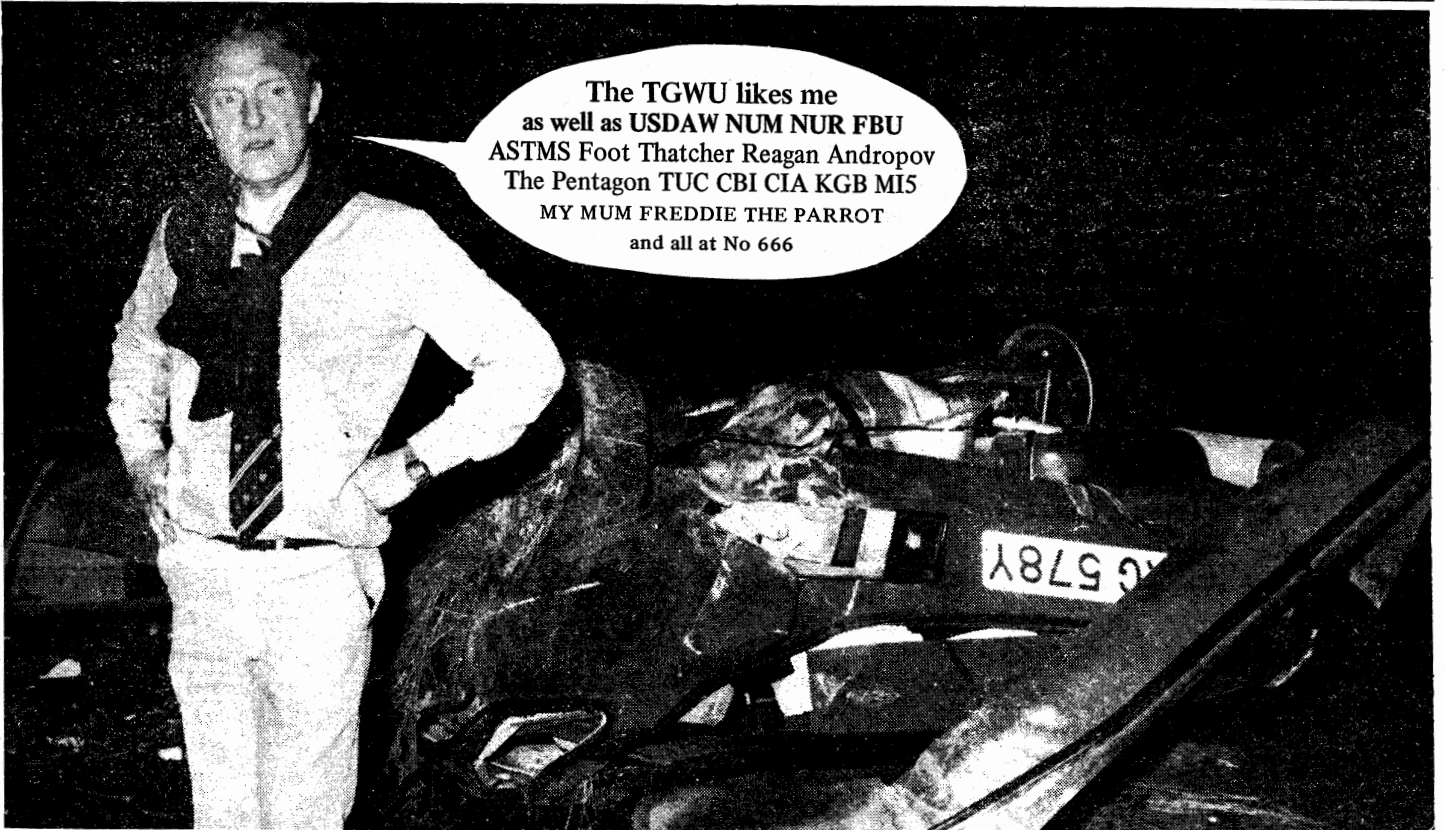


WORKERS PLAY THE

MAN AND PARTY MACHINE IN PERFECT HARMONY



SURVIVOR—Neil Kinnock stands by his wrecked car on the M4 early today. The car somersaulted for 100 yards. But the MP walked away with minor cuts.

'SOMEONE UP THERE LIKES ME'

BUT WOULD YOU BUY A USED VEHICLE FOR SOCIALIST TRANSITION FROM THIS MAN ?

Popular yarns of class war

INSIDE : France/Aire Valley Strike Co-ops/NGA/F.T/EEPTU/LT/More Initials/Jargon/Small Type/etc etc e

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INSIDE : France/Aire Valley Strike

St. James Infirmery Blues

Hospital workers in Leeds who displayed high levels of militancy during last year's Health Service strike have been at it again. At St. James Hospital a strike by laundry workers over pay cuts is currently in progress. We were sent this account of a technicians' strike at the same hospital by a member of the Northern Communications Group (Leeds).



Having been threatened with dismissal unless they returned to work by May 13th, fourteen medical physics workers – all members of the Association of Scientific, Technical and Managerial Staffs (ASTMS) – went back after 12 weeks on strike.

The strike, coming in the aftermath of the official Health Workers dispute, was over the dismissal of a trainee technician (who won't allow his name to be published, because of future possible victimisation), who was taken on from technical college and told he would be given training to do the job. He was sacked for alleged incompetence. He had been given little training. In fact, he was sent to college to learn more specific skills, and at the end of the course got 100% on a theoretical paper. Even though an enquiry into the Medical Physics Department, headed by a District Nursing Officer, had concluded a year before that training was essential, the management had given this worker about one day's practical training. He was then sacked.

The decision to strike came not from the technicians' shop stewards, but from the membership. They called a meeting and then informed their stewards so they could attend. By a majority vote, they decided on strike action until reinstatement.

Medical physics technicians service the complex machinery of modern health; e.g. X-Ray machines, life support machines and dialysis machines. Often,

this equipment has a 1 or 2 year service guarantee from the manufacturer. As a result, it is very difficult for such a strike to affect the hospital and squeeze management through the withdrawal of services to patients (same problem as in the national dispute! Same dubious targets.)

