

P.RINTERS *Playtime*

Workers Playtime is a defunct workerist journal that last came out in May 1985, just after the end of the miners' strike.

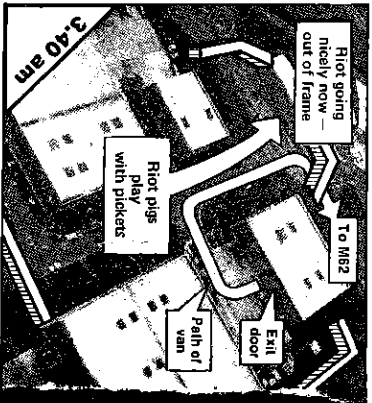
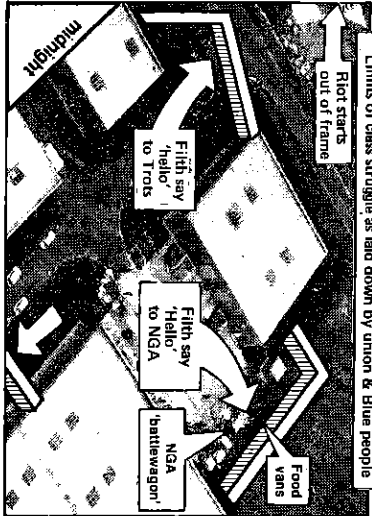
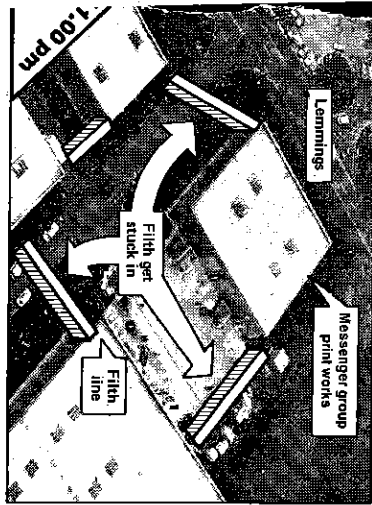
This pamphlet is a collection of Playtime articles. Together, they trace the changing character of the class struggle in the UK printing industry. It ends with a short piece about Wapping, and extracts from the unofficial strike bulletin Picket.

The graphic on this cover comes from Playtime, and refers to the picketing of Eddie Shah's Stockport Messenger, which foreshadowed Wapping.

THURSDAY DECEMBER 1 1983

THE TIMES

The picket line battle of Winwick Quay



Chronology of the

NGA van is

Dark Star
and Phoenix Press
0 948984 02 3

90p

Free to members of unemployed
chapels

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 small-holding 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.

This pamphlet is about new technology in the printing industry, about its effects on printworkers, about the response to new technology made by the unions and about the struggles against new technology. The effects, as has already been seen, include worsened pay and conditions of employment, redundancy, the sack, and police violence for those who resist. The most dramatic result so far was the recent year long dispute at Wapping and the last article is on that subject. All the other articles are on the general topic of the struggle over new technology of which Wapping is a particular example. They were written well before Wapping and may therefore be assessed with the benefit of a hindsight not available to the authors. The articles are about bosses such as Robert Maxwell, Eddie Shah and David Dimbleby, about the unions NGA, SOGAT and the EETPU, and about newspapers ranging from local free sheets to Fleet Street dailies. They originally appeared in Workers' Playtime, a short-lived libertarian periodical that ran to a total of 10 issues in the early eighties. They raise important questions about technology, employment, unions, society in general. Without pretending to be exhaustive or definitive, they put forward a viewpoint that many people will find unfamiliar, particularly those who rely on Fleet Street for their news and analysis. The answers to the questions posed here involve all of us.

Maxwell axes 250 for 'anarchy'

Robert Maxwell is insisting that the 350 Radio Times printworkers dismissed by his company (British Printing and Communications Corporation) for 'anarchic behaviour' will not be given their jobs back. Even if they are, any 'victory' is likely to be short-lived.

Employment in the printing industry — traditionally a bastion of working class militancy — has been savagely cut in recent years. Worse is to come. The Printing Industries section of the National Economic Development Council predicts a fall in employment of 84,000, from 250,000 to 166,000.

SOGAT IS GETTING SLADE

Workers in print have become less and less able to defend their jobs through the unions. These old craft organisations remained useful so long as printing processes depended mainly on the skill of the individual craftsman. By controlling the supply of labour into the trade, for instance through long apprenticeship, they could protect jobs and keep wages high.

But despite many battles, the unions have not been able to stop the advance of sophisticated, labour-saving technology. As a result, the demand for labour has steadily fallen, both in quantity and quality. And the current recession makes things even tighter for printworkers.

The current dispute at the Radio Times is a good example. Management can break up a militant group of workers simply by moving operations to a more technically advanced plant

The 250 SOGAT 82 workers were sacked for their action over non-payment of a bonus. BPCC had promised a pre-Xmas 'goodwill' supplement, averaging £400 per person, in return for extra productivity. They withheld part of this payment because of 'lack of progress'. Maxwell ordered the sackings during the strike which followed.

Printing operations have since been trans-

ferred to another plant at East Kilbride, near Glasgow, which up to now has printed only 1½ million of the RT's 3½ million copies. Maxwell claims that East Kilbride already has the technical capacity to handle the extra work. And current levels of unemployment mean it should not be hard to find the extra 200 workers, who, Maxwell hopes, will form the nucleus of a docile, semi-skilled workforce.

So far, the move has not been easy — 114 East Kilbride workers had to be sacked for actions in solidarity with Park Royal. Meanwhile SOGAT 82 has made gestures of protest by blacking the distribution of Sunday colour supplements printed by BPCC.

And the Park Royal workers are not the sort to take this lying down. The management were praising their militancy when they spoke of "a record of non-co-operation and bloody-mindedness on a scale unequalled in British industry." Indeed, of the last 52 issues of RT, only 7 have been on time and up to the full print run.

The BPCC will eventually move the whole operation to East Kilbride, or at least away from Park Royal. At the moment it is continuing typesetting there. The typesetters are members of the NGA — as usual, employers are taking advantage of the union divisions to play off groups of workers against one another. For the typesetting operations at Park Royal are even more archaic than the printing — much of it is still done by hand!

The development of technology has, over the years, made it harder for production workers to rely on skill as a weapon against the bosses. The craft unions, like those in print, are now unable to manipulate the labour market in the way they used to. Nowadays their only function is to perpetuate artificial divisions between workers in different firms and industries. But it is only the unity of mass, autonomous action which can help workers like those at Park Royal.

State of Minders

At the end of a 2-month pay and productivity strike by 270 NGA printworkers, the *Financial Times* was back on August 8th.

The strike was in support of 18 machine managers, who were demanding an £18 rise and extra shifts. Their claim was in response to an award made to SOGAT machine assistants, and was said to be in defence of pay differentials. The management has been insisting on more productivity and an end to the 'leapfrogging' pay demands. NGA and SOGAT workers have used so effectively in the past to hike up their wages.

At various stages in the dispute, the bosses threatened to print the *FT* without union labour, or at least without its NGA workers — either by persuading SOGAT printers to scab, or by having the paper printed abroad (it already publishes a European edition). The TUC put pressure on the union to force its printers back on ACAS terms the workers had already rejected, since ACAS backed the management.

The strength of Fleet Street printers is their ability to inflict large losses on the

Poached — or Hard Boiled?

A group of workers seeking to break away from their autocratic union leadership and by doing so challenging a closed shop agreement ought to be causing big headlines in the press and noises of support from the government. But these are not an 'ordinary' group of workers. Those involved are part of the Fleet St. branch of the electricians union EPTU. They previously gained front page prominence in defying Tebbit's 1980 Employment Act by stopping production of all national newspapers for a day. Moreover

company very quickly and without hardship to themselves, since they can get casual work at other papers. Falling profits, however, are at last persuading newspaper bosses that they need to break this power once and for all, even at the expense of a massive, Fleet Street-wide showdown. New technology would be a weapon in their hands.

In the end, the printers won a £13 rise, taking them to £317 a week, and more shifts. Nobody is claiming total victory, but the workers have once again staved off a catastrophic attack. The TUC couldn't face expelling the NGA, a union which lives in fear of its own members, and prefers subtler methods of grinding down strikes it doesn't like. The *FT* bosses couldn't bring themselves to dispense with the NGA's services either, although they would have loved to sack its members. And 'Wobbly' Bill Keys of SOGAT couldn't bring himself to stab his opposite number in the back.

But the *FT* strike takes craft printers one step nearer having to choose between total surrender, and all-out attack in alliance with other groups of workers.

they are seeking to join SOGAT '82 in an attempt to gain more industrial influence. Their arguments for this are couched in appealing liberal terms — individuals should be free to choose between various democratic forms of union organisation. This in itself does not challenge the form, let alone role of Trade Union 'democracy'. It is simply a wish to swap the hypocritical democracy of the EPTU for the more devious sort peddled by SOGAT '82. It goes nowhere near the electricians desire for autonomy. A further claim that

this entails "... how we will best serve the interests of our members, our industry and the trade union and labour movement" gives a better perspective on the type, limitations and false choices available in an inter-union dispute. All union leaderships see themselves as serving, that is, leading the membership. Through this attitude the interests of the labour movement come in direct conflict with those of workers; the way that they will sell out their members in order to serve the best interests of the industry bosses.

