

DOLE DRUMS 2



U.F.O.s Land In St.Anns

I welcome Issue No. 1 of Dole Drums. I could not understand the front cover, what it was saying, but that was probably my ignorance, not yours.

The article 'Discussions on Unemployment' raised some interesting points. The quote "'We are organisations of the unemployed" cry union bureaucrats', if said could only have been by some misguided individual.

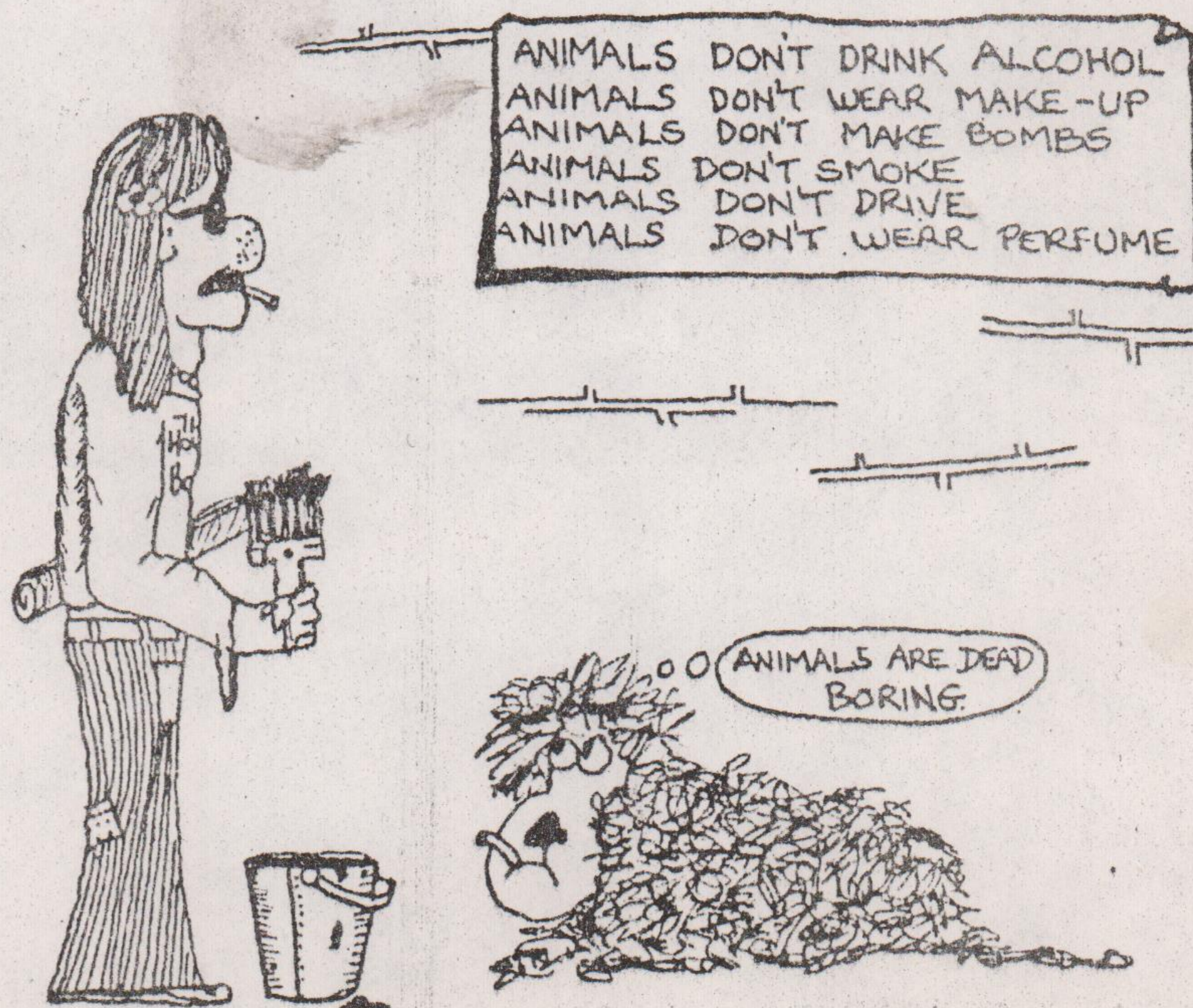
Trade Unions came into being from those at work: it was, and remains not only their prime, but their sole objective as organisations to represent those at work. In the four major recessions since the 1870's, TU's may have noted unemployment, primarily by trying to prevent their members joining them, but once out of work, individuals were no longer represented by the union. This is not to confuse the position of some unions maintaining unemployed in membership, with some paying benefit. This is not representing the unemployed.

The "hope of TU change" in the article does not in my opinion take account of what has been going on. I would argue that the 1980's has held more change re TUC/TU's and unemployed than the whole of the period back to 1868. I am not suggesting great leaps, but changes on ways of working and attitude are taking place.

1980's has had two 'People's March for Jobs', organised, financed and backed by the TU movement; Jobs for Youth Express - initiated by TUC working with black, youth, student and religious organisations; TUC actively encourages TU's to maintain unemployed in membership; has had money raising campaigns throughout the movement for campaigns concerning purely unemployment; setting up TUC Unemployment Centres. This last initiative has given whole towns, local authorities, Voluntary Groups, black organisations, students and the Trade Unions the opportunity to work with and take responsibility for the Unemployed.