The technicians knew that the support of other workers was essential to get a favourable resolution. Hospital drivers were willing to strike in solidarity, and said as much to the pickets. However, COHSE Branch Secretary and failed Labour councillor Susi Armitage refused official support by the drivers, saying that there had been no official call for solidarity. By official call, she meant written request from ASTMS full-time officer Graham Johnson, who was conspicuous by his absence from the picket and from the workers. He did however have a few meetings with management, details of which he would pass on to the other workers when the urge took him.

As a result it was 14 men alone, picketing in freezing conditions, with harassment and ejections meted out to them by hospital security staff. Financial support came from other workers in the NHS, and physical help on the picket line, but the call for a mass picket in support got little response.

After an appeal, the management was instructed by the health authority to reinstate the worker, but this was later

reversed and management refused to comply. The worker remained out in the cold.

In the end, because of intimidation, the workers went back. The victimised worker found another job outside the NHS. However a new training scheme has been established, and contact with the technicians has shown that a good spirit still exists; in fact one has said that maybe the mistake was 'going out' – maybe we should have 'stayed-in'.

There was no talk of a sell-out either. Graham Johnson was an irrelevance. The workers themselves ran the strike, and decided to return as a group freed from manipulative leaders.

How many other workplaces are taking these tentative steps to freedom from the dead hand of Labourism?

SAB

SENTENCED TO WORK (2).

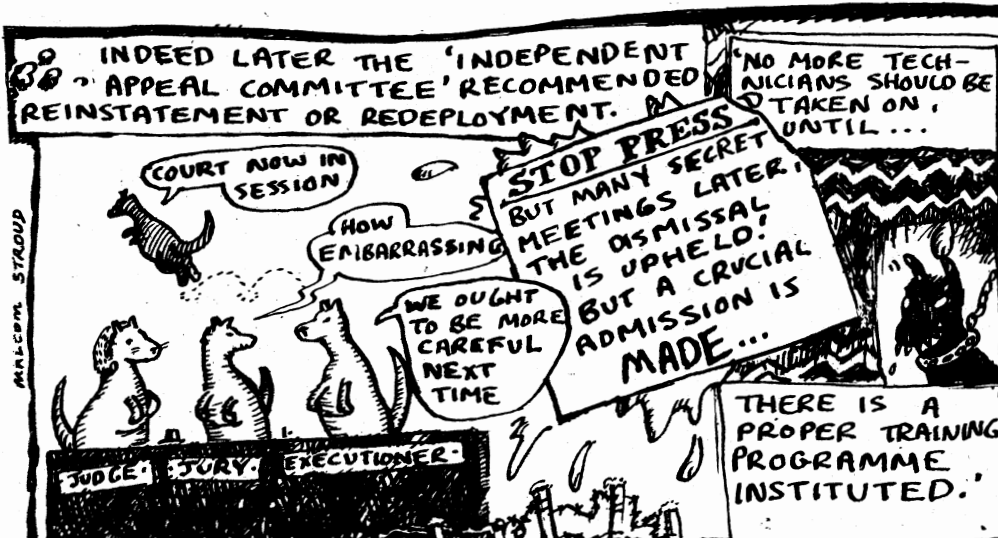
Soviet jails 'an example to the West'

By Rupert Morris

Prisons in China and the Soviet Union provide outstanding examples which the West would do well to study, Mr Warren Burger, Chief Justice of the United States, said in London last night.

Chief Justice Burger told law students at the Middle Temple Hall: "On my visit to the Soviet Union, I was compelled to conclude that the one correctional institution I was invited to see – a juvenile institution – had training programmes in advance over anything I had seen in other countries."

He added: "The prisons in China literally are factories with fences around them, and the prisoners are trained in marketable skills by producing goods to help pay for their incarceration. That surely makes them more likely to become useful citizens."



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 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.

See Page 16



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 EEPTU. They previously gained front page prominence in defying Tebbit's 1980 Employment Act by stopping production of all national newspapers for a day. Moreover 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 EEPTU 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 ser-

ving, 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 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 member-

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

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

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

Thanks to Little @ Printers (488 0602) for help

ship 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.

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)



The strike at Aire Valley Yarns began on March 15th. 21 of the 22 Asian workers had joined the TGWU. The eight odd white workers – getting more for a 40 hour week than the Asians were getting for 60 hours – refused. Having first tried to bribe and then threaten Liaquat Ali, the prime mover behind unionisation, he was finally sacked. The other workers downed tool in protest. When they came to work the next day they found they had all been sacked.

A 24 hour picket began. The firm recruited scab labour by sending a man round Bradford knocking on doors asking people if they wanted work. They were driven in through the picket by management. Attempts were made to intimidate the strikers including a campaign of anonymous phone calls.

The TGWU made it official and then left the strikers to it. The strikers organised blacking and attempted to mobilise the Asian community to prevent the recruitment of scabs. Finally on June 30th the TGWU negotiated a sell out – recognition of the union and a pay rise, but only reinstatement for 18 workers. Liaquat Ali and two others stayed sacked.

The following account was sent to us by the Northern Communication Group.

The workers did all vote to return and accept the deal and when we met them they seemed very happy with the result. Whether this extends to Liaquat Ali, Malik and Saliman is a different matter. They have consistently said that the issue is about recognition (and the consequent rise in conditions) and not about personalities. However for better or worse a 'settlement' has been reached of a dispute which 10 years ago might have led to another 'Grunwicks' but which did little more than show the poverty of both 'union' and 'community' politics as they traditionally manifest themselves.

The 'once great' TGWU was reduced to bargaining for the crumbs from the table of a tin-pot racist management of a backward sweatshop.

When we turned up after the strike had been going a few weeks there were no official T.U. strike notices – Quote of the year 'TGWU doesn't have any official picket notices in the region': Peter Booth.

The strikers launched a 24 hours 7 day picket huddled in a tin shack donated by the TGWU. This exposed them to fascist and/or management attacks including one striker being beaten. (On being told the police said 'Prove It'). Northern Communications Collective towed our caravan (previously used by the water workers) to support their picket and it became an established feature of the strike.

Two support groups were created. One in Bradford was organised by Asian community activists who sensibly had no faith in the trade union movement. They saw it as a job for the 'community' and hoped to mobilise the Bradford black community to support the strike (and to stop the scabs which were being shipped in by management - both black and white). However on a demonstration in support of the strikers only 500 turned up – much less than the Bradford 12 demos.

The other group in Leeds seemed more dominated by RCP activists although not totally – some health workers were involved in this. This group wanted to mobilise rank & file union support.