SUNNY SIDE UP

The decision of the electricians to break away was in part a wish for a stronger craft position within Fleet St.. Electricians hold 'the key' to the print process — it is they who not only keep the machines running but actually start them up (or refuse to as the case may be). But while this was in their minds their actions were a response to the immediate problems posed by their own union leadership. Tension between branch and union executive built steadily from the activity during last years NHS strike. The Fleet St. electricians defied both a High Court injunction and Union directives forbidding them to stop work in support of the hospital workers. Sean Geraghty, branch secretary, was subsequently fined by the courts, banned from holding office by the union, and overnight became a hero of the working class (well, leftist folklore). There was a further notable industrial confrontation; a two week stoppage of the Times at the end of last year. During this a despairing Frank Chapple, leader of the EEPTU, showing a rare insight, was moved to exclaim "The men seem to enjoy being out on strike. . ." Despite a further statement that he "... really could not care what happens to them" — whether they were sacked by the Times or not — his real concern was

that something had to be done about their disregard of union authority. The executive's response was to take control of the branch's function to fill vacancies that arise within Fleet St., bringing branch recruitment under the control of the full time area officials. Various branch records and minutes were also called in for examination. These actions were seen as preliminary to Chapple dissolving the branch and dispersing the membership among others; a tactic much used on troublesome branches in recent years. The electricians response was to open up negotiations with SOGAT '82 and the NGA to affiliate the branch en masse.

EGG ON HIS FACE

At the end of May the branch voted to leave the EEPTU and join SOGAT '82. Led by Geraghty, half the branch members filled in resignation forms and returned them to head office. Chapple refused to accept them. Backed by Len Murray and the Newspaper Publishers Association, he threatened that any electrician employed on Fleet St. who is not a member of the EEPTU is breaking the closed shop agreement and would therefore lose their job.

The EEPTU regarded all the resignations as invalid and accused SOGAT of 'poaching' members. Under the TUC's Bridlington agreement, members need the consent of the union they are leaving in order to change to another. Branch secessions need the permission of the TUC — only given on rare occasions. Bill Keys, general secretary of SOGAT, was summoned by Murray. His union was threatened with expulsion if it accepted the membership cards already issued by its London Machine Room Branch to the electricians. Ironically, at the time Keys was busy helping force the NGA to capitulate over the Financial Times dispute with threats of their expulsion.

The EEPTU's attitude is the usual paternalist union one : that we know what is best for the members. Anything at odds is "irresponsible advice" from the politically motivated. The unions argument is that the industrial importance of skilled electricians would not be recognised in a general print union; especially at a time when electrical and electronic skills are at a premium, whilst more manual skills are declining due to new technology.

After the breakaway, the EEPTU branch managed to reconstitute itself, electing new officers and being recognised by the union executive. Those remaining see themselves as an "autonomous" independent branch, as they have had the employment register returned — the touchstone of Fleet St. autonomy. The split in the branch has not been a left/right political divide. We are told that those remaining contain prominent 'left wingers' equally opposed to the conservatism of Chapple. The new branch has criticised him for his article in the Times suggesting that Trade Unions become more independent from the Labour Party. Chapple stated that the choice is "between socialism and survival". It is a choice he has imposed upon his members, and it has dictated their response.

The Ragged Arsed Widower of Fleet Street (The NGA)

Changes in the printing industry are beginning to have a drastic effect on the pattern of work and workplace struggle, as old skills are made redundant and traditional bargaining positions are undermined. At the same time, the print unions are being weakened by unemployment, and finding it difficult to meet the industry's changing requirements of them.

Managements have sought to reverse the decline of profits in the industry by raising productivity, holding down wages, 'rationalising' production and reducing the size of the skilled workforce.

They have been helped in this by new printing technologies, based on micro-electronics, which make it possible to

At present, and possibly for some time to come, the electricians are effectively without union representation. As such they are in jeopardy under the closed shop agreement. But their position demonstrates how the closed shop only confers power upon the union; the power of the workers arises from their position within production, the degree of their militancy, and their willingness to take on and hold out against their union. Regardless of what union they belong to, their sectional industrial strength will still remain, but allying themselves to one union or another will not further solidarity within, let alone outside, Fleet St. — where disputes are contained by unions as separate struggles in different papers.

The age old dream of one union within an industry obscures the maintenance of vested interests and positions that the electricians hope to gain by joining SOGAT. The question is not one of which union best serves the interests of its members or maintains the higher craft status. Any "victory" claimed in such terms by the electricians, EEPTU or SOGAT will be another example of containing the working class within a shell. What is needed is to throw off the yoke of unionism.(Groan — typist)

Most printworkers now belong to either the National Graphical Association (NGA 82), which takes in craft printers and other skilled production staff and has about 150,000 members, or the Society of Graphical and Allied Trades (SOGAT 82), with about 260,000 non-apprenticed printers, distribution, auxiliary and clerical workers.

The most drastic changes in the industry are affecting members of the NGA. Many of them, facing redundancy, redeployment or retraining, are rethinking their attitude to their work, and to other workers.

The NGA, which has always organised on the basis of craft exclusivity and the defence of its territory against other unions, is being forced to change its policy towards non-NGA workers in the media. The problems of a craft union like the NGA, struggling to keep in step with the times, raise the wider question of the relationship between unions and workers' struggles. The union is not merely a deadweight. It needs and gets a large amount of loyalty and money from its members. In the NGA's case, this is based as much on workers aggressively pursuing and defending sectional interests as upon the union co-opting and institutionalising their demands. In fact, the NGA has rarely been forced into open opposition to rank-and-file members.

CRAFTY SODS

The power of any union rests in its control over labour. The craft unions are more sophisticated than most. The NGA not only mediates workers demands, it has a near-monopoly on the supply of skilled printing labour. Bosses use it as a recruiting agent. The pre-entry closed shop, in force in most printing firms, means that bosses agree only to take on workers who are already accredited by the union. When they are notified of a vacancy, the union has first responsibility

for filling it. Numbers of new trainees are strictly regulated by a quota system.

This is a historical arrangement. The union's ancestry can be traced to the craft guilds of pre-capitalist times, and the NGA retains some of the functions of those organisations. By agreement with the employers (some of whom still call themselves 'Master Printers'), the union keeps firm control over admission to membership, and who is allowed to do which jobs. The skills have always been well-defined. The basic unit of union organisation is the 'Chapel' or workplace branch, with a 'Father of the Chapel' and an 'Imperial Father of the Chapels' in each workplace (roughly equivalent to Shop Steward and Convenor, although FOCs have more power than the average Shop Steward.) A very few Chapel officials are women, and they are known as Mothers. These union officers may conduct local negotiations over wages and conditions, obtaining agreements which run in parallel with those reached at the national level.

The Chapel system provides an illusion of autonomy, an immediate focus for the expression of grievances and an effective disciplinary structure. NGA members are subject to many rules and regulations, which carry sanctions such as fines, suspension or expulsion (and the loss of a job.) Members can only work in non-union firms with the permission of senior regional officials. They are not allowed to distribute unapproved leaflets or other literature in their workplace, and until recently there was a ban on unofficial caucuses.

The traditional militancy and craft solidarity of skilled printworkers have often been expressed as sectionalism and elitism. The snobbishness of the NGA is based on the division of workers into strongly demarcated trades and grades, a devotion to Work and the mystification of skills. Semi-skilled and unskilled workers in print have been regarded as

outsiders, to be kept at a discreet distance or excluded altogether. Some of the bitterest disputes have been fought in defence of craft status against other members of the working class. Women were barred from craft training until quite recently. Groups of workers from outside print, trying to get support in Fleet Street for their own strikes, are ritually patronised and given large amounts of money, but solidarity rarely goes as far as interfering with hate-stories about strikes in the press.

The authoritarianism of the union is most naturally shown in the personalities of the branch officials. The hard men from HQ back up their knowledge of rules and customs with plenty of aggression, useful for intimidating their opposite numbers, and even more effective for intimidating or impressing workers. Officers behave more like middle-ranking freemasons than workers, with their complicated statutes, ritual penalties and bizarre codes of communication. In fact, craft unions and masonic lodges overlap and compliment each other.

The NGA's role as a seller of workers is one reason bosses have found it an aid to the day-to-day running of their factories. Another is that it helps them know where they stand with their workers. The union does not like its members ignoring the procedures agreed on their behalf. Disputes are either quickly made official, or stamped out.

Why are workers loyal to it? In return for high subscriptions, those who complete their apprenticeship or probation get sickness and dispute benefits, free legal advice, and other forms of insurance and protection. Above all, they get a secure place in the queue for jobs if they get made redundant, and £32 per week unemployment benefit in the mean time. The union is literally their Job Centre. It is responsible to the state for finding work for its members on the dole, and chasing them up when they get

lazy—something it does more efficiently than the Department of Employment, especially when employers complain that nobody seems to want their jobs. It informs members of their rights, such as what they can demand and how far they can go.

N.G.AAAAARRGH

The NGA is being destabilised, on the one hand by the effects of the crisis, on the other by the bosses measures for restoring profits.

The union has been stretched to near-bankruptcy by its commitment to paying out unemployment benefits, now running at about £1½ million a year. The system was not designed to support a mass of unemployed members, and relied on the union being able to maintain artificially high employment among them, by controlling the level of demand for work.

Although the NGA has progressed in its campaign to establish a 100% pre-entry closed shop in print, it has simply not been able to match the rate of redundancies since 1978 by restricting numbers of apprentices. It has therefore been forced to levy extra money from its working members, on top of the usual subs of £1.80 or so a week. Last year, a £1 levy had to be stopped by popular demand after six months. This year, the national officials were so worried at the prospect of losing the vote on a 75p levy, that they took off all over the country, convening meetings of all the FOCs in the regions, telling them to go back and persuade their Chapels of the need for compassion and sacrifice. It worked—but for how long this time?

Of course, the union's response to the crisis has to be seen in a wider context. The NGA is in a similar position to the Tory government, caught in a policy dilemma. By deliberately excluding young workers from wage labour, it is

cutting down on its own membership, and therefore on the revenues it can levy—at the same time as its welfare commitments are growing. Like the state, its rationale is that of guaranteeing the jobs of those who remain. In the long run, however, it can only deliver austerity measures, that is, until ‘things pick up’.