Notwithstanding how successful or not much of these initiatives have been, it shows the TUC and Unions are seeing unemployment not as in the past, a problem for the individual and state, but now as a collective responsibility for those still at work.

CHRIS PRESTON



I'm glad that Chris has replied to my article in DD1. Unfortunately "Organisations of the Unemployed" should read "Organisations of the Employed". Chris outlines the historical basis of British Trade Unionism well and I wouldn't disagree with this outline; the point that Trade Unions should fight Unemployment by defending members' jobs is particularly relevant.

Unfortunately we are now experiencing the aftermath of Compromise, Betrayal and Defeat in the fight for jobs. The result is that more people than ever before are on the dole with no hope of finding real work. That situation, I feel, demands a radical response, the most obvious being to take on the responsibility of organising all workers employed or unemployed to fight for their rights. As Chris rightly points out, the TUC have recognised that a problem does exist and have taken various initiatives.

Firstly there were the '81 and '83 Peoples Marches and the '81 Jobs Express. Unfortunately if ever there was a case of 'One step forward, two steps back', it was these three initiatives. The 1981 March for Jobs did indeed command mass support. The problem was the lack of a serious follow up. Having provided a pole of attraction for the Unemployed, they were just allowed to drift away. No real Peoples Campaign for Jobs with mass Unemployment membership was built. It's interesting that the usual response to requests for organisation was 'Join the Labour Party' much as 'Right to Work Campaign' Marchers were told to join the SWP! The follow up 'Jobs Express' was really dire. Unemployed youth were whizzed round the country on a train. They were discouraged from associating with workers in dispute. Most insulting was the 'Banner of the Begging Hand' wished upon these people by the TUC. The '83 march only served to confirm the damage done. No longer a march for jobs but a march for full employment a first priority, the message was watered down to appeal to Tories, churchmen etc so that it failed to appeal to the Unemployed. With the Peoples Campaign wound up there remains the Unemployed Centres. These leave much to be desired. Many 'Centres' consist of nothing more than a couple of volunteers in a draughty church hall. Many of the bigger centres like NCU have the MSC 'sword of Damocles' hanging over their activities. Sheffield was disrupted by withdrawal of funds for being too closely associated with an Anti-Snoopers Campaign. It is perhaps significant that one of the best Centres, Merseyside, is funded by the Labour movement and exists in an area with a unique unemployed branch of the TGWU. Would not the full participation of the Unemployed in TU's help realise the potential of the TUC Centres? Of course the TUC has a policy of allowing membership of Unemployed ex-members, but this is invariably a "second class" membership with no right to attend conferences etc. Government policy appears to be one of driving down wages and conditions by excluding a large number of workers from the economic process. The Trade Unions must answer this with a campaign that involves all workers regardless of employment status.

A writer replies to a reader's response.

PLASTIC CARDS AND POLICE STATES

The introduction of plastic National Insurance Cards evoked predictable protest from Labour Spokesman M. Meacher. Unfortunately his emphasis was wrong. His comments that these cards represented a development of a police state were easily rebuffed by the Tories; what was sinister about replacing a bit of cardboard with a bit of plastic?

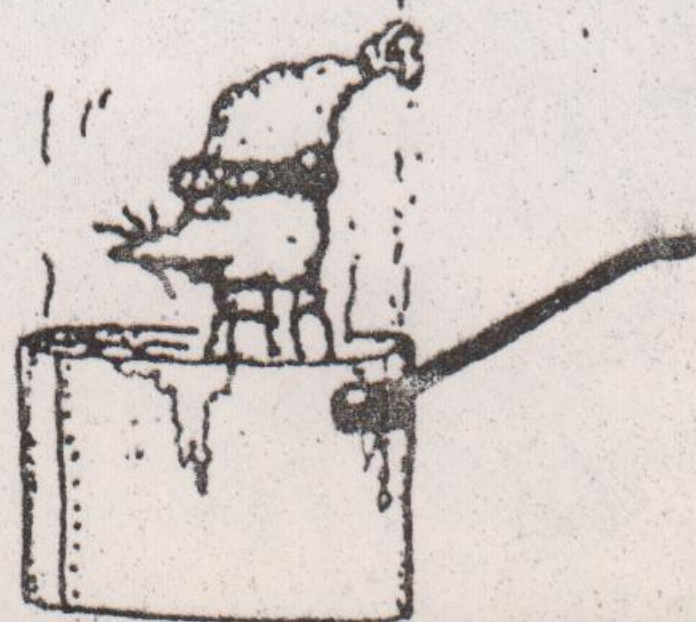
The first point that can be made is that the police state is developing quite well thank you plastic NI cards or no. Just join CND and the boys from the local Gestapo will be round to check out your loyalty to the state. While if you're unlucky enough to look like the current Public Enemy No. 1 you could find your next stop at the traffic lights more exciting than usual!