The RCP nearly blew what support there was by their arrogant heckling. Workers in Chas Busfield, a mill in Gossop, blacked any clothing going to the Aire Valley mill. Aire Valley management took an injunction out against the shop stewards of this mill to stop the blacking. The stewards got round this by claiming they were simply representing their workforce's desires and were not encouraging them. The court did not levy any fines and simply instructed the stewards not to encourage 'their' workers to black the goods.

However this wasn't good enough for the RCP who leafleted Busfields telling the workers to pull their fingers out and give some proper support. This led to the workers then feeling exceedingly resentful, believing themselves to be accused of selling out the Aire Valley strikers.

Eventually Aire Valley management themselves went to Busfields on a Sunday and loaded up the blacked goods.

So in the end a deal was cooked up – union recognition achieved faces saved all round. The only people really satisfied maybe the 18 workers who also got a wage rise – for how long?

One thing – some of the workers said later that they made a mistake walking out and that they could have fought a stronger fight from inside the mill where no scabs could have got in.

SAB

An article in the March 83 issue of Race Today gives the background to this strike. Asian immigration to the area began in the late fifties. Textiles were then the largest industry (1/3 of employment locally). Neither machines nor conditions had changed much in 100 years. However employers faced intense overseas competition. The attraction of textiles to small capitalists was the relatively low levels of capital needed to start up. The same con-

sideration made textiles attractive to industrialising nations in Europe and the third world, who also had supplies of cheaper and less militant labour.

British firms needed to re-equip and reduce wage costs. They began using immigrant labour – at first from Eastern Europe – and investing in new machinery. The new machinery had to be run continuously to be profitable. The pattern of an 8 hour day and short evening shift, was replaced by 24 hour working – a 12 hour or split day shift and a 12 hour night shift. Traditionally women had been employed in the unskilled jobs. It was illegal to employ them at nights and most men refused to accept the long hours and low pay in the context of relatively full employment.

Asian workers filled the gap, and immigration increased in the early sixties, esp. from Pakistan, to take up this available work.

Employers used the arrival of an Asian workforce (23% of Wool textiles production workers by 1978) to break down traditional work practices. Piece rates replaced time rates. The workforce was racially segregated, by shift (women on days Asians nights) or by department, with Asians concentrated on the new machinery or in the unskilled dirty jobs. This partition enabled management to divide and rule, and bring in the rationalisations of the work process they needed without effective opposition. The widespread introduction of new technology meant intensified competition between firms, which closed or were amalgamated on an enormous scale. (A process encouraged by successive governments through financial aid). Those firms still using old machinery (like Aire Valley Yarns) were obliged to drastically speed up the work.

Overall then the new technology meant massive job losses (in Wool textiles from 96,000 in 1970 to 37,000 in 1980) and increased exploitation. The picture painted by management is of an industry in crisis – in fact the immense increase in output per head has meant that despite closures and job losses, the level of production in the industry has remained constant.

The unions (GMBU and TGWU) are uninterested in this outpost of their labour empires. They haven't bothered to pretend to be interested in their women or Asian members. The result has been a series of struggles like that at Aire Valley which have been consistently sold out by the union. Among Asian workers the consequent disenchantment with the union, seen as an arm of management, has led to talk of organising independently. Only time will show what they mean by this and what becomes of it.

NASTY BRUTAL AND SMALL

Another commentary on a strike a long way away by someone with no direct involvement with it?

I believe the Aire Valley Strike demands some comment because its a classic example of the problems of workers organisation in small companies. Small firms come in all sizes and the situation facing workers in them is always to some extent unique. But from the workers point of view they can be roughly divided into two kinds. Very small 'paternalist' businesses (typically employing fewer than 20 people), in which relations between owner/manager and workers are direct. And small to medium sized firms in which clear divisions between departments (office/factory/warehouse/transport etc) are established, and a hierarchy of middle management (forepersons/department heads) oversee the workers and mediate between them and the owner/manager.

In small paternalist firms relations with the boss are direct — people are obliged to have a personal relationship with him. Wage rises and promotion (or more exactly increased responsibility) depend on dealing with him on an individual basis. It involves competition with your fellow wage-labourers. Those competing hardest grass up their rivals and everyone else to the boss. Loyalty between workers may exist, but it is often only as strong as loyalty to the boss who is 'almost one of us'. The degree of responsibility in each job is much higher than in larger firms, because the division of labour is less. People thus tend to be much more 'involved in their jobs' — are usually obliged to be in order to hold them down. The divisions between 'workers' or 'management' and who's on what side are difficult to see or determine. Fellow workers will often be relatives or friends of the boss — or as at Aire Valley will share a common nationality with him as opposed to the workforce.

This situation presents difficulties for the aspiring militant. Collective discussion is usually hampered by the impossibility of communication out of earshot of the boss or his toadies. Perks, dodges and fiddles have to be worked on an individual basis and hidden not only from the boss but the other workers. (Part of the paternalist bosses power derives from 'allowing' fiddling). The development of unity amongst the workers is a slow process of building and testing interpersonal solidarity at a friendship level, and trying by all means possible to stoke the natural antagonisms between boss and workforce into concrete divisions. Without getting sacked. Its absolutely not a matter of winning people to 'revolutionary' positions. Indeed it will normally involve a conscious choice between building relations of trust or discussing 'politics'. I will return to this later.



CORE BLIMEY

All this in the hope that some incident will arise (or more usually some change in the company will take place), which will catalyse this latent solidarity into a collective struggle, and hopefully a more collective unity afterwards. Hopefully is the key word. Agitating in a small firm is a dodgy business — 'success' can only ever be a matter of hope rather than expectation, and equally a matter of many months, even years. The problem is always that the company is liable to change faster than the growth of unity in the workforce.

Small firms like this essentially consist of a 'core' of wage labourers closely tied to the boss — a community already established in relation to him, with little space for any 'autonomy' from him. Aire Valley Textiles by contrast is an example of the other sort of small firm I defined above. Why dwell so long on this first sort you might ask? Because the problems faced by militants in the second kind are very similar — what has changed are the possibilities offered by the situation.

The 'core' group about the boss doesn't disappear in larger firms. It merely forms the top layer of the hierarchy. When a firm grows in size those who were there at the start become the first department heads (and those that don't often constitute a problem on the shopfloor. Old,

loyal and preferentially treated and paid workers are generally rabidly pro-boss and company.)