From our point of view, even if the union succeeds with its remedies, it is merely exporting its problems to the rest of the working class, especially school-leavers trying to avoid the dole. It is an example of craft unionism posing as class solidarity, when it is nothing of the sort. At the same time, the NGA campaigns against work being taken abroad. This too is supposed to combat unemployment. In fact, it just aggravates the conditions of workers in other countries, facing the same crisis conditions. Union policy for employment in the '80s smells strongly of nationalism, hypocrisy and bureaucratic self-interest.

On the other hand, bosses are looking for new working methods, technologies, pay and grading structures which threaten long-standing practices of the union. Simpler shop-floor procedures make it more difficult, for instance, for the union to insist on prolonged apprenticeships—already down from 6 to 2½ years in the space of a decade—and therefore more difficult to regulate the intake of young workers.

The new printing technology is rapidly changing the structure of the industry. Put simply, faster machines with easier controls mean fewer workers with less skills. New techniques have led to the growth of an alternative printing industry, consisting of High Street ‘Instant Print’ shops, ‘In-plant’ printing in local government offices, banks and manufacturing companies, Art Studios and advertising agencies. Printing itself is giving way to new ways of transmitting information, such as teletext, viewdata, on-line systems, cable TV and local radio.

Craft manual workers like compositors and proof-readers, whose key skills in producing print put them in such a strong negotiating position, can now be replaced by a smaller number of white-collar and semi-skilled workers, operating computer typesetting systems.

The writing, editing and printing of large-circulation papers and magazines can now be divided between several different locations, making it easier for bosses to limit the damage done by wildcat strikes in one plant. Improved communications also mean that production can be shifted to wherever workers come cheapest. Robert Maxwell's British Printing Corporation (BPC) is a pioneer of this strategy. Production of the *Radio Times* has been shifted away from the Waterlows factory at Park Royal, to the newly-equipped plant at East Kilbride, where the company was able to get more advantageous terms on wages, conditions and productivity from the workforce.

Most dangerous for the NGA is the possibility that bosses, encouraged by the government, will stop relying on the union as a ready supplier of skilled labour. This threat will increase if the union shows itself less able than in the past to secure the loyalty and obedience of workers, through the promise of steady work and protected status. Some of the union's traditional practices are threatened by new laws against secondary blacking and the pre-entry closed shop. It has already seen the need to bend some of its principles, such as the one enshrined in Rule 43, which forbids NGA workers to touch original artwork from non-NGA firms.

THAT'S THE WADE TO DO IT

So far, the NGA has dealt with the introduction of new technology by slowing it down. The British newspaper industry is now several years behind the rest of the world in bringing in ‘single

keystroking’ (a term which denotes the editing and composing of text for printing by a single operator.) In fact, full direct input was installed in the early '70s at T. Bailey Foreman, publishers of the *Nottingham Evening Post*. It is no longer a union-recognised firm. Fully-integrated computer photocomposition has in fact been installed in other places, including the *Mirror*, *Times* and *Express* newspapers, but there the NGA was able to insist on ‘double keystroking’—in other words, an unnecessary division of labour. The union's strategy seems to be to accept a steady rate of technological redundancies, in return for secure manning and demarcation agreements as in the past. It is trying to recruit new groups of skilled workers to replace those it is losing. It has relented on apprenticeships, which will be replaced this month with a more ‘flexible’ training and retraining scheme. In the longer term, it looks towards mergers with other unions, particularly SOGAT or the 30,000-strong National Union of Journalists (NUJ), some of whose members would be operating the strategically important ‘front end’ of the direct input technology.

A merger would be just one more in the long series of the last 15 years, part of the process of capitalist concentration. Most recently, the NGA and SOGAT made parallel mergers with SLADE, the graphic artists union, and NATSOPA. The NGA is beginning to see the formation of a single media union as a necessary objective.

The NGA and NUJ recently broke off merger talks because of long-running quarrels over ‘accountability’, ‘internal democracy’ and ‘industrial organisation’. These are superficial arguments. What really stopped them was inertia: the two unions have a long history of sabotaging each others disputes. There is craft snobbery and professional elitism to get over. Most seriously of all, there is the problem of merging two career

bureaucracies, with all the loss of status and promotion prospects that would involve for some people (surely, they won't let their pensions escape.) In the end, they will either patch things up or they won't. As far as workers are concerned, we shouldn't be trying to breathe new life into the corpse of industrial unionism. We should be burying it.

Neither the right nor the left wings of the NGA has any answer to new technology. One lot are falling over themselves to hurry things along (this is known as ‘realism’), while the others go on about workers ‘dignity’ and ‘a fair share in the rewards’ (keeping their socialist clothes in good repair). The union depends for its survival on a profitable media industry, and therefore on new technology and other ways of upping the rate of exploitation. This is capitalism's only way forward.

As they debate about how best to carve up areas of jurisdiction over the working class, the main intention of the unions is just to keep us working. Whether or not two unions merge, merely determines whether we are supporting two bureaucracies, or a single, larger one.

Whatever becomes of the NGA, skilled printworkers will not be able to go on in the old ways. They have pushed capital to the brink again and again in their defence of wages and conditions, with less and less success as the crisis has taken its course. Profit-hungry bosses have now gone onto the offensive, locking workers out in pursuit of their own demands.

T. Bailey Foreman survived a long dispute and is ‘doing well’, despite NGA/NUJ blacking. It shows that the technical means to attack craft workers and raise profits have long been at capital's disposal. The boss class has merely been biding its time, testing the ground every now and then, waiting for opportunities. Recent skirmishes have shown them that it will be difficult to introduce new tech-

nology little-by-little, firm-by-firm. So as soon as the workers, already pushed into a corner by the recession, are judged to be ready for it, the changes will be forced through on a wider scale.

MUTUAL STROKING

Fleet St. management is getting very impatient. If they can overcome business rivalry and unite in their common interest of screwing workers, 'single keystroking' and the rest of it will be brought in on an organised basis. If that happens, we can forget straight away about craft identity, workers 'control' of the shopfloor, and a management prepared to pay for happy, healthy wage-slaves. In any case, time is running out. The union says we have to be 'hard-nosed' in this situation. Well, the NGA may be able to afford plastic surgery — but what use is that to workers, when they decide to kick your face in?

New technology may be an unstoppable feature of capitalist progress, but at no stage does this mean that we have to accept it. Vulgar marxists say capitalism's role is simply to develop the means of production, that it will grind down the working class to a universal level of skill-ness and misery, and that when this happens a political revolution can occur, in which workers will seize the machines and use them to satisfy everyone's needs. This is a false view of technology and a false view of the need for revolution.

There is nothing neutral about factories and machines. They have been built, not just to be mismanaged by exploiters, but to sustain a complete social order based on buying, selling and exchange. In the market-place, it is not just our productive labour on display, but every transaction of our daily lives. This is true whoever runs the system. 'Democratic ownership' of the means of production just means the working class selling itself to the left. If workers can autonomously destroy capitalism, then they can also throw democracy (being a type of political representation, however you define it), and ownership (meaning the power to demand a price in money or in kind), into the waste disposal unit of history.

To put it another way, a society without poverty will not have a system of ownership, and one without classes will not have institutions of political representation. The revolution as I see it is not about equalising the market. At the very least, it means abolishing wage labour, commodities and classes, and creating completely new conditions for meeting our material, social and individual needs.

IT CAUSES BLINDNESS

It is claimed that computerised typesetting cleans up and re-integrates the production of print. The writing, editing, proofreading of text can now be done on one Video Display Terminal (VDT). In fact, workers are exposed to a new range of progressive psychological and physical illnesses, and the new technology represents another stage in the division of labour between operative, technical and maintenance tasks. The real skill now lies in the hands of the computer programmer. The work is more individualised than ever, and each worker is one step further from control over the production process as a whole. In the proletarian alphabet, 'A' still stands for Alienation.

In the past, workers facing redundancy or retraining due to new technology have been among the most militant in the class. Craft printers are no exception. In the long run however, we will not be able to stall the bosses' demands, or salvage anything worth keeping from the wreckage left behind in the wake of their advance. The interest of printworkers is more clearly than ever the revolutionary interest of the whole working class, not the making of demands on the system, or the preservation of their historical status. This does not mean following the NGA down the blind alley of corporate unionism: the unions will have to be dealt with like every other political institution of capitalism.

It may be difficult to create genuine links with workers in other grades, trades and sectors, especially when they are people like journalists. The crisis may be creating limited conditions for unity. For instance, when compositors find themselves doing

work 'any girl typist' could do, their elitist sense of craft status is undermined, and the possibility of a new sense of their common status with other wage workers is raised.

On the other hand the situation can equally give rise to new divisions. In the end, workers will always be able to pretend that their jobs are fulfilling; that what's produced is decent, honest and truthful; and that their misery is worth defending — if they want to. In the battle to prevent this happening again, we must make sure

that those discussions about work already taking place do not sink into the sands of resignation. And where they are not occurring we should be initiating them. It is essential that struggles be taken out of the hands of union officials, party hacks and other apologists for capitalism, and fought on our own terms. For a start, we would be fully justified if we smashed up every VDT in sight, in the noble tradition of Ned Ludd, a man who proof-read the bottom line of technological progress — and then tore it up ■■■

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 'const-

raint' 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 interests 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 usu-

Left Feeling UnShah of Itself

The roots of the Stockport Messenger saga go back some years. Eddie Shah got into the Free Sheet business during the three day week in 1974. The printing and typesetting on his first title was put out to contract with a unionised print firm in Carlisle. Freesheets started appearing in fair numbers at that time. Like the comparatively short-lived growth of the 'radical' Free Press, they responded to the

ally 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.

complacency and conservatism of the local and provincial papers. Where the Free Press papers countered the failure of the local press to cater to the interests of the new left and liberal strata, the Free Sheets attempted to cream off vulnerable advertising revenue.