The significant thing about these cards is the magnetic strip on the back. If the cards really are just an innocent replacement for their cardboard counterpart why is this strip there at all? The strip enables the card to be used to operate 'hole in the wall' machines like those used by banks. It is thus possible to introduce electronic signing on in the wake of these cards being introduced. This obviously poses the threat of Job Issues in Dole Offices. But possibilities go beyond this. The cards could be combined with "point of sale" terminals (the ones that read bar-codes). This would enable the payment of benefits in the form of a ration rather than in cash. While this may seem extreme it would only be the continuation of a trend started by Housing Benefit, of depriving Unemployed of the right to organise their offices. In fact this very system is being introduced in parts of the USA to replace food stamps. (parts of the very same 'land of the free' have resurrected the poor house incidently).

It is not only these dangers that are worrying. The fact that the system is prepared to introduce all this Hi-Tech reflects a view of unemployment; that it is here to stay at current levels. This obviously produces a problem of control. One side of the response to this is the increased reliance on coercion, seen in the development of Special Patrol Groups, Riot Gear etc. Included in this is the use of tactics originally developed in the Ulster statelet. The other aspect of the response is the card and what this could imply.

It would be wrong to think that this view of Unemployment is the exclusive preserve of the Tories. Neil Kinnock has said that Labour will be unable to promise work to those male Unemployed under the Tories. (Interesting this, having lost the last election promising F.A. to the Unemployed, Neil imagines he'll win the next promising sweet F.A.).

Unfortunately these threats will probably result in yet another roar of Apathy from claimants. Leaving the fight against such attacks to a few stalwarts is dangerous, and if the solving of the problem of Unemployment is left to Politicians, Bureaucrats and Policemen, claimants are unlikely to like the 'solutions' offered.



In the first issue we printed an article by a certain "Dick Croft", little did we realize the repercussions of this innocent draft, in fact...

A Reader Replies ...

In his article in DD1 Dick Croft asked for comments; this, for what it's worth, is mine.

The article is difficult to reply to as it is very confused; however, here goes. Dick seems to hold to a concept of Broad Based reformism as opposed to "class struggle". In this he is of course not alone; fellow travellers on the particular road include the Labour Party, the Communist Party of Great Britain and TU Bureaucrats too numerous to mention. To support this, Dick makes several points, most of which I would contest.

Firstly an error. Unemployment has no meaning in relation to Imperial Rome whose economy was based on Slave Labour. Further it is Dick himself who seems to neglect the resistance to the symptoms of the Agricultural Revolution which included the activities of 'Captain Swing', a sort of rural Ludd.

Comparison of unemployment in the 80's can be made to that of the 30's! Not only is it numerically worse but also worse in its effects. This is because Poverty can only be talked about in relative terms. If Society has advanced in terms of relative affluence then the condition of the poor in that society must be worse relatively speaking; putting it simply, there is more they haven't got.

Dick seems to be saying that Technology governs employment. This is wrong. Unemployment is socially determined with the ruling class doing most of the determining! It wasn't that long ago that workers worked 6 twelve hour days per week. If that still held then unemployment would be worse. In contrast if we reduced the working week now say to 3 days with no loss of earning the present unemployment situation could be solved. The reason that this isn't an acceptable solution is that it would cut into the profits of the capitalist ruling class. The question of world markets is interesting. If we ran our society on the basis of social need we would opt out of the world market exploitation game, where Korean car workers labour in freezing cold plants under ex Leyland management, putting Leyland workers on the dole. Instead we could concentrate in improving areas like housing and public transport and provide work for steel and motor workers.

Unions must put the interests of their members and class first. The idea of a 'National Interest' is a sick mirage used to justify Tory oppression and Labour betrayal as well as the activities of Duffy, Chapple, Sirs et al. "Working class struggle" is a reality that will not be outdated till we have a classless society, and is indeed part of the achievement of such a state. Finally the idea of 'nationalising' Unions must be treated with great care, there is a world of difference between the ideas of Syndicalism and the 'Labour Fronts' of Hitler, Mussolini and Pinochet.

More this way folks! →

Here it comes!

The growth of Unemployment must be stopped if it means the impoverishment of its victims as now. THE renaissance took place in a world of grinding poverty under Machiavellian rule for most. The price of a renaissance is too high if this must be the cost.

As to the comments on youth, Dick merely reports the bosses' slanders of the youth they can provide no future for. Youth cults can provide some essential elements of life like companionship and identity; would you be a mod or an office boy? Education has always been too work orientated, more a set of exam hurdles than a process of learning. Run in the interests of the bosses it is devoid of democracy and justice for those in it. Access to its upper levels are still limited to the sons and daughters of the very rich. A scraped PPE from Oxford still gets you further than a First from one of the Polys. So much for catering for 'minorities' or 'egalitarianism'.

Finally Dick associates his views with those of Socialism. I personally can find absolutely no justification for this. Socialism holds that there are two classes, Expropriators and Expropriated, whose interests are opposed. How this can be reconciled with concepts like 'working class struggle' being outdated and an adherence to "the national interest" I for one just cannot see. In conclusion while I welcome the expression of opinion in DD1 I do feel obliged to reply strongly when something that could have been written as a speech for Thatcher is associated with Socialism.