Recruitment in firms up to a certain size is normally 'internal'. Companies start up with the boss hiring old friends, friends of friends, his relatives and so on. Most of these people will be a dead loss from the point of view of worker solidarity — being effectively what would be middle management in a larger firm, and often becoming same. The first actual 'workers' as distinct from management will be people hired as assistants to this 'core' of management. Again these people are more likely to be recruited from people recommended by existing employees than from the dole office or by advertising. Bosses like to think of these new recruits as part of the family. Its with the growth in company size to the level of separate departments that deliberate recruitment of a distinct 'workforce' will take place. Its now that departments will be expanded around recruitment from particular strata of 'cheap labour', depending on whats available locally.

In the boom years after the last world war pools of cheap labour were built up through immigration, while women and youth were being exploited on a hitherto unknown scale. The advantage of using such pools of 'reserve' labour is not only its cheapness — its also the possibility of exploiting the inevitable divisions between sex, age and race. This was particularly important where these 'reserves' were used in the process of breaking up and reorganising established industries, as Asian and Female labour was used in the Wool Textiles industry.

Today of course labour needs are totally reversed. Mass unemployment has swollen the numbers of the 'reserve army' of available cheap labour. Offering one might think, immense possibilities of exploitation for sweat shop proprietors. However the same economic climate thats produced mass unemployment has sharpened the competitive pressures on small businesses as well. Hence the state intervention by the Tory government to reduce wage costs by establishing a supply of cheap youth labour, and by reducing unemployment and supplementary benefit — putting on pressure to reduce low pay. The end result is super-exploitation as industries are forced to restructure and still greater numbers of job losses. As companies expand or are merged together (though not so much where companies are merged into a group but maintained as separate firms) the possibilities for workers unity and struggle multiply dramatically. Where a section of the workforce has been employed (usually around a particular process), in the way the Asian workers are at Aire Valley

the whole idea is that they are paid less and treated worse than everyone else — an obvious source of grievance. However the isolation created by their separation as a particular department or shift increases the possibility of unity developing. This can be helped by a common sex or racial background. To start off with this is usually a solidarity of the oppressed — a defensive response to common treatment. But it can build into something more especially in small firms where the sophistications of personnel management are lacking. As often as not middle management will create immense problems for themselves through incompetence compounded by racism, sexism and general unpleasantness. The possibility for communication out of earshot of middle management increases as departments become well separated in terms of function and geography. It can equally develop in those situations where a language or patois is shared in common as distinct from management. That said in the context of Asian workers obviously not all Asians speak the same language or share the same cultural background.

Its equally important to avoid the idea that its always a question of white bosses exploiting coloured or black labour. In the rag trade there a large numbers of sweatshops owned or managed by people from one national or racial group, exploiting their relatives, and co-nationals as the 'core' group, and then exploiting other racial or sexual groups as the workforce.

WHY BOTHER ?

So what does this all mean and why am I writing it ? A large and expanding sector of the working class are employed in small to medium size businesses without unions and often without any negotiating machinery whatever. In such firms the first priority of workers is self defence against exploitation. The task of militants and 'revolutionaries' — almost invariably isolated individuals — is to help generate shop floor solidarity and increase the divisions between shop-floor and bosses.

But whats this got to do with revolution ? Hard core 'revolutionaries' will doubtless already be dismissing the above as mindless economism, mere demand militancy or somesuch. 'Revolutionary' papers like Workers Playtime normally concentrate on struggles in large unionised industries. (The 'Key' sectors of 'The Class'). Its comparatively easy to cobble together accounts of strikes in them by assiduously reading lots of newspapers and then drawing political conclusions from a distance. (Though to be fair to Workers Playtime it still takes more effort than fleshing out a single press clipping with a lot of 'revol-

utionary' hot air as most of our rivals do).

Inside large industries its the degree of relative job protection provided by formal negotiating and grievance structures which allows the growth of rank and file groups/



factory groups organised around a political platform/even party cells. Whether these are loyal oppositions to unionism or 'anti-union' they exist in the space opened by the existence of unionism, and can concentrate on being a militant 'political' opposition to the official negotiations over wages and conditions.

POLITICAL CELIBACY

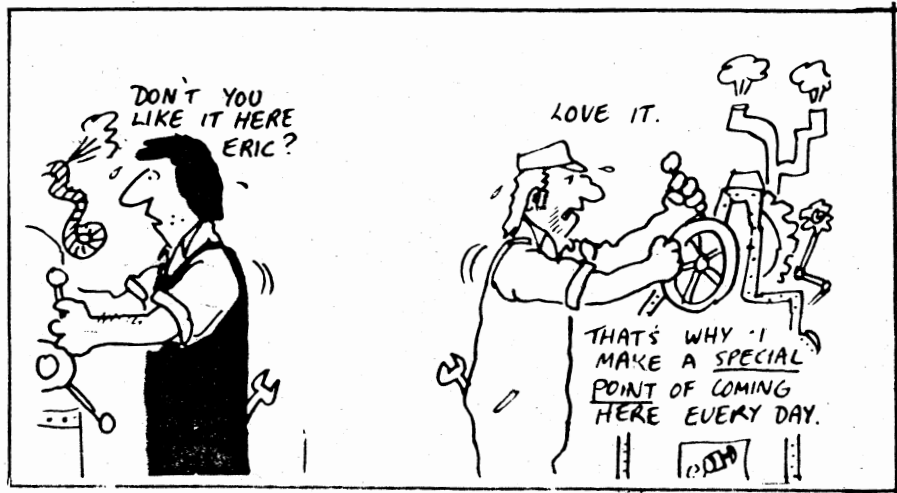
In most small businesses by contrast this space for 'political' militancy doesn't exist. As I said above where the isolated militant decides to openly proselytise his 'revolutionary' views he usually does so at the expense of isolating himself as at best a standing joke and at worst an active nuisance. I am not suggesting for a moment that people abandon their political views about the need to destroy capitalism in favour of militant sectional self interest. I am saying that political discussion can't be forced on people but should arise out of whats being commonly discussed. And more importantly that militants have to decide for themselves the question of what is more important in any given situation — building inter-

personal collectivity or arguing about politics. Both are obviously necessary — but often enough they are contradictory needs. I am also saying that neither can be done outside the workplace collectivity. Of course people can choose to isolate themselves politically and argue for 'pure communism' if they want, just as they can isolate themselves by becoming devotees of 'conspicuous militancy' and attempt to 'lead' their fellow workers into Struggle (or into bringing in The Union). In the latter case they make it easy for management to pick them off (or buy them off). In the former they make it easy for their fellow workers to discount what they say, and for themselves to keep clean hands in the "reformist mire" of defensive struggles.