None of this was very surprising – local papers exemplify the worst elements of formularised idiot journalism. The Free

Sheets didn't even aim that high. Correctly perceiving that a high percentage of people only bought local papers for details of local events and small ads, they calculated that blanket distribution of Free Sheets to every house in targetted areas would offer local advertisers 'penetration' into the thousands of houses that didn't see local papers.

Early Free Sheets had no news content at all – merely popular features (horoscopes, household hints, thinly disguised publicity blurbs etc). Shah claims his was the first Free Sheet in the country to have editorial content. Currently 25% of his papers is news, and typically he boasts of their populist stance – support for anti-cuts campaigns etc.

Free Sheets have become big business over the last five years. From 100 in the early Seventies to 354 in 1980, today there are over 600. Between 1978 and 1980 their advertising revenue quadrupled from £35. to £196. million – 4.4% of all media advertising compared to 40% for bought newspapers. By contrast local newspaper advertising revenues increased from £150. to £196. million. The six titles in Shah's Messenger Group Newspapers currently distribute 250,000 copies in the Greater Manchester Area. Last year he made £170,000 profit on £2.5 million turnover – this year he predicts £600,000 profit on £5. million, despite the dispute.

But these statistics are potentially misleading. Only just over a third of the Free Sheets are independently owned or run. Most have been started up by the provincial newspaper groups themselves to nip potential rivals in the bud, offer a more comprehensive local advertising package and control a key point of leverage in negotiations with the NGA over the introduction of new technology.

In June this year the Newspaper Society, which represents provincial and local newspaper and Free Sheet publishers, (Shah isn't a member), launched Project Breakthrough. This is aimed at reaching national agreement next year with the

print unions "for the full and sensible use of new technology". Essentially this means the introduction of single keystroking – journalists typing copy direct into computers ready for printing, rather than it being retyped by NGA compositors. According to them the cost of the extra keystroke (the compositors wages) means that a regional evening paper needs a circulation of 60– 100,000 to be viable. Single keystroking would reduce that to 30,000 and offer the possibility of genuinely local editions within a region.

For years the NGA have been resisting this threat to the existence of the skills of their members. Local press proprietors are now threatening that they will go non-union if no agreement is forthcoming next year. In the other hand is the carrot of new titles becoming viable under new technology – hence potential jobs after retraining for former compositors, as advertising copy-takers, paste-up artists, night-watchpersons etc. Perhaps the sweetener of a job for life for key staff as an inducement to retrain. Even if it's only the life of the company.

The NGA knows that it cannot avoid the introduction of the new technology. It's agreed to a pilot study on the effects of it on six newspapers which will shortly be concluded. In a breakthrough an agreement was recently reached over direct input and sub-editing by journalists on a motorcycle magazine. All the compositors do now is put in a computer disc and key in the instruction for it to typeset. An agreement was possible because the magazine is part of a group and the compositors perform normal functions on the other titles. But this is the thin end of the wedge – they know that conceding that much makes it "difficult to resist" conceding full direct entry by journalists. In this situation the NGA's power, expressed through the pre-entry closed shop, becomes crucial in the negotiating away of the skills of many of their members which is imminent.

But the other side of the new technology is that it gives employers the potential to bypass the union completely. The precedents have already been set (see the article further on about David Dimbleby's group of papers). In this situation it is vital for the NGA to be able to make agreements and enforce them. Faced with the threat of a national strike, the Newspaper Society estimated that over a hundred local papers had introduced

Warrington

At the end of the seventies Shah decided to set up his own typesetting firm, Fine-ward in Stockport. He signed a closed shop agreement with the NGA, he and six executives joining the union. Eight NGA members were recruited, some from the Carlisle firm which did his printing and had till then done his typesetting. Wages were £155 for a 37½ hour week including one 15 hour shift. Trouble between Shah and the NGA began in 1981 over the new house agreement and new technology. In the meantime the group was still expanding. Shah planned to open a second typesetting plant - Caps Ltd - in Bury. Negotiations for a closed shop broke down over failure to agree hour and rate differentials with Fine-ward. Though an interim agreement recognising the union had been signed Shah tore it up and started with a mixture of union and non-union labour. Applicants were asked how they would react to 'trouble with the union' according to Shah himself.

The NGA only pursued the negotiations over Caps Ltd half heartedly because Shah also had plans to open his own printing works and they hoped to persuade him to site it in the North West where they had a high level of unemployed members. Shah finally opened the works at the end of 1982 in Warrington, again with a mixture of union and non-union labour. Sporadic negotiations continued over both Caps Ltd and the press. The NGA were allowed to make a presentation on the benefits of union

new technology and trained staff on it. They could thus continue publication in the event of a strike. Between 25 and 30 did so during the six-week printing strike in 1980. Unlike then the recent Employment Laws would give them the right to sack strikers for breach of contract and continue with non-union labour. Its against this background that the Warrington Messenger dispute must be seen.

membership and ballot the workers. The question 'Do you wish it to be a term of your employment that you become and remain a member of a specific trade union?' met with a unanimous no. The NGA blamed company propaganda but coming only weeks after the NGA's desperate appeal for an extra levy on members its hardly surprising they got the big E.

In June this year the NGA National Council decided that failure to achieve a closed shop would be a green light to other Free Sheet and local newspaper proprietors to break agreements or even go non-union. On June 9th they told Shah that if agreement wasn't forthcoming by June 22nd an official dispute would begin. No agreement was achieved and on July 4th the NGA pulled out its 8 members at Stockport. Shah responded as he meant to go on, by applying the rights granted him under the 1980 and 1982 Employment Laws. Within weeks the 8 were sacked for breaking their contracts of employment, and replaced by non-union labour.

Initially the strikers were left to themselves while the NGA put pressure on in the way they understood best. A 49% shareholding in the Messenger Group was held by a subsidiary of Reed International, owners of the Mirror Group. The NGA asked them to lean on Shah to get him to settle - getting no response they pulled out the Mirror for one night. Reed, on the verge of putting up the Mirror for sale in any case,

simply sold their shareholding in Messenger for a reported £1.

Negotiations at ACAS got nowhere. The NGA were prepared to concede half the issue by agreeing a post-entry closed shop for future employees and only 50% membership at Bury and Warrington. Shah refused to agree and held his own ballot - again the closed shop was rejected.

After four weeks the NGA asked for and got NUJ blacking of copy. At the start of September Shah issued his first writ against the NUJ for inducing his workers to break contract. It was granted, the NUJ refused to comply and on the 16th were found in contempt of court but not fined. Their executive was prepared to defy this but the local branch disgusted at the failure of the NGA to even picket went back. (Subsequently journalists did refuse to cross picket lines but weren't sacked).

The NGA attempted to persuade Shah's advertisers to boycott his papers. Shah issued a writ. Simultaneously the NGA began picketting the Bury and Warrington works. Shah issued a second writ about this. On Oct.14th both were granted - attempts to obtain blacking, mass picketting and secondary picketting were all ruled illegal.

The NGA went for a treble strategy, increasing direct pressure through mass picketting, pressing for ACAS talks and taking pains to be seen taking them seriously, and trying to apply indirect pressure by trying to get TUC support and by threatening industry-wide escalation to force employers to lean on Shah. (Robert Maxwell was eventually persuaded to do so, but more employers urged Shah to stand firm).

On Nov. 9th 700 pickets successfully blockaded both the Warrington works preventing the papers from leaving, and the Bury offices. This was the first and last successful picket. Organised 'three day mass pickets' in following weeks, largely drafted from Fleet St. and Manch-

ester Dailies, were increasingly augmented by other trade unionists, students and leftists. Violence took place, but only ritualised pushing and shoving, which generally remained 'good natured'. Injuries and arrests remained low and police and pickets complimented one another. Police injuries on Nov.23rd turned 'Violent Illegal Picketing' into a national issue. The stage was set for the 'Battle of Winwick Quay'.

Shah's response to the picketting was to operate his press under siege conditions protected by security guards, and issue writs for contempt of court and then for sequestration of the NGA's assets. These were granted: a fine of £50,000 and threat of sequestration on Oct 14th. The NGA refused to pay as a 'point of principle'. Talks once again broke down - both sides agreed on the post entry closed shop but Shah refused reinstatement for the sacked strikers. (Two of the original 8 went back at the start of Oct. - hence the 'Stockport Six'.)

Realising that grounds for winning the dispute were limited, that they could not afford to 'lose', and that no acceptable compromise was available, the NGA decided on a desperate strategy. It was to become a battle in defence of union rights against the employment laws. Their 'confrontation' with the courts was designed to maximise their 'martyrdom', and pressure was to be increased in the only way possible. An industry wide escalation in an attempt to force the TUC into taking responsibility for the struggle. This had to become a 'historic' struggle.

From the start Shah had been portrayed as an 'anti-union' Tory puppet programmed to destroy 'our movement' and force his workers into sweated slavery. In reality Shah was a typical liberal paternalist employer (profit-sharing and free health care etc), and his only concern to this point had been to run his business and maximise his profits. Willing to come to an 'acceptable' deal, his mistake

was to hope the NGA could be strung along without it reaching confrontation. Once it had done so he was fully prepared to exercise his legal rights however. Now faced with NGA propaganda portraying him as shifting position during negotiation he eventually took the logical step of making it a matter of principle on his side: specifically the question of workers rights to join or not to join a union.

Having decided to defy the court the NGA made attempts to secure its funds – hiding share certificates and deeds and transferring funds to an Irish bank. Shah went back to the court claiming contempt of the original injunction again and asking again for sequestration of union funds. On Nov.25th Manchester High court imposed a second £100,000 fine and ordered the unions assets to be seized, appointing four commissioners (partners in accountancy firm Price Waterhouse, liquidation specialists). In the Appeal Court in London the same day the NGA got this altered to seizure of £175,000 to cover fines to date and costs, pending a full appeal against sentence. The same day they played the last card under their direct control. NGA members in Fleet St, 'spontaneously' walked out for the weekend.