BLACK DWARF

well, strong stuff from Mr. Black Dwarf!
Your comments are welcome

Facts and figures.

FACTS AND FIGURES - the past year

Official statistics show that unemployment in Nottinghamshire decreased by 1,102 between December 1982 and December 1983, in line with the national decrease of 17,619.

However certain changes on the 1983 Budget caused less unemployed to be included in the official count (as had previously happened in 1982), so that 'unofficial' estimates are that there was a real increase nationally of 144,000, and locally of 3,000.

At the same time, the number of job vacancies locally fell to 2,005 (compared with 2,470 in Dec. '82).

YOUTH The number of people out of work in Notts in Dec. '83 according to the official figures, was 50,867. Amongst those not counted were 817 school leavers who were not eligible for benefit; and 5,320 young people were on 'special measures' schemes (eg YTS). This is, however, a decrease in youth unemployment of around 1,000 compared with a year ago. At the same time a national survey made between 1980-1982 showed that a significant number of long-term unemployed were under 25 years, a trend which seemed to be increasing.

Facts and figures continued...

* WOMEN

Very many women who are seeking work do not appear in unemployment statistics because they do not register; this applies particularly to married women and single parents. This is borne out by the findings of the national survey, which showed that women registered for work were predominantly in either the older or very young age groups. Of those who were counted in the long-term unemployed 80% were single, divorced, separated, or widowed, and only 7% had dependent children.

Whilst it is admitted that long-term unemployment is increasing, the real extent of this is still 'hidden' because of those temporary work schemes which give a maximum of one year's work to some of the 'long term register' who return to the short-term register at the end of their 'work experience'.

A recent programme on Granada TV showed a Tory MP's attempt to live on the dole for one week! As this proved more difficult than he had imagined, and he had, as I presumed, an adequate stock of good clothing etc at home, I wonder how he would have managed after one year on the dole, when shoes and clothes and general household goods needed replacing or repairing. What if he had rapidly growing children to provide for as well? 60% of long-term unemployed men are married, 33% have dependent children. And long-term social security benefit never becomes payable, even if long-term means 5 or 10 years (But N.B. single parents on the dole do become eligible for long-term rates after one year).

Take a look again at all these numbers and figures, and think that each one represents a human being, some represent a family of human beings, who have no jobs to go to and who must live on 'state hand outs'. And if you're in any doubt about the stress and cost in human terms, I'll leave you with just a few more statistics:

over $\frac{1}{3}$ of those seeking help with drink problems are unemployed
over $\frac{1}{2}$ of attempted suicides are unemployed (long-term unemployed are 19 times more likely to attempt suicide than employed!)
Unemployed are twice as likely to divorce

And one more - the cost to the taxpayer (unemployment benefit is taxable) in upkeep of the royal yacht Britannia for 1983 was £9 million. Makes you think!

Sources include: Policy Studies Institute, MSC, New Society)

* Women wanting to know about the benefits of registering unemployed should contact this centre.

All contributions welcome. Send them to
Doledrums, Nottingham Centre for
the Unemployed, 66-72 Hounds Gate, Nottm.

Keeping Warm

The problems of surviving on a low income are never more serious than in the winter months, when the overriding concern is how to keep warm. Lack of warm clothing is a problem, but one that most people manage to get around. Less difficult to cope with is the rising cost of gas and electricity; between January 1974 and April 1983 the price of fuel rose by 366 per cent, while earnings rose 246 per cent.

That the fuel boards have recognised the problem is demonstrated by the range of schemes which they operate offering alternatives to a quarterly lump-sum payment of bills; they have also agreed to a code of practice containing safeguards relating to disconnection. Under the terms of this code of practice fuel boards must offer a "reasonable" repayment period, or the installation of a slot meter.

Anybody receiving a fuel bill that they can't pay should contact the fuel board immediately - don't wait for the red bill. If you think the bill is unusually high ask the fuel board to check their readings; they have been known to make mistakes. If the board insists that the amount of the bill is correct, you can then negotiate on how the bill is to be paid. Fuel boards are, obviously, primarily concerned with collecting the debt and may suggest a weekly or monthly repayment that you can't afford - you can make a "reasonable counter proposal". It's best not to agree to a weekly payment that you can't afford, since if you default on the agreement the board can take disconnection proceedings.

Slot meters can be fitted where the board consider it "safe and practicable" to do so. This offers control over the amount of fuel used and money spent, but there are drawbacks. You may be asked to pay a high instalment fee, although you can ask to have this reduced. In order to recover the original debt, and cover the cost of present consumption, the board can set the meter to charge more than the actual current cost of the fuel.

Families who have to live on Supplementary Benefit can get help in three ways. They may qualify for extra weekly benefit (heating additions) if, for example, a member of the family is elderly (over 70) or they live in a house that is damp and difficult to heat. In some circumstances the DHSS can consider giving people lump-sum payments (Single Payments) towards the cost of fuel bills - an example of this would be where people are operating a new heating system that they are unfamiliar with. Lastly, the DHSS may agree to putting people on the "fuel direct" scheme. This is where the DHSS make weekly payments to the fuel board on the claimants' behalf, and the amount of benefit paid to the claimants is reduced accordingly.