It is often said despairingly by leftists, confronted by struggles like that at Aire Valley, that the "unions have forgotten how to organise or struggle". Of course these struggles actually reveal most clearly the anti-working class nature of trades unionism. But even revolutionaries, busy setting up autonomous groups in big industry, will shrug their shoulders and agree that its an impossible situation for organising. I believe that such arguments stand the priorities for revolutionaries today on their head. Because they presuppose a level of class consciousness, of class community and solidarity which does not exist. For some 'revolutionaries' this is no problem. The crisis will reduce us to the same intensity of exploitation and our 'spontaneous' response will be to throw up autonomous fighting institutions — Workers Councils. This ignores the obvious fact that where Councils have been set up by workers themselves (as opposed to by politicians (1917) or 'anti-politicos' (1936), it has been on the basis of existing working class community and solidarity. Community clearly doesn't presuppose solidarity, but it is its necessary precondition.

COMMUNITY SERVICE

In Britain since the last world war we



have seen the disintegration of the 'old' working class communities — through the restructuring of industry, through 'urban planning' which has destroyed working class communities and cultural ties, and through the relative prosperity produced during the post war boom. The period has seen the destruction of many of those ties of mutual dependency which those working class communities. Capitalism's tendencies towards a society of atomized individuals — Citizens, Workers, Consumers — has proceeded apace as the space for 'individual realisation' has grown. Wider communities of dependency crumbled in face of the rise of the nuclear family as an independent economic unit, and now we see the 'crisis of the family' as jobs for women and youth give them the potential for economic 'autonomy' enjoyed by many men.

The primary task of a revolutionary movement in this situation is not fighting to build up power bases in the 'Key Sectors' of society — even where its genuinely 'autonomous groupings' as opposed to people getting themselves elected as stewards. For militants in those sectors this is obviously one task. But the basic task of revolutionaries everywhere is helping to rebuild class community and solidarity in the face of its obvious decomposition. In workplaces of whatever size that means doing the basic work of helping

rebuild collectivity and unity in the face of management.

Within small firms that goes hand in hand with the need for everyday self-defence. Even if the unions were fighting, anti-capitalist bodies they would be impotent where there was no collective strength on the shopfloor. In reality of course their power is rooted in our impotence.

What does a new working class community mean? After all we can have no truck for peddlars of socialist nostalgia with their lies about how wonderful it used to be. A subject for further debate in these pages I'd humbly suggest. (Yeah all right I'm not really sure either.)

I'll leave off with a couple of conclusions :

We must get away from the idea that isolated individuals in unorganised workplaces can only participate in the 'real' class struggle at second hand by joining political groupings, or acting as back-up to workers in the 'Key Sectors'. Where you are — however 'unpromising' or 'difficult' — is where the fight is, where the basic struggle starts.

We must get away from conceptions of the struggle which start off from the construction of 'Power Bases' in

'Key Sectors' — (as all the various conceptions of 'Workers Autonomy' do) — or which see class consciousness and solidarity as something which the developing contradictions of capitalism will 'spontaneously' solve for us. Of course its true that capitalism as a crisis ridden system suffers from periodic breakdowns, offering an opportunity for class struggle against the system itself. But its equally true that if that situation finds the majority of the working class atomized, divided and confused, then all the courage, militancy and radicalisation they'll undoubtedly display will not prevent capitalist barbarism re-establishing itself over our dead bodies. ■



It's a Fare Cop!

Well before the final election results had come in Ken Livingstone suggested that the reason for Labour's disastrous showing was that the party had failed to put forward policies which were financially realistic given the depth of the recession. Modest as always, he neglected to mention that he and his GLC cronies were already perfecting moves in this direction.

At the beginning of this year the High Court ruled that the recent fare reductions could only be brought in as part of a general 'efficiency' drive. Not wishing to trample on the rights of ordinary working London judges Ken complied.

This efficiency will take the form of a 10% cut in staff over three years together with substantial cuts in 'bus miles' and increased one-person operation of buses and tube trains. This will inevitably involve a greater pressure of work for LT staff who are left, which will lead to increased sickness and absenteeism meaning yet more delays for passengers.

There is also much concern about fare-dodging, which is reckoned to cost about £40m a year. Hence plans to employ more inspectors. Does this mean the end of the 30 pence Amersham to Brixton journey as we know it? Unlikely, at least



EVER WANTED TO DRIVE THE PUBLIC? OUR KEN EARNS A GOOD LIVING ON THE BOSSES.

for a while. As Dr. Keith Bright, LT chairman, puts it, "We now believe that the problem of fraud, and the public visibility of fraud, is of such a dimension that we must spend money initially without a guarantee of an immediate return".

A GLC policy document sums it all up by saying: "Walking remains one of the most popular methods of transport in London and no doubt will continue to be so".

However, we must remember that these policies are not simply 'realistic', but also 'socialist'. The Londoners who get the best value for money from the new travel cards are those who live in the two central zones which include most of the boroughs which are still under Labour control.

As Ken recently stated in an interview in City Limits (1/7/83), the appeal of Labour Party politics (in London at any rate) is no longer to the white, skilled working class but to the 'dispossessed', many of whom live in Westminster. ■

Letter

REPLY TO 'YOUR CARING SHARING COP-OUT' in June W.P.

At a time when the Labour Party's 'left' credibility rests largely on the claims to 'local socialism' of various local or metropolitan authorities, your article on co-ops and local authority initiatives in 'popular planning' provides a welcome and necessary critical analysis.

You are however quite wrong in your assessment of the Lucas Shop Stewards' Corporate Plan. Far from being simply a request for the state to provide funding and soften 'the demands of profitability on Lucas', it was a demand that Lucas shift its production from armaments to goods which would meet indisputable social needs in any industrial society (e.g. kidney machines, heat pumps, fire fighting equipment etc.).