This was a mingled farce and disaster on both sides. The NGA's fairly transparent attempt not to be 'seen' organising the strike got nowhere. And the objective of the strike – winning TUC backing failed. On the publishers side agreement was reached to sue the NGA for damages – claims for £3 million in total remain outstanding. But an attempt to impose a united lock-out failed when four papers broke ranks – the Mail actually paying its NGA workers a bonus to print extra copies. This display of natural greed saved the NGA's bacon, but effectively cost them any chance of winning the Stockport dispute.

To maximise their 'martyrdom' the NGA withdrew their appeal against

the sequestration which then took place. Hopes that this would pressure the TUC into effective support were dashed.

Realising the NGA had played its ultimate card Shah realised there was little they could actually do. His situation was strengthened by the 'Battle of Winwick Quay' which confirmed his workers resolve not to join the NGA – indeed two of the three remaining members resigned from the union along with Shah and his executives. He announced all previous offers were off the table and issued a further two writs for contempt. An NGA offer to call off picketing if he would suspend these writs was refused – Shah had the satisfaction of forcing the NGA to apply to the court for a seven day adjournment on a promise of good behaviour. Resulting ACAS talks over the following week got nowhere – ironically both sides came closer over the issue of reinstatement around Shah's offer to set up a co-op with £40,000 of equipment and a years guaranteed work for the 'Six'. (Supplemented by promises of work from other print employers). But on the question of the closed shop he refused to budge – they could have one if over 50% of his workers asked for a ballot and 80% voted yes. Knowing there was no pressure the NGA could impose that he could not withstand he merely had to sit tight.

Talks broke down on 9th Dec. Shah went to the High Court and the NGA was fined a further £525,000. To date they had not seriously applied for control of enough funds to pay sickness, retirement and unemployment benefits. Their application now was refused pending a further hearing. The only hope for the NGA was that the TUC would agree to take up the struggle and instruct member unions to give material assistance. The TUC had throughout distanced itself from any illegality, engaged as it was in delicate talks with the govt. over voluntary union reform. In a last ditch attempt to

force the issue the NGA called a one day strike of all its members for Dec.14th when NW region TUC had organised a demo in Warrington -well away from Winwick Quay. Either this would force the TUC to honour the resolution at its Wembley conference on the Employment Laws in 1982 to support unions under attack by them. Or it would force the TUC to 'stab them in the back'. After three days of cliffhanging while a rogue vote by the TUC Employment Policy and Organisation Committee was first repudiated by Len Murray and then overturned by the 'Right Wing' majority on the TUC General Council, the latter was the result. Six month's struggle had only succeeded in getting the NGA's six 'martyrs' the sack, destroying its own credibility as a craft union, and only avoided bringing further ignominy by pulling the same trick as ASLEF – forcing the TUC to 'betray' it.

If the mass pickets at the *Stockport Messenger* printing works in Warrington fail to become a Grunwick-sized Labour Movement myth, it's only because the NGA called them off just when things seemed to be getting historic.

By the night of Tuesday November 29th., all the ingredients had been put together. Thousands of militants, symbolically encircling Eddie Shah's bunker in a well-worn gesture of working class solidarity. Bathing itself in the reflected glory of pickets three weeks before, when the lorries had been stopped or delayed by a tenth the numbers of people, the 4,000-weak crowd of the 29th. was hopelessly outclassed and outmanoeuvred by the police. As usual, the Left was rushing into the struggle miles too late. All it could do was add 83 names to the roll of honour, to be published in a *Daily Telegraph* court report two days later. Social workers and students outnumbered printers by four to one.

At 9.30 pm, the NGA's Unemployed Chapel bus was starting up the motorway. The Father of the Chapel stands up and gives a little speech :

"You'll all be wondering what happened to the charter train. Well, British Rail cancelled it at the last moment. Also, we had a phone call from ASLEF. They told us that if we'd taken a train, we'd probably have ended up in a siding somewhere in the sticks. Anticipating this, we booked a fleet of coaches instead. We fully expect road-blocks in a ten-mile radius around the factory, so we'll meet up with the rest of the coaches at Knutsford Services and go in convoy. If we get split up miles from Warrington, I want you to stay on the coach till morning, then we'll go home."

Reading between the lines, he was telling us that British Rail wouldn't take a dodgy NGA cheque, and they'd had to pay cash up front for the buses. He didn't know the way to Warrington, neither did the driver, and was busy covering himself in case he got lost. We missed the rendezvous, and only found the factory – after wandering around Cheshire Lanes for an hour – with the help of a sympathetic local Minicab driver. (But where was the headline in *Socialist Worker*? **WORKING CLASS TAKES WRONG ROAD TO SOCIALISM – Saved by Intervention of Petit Bourgeoisie**)

Of the 4,000 or so picketers, at least half appeared to be experienced tacticians of class struggle. Some were running around in the road, well out of reach of the long arm, shouting *"Come on, link arms and push."* A minority were trying to sabotage these efforts – *"Christ sake don't push so hard, the comrades at the front will get crushed"* As the vanguard of the proletariat was getting itself crushed, concussed or nicked, a further thousand or so watched impassively from a grassy mound across the road, clearly unmoved by appeals such as *"Bastards, why don't you get off your fucking arses and fucking*

do something, or go home and watch it on your fucking videos?" — but, of course, edited television highlights are never any substitute for live action.

The police too behaved as though they were involved in historic events, or at least as though they had to cram in as much red-bashing as possible, so as to have a few stories to tell during the boring, routine months ahead.

Having decided that this was to be a historic event, and invested it with so much wider significance, the picket could not afford to be seen to lose. In fact, the police had been instructed not to lose either. The result was a foregone conclusion, and most people sensed it. The newspaper lorries were never going to have any trouble at all leaving the factory, as the crowd was pushed back, divided and manipulated as and how the police wanted. For the Tactical Aid squad (SPG), it was an opportunity to practise and test crowd-control techniques in a 'live' situation: for the police as a whole, an exciting and mostly enjoyable spell of overtime. But what should we have expected from an event advertised so well in advance as a violent confrontation between us and them?

The point is not that the picket should have been better organised, readier to defend itself, or more numerous. Many of the finer points of street-fighting technique were being debated at the time and afterwards, but the fact is we walked into a fight we had been set up to lose. Neither is it a question of being prepared to fight dirty. The police chose the ground, dictated the issues and tactics of the night, and walked it.

There was, however, one positive development. Early on, the NGA's disputes van and the people in it disappeared from the scene. This spared us the haranguing of union sergeant-majors on megaphones, so that they could not engineer a conflict between 'responsible pickets' and rioters. Later, when the police broke up the crowd

with repeated baton-charges, the fighting became much more open, and spread to a wide area around the industrial estate. This was the best action of the night, and not just because it provided instant relief from boredom and cold.

During the pushing-and-shoving, the police not only had the crowd where it wanted it, but they were able to beat-up and arrest individuals without bother. In the riot, the police looked distinctly more human, suffering most of their casualties without being able to arrest anyone at will.

Barricades were built and set light to, on one of the two roads leading to the factory, from materials available to hand or looted — like small trees, steel girders, fences, a drum of diesel oil and a cylinder of Butane gas. Each time the police charged the barricades, they were obliged to come out into the open and face some real opposition. Each time they fell back, under a hail of stones, the barricades could be built up stronger than before.

The police operation was hampered in other ways; the road could not be used freely for communications, as all police cars were stoned (at least one Range Rover was forced to take to the fields, though not until it had driven into a steel hawser tied across the road, bringing down a telegraph pole.) Incidentally, the barricades were the most likely way of stopping the lorries, which eventually left in the opposite direction. This, however, is a bit of a side-issue: by now, stopping the lorries was a matter of minor interest. The action was started and developed mainly by local youth from nearby estates. They hadn't come for that reason in the first place. So, at some point the fighting was brought into the open, on ground and on terms that suited us better than the police.

These, I would suggest, are some lessons to be drawn from the 'Battle of Winwicks Quay'. Struggles in which the area of confrontation, the objectives and terms, are worked out beforehand by the police,

the union or the state — or all three together, like this one — are almost certain to end up as humiliating defeats. The only way to win is to keep them guessing about where we'll hit them next, and how. At Winwick's Quay, every factory on the estate could have been attacked, and should have been. Police in concentration and at close quarters are difficult to deal with. Broken up in small groups, they are much more vulnerable.

The best activity of the night of November 29th. had nothing to do with the NGA or defending unionism. As *Socialist Worker* so rightly says:

"(These struggles) will determine how far workers, from post office engineers to peace protestors, from miners to Green-

peace campaigners are able to organise to defend their own lives and living standards."

— for, indeed, there is little to choose between surrounding a factory in protest at the consequences of capitalist technological progress, and surrounding a missile base in protest at the result of advances in military technique. The real futility of demonstrations like these cannot be compensated for by being wise after the event, or by manufacturing consoling myths, or even by mini-riots. No real challenge can be made without a wholesale and indiscriminate attack on every feature of capitalist life.

The bus taking us back to London was three hours late.

Dimbleby Dispute

That paradigm of media 'balance', T.V. superstar David Dimbleby, has emphatically shown that he refuses to be outdone by some tinpot proprietor from up north. However, whilst Dimbleby has frequently been photographed alongside union leaders and Labour MPs, Neil Kinnock has so far failed to stand up in parliament and draw the obvious conclusions.

The background to the journalists' dispute at Dimbleby and Sons Ltd. (The Richmond and Twickenham Times Group) is the 1978 strike throughout the provincial press. After a hard-fought dispute a settlement was reached with the employers' organisation, the Newspaper Society, early in 1979. With the exception of T. Bailey Foreman, a company publishing a newspaper in Nottingham, all the proprietors reinstated the journalists sacked during the strike.