All of these schemes offer, at best, a partial solution to the problem, and at worst are no help at all. They help to conceal, rather than tackle the real problem - a growing number of people who find that they are unable to pay for fuel. There are a number of long-term options available to the Government. They could spend more money on serious research into cheaper alternative energy sources; they could encourage the industry to produce cheaper, more efficient home heating systems; and finally the high profits which accrue within the fuel industries could be used to fund home insulation schemes, and to introduce a fuel subsidy for people with low incomes.

The 23.1.84 edition of World in Action, "For the Benefit of Mr Parrish", demonstrated the large gap which still exists between the haves and the have nots in this country. Matthew Parrish, the Tory MP for Derbyshire West, an ex-diplomat and ex-assistant to Thatcher, was shown at the beginning of the programme, cocktail in hand, delivering a speech to a be-hatted, be-jewelled Ladies Conservative Club, denouncing "scroungers" and proclaiming that life on Social Security needed to be made even more uncomfortable in order to force these "scroungers" to go out and look for work instead of living luxuriously and contentedly on the dole. World in Action then challenged Matthew Parrish to live for one week on £26.80 in Newcastle in a DHSS paid flat heated by slot meters. (Thus Mr Parrish did not even experience the routine discomforts of signing on and waiting several months for his benefit and Housing Benefit to be sent to him). Confident that by the end of the week he would still have 'at least three pounds' in hand, Matthew Parrish accepted the challenge.

Met off the (first class) train at Newcastle by the team, Mr Parrish was stripped of his wallet, cheque book, credit cards and expensive suit and given £26.80 and the type of clothes worn by the unemployed. Mr Parrish's problems really began with his heating and lighting. He soon found that the cost of keeping warm took more money than he had bargained for. He had earlier denounced drink, cigarettes and TV as 'luxuries' for those on the dole, but soon found that unless he walked (to save bus fare) into town to look (and only look) at the shops, his black and white TV was the only alternative to sitting in a cold dark flat staring at the walls. Nor did he find that he had enough money to buy the drink that he had claimed the unemployed spent too much money on; not only did he have to switch from his habitual cocktail to a half pint, but by the end of the week he was reduced to allowing a total stranger to buy him a drink. Mr Parrish becomes a scrounger?

The most moving confrontation of the programme was that between Mr Parrish and Harry, an unemployed ex-worker who now runs a coffee bar for the unemployed of Newcastle. Harry had been unemployed for four years and has three children to support. Faced with this man who represented one of those living "comfortably" off the dole and "unwilling" to work, Mr Parrish rather feebly reiterated his policy of making life on Social Security even more uncomfortable in order to force people to go out and get work. Harry pointed out that he wanted to work; he had three children who often went without; and that it was hardly fair to punish him even further for not being able to find work that in economically depressed Newcastle, wasn't there. Harry, whose Geordie pride was apparent, described the physical and mental misery that 'signing on' regularly gave him and said:

"I tell you, mister, it is uncomfortable in thousands of ways you don't even know about. Don't say to us, 'Because we can't give you work we are going to make it hard for you.' We are the casualties of the economic war".

Outdoor shots showed Mr Parrish and thousands of others at the Job Centre, chasing after a few jobs and jobs that weren't there; Parrish visiting the empty docks and closed ship yards; and in a supermarket, moving along shelves, comparing prices and rejecting coffee as a

turn over!

'luxury' (and many other items of his former diet as an MP) he could not afford as he searched for cheap and filling food. In fact, Mr Parrish was beginning to realise his mistake. By the end of the week he had no money at all; he was in debt; his flat was in darkness and unheated; he had virtually no food and after a supper of cold tinned fish he spent his last night at a working mans club where entertainment, heating and companionship were free amongst those he had previously denounced as "scroungers". Mr Parrish was shown laughing uproariously at a comedian's anti-Tory joke!

Interviewed on the last day, Matthew Parrish admitted his mistake; life on the dole was already uncomfortable enough and people like Harry should not be punished further for not finding work they wanted but wasn't there. Having said this, Mr Parrish got back his own clothes, his wallet and credit cards and boarded the train back to London. Millions of others on the dole don't have this option, and won't until more of the haves try Matthew Parrish's experience. Perhaps World in Action should now challenge Thatcher?

MORE MONEY FOR THE UNEMPLOYED AND PART-TIME WORKERS

A claim for Unemployment Benefit lasts for 52 weeks in a period of unemployment. Many people are not affected by this because they claim Supplementary Benefit to top up their income both before and after their Unemployment Benefit runs out. Other claimants who do not qualify for Supplementary Benefit can qualify for another 52 week period of Unemployment Benefit.

To requalify for another 52 weeks of Unemployment Benefit it is necessary to be employed for 13 weeks for at least 16 hours a week. This provision is particularly useful for part-time workers because they can requalify and then receive unemployment benefit whilst at work.

