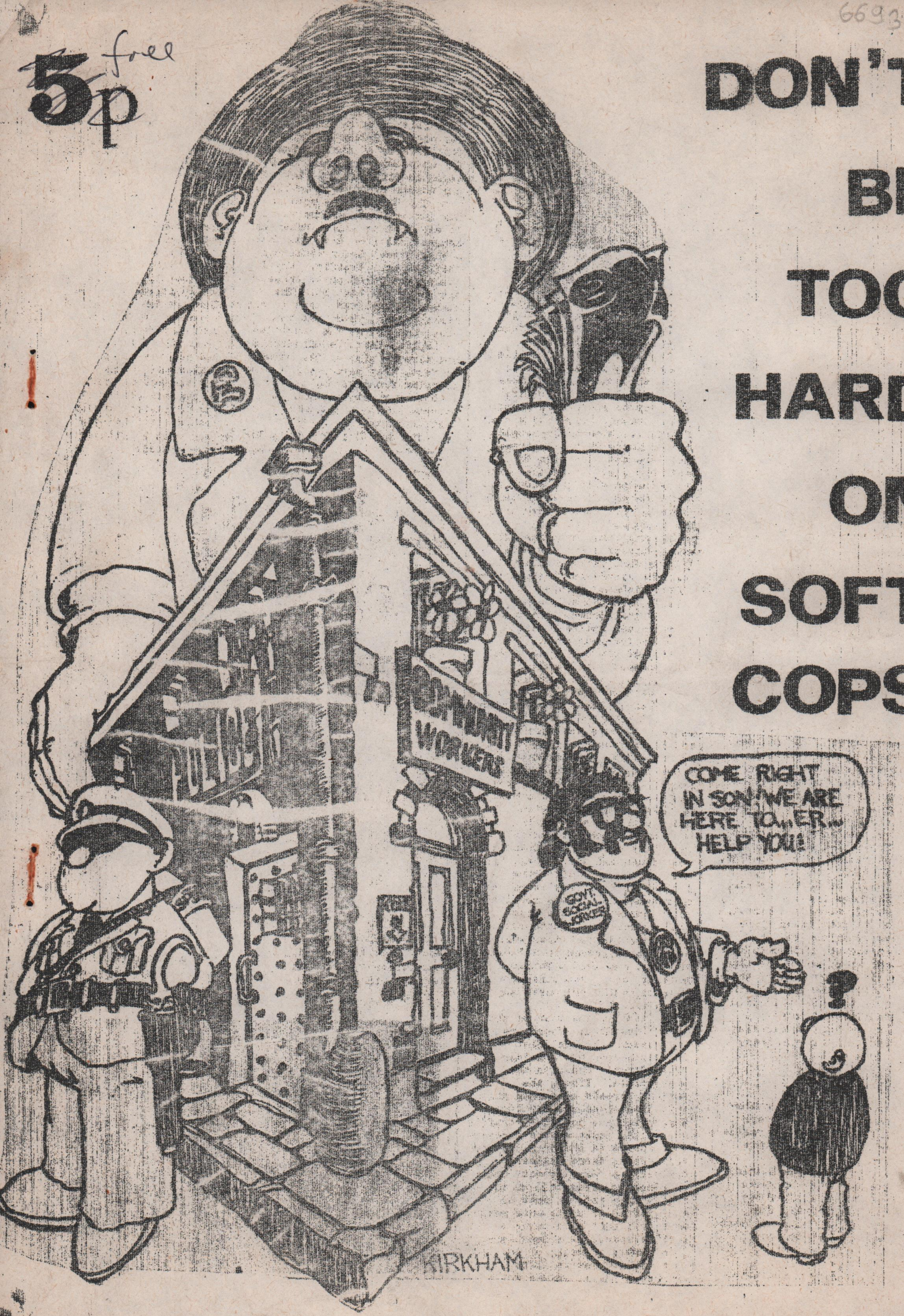


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DON'T BE TOO HARD ON SOFT COPS



KIRKHAM

DON'T BE TOO HARD ON SOFT COPS.

This article has been reprinted to throw some light on the political development of social work, community work and 'community politics'. Fundamentally, it tries to show how the State has taken an increasing role in the planning of the whole of society; it has done this to maintain the control of the capitalist class. To keep this control it is necessary for them to use working class struggles against working class people. Mass movements for change are often treated not just by strong opposition (repression) but by giving concessions in order to bring isolation and kill the movement with kindness (co-option). Unless we're careful our struggle for change today can forge our chains of tomorrow.