Reinstatement had been made a clear condition of the settlement. Yet in spite of this blatant victimisation, the 28 sacked journalists were left to their own devices. Apart from blowing a lot of hot air, the NUJ simply declared T. Bailey Foreman 'blacklisted', and placed the journalists on strike pay. The dispute has continued to

this day. But the firm has succeeded in bringing out the newspaper with non-NUJ journalists.

CAN THE HACKS TAKE THE FIRST HURDLE?

The provincial press figures only as a first hurdle in the career strategy of many rising hacks, so the NUJ has far less power to control the supply of labour than the manual and clerical print unions. The blacking of T. Bailey Foreman has only highlighted the sacked journalists' isolation, leaving them dependent on useless gestures of 'sympathy' whilst looking for alternative employment.

Earlier this year Dimbleby sacked NGA members who struck last August against redundancies at the company printing presses. The journalists took no immed-

iate action to support the sacked printers — presumably regarding this as another union's affair.

But Dimpleby was left to find a press not manned by NGA staff. On October 7 journalists on Dimpleby's newspapers were informed that in future the papers would be printed by TBF. TBF has been manned by non-NGA staff since a dispute over the introduction of new single-key stroke technology in the early seventies. The firm, which is associated with T. Bailey Foreman, was the only viable option for Dimpleby, which lends a twist of irony to the story. After the dismissal of TBF's NGA printers, the NUJ agreed to allow its members to operate the direct-input technology. But stabbing their comrades in the back like this had repercussions for the NUJ.

After consultation with the NUJ leadership, on October 13, the union chapel at Dimpleby's gave notice of a strike to begin four days later. This was in spite of a warning from the editor that no striking journalist would be reemployed in any circumstances.

HACKS TO THE WALL

The dismissal notice was in fact withdrawn, but a week later Dimpleby sought a court injunction to stop the journalists' action.

The subsequent ruling by the Court of Appeal on December 6 that the journalists' action was 'secondary' turned on the judgment that TBF Printers was a separate legal entity from T. Bailey Foreman.

These mystical 'points of law' need not concern us. Whatever the effect of the employment acts, the journalists' failure dates back to 1979, or even further, to the NGA disputes in the early seventies. No dispute can be regarded as settled

when workers remain victimised — it is hopeless trying to pick up the pieces some five years later. And now journalists belatedly find themselves on the same picket line as the sacked NGA printers at Dimpleby Newspapers. Both unions have attacked Dimpleby for 'bad management', 'unreasonableness', and 'negotiating himself into a non-union corner' as the NUJ mother of the chapel at Dimpleby's recently put it.

But the whole series of disputes illustrates all too clearly the price workers have to pay if they conduct their disputes according to what the trade unions regard as legitimate, let alone what is permitted by the recent employment acts and those few bosses who are prepared to use them to the full.

The current dispute also poses a question for journalists. Contemporary journalism consists of little more than the ability to hack together week after week the same stock stories within the narrow limits of what editors regard as fit for public consumption. Yet there is no shortage of the Woodward and Bernstein type of mythology to convince journalists that they are a cut above your average printworker. Certainly the promise of Fleet Street glamour keeps many in line. All of this will have to go if they are to lay claim to any genuine solidarity with the rest of us working in the media racket.

HARD HEARTED HANNAH

At any rate we can look forward to some crisp exchanges if Vincent Hannah, the BBC journalists' FOC, is called upon to interview fellow-hack Dimpleby. For at least Eddie Shah had the decency to tear up his own union card — David Dimpleby seems less prepared to damage a brilliant career by doing likewise.

Maxwell's Thirty—Piece Silver Hammer

When it comes to stitching-up fellow trade unionists in a print dispute, old hands know best. Eddie Shah, an entrepreneur who had joined the NGA, was left complaining about difficulties in getting a fair deal from union negotiators and resorted to court action. NUJ member David Dimpleby's mask of even-handedness slips as he has to take out injunctions to try and get journalists back to work at his newspaper group. It is left to a socialist, and a proud member of the trade union ASTMS, to show how a workplace can be closed down, and amiable discussions with the unions follow, without dirtying his hands with court actions. Robert Maxwell, head of the printing company BPCC, and the print union SOGAT, have displayed the "acceptable" face of print disputes in their deft handling of the strike by Radio Times printers at Park Royal.

The current action is Maxwell's second attempt to close down Park Royal. The first was threatened earlier this year during a five week strike by SOGAT printers in March and April (see W.P., April '83). They returned to work, with an agreement, initially rejected by SOGAT and the EETPU (the NGA jobs were not at risk), promising a £10 million investment to replace the 50 year old machinery. The present dispute has arisen from the conditions imposed with this investment — a new shift system and redundancies; but underneath it all a great deal of hatred towards Maxwell as a boss. After April, five of the seven presses were dismantled and production moved to East Kilbride in Scotland and Leeds, plants that had covered the printing of the Radio Times when Park Royal was on strike. Park Royal existed solely to produce the Radio Times and The Listener. Whereas it previously produced 2 million of the 3 million print run of the Radio Times it was now to handle only 600,000 copies. This weakened the unions (Park Royal SOGAT members are in the militant London Machine Branch) and reduced costs — at Park Royal printers were earning £14,000 p.a. compared to

£8,000 at East Kilbride where productivity is higher. Soon after the announced modernisation BPCC recorded profits of £12.4m (turning over a loss of £1.2m) claiming that these were a result of "the substantial reduction in labour and other overhead costs flowing from the successful implementation, with full trade union support, of the survival plan". The plan of reducing staff levels and improving productivity had resulted in two plants being closed and two others losing their printing capacity.

Workers at Park Royal soon came to realise the implications of modernisation and the 'survival plan'. Maxwell demanded a 75% reduction in jobs — from 360 to 90 — by June. Perhaps it is no coincidence that this demand was made soon after the 'orderly closure', agreed to by the unions, of Odhams in Watford, which Maxwell had purchased for a nominal £1½ million from Reed International in order to close it down. This was to consolidate his hold over colour printing in the UK — contracts worth £30m. per year — at the nearby Sun Printers. The closure resulted in 1,400 redundancies and Maxwell promised no more closures in 1983. The printers at Park Royal

put this statement to the test in their refusal of 'orderly redundancies'.

The June deadline passed but a confrontation arose early in November when SOGAT's refusal to agree to longer shifts and more redundancies as the price of the new web-offset machinery gave Maxwell the excuse to close down the printing plant completely. To this end Maxwell hired Vanguard (sic) Removals to demolish the remaining two presses. The workers' response was an occupation, claimed initially to involve 100, but more significantly by a group of seven in the plants' electrical sub-station who were able to cut off the power. This meant that none of the typesetting for the Radio Times or The Listener could be carried out. This was a blow to the NGA who had crossed picket lines to work normally during the strike earlier this year. On that occasion they were rewarded by Maxwell putting up signs and logos for a new company, the 'London Typesetting Centre'. The intention all along was to close down Park Royal as a print plant but keep it open for typesetting. This caused a great deal of resentment from other workers who painted up their own slogan - 'NGA cards available for only 20 pieces of silver'.

The occupation of the sub-station was watched anxiously by the print industry because SOGAT printworkers were taking action alongside electricians, who had just left their 'own' union, the EETPU, and joined SOGAT in order to increase their effectiveness as trade unionists. In the earlier strike the electricians had 'pulled the plugs', but power was quickly restored and maintained because as members of EETPU they were not party to SOGAT's dispute. This time round the continued disruption has demonstrated the potential for, and necessity of, links between crafts in a workplace, even though it took the notion of single-union discipline to bring this about.

In both disputes Maxwell has claimed that the issues have been forced by the Central London Branch of SOGAT, who, in his view, must be taken on as they represent a dangerous force often at odds with the SOGAT national leadership. Maxwell claimed to have made 'considerable progress' in negotiations with Bill Keys, General Secretary of SOGAT, over the Park Royal question, when the Central London Branch decided to live up to its reputation by supporting the striking Park Royal workers with the blacking of all BPCC publications - including The Sunday Times, Observer, Mail on Sunday magazines, Woman, Woman's Own, Woman's Realm. This immediately hit the distribution of the Sunday colour supplements. Maxwell called off negotiations, which had nearly resulted in a return to work, complaining that they were meaningless if the union could not control its members. Maxwell issued dismissal notices to the 280 on strike at Park Royal and 'protective' (sic), or possible dismissal notices to another 257 at Park Royal, 152 at East Kilbride and 540 at Bristol. This threat to over 1,200 jobs had its intended effect of pressuring the SOGAT executive to take action against the Central London Branch.

WHEATON EARTHS GOING ON?

The London Machine Branch contacted every branch and chapel in all 25 BPCC plants to win support, but with little effect. This lack of solidarity allowed Maxwell to reach agreement with the NGA and SOGAT on a National Executive level in order to isolate the strikers and the Central London Branch who were blacking distribution. Typesetting was transferred to Wheatons, a BPCC plant in Exeter. Workers at Furnells in Bristol maintained that they wanted to carry on working so long as it kept to the 'status quo', i.e. they were

prepared to print the colour pages, but no more. Printers at East Kilbride decided not to fight plans to transfer production from Park Royal to their plant. This was in part due to the protective notices issued against them by Maxwell (who during the first strike sacked 114 who took sympathetic action and refused to handle plates typeset at Park Royal), but also reflects the difficulties encountered by the Park Royal strikers - a hostile union bureaucracy making concessions to management while their own lack of direct contact (not simply a result of geographical distance), failed to capitalise on dislike and distaste for Maxwell.