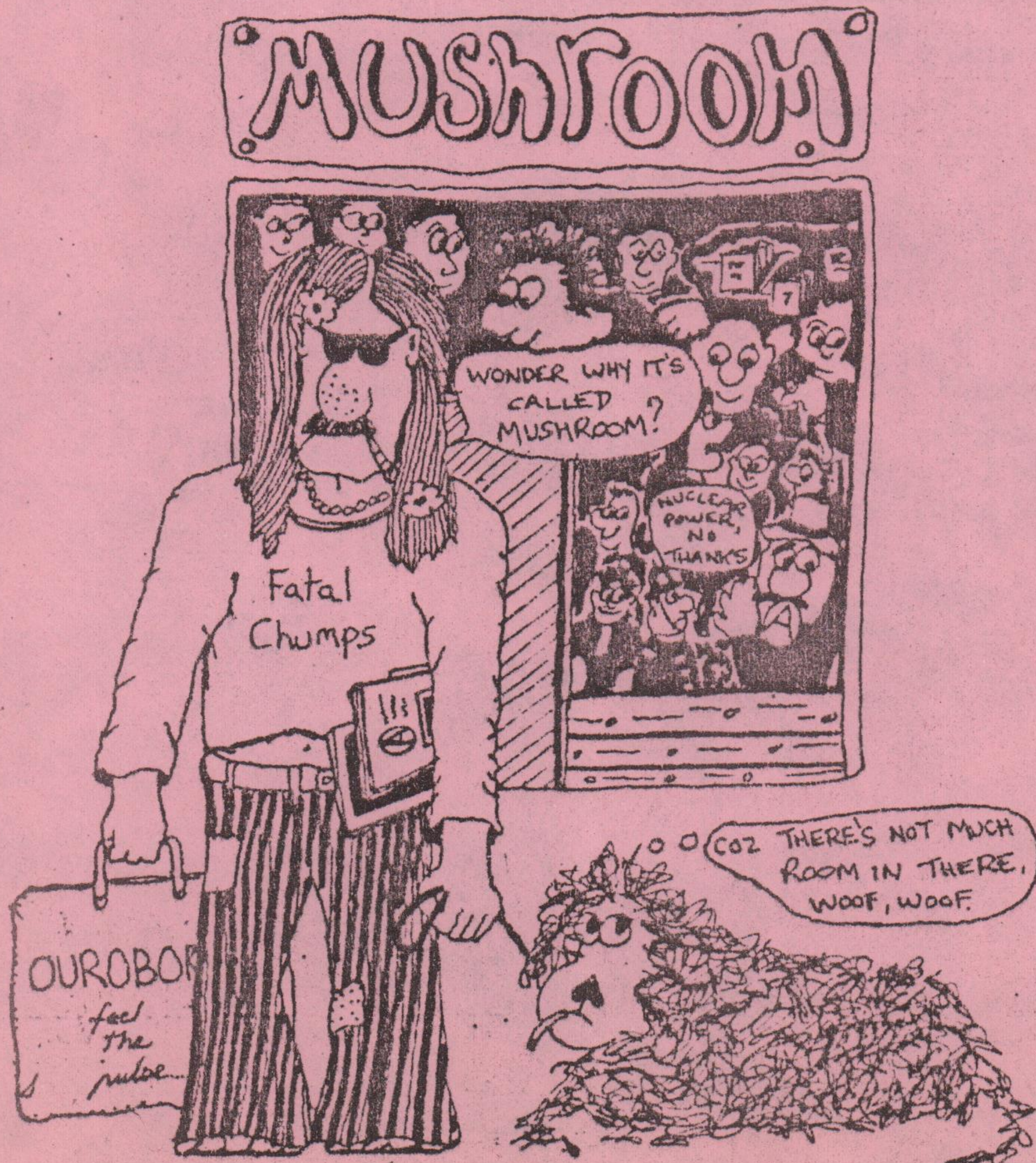
For example:

June gets a job for 3 days a week (21 hours) on a Community Programme (CP) Scheme run by the Manpower Services Commission. She would like a permanent full time job if one was available. If she signs on as unemployed after working on the CP scheme for 13 weeks, she will get $3/6 \times £27.05$ or £13.53 on top of her CP wage.

Review of 'Citywise', Nottingham's alternative paper. (SK)

Considering the anti-Union policy and activity of the 'Post' and the resulting TU boycott of this publication there is an obvious need for an alternative paper in Nottingham. It is good therefore to be able to say that 'Citywise' looks like meeting that need. The TU orientation is obvious in the Nov-Dec issue with pieces on NHS cuts and the residential social workers' dispute. General features include Police and arms, Girls' Project and childrens play. There is a regular Campaigns feature plus a special spread on the Asbestos campaign. Some short pieces and humour complete the issue. The paper needs to build a base before attempting mass popularity and its approach seems to be right for doing that. At present the paper lacks any coverage of the local music scene but no doubt this will be covered in the future. The only real criticism I personally have is of the cartoon, which I feel is in very dubious taste.