To devise 'advanced' means of control the State often makes use of the energy of the 'radicals'. Participation schemes for planning can help discover how much icing they need to give us to delay our finding out that the whole cake is rotten; getting homes through arranged squatting but without a real movement behind the demand can encourage the isolation which the Housing Authority needs to force through an unwanted Redevelopment scheme; registered free schools can be used to cool out school students militancy; 'people's' advice centres can prevent the development of people's own organisation;

and, of course, the social contract of the 'left' (!?) in the Unions can stop us from rocking the boat today for a better tomorrow.....that never comes. We seem increasingly faced with the choice that our actions are political ones and that the choice is Revolution or nothing. This doesn't mean there is nothing to do; it just means that we need to consider our actions in terms of their consequences for class struggle.

This article originally appeared as a leaflet to invite community workers etc to a meeting called by Islington Gutter Press - a local (London) political newspaper. This fact explains some of the details of the article; however, we may cautiously be able to find the parallels elsewhere. It then re-appeared in issue 5 of the 'Libertarian Network Newsletter' (April 1974). This network, along with its newsletter and conferences, was started to tentatively exchange information and the experiences of about a dozen groups of revolutionaries whose politics had developed in very practical situations.

The front cover is from (Manchester's) Mole Express; the puppets on this page from Case Con 15 (Women's Issue). Overleaf the drawing is from Community Action.

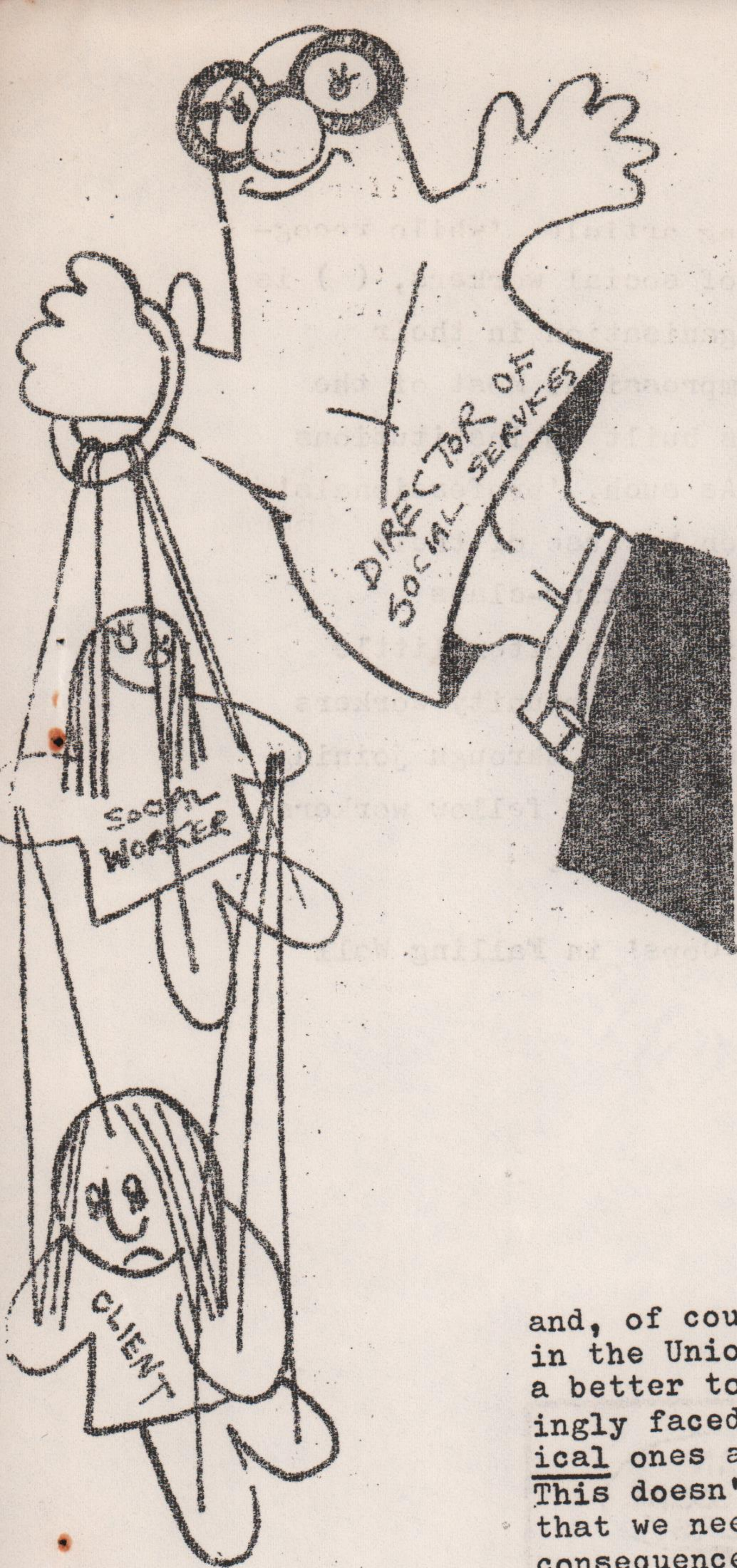
Recommended reading: 'Women and the Welfare State' 20p. Red Rag pamphlet no 2. (9 Stratford Villas, London NW1)