This shift in production would have required an initial input of state capital and clearly it would not have fundamentally altered the relations of production inside or outside Lucas. Yes — it was a reform. The question arises as to whether or not some reforms are worth fighting for. True, 'communism is the destruction of wage labour and the commodity, of production for exchange, and of the state, democratic or dictatorial..' The question is how does such a communism become an immediate possibility?

It is nonsense to suggest that all capitalist commodities or all tasks within the labour process are equally 'useless and wasteful' — clearly they are not. If workers are demanding that they produce kidney machines instead of high technology weaponry then revolutionaries should be supporting these demands and not dismissing them as irrelevant.

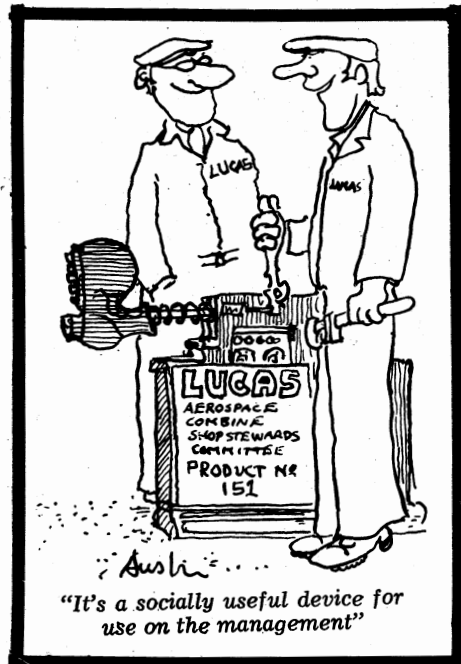
The same approach should be applied to workers' co-ops. If workers are simply taking over unprofitable plants and continuing to market the same product without guaranteed state support, then it is a recipe for both redundancy and demoralisation. If however a workers' co-op

is challenging the criteria for production, or offering as you suggest 'advantages' to the workers — then it should be supported. Similarly, if local authorities are prepared to finance such initiatives then in this respect they too should be supported.

Clearly co-ops are open to being 'co-opted' into the type of progressive mixed economy package that left reformists dress up as socialism but this is not always going to be the case. Even in a recession such as this the extent and the unevenness of capitalist economy allows for developments that are not necessarily revolutionary, but which are not directly serving the interests of capital either. Finally we should consider the possibility that alternative plans, implemented on a wide scale would place increased pressure on capitalism's already declining rate of profit. If not why was Mike Cooley sacked from Lucas?

Returning to the Labour local authorities — of course they do not adopt a revolutionary communist perspective and can be criticised on this basis — but beyond that the various reforms that are currently being implemented should be critically analysed for their content and effect and not dismissed out of hand. If for example the GLC is fronting the money for co-ops providing 'street theatre, organic food,' and cheap printing facilities and if the GLC is attempting to 'step in where the more grotesque and obvious injustices arise' can we really conclude that this serves to 'safeguard capitalism's existence as a whole'? So much depends on the exact details of each initiative that blanket condemnation ends up simply as ideological rhetoric.

There's plenty to criticise the GLC for, however. For example, the newly formed



workers' co-op at GEC's Associated Automation plant has already, according to Socialist Worker (2 July) folded up amidst much demoralisation and discontent. Similarly the decentralisation schemes of the London boroughs of Islington and Hackney have been criticised by the paper Big Flame (April/May issue) on the basis that they are being imposed from above without genuine support or interest from the community.

It is specific and detailed reports like these that we need in order to assess the role that particular co-ops, local authorities, or alternative plans might play. It is simply not the case that they are all, always, necessarily the friendly face of capitalism out to lull the workers into side stepping the class struggle.

The analysis in Workers' Playtime is impressive — but in this case it has provided a uniform stamp by which all manner of initiatives have been condemned without being fully considered.

ANDY PORTER Brighton.

Reply:

Thankyou for your letter.

In response, let me say I agree co-ops may indeed be engaged in anti-capitalist activity. It is the form which (for example) revolutionary printing presses find most appropriate.

Alternatively, working conditions may be better in some co-ops than in 'orthodox' set-ups (although this is often at the expense of lower wages). As far as this goes, it is true you can't generalise — certainly individual case studies might be useful.

But this is not the issue I was immediately concerned with. I was attacking the notion that co-operatives, or other more democratic management and ownership structures are inherently anti-capitalist as institutions. If they exist to compete as commercial concerns, the worker-managers will be obliged to respond to market forces in the same way as managers in 'normal' firms. This is why, after an initial enthusiasm, workers in co-ops often end up very cynical — as exemplified by GEC and the Unicorn factory in Taunton.

Beyond this, it is the content of an organisation's activity which determines whether or not it is anti-capitalist, rather than its institutional expression.

Continued Page Nineteen.

Playtime Travel: FRANCE

ONCE AGAIN WE'RE FACING THE MOST IMPORTANT DATE IN ANY REVOLUTIONARY'S CALENDAR. THE ANNUAL HOLIDAYS. TWO WEEKS – EVEN A MONTH – WITHOUT BORING MEETINGS ONCE A WEEK, NO GUILT ABOUT NOT HAVING SOLD THE PAPER, LOVELY STUFF. FRANCE IS ALWAYS A POPULAR DESTINATION WITH RADICALS. TORY-VOTING EX-STALINISTS CAN RECALL THE POPULAR FRONT, LABOUR-VOTING EX-MAOISTS CAN RECALL MAY '68, AND BROKEN-WINDED EX-AUTONOMES CAN RECALL THE HOT SUMMER OF 1978. BUT FOR THOSE WHO CAN'T ESCAPE THOSE NAGGING DOUBTS ABOUT NOT UNDERSTANDING THE POLITICAL SCENE TODAY, WE PRESENT PLAYTIME'S FIRST HOLIDAY SUPPLEMENT. NEXT MONTH THE REVOLUTIONARY MOVEMENT IN FLORIDA.

The Rigours of High Office

British Socialists upset by the triumph of Thatcherite reaction in the General Election may take comfort. Across the channel the red flag is flying and can be a source of inspiration to all devotees of the parliamentary road!

When Francois Mitterand defeated V. Giscard d'Estaing in the presidential election in May 1981, twenty three years of right wing power was brought to an end. The socialists subsequently gained an absolute majority in parliament, but Mitterand honoured electoral pacts and has governed in coalition with the Communist Party and the small Movement of Left Radicals.