MARK



ON THE TRAMP IN THE 1930's -
a new book by CHARLIE POTTER

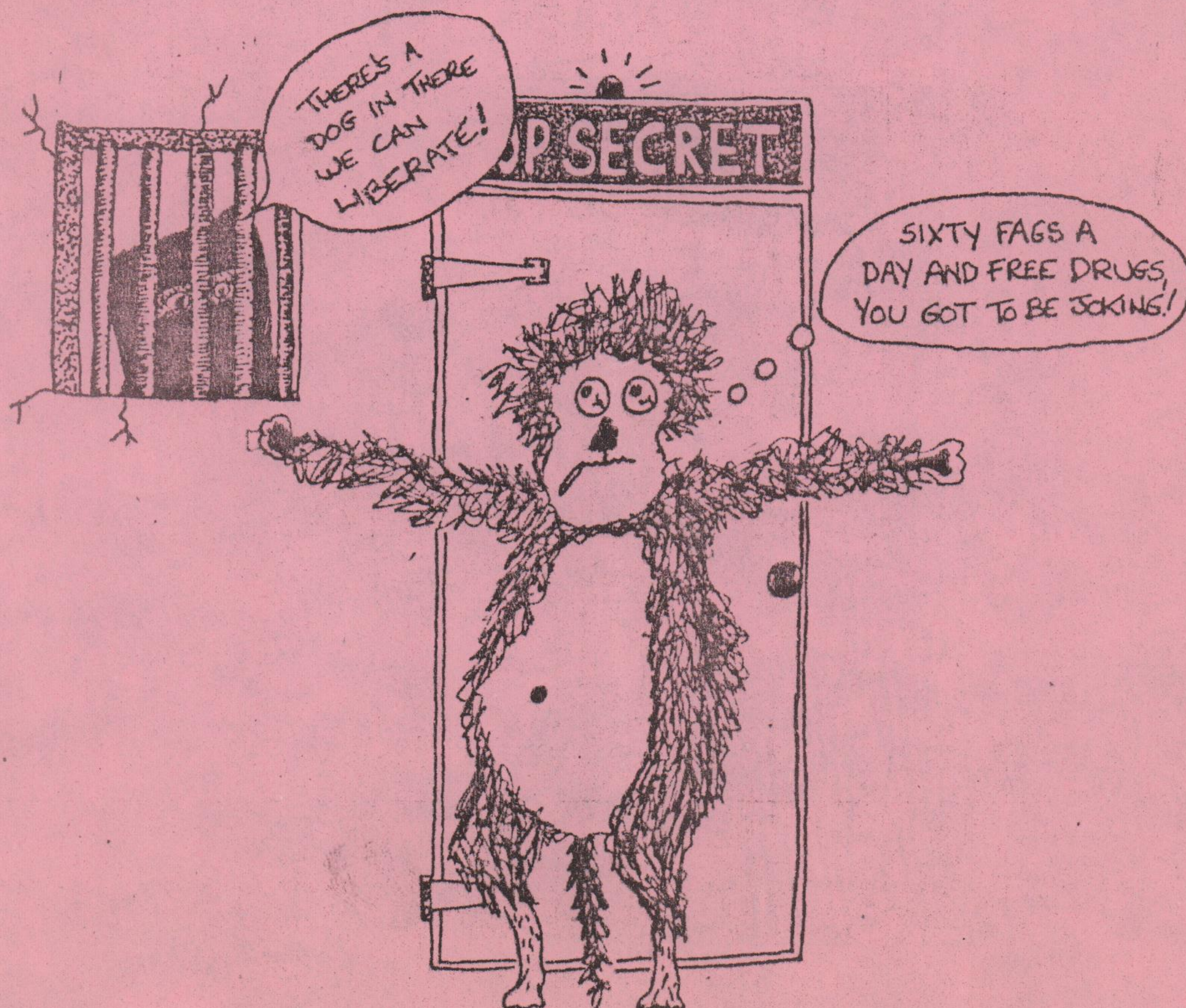
This is the ninth publication of 'Yer Own Stuff Press' - the Nottingham Community Publishing Group set up to share and encourage neglected voices in the surrounding district, printing books which would more than likely be overlooked by the established publishing houses.

Charlie Potter is now 78 years of age, and his book is well worth a mention in Doledrums, as it is an extraordinarily well-remembered account of the experiences of two Beeston men, himself and his friend, Joe, who are without work during the depression and set off for Yorkshire, chasing the rumour that an Iron-works there is 'setting on'.

Whilst on the road, or on the 'Toby' as Charlie puts it, we are treated to a colourful description of survival in those days, collecting 17/- dole money at a different town each week, staying in doss-houses, Salvation Army Hostels, and the 'Spikes', or Casual Wards, where a bath and a bed was to be had, under prison like conditions, in exchange for a couple of hours work the next morning.

Book Review

Copies are available at MUSHROOM BOOKS
or by post from 18, Waterloo Road
Beeston, Nottingham
Price £1.25 with 20p extra for post
and packaging.
For further information phone
Nottingham 251587



January 1984 saw the first of the NCU Individual Pool Championships.

Some 25 people entered and the heats were held over 3 days.

The Winner was Dave Verney, and runner-up Des Taylor.

The next Championship will be on April 23rd, 24th and 27th. Any unemployed person may enter by paying a fee of 15p. Lists close 16th April. Winners receive individual trophies and their names will be engraved on the NCU Shield.