This is the first in a series 'Dancing in the Streets'

'Don't be too hard on Soft Cops' 5p + 5¹/₂p postage.

November 1974

Dancing in the Streets
c/o 36 Kenilworth Terrace,
Raleigh St,
Nottingham.



RE-INTRODUCTION

It has been suggested that the following article 'while recognising the counter-revolutionary role of social workers, () is attempting to build a revolutionary organisation in their ranks'.* This note is to correct this impression. Most of the article describes the way the state has built up institutions of co-option in every sphere of life. As such, 'professionals' in social work and related fields, often because of their 'liberalism', generally diffuse offensive working-class struggle. The so-called 'revolutionaries' are often little different. Perhaps the most likely way that community workers can get involved in developing the struggle is through joining women's groups, preventing the victimisation of fellow workers and other issues connected with their own needs.

* Priscilla Allen, reviewing 'Soft Cops' in Falling Wall Book Review no 3-4 (1975)



If we want to understand the role of social workers and other professionals active in the community, then we need some sort of historical framework. We need to understand how such workers came to be paid by the State, and some understanding of the Welfare State as a whole.

Early laissez-faire capitalism solved its social problems (disease, poverty etc) by means of charity organisations. Individual philanthropists set up Housing Trusts, for example (Sutton, Peabody).

It was only in response to crises that the State itself began to intervene with legislation. It was the cholera epidemic that led first to the housing reforms. The State had to intervene to zone the city to make it safer for the bourgeoisie. Similarly the militancy of Red Clydeside in 1915 (strikes in munitions factories etc) led to the first intervention by the State into the control of rents. Western capitalism had to reckon with the turn of events in Russia.

The mass unemployment of the 20's led to a new way of thinking by the ideologues of the ruling class. In the interwar years Britain lost its primacy as an imperialist power, and so its domination of trade. In a period of stagnation and increased labour militancy, the ruling class got itself a new thinker - Keynes. He was the first to put forward clearly the role of the State in ensuring the survival of capitalism. As such he was not so much an economist as a planner. He saw that the economy couldn't be left to look after itself, that the 'market mechanism' wasn't enough. He put forward a comprehensive strategy aimed at modifying the classical 'crisis' into a 'recession'. He argued that wage demands could be met, that growing labour militancy could be contained by wage increases. He argued that it was in the interests of the State to pay out social benefits, and provide for the huge mass of unemployed workers. He argued that the government could become employer - he proposed an extensive scheme of public works. (This can be defense programmes, or council house building.) Keynes argued that large numbers of unemployed workers who were paid no social benefit virtually lost their power to consume. This meant the stability of the internal market was threatened, which led to a chain reaction effect of further lay-offs, closures and a further drop in buying power. Keynes saw the problem not just of maintaining production, but of getting the balance between production and consumption right.

And corresponding to the birth pangs of consumer capitalism went the creation of the Welfare State. It was the other ruling class planner par excellence, Beveridge, who in 1942 brought together the existing pieces of welfare legislation. There had been a Workman's Compensation Act dating back to 1906, a health insurance scheme from 1912 and an Unemployment Act passed in 1934, but the State's part in these was still small. Now there was to be a major intervention, in the name of the 'correct distribution of the product'. The "Plan for Social Security" was put forward as part of a general programme of social policy. "If you don't give the people social reform, they will give you social revolution".