Since then the few measures apparently beneficial to workers (39 hour week, fifth week of paid holiday, retirement at 60) have either been emptied of any content by a stricter control of work schedules, and unemployment (currently 10.2% but set to rise sharply), or else have been counterbalanced by increased inflation, taxes and national insurance.

The socialists ambition has been to fulfill the old Gaullist dream of creating powerful French or French-dominated companies capable of beating off the Americans and Japanese. This is to be achieved through nationalisations and state-intervention to help buy-ups and merge competitors. The aim is to produce nationalised corporations, cutting out the waste of competition on a national level. This "socialist experiment" is being assisted by a growing protectionism (exemplified by the famous Poitiers customs house, the only permitted point of entry for imported video recorders. The resulting bottleneck keeps imports down without the political consequences of "official" import controls).

But the inability of France's financial institutions to finance growing company

debt has jeopardised the governments declared aim of rationalising big industry without redundancies. (This in spite of the fact that the socialists nationalised 36 commercial banks). French borrowing on international money markets has doubled since 1981 to 14.6 m dollars. In 1982 France borrowed more from international banks than any other industrial nation apart from the USA.

The heavy burden of servicing the interest on these debts – the annual cost is 3000 francs (£250) per household – and restoring profitability to French capital has meant that the modestly reflationary programme of 1981 has given way to a series of austerity packages. The latest round was introduced in the Spring following publication of the disastrous trade figures and evidence of a continuing upward trend in inflation (currently 11.9%).



Jean-Pierre Chevenement : hands up for austerity.

This entailed curbs in public spending, a continuation of the wage freeze, increased tax and national insurance and a currency limit of £188 per year for anyone travelling abroad. Together with the third devaluation of the Franc in 18 months, this amounts to a much greater attack on spending power than anything under the government of Giscard and Raymond Barre.

PARIS-ITES

The government again followed up the publication of May's trade figures – a deficit of 7.7 billion francs (£650m) – with the announcement that a further dose of austerity was on the way. Mitterand warned of rises in transport, postal, telephone and electricity charges – "public services will have to pay their way". Government spending is to be cut back about 5% in real terms over the next year, and civil service recruitment halted. (The government took on an extra 200,000 staff in its first 18 months in office).

Further levies on tax and social insurance – already averaging 42.7% of incomes – were proposed a week later. This entails a compulsory loan from taxpayers, equivalent to 10% of taxes on income and wealth, and a levy of 10% of taxable income.

If these measures sound depressingly familiar to English ears, the rhetoric and presentation is rather different. True, Mitterand is posing as a hard realist a la Thatcher. In recent interviews he has emphasised that he has always been a man of "rigour" (the French left's euphemism for austerity). "I knew reflation would not work," he has said, "But I was elected for that kind of policy : the people wanted me to apply it. The French are stubborn. They have to see for themselves that a thing cannot work".

FRANCE

Elsewhere, others are blamed for standing in the way of Monsieur le President's great vision. "Right from the Spring of 1982 I wanted rigour. But the Germans were not ready. And everyone, economists, journalists and the advisers, were saying growth was coming back. . . . I lacked the basic information to tell them they were wrong." (Reported in the Guardian, 12th July).

CHEVVY WANTS A LEVY

But "rigour" is now being pushed as something progressive and salutary in itself far more than in Britain, where austerity is presented as an unavoidable but necessary evil. Jean Pierre Chevenement, leader of the socialist left, speaks of a "grand project to break out of decadence." His differences with the architect of "rigour", Finance Minister Delors, 'have been exaggerated': "It was never a question of a choice between rival policies, as the press made out," he says, "Delors is right as far as he goes: there has to be effort and sacrifice and this needs to be shared out as equally as possible." Socialism is thus defined as equality of sacrifice.

Chevenement and the Communist Party are using the old left rhetoric about the "unpatriotic rich", starving the country of the money needed for investment. Andre Lajoinie, the parliamentary leader of the Communist Party, says of tax exemptions from stock exchange earnings: "These are bad psychologically and politically. People are asked to accept sacrifices and they see privileged people virtually untaxed. Besides we need the extra money to pay for industrial investment".

This demagogy is calculated. The true psychological intent of such attacks on the rich is to make workers feel superior to the morally depraved bourgeoisie: they are more prepared to make sacrifices, more dedicated to the National Economy. There is dignity in their labour and their poverty.

OWN GAULLE

The political intent is to make people demand equality of sacrifice (as if there could be such a thing under capitalism) rather than question austerity itself. All of this amounts to workerism — the glorification of the social condition of the proletariat as it exists under capitalism. The left is particularly adept at claiming for the proletariat the positive role of defending values and regenerating society

(in contrast to the idle rich). This was echoed by President Mitterand's TV chats following the May disturbances. He praised the working class's restraint by contrast to the impatience of more privileged social strata.

Secondly, the French left is promoting the "lack of investment" theory in this and many other statements. This says that the recession is caused by the decadent boss class gambling its profits on property and stock-market speculation instead of spending it wisely in factories.

This call for a return to the good old bourgeois values is meant to obscure the fact that industrial investment falls

patriot is no contradiction for Chevenement. "Since there isn't a European Patriotism we have to use the one we know: it's the natural way to get people mobilised". (Guardian 23rd June).

The unions have been the most active in mobilising people to "save the nation". The CFDT, the socialist-led confederation, has stood faithfully by the government, but reminding it that it will only succeed if it wins the adherence of workers at the grassroots. It demands a more self-managed austerity. Its general secretary, Edmond Maire, welcomes "the new solidarity" of a nation in times of adversity. The CP-controlled CGT, the union of "class struggle", never ceases in its calls to struggle . . . for better management. It is



precisely when industrial profits are low — if profits were high enough industry would automatically attract more funds. It is capitalism's difficulties that causes investment to fall, because profit expectation is low, not vice-versa. During a recession is only by 'rationalising' — merging firms, developing plant specialisation, automating production — that capitalism can return to profitability. So the extra investment the French Communist Party calls for will only lead to redundancies for some and more intense work for others.

