continually taken away from us, so as to turn us into objects dominated by money. The alienation of human activity means that, having lost all control over the conditions of life, workers are reduced to objects of capital, who can only recognise their human needs and desires through their lack of satisfaction.

The reduction of human physical and intellectual capabilities to labour power, to a commodity, is a process which tends to reduce us to objects. The contradiction of capitalism lies in the fact that human beings are not objects, and that the actual sale of commodities implies that they are active. Human beings are living creatures. They adapt, modify and create the environment in which they evolve. This implies that it's also possible for them to reject their situation. Working class people continually reject the way of life capitalism imposes on them. The problem is that this refusal is most often in capitalism's own terms. The individual refusal of capitalism can only be an accommodation with it, sometimes taking the form of social opportunism. Thus the choice is made to profit out of others by climbing the ladder of the hierarchy, or setting up in business for oneself. It can also take the form of absenteeism, which is never more than taking advantage of circumstances, and while it sometimes involves a refusal of work, in other cases

is only the means of doing some moonlighting.

Strikes, which imply workers stopping work collectively, are the basis on which we can put forward something more than an accommodation. But from the outset, there's a conflict between working class needs and their expression in the form of demands, whether these arise from the workers themselves or from the unions.

If it is not quickly transcended, the struggle to to maintain or increase wage levels can only lead to workers negotiating the price of their labour power (in competition with others); and to their identifying with their "niche", with the localist and corporatist interests which the fragmentation of society assigns to everyone. The nature of negotiations fosters all kinds of "specialists" in the sale of wage labour. Today, this is the role of the unions, but even if strikers elect representatives to take charge of negotiations with the bosses, these repres-

entatives will immediately fight the control and revocability exercised over them. They will want to assume the role of leaders on a basis of equality with their opposite numbers in negotiations, and will be supported by strikers themselves who will want to be led by people who reassure them. Collectively stopping work is a process which upsets the normal habits, behaviour and living conditions of workers. Faced with no extension of the struggle (whether through geographical or social barriers), or with no further widening of the fissures that have been opened up, they find themselves confronted with a vacuum which they want filled with reassurances.

It is not enough to denounce the various divisions between workers — corporatism, racism, false needs, competition, nationalism, regionalism: the commodity logic of value and exchange must be fought. The "unity" of workers around demands, or in alliance with the unemployed, is at best wishful thinking, and at worst a capitalist manoeuvre. In being limited to "workers unity" or "solidarity with the unemployed", instead of contributing to the assault of the working class on the state, which is the only way of integrating the unemployed into new social relations, every worker — employed or not — is fixed into "their" particular situation, and in a fragmented view of the world. From such an isolated viewpoint, the unity of the proletariat can only ever exist thanks to some exterior body; the party, the union, the state, the nation, the law, democracy or a moral principle. But this atomisation is only one aspect of the working class, its negative aspect. Faced by capital, another aspect is its collective material interdependence. The proletariat's strength consists in the potential associated with its position in the social set-up. This makes it the only class expressing a tendency — through its revolt and its consciousness — to overthrow its situation in society, and the relationships which keep it there.

THE DEAD END OF DEMANDS

We must understand the contradiction at the heart of the working class, if we are to understand the process of development which precedes revolutionary upheavals. It's not just presented with a consciousness of its identity, nor for that matter with a will to dissolve itself into a world human community.

The conflict between, on the one hand, material needs (which can't be reduced simply to food), and on the other hand the domination by market relations, forces workers into a desperate attempt to satisfy their needs within the framework of wage demands. In this situation, they obviously make use of their power

— real or illusory — that gives them their position as wage labourers ; strikes, sabotage, go-slows, absenteeism, theft ... through these means, they try to resist the worsening of social conditions by seeking the weaknesses in capitalist relations. In a period of relative prosperity, these weaknesses appear in the sense that capitalists are often ready to toss a few crumbs to maintain relative social peace. But with the appearance of economic crisis, the logic of putting forward demands ends up in defeat. If the speed of production is slowed down, capital reorganises the labour process; if we build up a position of strength, capital erodes it by dividing the workforce or replacing it ... wage increases are eaten away by inflation. In order to drain all means of self-defence as wage labourers, the lessons of defeat are drummed into us. If workers limit themselves to putting forward simple demands, they fall victim to discouragement; struggle is abandoned as it "doesn't lead anywhere", and then the worsening of living conditions and frustration once more accumulate, and the search for weaknesses in the system begins all over again.