Come 1945 and it was time for the ruling class, armed with the thoughts of Keynes and Beveridge, to accede to people like Bevan. A comprehensive Welfare System of municipal housing, NHS, family allowances, free university education was introduced. For the institutions of welfare are also the institutions of control. In 1945, the re-structuring of bomb-shattered cities allowed centralised planning control of where people live and work. The New Towns, the redistribution of industry and population start at this time. This is already beginning to be the developed State as Planner, organising for the survival of capitalism.

The Welfare State apparatus has increased enormously since 1945. Never before has the influence of capital reached so far into the details of people's lives.....it isn't just at the workplace. We eat what Joe Lyons accountants prepare for us. We dance to the tune of Mecca's profits. Even the housewife hanging on for dear life with barbiturates is following the logic of Roche's marketing patterns. And at the same time, never before has the economic and social planning of the State been so widespread. The State cannot restrict its control to the workplace, or to any one sector. The woman's role as housewife, the home, the family are now seen by the State as part of the productive process, as the proper object of planning (not just as servicers of the present workforce, but as producers of the workforce of the future and ideological trainers, etc.)

DEVELOPMENTS IN THE STATE UNDER THE TORIES.

The Tories response to the international profitability crisis over the last four years has been to move steadily towards a Strong State (NIRC, Pentonville 5, Shrewsbury 24, Leb 26, Heathrow, Hull, Nato counter-insurgency exercises in Germany - are some of the weapons the Strong State uses.)

The Strong State is also manifested in direct attacks on the living standards of the working class (in the name of counter-inflation etc) - NHS cuts, education cuts, Pay Board, Housing Finance Act, Industrial Relations Act etc.

The Tories attack on living standards just highlights a continuing long-term crisis of poverty, homelessness, the break-up of families,

"If you don't give the people social reforms,
they will give you social revolution".

the numbers of people thrown onto the mercies of institutions - Old People's Homes, Child Care Units etc. More and more of the working class become dependent in one way or another (means-tested benefits of all kinds) on the Welfare State.

THE BREAKUP OF THE CITIES

What's happening in Islington is typical of what's happening in inner-city areas all over the country : large scale redevelopment, demolition of the old housing stock, breakdown of old working class areas, gentrification of certain areas (Barnsbury, Canonbury, where next? - areas of Highbury), migration to new and expanding towns by the young working class nuclear families who pass the Industrial Selection Scheme, speculative development in offices and hotels (Eagle Star at Archway, Sterling Land at King's Cross, Royal Scot Hotel, Joe Levy trying to buy up land around King's Cross to make sure of cashing in on the possibility of Maplin Terminal there, Max Rayne trying to squeeze ODP's out of the Council in the Angel Development.)

The existing social fabric is being torn apart. (Partly due to the forces of finance capital - property speculation - with the shift away from industrial investment, partly due to the whole idea of regional planning going back to Barlow and the Royal Industrial Commission on the Redistribution of the Population and ending up

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with the Greater London Redevelopment Plan and the Statagic Plan for the South East)

The whole zoning of the workforce needs a larger and larger number of overseers. Islington's Social Services staff is projected to double in the next 10 years. To bring about these changes within the bounds of social-democracy, a larger and larger number of State-paid professionals (with the help of a few thousand volunteers) is needed.

THE INSTITUTIONALISATION OF THE CLASS STRUGGLE IN THE COMMUNITY.

The State recognises it must do more than deal with individuals. It needs social-democratic ways of getting in touch with groups of people. (It needs leaders, spokesmen, negotiators) This is what participation is all about. This is why the Council is currently driving to set up so many Tenants Associations. Currently, the Participation Committee is pushing the Action Manual, which actually encourages tenants to revolt! The 'revolution' is very carefully mapped out in advance. The tenants mustn't go too far, and they mustn't do anything that isn't on the list!

The struggle of the tenants in Lorraine Estate to get playspace for their kids and the struggle of the residents surrounding Laycock St to get the street closed through traffic turn up in disguised form in the Council's Action Manual :-

Officially sanctioned protest Number 973. How to get playspace.