DREAMING OF A BLACKED CHRISTMAS

It was at this point that SOGAT became involved in legal proceedings. Maxwell was not party to the injunction taken out on 23rd November by 11 London wholesalers and distributors (including WH Smiths and Menzies). The week-long blacking of BPCC publications had hit a significant proportion of their trade. The SOGAT executive 'advised' Central London Branch to comply with the court order and stop the blacking - an illegal 'secondary action' under the Employment Act - but they refused. The executive's response was to make the Park Royal strike official, and order the blacking to be lifted. Thus the executive took the dispute under their control, and while they imposed blacking of the phototypesetting now being carried out in Exeter, they broke the effective actions being carried out against the BPCC empire.

Negotiations between Maxwell and Sogat continued, but broke down on the 30th. BPCC, in conjunction with BBC publications (publishers of the Radio Times and the Listener), took out an

injunction on the 2nd December to stop the blacking of the phototypeset negatives from Exeter, which had resulted in the loss of one complete print run of the Radio Times. This litigation was a careful application of pressure. Maxwell stated he would give SOGAT time before resorting to further legal action, citing their responsible attitude in lifting the blacking of BBC publications when ordered to do so. In addition, the executive was under pressure from other plants to allow printing of the Bumper Christmas issue of the Radio Times - double the size and with a print run of 9 million copies - three times the usual. East Kilbride and Leeds threatened to print even if the blacking of plates was not officially lifted. The executive gave the go-ahead to print after the printers at Bristol backed a motion deploring support for a minority - the Park Royal workers - and a disregard of the wishes of a majority involved in the printing of the Radio Times. This attitude serves as a suitable epitaph, not just for the Park Royal strike, and not just to the other current disputes, but to the attitude of 'unionism' in general and the 'new realism' in particular.

The resumption of printing, even though it looks as if the London edition of the Radio Times may be lost, came as a relief to Maxwell, who had been given an ultimatum by the BBC to get the Christmas issue published or lose the contract. Maxwell was prepared to put money on the negotiating table to ensure printing; the rumour being that he needed the contract in order to be in a secure financial position to bid for shares when the Mirror Group is sold off. The closure of Park Royal points towards this - a process of asset-stripping that most BPCC employees fear. For example, Maxwell - having closed down Odhams - was hoping to develop the site in a £20m. deal with Savacentre, the superstore chain

owned by Sainsbury and BHS.

During negotiations over Park Royal with SOGAT and the NGA, Maxwell became involved in the Shah/Stockport Messenger dispute. His concern was over the threat of a nationwide strike, and he voiced his fear that the industry would lose orders abroad and would be "wiped out". This apocalyptic vision was merely an expression of his anxiety to ensure printing at BPCC, especially of the Radio Times, but also of colour work such as the Argos catalogue, which BPCC had clawed back from abroad. Maxwell is dubiously reported to have made a £4m. offer for the Messenger group - his real ambition is Fleet Street, not the provincial press. In February '81 he made a bid for the Times, and lost to Murdoch (2 months later he took over BPC, now BPCC, for £10m.) In July '82 he announced he was no longer interested in Fleet Street, but at the same time he was keeping an eye on the Observer, and was planning a major printing centre in the Isle of Dogs, to which the Telegraph is expected to move.

Maxwell seems to have got what he wanted out of the dispute. The contract is safe - if only for the fact that BPCC is the only single company capable of handling the work involved. Park Royal is closed and will probably open as just a typesetting centre, if at all, thus saving his £10m 'investment'. Production of the Radio Times has been diversified away from the expensive and militant London plant (where wildcat strikes have lost 16 million copies in the past 18 months, Maxwell claiming that £20,000 worth of production per week was costing £100,000 in wages) to the cheaper and less militant provinces. Last Christmas, production was concentrated at Park Royal, with colour printing done in Bristol and a small print run for some Northern editions at East Kilbride. Now it is spread between Exeter (or Park Royal) for typesetting, colour and

perhaps other work at Purnells, litho printing at East Kilbride, and web offset in Leeds. And all this has been achieved, in the end, with union acquiescence.

For the workforce, prospects look bleak. The Park Royal printers have added another example to what Maxwell has previously described as "a record of non-cooperation and bloody mindedness..." The 'victory' achieved in preventing a closure in April was realised simply as a stay of execution. This time, with Maxwell removing the remaining machinery, they had virtually no chance of achieving anything, given the lack of solidarity from other plants. But they achieved nothing because they did nothing. Maxwell feared the dispute spreading, while SOGAT (as you would expect) and the workers themselves (less understandably) left his fears unrequited. No pickets were sent to ask for support at other plants, simply a half-hearted call for blacking from the executive once the dispute was made official.

Muted squeals of outrage resulted from the court injunctions banning the sympathetic action by other SOGAT members in blacking BPCC publications. The gibberish about 'outlawing class solidarity' only obscures the fact that it was only 'sympathetic' action anyway. The blacking was seen in terms of giving Maxwell, in the dismissive tone adopted by Bill Keys, "a bloody nose". What was needed was a kick in the vitals - his (re)productive system. BPCC magazines, and more significantly the Radio Times for a week following the start of the Park Royal strike, were being produced in other plants. No rhetoric of class solidarity here. The blacking by the Central London Branch was doomed to failure under the Employment Acts, but the essential point is that autonomous action is doomed to fail - to not achieve its aim - if it is action taken in isolation. It simply becomes an issue of defiance of the union exec-

utive. Great in theory but little in practise.

While not expecting the SOGAT executive to spread the dispute, the failure of the London Machine and Central Branch to do so was a significant omission in their actions. There was a great opportunity to build upon the resentment most workers, whether SOGAT, NGA or NUJ, have towards Maxwell. Geographical limitations offer some excuse, but no attempt was made in the London area to approach the NGA (partly because of animosity over them crossing picket lines in April) or NUJ members working on the Radio Times - who had themselves asked for and received support from SOGAT members when they went on strike 2 years ago. In fact, the NUJ and NGA worked together setting pages in Exeter even while the plates were being blacked elsewhere. The most significant aspect has been the activity of the engineers switching from the EETPU to SOGAT, and

by their actions and occupation increasing the effectiveness of the strike at Park Royal the second time round.

The national executives of unions are constantly criticised for 'selling out' disputes, and in moments of lucidity the function of unions are analysed as such. The Park Royal strike demonstrates that despite militancy at Branch level, workers will still fail to spread strike action, with or without the hindrance of unions. Disputes which are 'localised' - which remain restricted in geographical and industrial terms - generally receive only localised solidarity. Appeals to other workers over questions which involve differentials or competition between workers, such as redundancy, wages, work practises and so on, merely confirm entrenched positions. Disputes will only realistically widen to involve other workers, and other individuals, when the demands themselves widen beyond mere sectional interests. ■

Wapping

In January 1986 Rupert Murdoch's News International (publishers of the *Times*, *Sunday Times*, *Sun*, and *News of the World*) sacked 6,000 striking members of SOGAT, the NGA, the AUEW and also some journalists.

Low profitability in the newspaper industry had been aggravated by the success of skilled and semi-skilled printworkers in resisting the application of new technologies over the last twenty years. As Fleet Street's most profitable publishing group, NI was in a strong position to force through a programme of rapid restructuring. The elements were investment in new plant and equipment at a site in Wapping, on the western edge of London's docklands (under the pretext of the company's announced intention of launching a new title), and a plan to subdue and reorganise the workforce more quickly and more thoroughly than any of NI's competitors had attempted.

Having provoked a strike by presenting the print unions with a list of unnegotiable demands, NI used a legal technicality to sack almost its entire London workforce. Production was transferred almost overnight to the new factory, run by scab labour. The print unions were completely excluded, and NI instead hired the services of the EETPU, a moderate union in tune with the realities of the broader labour market. SOGAT, the majority union in the strike, was fucked, and stayed fucked. The NGA was already fucked after Warrington. Although officially 'in dispute', the strikers were out in the cold. Nevertheless,

it took SOGAT, the NGA, the company and the police 13 months to demobilise them. (Picketing virtually stopped within a week of SOGAT withdrawing its franchise.)

The public demand of the strikers was for 'full reinstatement'. Their individual and collective assessments of the situation produced a different set of objectives, ranging from better compensation to bloody revolution. The only way the strikers could apply direct pressure was by harrasing scabs, disrupting distribution of NI titles and generally making a nuisance of themselves, so that the leaders of the strike became the pickets, and in particular the violent pickets who were prepared to risk repeated arrest in order to keep the stakes high. As in the miners strike, their relation to the unions was ambivalent.

The unions needed the vioent pickets; their only other bargaining chip was a facile PR campaign, which was hardly likely to cause Murdoch to turn in his grave. But it needed control over them, and through the offices of skilled manipulators like picket co-ordinator Bill Leeman and chief steward Mike Hicks (both of them old-style CP creeps), they managed to get a hold on the picketing and isolate the real nutters. And as in the miners strike, the end of serious and systematic picketing of the distribution network meant that the collapse of the strike was not far off. The pickets, however, needed the union early on since the union (organised by chapels horizontally and in a rigid hierarchy of committees and officers) controlled the important lines of communication between different groups of strikers. Without the assistance of the officials, and without an unofficial network which included strikers and pickets from all union chapels and none, the picketing would have been marginal, sporadic and badly-organised, as it became in the later stages of the strike.

Wapping was the scene of a number of violent mass demonstrations over the months, culminating in January 24th. The police were forced to engage the pickets in running battles in the streets north of the plant, the nearest the violence came to a sudden general escalation. The reaction was quick; the company brought the law to bear on the SOGAT leadership, which announced the dispute officially over within a few weeks. The strike then collapsed in a matter of a few more days as one chapel after another disbanded itself, and even the most militant pickets gave in to exhaustion.

What follows is a number of extracts from editorial articles in the unofficial bulletin *Picket*, which published 43 times between the fifth and final weeks of the strike.

Picket

5th March 1986

The TUC traitors and various components, hangers-on and pressurisers continue to try to contain the dispute in order to kill it. They feed lies that strike-breaking electricians are dissatisfied at being conned. Picket lines mean DON'T CROSS. Open shops mean hands and arms caught in machines.