But to say that we have less and less to defend as wage labourers, is also to become aware that wage labour is not a form of organisation that can satisfy social needs. So the problem is not "championing" or "condemning" struggles around demands, it's the capacity of workers to move beyond them. It doesn't particularly matter what event serves to stimulate such a move; price increases, repression, a workplace accident, redundancy ... The revolt which arises uses this single incident to concentrate on it everything that has been suffered before — the waged condition. Struggles develop out of a refusal at a given moment of some major or minor matter concerning the conditions imposed by capitalism. Moreover this refusal over one issue may — because it does not allow for direct struggle — give rise to another. Ultimately, the particular issue isn't important, what matters is that the workers express a refusal of something and through that their desire to live.

Workers will not become united through particular demands, otherwise they would generally maintain autonomous forms of organisation outside struggles. The slow road to consciousness runs through those rare moments when "something happens" — those discussions, or confrontations where the logic of exchange and negotiation is forgotten.

There is therefore no straightforward progression from struggles around demands, but a confrontation with the dead end they constitute. The moments

of unification, of development, leave a strong memory of "taking things further" which can allow the appearance of radical elements after the struggle has subsided.

BEYOND MAKING DEMANDS

Even in the course of the most traditional strike, we can see all sorts of other things emerge beyond the particular demand. Everything that's hidden away in everyday reality can quickly push a struggle beyond its original horizons — the search for a way to discover a new goal, and the realisation of things outside the framework of capital, arise to the extent that the struggle is transformed.

Those who don't see that the demands are overshadowed by more important things merely apologise for some sort of "hardheadedness", and help limit the movement to secondary questions by masking its essence. For them, needs can only be expressed in terms of existing reality ; to demand, to sell, to buy, to negotiate, to exchange.

Rather than drawing up lists of demands

classified as "reactionary" or as "subversive", it's better to look at what the participants put into the struggle. There are neither "reactionary" nor "revolutionary" demands, rather there are rejections of the conditions of existence which express themselves in various ways. Often what inspires the strikers goes beyond what set the movement in motion. In 1982, for example, during the strike at the French bank Societe Generale, the principal demand put forward was for a new wage scale. The majority of strikers more or less realised they couldn't get this. The fact that the movement lasted so long indicates that the workers no longer wanted to go back to work.

After a strike about some demand where the return to work only happens with some difficulty, or when strikers say "It's not just a matter of more money, but about change, about our dignity", it's not because they are some brave type of idealists untouched by material necessity. It is because having experienced a break with the denials and privations that capitalism imposes, they are less tolerant

Contd. next page



of them. They express, if only for a moment, some needs that are a thousand times more real than the illusions of survival which are fostered by demands.

In that moment of realisation and of refusal of their lot which is expressed by workers in the course of many strikes, it's important that it ceases to be repressed by them and becomes an active force. This is the central problem of class struggle. Work today is one of the rare places in our lives where we meet others, even if it's only in a competitive way. The strike allows us to meet together, pitting us not against one another, but against the existence that is imposed upon us. It allows us to question the everyday reality of work and society around us.

In relation to the daily grind, to ordinary exploitation, to our routine non-existence,

these moments express in themselves the refusal of wage labour, the desire to escape the capitalist organisation of existence, the privatised view of life. This aspiration to live cannot be taken into account by any programme of demands. It cannot be negotiated with any authority.

The communist revolution can only come about through a break in the mental process and the ideological representations (morals, etc.), produced by working class struggle on the basis of the material conditions of existence which are implied by the domination of capital: the atomisation, competition, subordination and monotonous existence which wage levels and unemployment are merely an expression of. This break will come about, if it is produced, through the generalised destruction of the state and the commodity.

wild-cats with staying power. Revolutionaries should be supporting them rather than nit picking about their incorrect orientation to reformism. The failure of leftists' "community politics" is precisely this attempt to impose their vision on reality from outside.

The problem of reformism has always been that it confuses the proletariat into thinking that they can be free by doing something less than overthrowing ruling class power. Today this seems to be less of a problem than ever before since historically reformism is already largely discredited. Nowadays when people turn to self-activity to get reformist institutions to meet their needs, the experience tends to increase their belief in self-activity. We must distinguish clearly in our own minds between "reformism" from below and reformism from above.
P.W. Slough.

Authormates Response : Very little space — my brevity not meant dismissively. Any 'community' only arises "spontaneously" through the active relation of its members in circumstances which are given. Everybody "brings insights to bear" and acts on them. 'Revolutionaries' challenge — verbally or practically — the material circumstances and conformist assumptions structuring the 'communities' activity. You take a fatalist view — what if capital doesn't provoke 'communities' into unity against it, or provoke struggles 'Rev's' can "bring insights" to. Must we wait to be herded or attacked.