974. How to get a street closed.

"In some circumstances it may be necessary to organise the population along the same lines as employed by the enemy". "Counter-organisation is the putting over to the public by action rather than by propoganda the views of the government. For this purpose individuals can be sent among the community for the purpose of doing work which will help to remove sources of grievance and at the same time make contact with the people."

This is not Leo Smith, our Participation Officer, but Brigadier Frank Kitson, the main army theorist on counter-insurgency. Whatever the neighbourhood organisers who operate under the Participation Scheme (ICSS, Tenants Liaison Officer) think of their own role, the ruling class see them as Intelligence Officers serving in a counter-insurgency army for only these organisers know what the people are thinking and doing.

KEEPING THE LID ON THE CLASS WAR THAT'S BREWING

There are different ways of co-opting struggles (Phyllis Kershaw, the leader of the Lorraine Estate fight for playspace, becomes a Councillor and is buried forever under heaps of Council minutes). The Home Office has cooked up the Urban Aid programme - a £4million a year for priority areas where it looks like the people might start fighting back. The budget isn't higher because they have developed a domestic thus saving money by exploiting the community volunteer - CSV, AVF, Task Force). Money is available from other sources, too. People like Max Rayne set up charitable trusts which help the homeless. The Ford Foundation gives \$300,000 to the IRR. It has a vested interest in stimulating the whole race relations industry. Aspirations can be partially satisfied and struggles coopted by this kind of hush money. The Packington Estate gets a £12,000 log cabin and three full time workers. This is not to devalidate these struggles. We recognise the energy that goes into these partial victories. The log cabih represents one of these. The acid test will come in the use of it.

Apart from co-opting struggles the Local Authorities have another way of dealing with them if the threaten to go beyond the social democratic limits set for them and raise more and other demands. The LA smashes them. At Action House in Clephane St because the kids had control of the house they began to satisfy what they reckoned their own needs were. This was too much for Bayliss and Co. Mrs Welch gets summarily evicted because she squats a new

council flat and so threatens the whole filing cabinet mentality of local bureaucrats with their evaluation of needs through points schemes and waiting lists.

TOWARDS A REVOLUTIONARY CONSCIOUSNESS IN LIVING AND WORKING IN THE COMMUNITY

Some of the problems we see facing community workers are :

Professionalism. It's usually the case that there's a class difference between the community worker and the people of the community s/he works in. This is often re-inforced by the 'client' attitude, thus maintaining the elitist position often put forward by reactionary social workers.

Casework. Isolation of the individual in his/her individual 'problem' - where the most crucial thing that we should be doing is to bring people together.

Both of these things hold back the community workers from questioning their own roles and the needs of the working class people they're dealing with. (see Re-introduction) (Although three embryonic cheers for Case Con and Paper Tiger, perhaps)

"Counter-organisation is the putting over to the public by action rather than propaganda the views of the government. For this purpose individuals can be sent amongst the community for the purpose of doing work which will help to remove sources of grievance and at the same time making contact with the people."

Questioning their own role means politicising their own lives - questioning their own living situations, discovering how they are subject to the same class forces as their 'clients', discovering how their needs are ultimately the needs of the class.

Nalge It's obviously important to work in the unions despite the overwhelming odds against it, and the reactionary nature of much Union politics. The need for more money (Present London weighting allowance campaign) The need for protection against victimisation (necessary defense against pigs like Rea Price).

Sectionalism. British TU politics are renowned for their sectionalism - "our only job is to get a better deal for our workers." No thought about links with other factories let alone with the community etc. Many community workers are equally sectional - "the community is where it's at" syndrome must lead to reformist stop-gap measures.

One of the reasons we called this meeting was to talk about ways of supporting each other in struggles, to break out of the binds of case work, professionalism and sectionalism. (see Re-introduction)

We feel that everyone needs to generalise their own struggle.

The struggles on Estates, in the Courts, at Work, on the Dole, in the schools and hospitals, in the Social Services dept., in the discos and adventure playgrounds, the struggles of the women in the home : all must be linked.

All of the people involved in these struggles in the area need to have the means of generalising their own struggles, politicising their own lives and building class solidarity. Revolutionary networks of support and solidarity are already developing - how can all of us further the process made possible and necessary by the present stage of the class struggle in Islington?