Praise is due to the warehouseman who follows rat Hammond about, picketing and yelling 'thief' wherever Hammond seeks to find a dupe to hold hands with.

One of the best nights picketing so far was Thursday February 13th, when the pickets broke through the police line and got down to the Pennington St. gate. The lorries were held up for over an hour while the police reorganised. This picket succeeded because

some 'enthusiastic elements' - football supporters and others - decided to really have a go. Everyone else piled in behind them. Such people should be welcome at pickets, not told to keep away or go to the back.

Printers are faced with an open shop offensive by the bosses. The bloodsuckers want to get rid of the most experienced printers because of the higher percentages in ruining young bodies. Thousands of police are organised in military formations for strikebreaking. That is the reality of our working lives and not the puerile boycott campaign which deliberately disperses the activists among millions of newspaper readers, not the myth of the good boss, not the deceit of 'voluntary' slavery, not the crawling attempts at a sell-out...

The bosses have been planning an open shop in the docklands for years, we have not been prepared. This is our reward for doing our bit to help break the miners strike by printing strikebreaking lies. Financial support is nice but picketing is the key to winning. We should have gone out with the miners from day one. But better to fight today than never, Now the capitalist enemy are bloated as they prepare to extend the open shop while we work on. We are being deceived that our jobs are 'safe'. As long as we 'voluntarily' push our teachers out to pasture, allow untrained youngsters to cut work conditions at a fraction of the rate etc.

The Times/ST/Sun/NoW strikers have taken the correct stand. This is our dispute too.

12th March 1986

You have to be 'sensible', 'responsible' and 'realistic', we are told these days. But to a lot of peoples ears, 'realistic' sounds like 'the sack'. It all means put up or shut up while the bosses try to grind us into the dust.

We are told that the issues of new technology on the one hand, and wages, conditions and shop-floor power on the other, are totally separate. But this strike is ALL about new technology. Technology isn't just machines - it's how they're used and what they're used for.

19th March 1986

Dogged pickets and tremendous vanworkers doing long hours for the first six weeks in freezing weather held the picket together until better weather built up to a march of 7,000 on Saturday night. The collective experience of the pickets continues to grow. There's less onlookers. But while printers and their supporters battle the strikebreakers, the TUC committees manoeuvre continually and throw up false issues to take attention away from the real business. They think picketing is a bargaining chip. It is neither conscience-stricken scabs or toothless consumer boycott campaigns that will win the strike, but picketing. All this fight for a few quid compensation? No, the issue remains entry into Wapping.

In Scotland, Robert Maxwell (the 'acceptable face of capitalism' to some) has done a Murdoch on 220 Daily Record journalists who walked out last week. SOGAT workers on the same paper were laid off when they refused to print Maxwell's lies. He demands the right to say whatever he likes about them. Behind all this, he's after cutting 300 jobs, to go with the 2,300 he got for Christmas.

Back in London, Associated Newspapers (Mail) announces the unions have agreed to 1 in 5 redundancies - but says it wants a lot more by 1988. 12 NGA members at Clearview

are still locked out, and still fighting after 4 months. They refused to operate dangerous machines.

The bosses are out for the kill. But, as one picket said, 'If I'm going down, I want to take Murdoch with me'.

27th March 1986

Step by step the heart of the strike, the daily pickets, the real leaders, build the picket. New skills are learned. The printers' advantage is the growth of picketing in confidence, experience and numbers. That is the real change that has taken place over the last nine weeks.

The TUC 5 fear the picketing. That is why after failing to stage a march away from Wapping for Sunday 6th April they now want a boring meeting followed by a long march from Trafalgar Square which they hope will tire the pickets out. The TUC 5 have worked overtime to contain the strike, stop it spreading and then sink it. They want to get control over the growing picketing movement in order to demobilise it as soon as they can.

The strike is now 63 days old. The more it goes on the more the workers' (especially the womens') hatred of the bosses and the foremen/police screws comes out into the open. The bosses try to make out that they are all powerful. They are not. They are a tiny minority. These parasites can be overthrown. Great battles are in store.

Many activists have been drawn into meetings around the boycott theme. Overwhelmingly these are a trap which uses up good energy. The strike will be won through picketing. And the strike is very winnable.

8th April 1986

Once again the cowardice and bankruptcy of the left wing groups was demonstrated. It is the workers who are the revolutionaries, not the paper-selling gauntlet.

13th April 1986

Calling all good working class people

Your support is needed at Wapping - any night or morning.

Good news, for 82 days now thousands of brave pickets, printers, young and old, men and women of the working class have withstood freezing cold, no money coming in, near total unpreparedness and charge after charge from the police strikebreakers, and fought back. Reinforcements are needed. Yes there have been many defeats, but also a few victories. We are strong, we are confident, join us at Wapping. Whatever happens printers will fight because there is no alternative, and together the class enemy can be beaten.

Printers and supporters have staked out the banner at Wapping. In this ex-docklands area support is strong. There are no neutrals. You're either with the workers of a thug of apologist for Murdoch. Join us at Wapping.

It is no accident that the bosses chose Wapping to stage a worker-bashing drive. Nor accidental that they choose to put scab distribution depots in areas the capitalists have blighted - the Rotherham area or at Motherwell in the ex-mining heart of Lanarkshire. They would have put one in Maerdy but the pit isn't shut yet. It is never too late to rally, join us at Wapping.

It is no accident that 'outsiders' are used; Maxwell, Shah, Murdoch and Black. But they're as British as the bobby. The bosses and their hired thugs always rally. It is up to the workers to rally to the Wapping banner.

Don't scab for the bosses,
Don't listen to their lies.
Us workers never had a chance
Unless we organise.

Join us at Wapping, any night or morning.

28th June 1986

'TUC supports Wapping picketing' - Morning Star headline, 26th June.

15th September 1986

Letter: 'The Picket is always read. The ones that are accounts are better than those with boring political generalisations.'

25th October 1986

Pickets are settling for the long haul. Initiatives, such as a printers' march through Brixton, or a Saturday afternoon march from Millwall are good ideas and there are many more coming from the ranks, as always. But the proposal to listen to TUC filth covering their arse in a phoney lobby at parliament, deliberately several miles from the picket line, is *criminal*. Pickets know that the only way to win jobs back is to physically eject every last scab from the Wapping plant. Any proposal to give the TUC any say in their dispute is surrender. The TUC is not bothered by pickets in prison, or the massive strike-breaking operation in the heart of London, or the police assaults, or workers' hardship etc. What bothers them is picketing, just as they hated the miners' pickets. Police threats this week to have a speeding lorry kill a picket are because of the effect of picketing.

5th November 1986

With regard to Saturday night. Bet some of the pickets felt like Pickets again, didn't you, marching here, marching there, dodging Ploddy everywhere. Brick them here, brick the bastards anywhere. A bloody good night's work for a change. Beats standing at Well-close drinking tea and being policed in a pen. Keep pickets moving here, there and everywhere. Plod don't like it, Murdoch don't like it, and you can be sure them scabs don't like it. Let's heck it up, Pickets on every exit route, Whitechapel, Burdett, Commercial - both ends - and the middle. More radio contact; as they move one lot on, another lot take their place. We can win and will. Keep thinking and acting. Don't wait for leaders, lead yourselves.

23rd December 1986

In the case of the dispute we are at a stalemate; NI are getting their papers out, but we are harrassing them. Further, we are frustrating NI's efforts to expand and they are suffering from a declining share of the UK press market. The longer this dispute goes on, the more frustrated the employers will become. It is a war of attrition.

We have still to take the initiative. From the start of this dispute it is the employers

who have made the running, the question is how we take this out of their hands. Some are claiming that the key to the dispute lies with the TUC. However, even if the TUC expelled the scabs or the EETPU, the strikebreakers would carry on. Moreover the TUC is a sell-out.

Some people think that if we intensify the picketing then we will be able to force our way, which is correct. It has become obvious from the beginning that the leadership of out unions are either unwilling or unable to prosecute the dispute and therefore all the action has to be organised and implemented by ourselves.

NI did not expect this dispute to run for so long; they will now let the winter run its course and we have to keep up the pressure. If we do and we organise bigger and better pickets then we can win, if we fall under the spell of the TUC, we will be reduced to impotent protest.

1st January 1987

Let's make 24th January a night to remember. ONE YEAR AT WAPPING. Bring your wives, girlfriends, sisters, fathers, kids, friends and neighbours. Everyone should make an effort to harass the officials to support the picketing. We could have 30,000 on the march. So come along. Attend on January 24th for a great night out. Let's show Murdoch and his Muppets that our numbers are growing. We are not going to go away. We won't be intimidated. And we mean business in 1987 - The Year of the Picket.

28th January 1987

For months we have taken stick from the police. On Saturday *we got one back*. Brilliant. They must've wondered what hit them, even the veterans of May 3rd. For hours they had to sit there and take it, the noise of concrete on perspex deafened us, what must it have been like for them? It was too dangerous for them to charge us as they would have liked. Many thanks to all those people 'unconnected with the dispute' who were right up there in the front, showing they know quite well what the police are about and what they deserve from working class people. We need no excuses for hating the police. Thanks especially to the football supporters from Millwall, West Ham, Chelsea and Charlton. You were an inspiration.

5th February 1987

9.00 am, TUC buildings. Around 50 pickets gathered to tell the TUC what they think of their crying condemnation of pickets. Pickets stayed outside all morning. Only the NUM President distanced himself by refusing to agree with the forelock-tugging of the Executive. We are entitled to fight for our jobs. Meanwhile, Willis crawls around the back of the building for his job. Do we have to be bludgeoned to death before this lot even issues a toothless protest? (*Out of the mouths of babes....*One junior picket at the TUC, when asked who the lady with the fancy hair-do was, replied loudly, 'Maggie Thatcher'....Exit one embarrassed SOGAT general secretary.)