Agree 'natural leadership' exists and as likely to play positive role as negative. But 'leading militants' have no greater insights than other members of 'community'. And where they become institutionalised — like shop stewards — they *become reformist institutions themselves*. Their pro-order role must be confronted, not just by "nitpicking outsiders", but by "the led".

Agreed people must themselves fight for what they need now ('reforms'). But 'success' doesn't necc. lead them to see need for revolution any more than defeat. Struggles for 'reforms' are important because they inevitably reshape the whole 'community' in relation to itself and to rest of capitalist society. And though its not inevitable 'communities' can end up more united in opposition to it.

A society where people control their own creative activity implies their *active* participation in overthrowing capitalism and state. As part of their 'community' 'Rev's' *actively* participate in that direction. Agreed can't be done from outside — but nor by just reacting to circumstances. Thanks for writing.

We also recieved an article in response to the Aire Valley piece - held over till next time. Holding breath can be dangerous !



We recieved this letter in response to an article in the last issue.

Dear Playmates,

In the July/August issue of Workers' Playtime, the article on the Aire Valley strike suggests a need for "community" as a "necessary precondition" for the building of effective working class self-organisation. The article then proposes that further debate is needed as to what this "working class community" will be. I suggest that these communities can, by definition, only arise spontaneously, and indeed they are. All revolutionaries can do, or need to do, is bring their revolutionary insights to bear on the relationships they are involved in, whether at work, at home, or elsewhere.

Letter

This is not to deny that some individuals within a community, seem to become key figures in initiating struggles not necessarily against ruling class power, but in favour of facilities which they understand to be needed by virtue of their intimate knowledge within a neighborhood. Their effectiveness often depends on their skills in making reformist institutions, particularly the local state, responsive to needs with which the paid employees of those institutions are out of touch. Sometimes a shop steward has an analagous function in the workplace. Such key figures might be thought of as



BT/YP — Continued from page 7

them. The projected move of the business is going to involve about 200 staff having to be redeployed or paid redundancy money. Every officer sacked is one less to worry about when the business goes. It is purely coincidental of course that Martin happens to be an anarchist and a popular member of an unusually stropky (for the CPSA) branch committee.

There's no doubt that management has been taken aback by the strength of staff response to their provocation, and by the solidarity shown to Martin. Union leaders have also been surprised and have been galvanised into taking his appeal on in an unusually enthusiastic way. Management's response has been to initiate a smear campaign, claiming that he admitted doing the ad whilst he was drunk, that he's done it before and had warnings etc. (none of it true). This is being countered by his comrades and by the branch committee.

BT PHONE HOME

The incident has become a focal point for staff dissatisfaction, alienation and sense of vulnerability. Whilst the union is saying save your fight for the 'real' issues — campaigning against privatisation and the breakup of BT — YP workers like others throughout the country are realising that immediate response to direct attacks is more effective than following the union through endless tedious negotiations and empty 'days of action' to inevitable sellouts.

Whatever victories the union may achieve in terms of saving our jobs, the price we always have to pay is worsening conditions, as a result of rationalisation, speedups etc. If the YP staff take action themselves and succeed in getting Martin reinstated then at least they'll have asserted themselves and gained some real sense of control (for the first time) over what is being done to them. This can only strengthen them in the struggles to come.

We welcome accounts of class struggle, articles and correspondence.

We especially welcome accounts of class struggles by participants, or people with a closer perspective than we have. We won't change things without consulting you but we may add an introduction to fill in background. We'd obviously prefer to do that in conjunction with you so means of contacting you easily would be useful.

If you have an idea for an article get in touch. Playtime is collectively edited by the people who produce each issue, and all articles are discussed at Playtime meetings before a decision is made to publish. Disagreements are discussed and stuff is frequently rewritten. So its best to contact us as soon as possible with a draft. If its not possible we don't guaran-

tee to publish but we won't change things (beyond adding or subtracting spelling mistakes, 'humorous' subheads if not supplied, sarcastic illustrations etc), without consulting you. If we disagree strongly we may publish a response alongside it.

If letters are intended for publication please make it clear what you're arguing about so people aren't obliged to read back issues they may not have, to fully appreciate your genius. In any competition for space short snappy letters will win!

If you fancy helping produce Playtime get in touch. If you just want to see what sort of idiots produce it, or have a discussion about it then meet us at the London Workers Group meetings every tuesday evening. See details elsewhere.

HAVANA — MOSCOW — BARNSELEY



Bring out that Touch
of Class

F
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FROM
CHANEL

Anti-Porn Campaigner Of The Month. A £600 a month computer operator for the BBC was caught stealing 28 copies of the Mail on Sunday and 17 copies of the Sunday Times from outside a Kensington newsagents. Sean Kennedy, 22, admitted the offence and said "I thought they were pornographic magazines."