Many thanks to Brian and Barbara of the Transport and General Workers Union for their generous donation of the trophies and to Alan for presenting them.

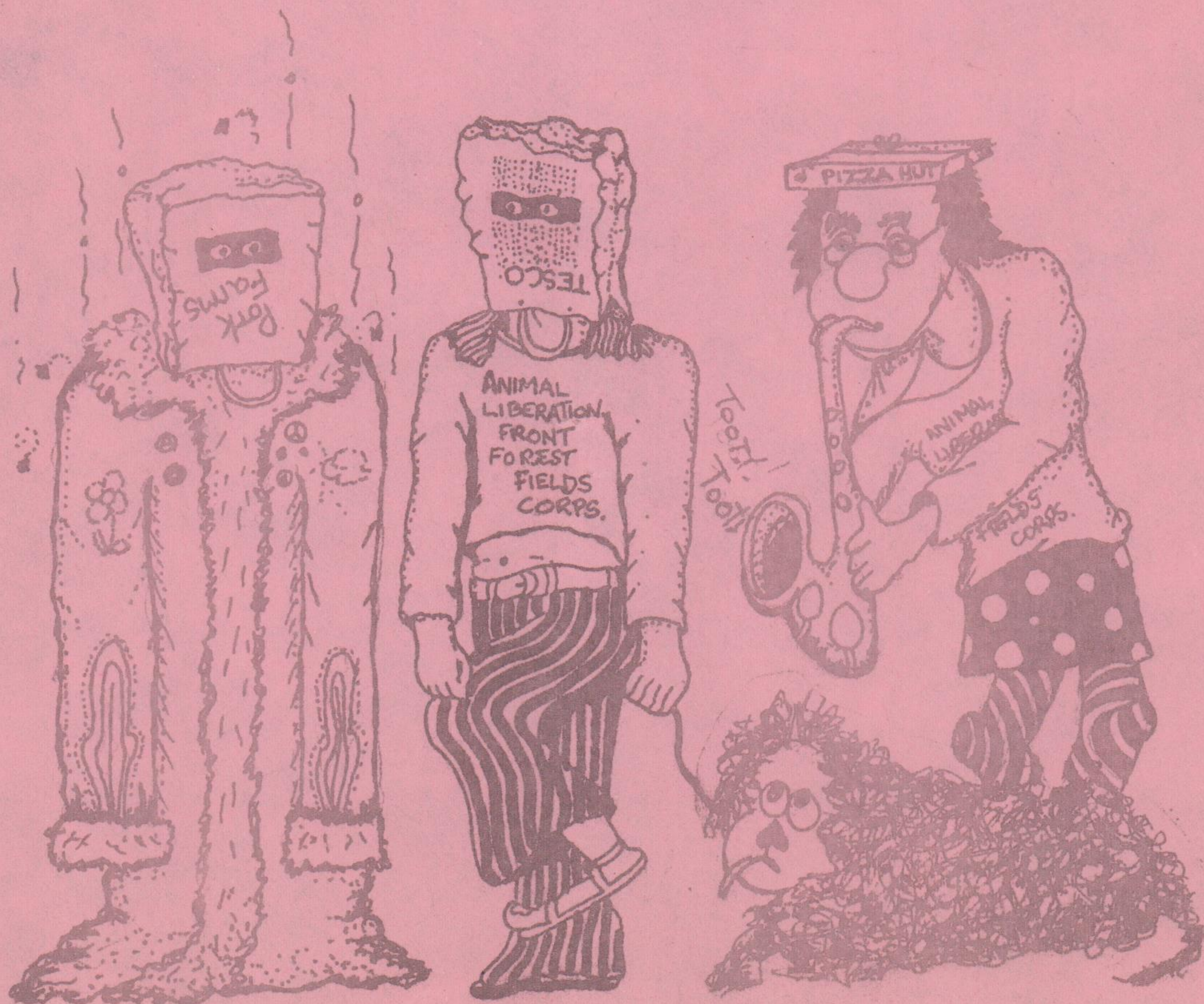
SOD THE OLYMPICS

Once more the unemployed and staff of DHSS are preparing for bitter conflict. The prize to be gained? The NCU Decathlon Trophy, presently held by 'THEM'.

This year the events are changed slightly - Football, Pool, Darts, Basketball, Chess, Scrabble, Quiz, Table-Tennis, Relay and Tug O' War.

Anyone wishing to sign up for the battle should come to NCU (ask for Lynn).

The event is held as part of the Nottingham Festival, May 28th-June 9th. Look out for the official programme for date and venues.



What's ON?

CrEChE

m n mon-fri/10-4

Coffee bar

mon-fri

UNEMPLOYED

GRoUp

every thurs 1.30pm

Womens

GRoUp

every mon 1.00pm

pool

mUSiC Co-op

phone for dd phone for details

AdviCe

welfare rights etc

video

every weds 10.00am

plus

COURSES

welfare rights 3 welfare rights/tuesday/februar

qwertyuiop welfare rights/tuesday/february 28-april 3

new technology/wednesday/february 29-april 4

using video 8nvp/friday/march 16-one day/11-4

mind your own business/self-employment/8-22 marh

8-22march