The Subject Thats On Everyones Lips. " . . as long as we adhere to the idea that

each individual has the right to the best medical treatments available, and the right to make up her/his mind about health care, after being informed of all the options available, then we will not have betrayed the reason for our existence, namely the idea of self-help and self-management of herpes."

S.B in HA NEWS The journal of the Herpes Association. Issue 1.

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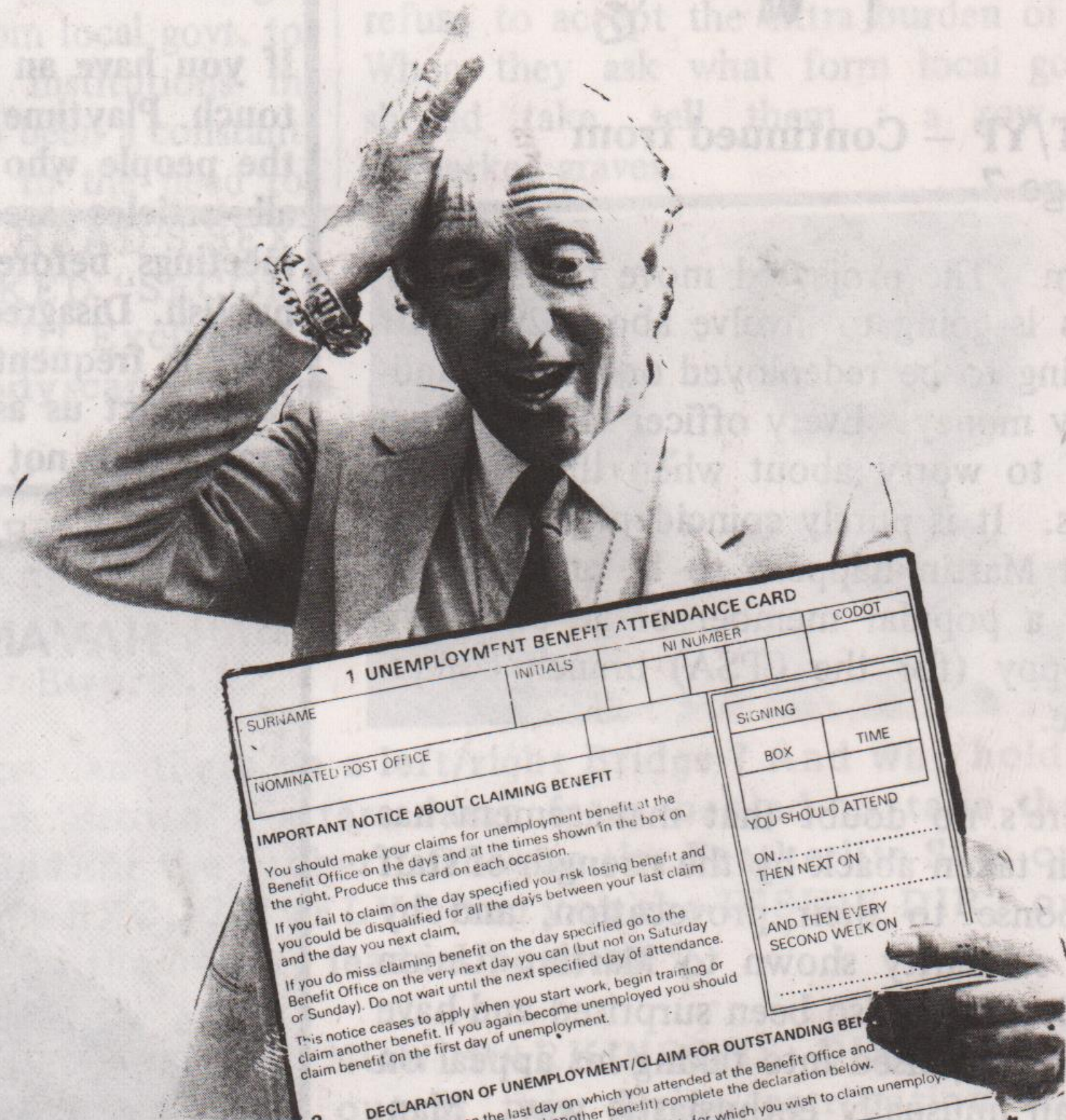


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TOILERS' PAPER

THE LABOUR MOVEMENTS OWN DAILY *'of the wankers, for the wankers, by the wankers'*