The belief that the national economy can be managed for the benefit of all Frenchmen and women naturally implies national chauvinism. The French left exploits crude anti-americanism and economic dependence theories to the same end as the Gaullists, and frequently even the rhetoric is identical. 'Being a socialist and a fiery

trying to organise workers to keep an eye on managers, ensuring that they invest wisely and don't buy too many foreign goods.

THE LEFT IS GAUCHE

The currently popular chauvinism is indeed best illustrated by the absurdities of the Communist Party's "let's produce and consume French" campaign. Recently CGT officials at the gas and electricity company EDF requested that management stop buying tyres with American trademarks, and start "buying French". "This will provide work for our workers", they declared, "this is the solution to unemployment". But to the unionists embarrassment, it was later discovered that the "American" brand was manufactured in France, whilst the "French" brand had been produced in Belgium.

FRANCE

In Britain, the Labour left also advocates import controls. The old lie that trade causes unemployment used to be a propaganda weapon of the right wing (imperial preference etc. in the 1930's). Some industries may not be able to match the degree or intensity of the exploitation of labour by their foreign competitors. But tariff barriers and tough import regulations only serve to intensify competition. The point of the propaganda is to ensure workers understand that they have to participate in such competition: they have to produce more goods more cheaply than "foreign" workers.

THE LEFT IS SINISTER

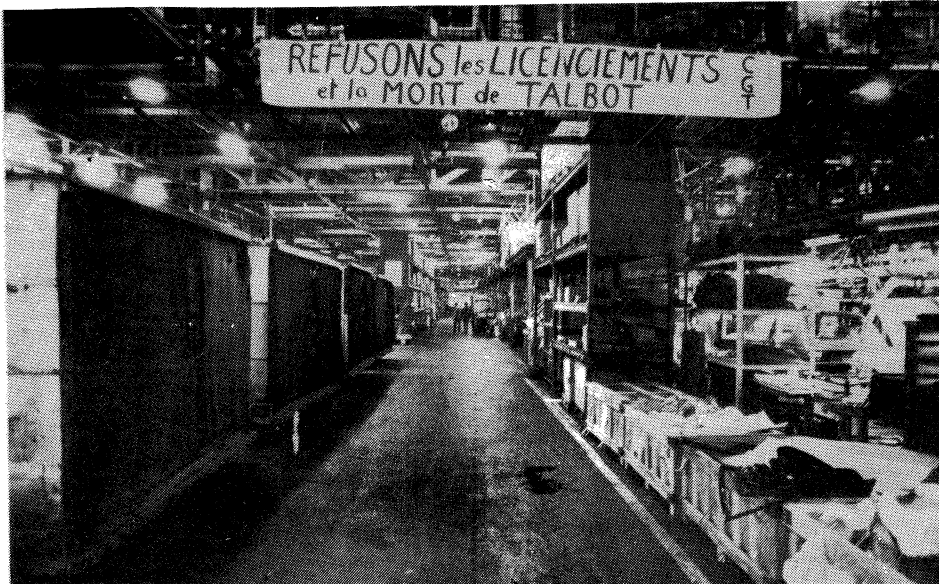
It is only a short step to take from attacking foreign workers abroad to attacking foreign workers at home. The racism of the French Communist Party was confirmed in spectacular fashion by the Vitry-sur-Seine atrocity. (At the end of 1980 the communist mayor of Vitry-sur-Seine and his accomplices attacked a new immigrant hostel under the pretext of combatting 'drug abuse'.) CP calls for stronger immigration control are a cynical attempt to regain lost ground within the working class, mainly at the expense of the 1.4 million north Africans.

At the same time, its trade union the CGT has had the cheek to proclaim great victories in "organising" immigrant workers in the car industry, where they contribute a large proportion of the semi- and unskilled workforce (3/4 of the workers at the Paris Talbot-Citroen plant).

SHAT-EAU TALBOT

These workers tend not to share the same enthusiasm for blue white and red capital as their union bosses. Immigrant workers were in the forefront of last winter's strikes, when entire plants at Peugeot SA and Renault were brought to a standstill. The unions manouevred with the management to get the more combative workers laid off or brought before tribunals, where union representatives denounced militant actions: "Such doings lead those responsible to be excluded from the community of work" (CFDT). "We have proved once more that we are not responsible for the violence. The baileiffs have confirmed that we have returned to work, which is what we always wanted." (CGT). Prime Minister Mauroy went further by publically blaming the strikes on "moslem fanatics".

The recent scandals over West Indian day-trippers to France have highlighted the



The Talbot plant at Poissy: Unions blame 'mistakes by management' for job losses.

fact that, in spite of the government's professed liberalism, it has cut immigration to a trickle and cracked down on illegal immigrants who failed to register during an amnesty last year.

President Mitterand has recently claimed that there is "no parallel between French policy and that of its economic partners. Employment, for example, remains a priority here". It is true that the rate of unemployment in France is still well below most industrial nations. But austerity measures are only just beginning to bite and are becoming more urgent as France's debts accumulate. It seems likely that France will call in the International Monetary Fund to convince people of the need for more sacrifice, just as the Labour Party did in 1976. The replacement of Chevenement by Laurent

Fabius in the industry ministry last March means that the claptrap about socialist rejuvenation will be translated into job losses sooner rather than later. Already massive job losses have been announced (9,000 at Peugeot, and perhaps 4,000 to follow at Citroen) at France's largest privately owned firm PSA. The nationalised metallurgical group Pechiney will shed about 2,500 jobs by the end of the year.

Because the French left had been out of power for a quarter of a century, many British socialists believed that the new Mitterand government could be a beacon of light amid the monetarist forces of darkness. But events are showing that the rotting corpse of leftism gives off the same putrid stench in France as here. ■



If you're the sort of person who can read a whole issue of Workers Playtime, you'll probably spend your holiday with your nose in a book anyway. Here are some of the more interesting of the current crop of French Autonomist/Communist publications. (If you're worried about wasting stamps they're all currently publishing). We've been forced to omit some due to space and/or lack of addresses. Beware — fluent french speaking dialecticians only!

Subversion
from L'Eveil Internationaliste
BP 221,
44604 St Nazaire.

La Banquise,
BP No214
75623 Paris Cedex 13.

Insecurite Sociale
BP 243
75564 Paris Cedex 12

Guerre Sociale
BP 88
75623 Paris Cedex 13

THE RIOTS IN FRANCE THIS SPRING PROVIDED SOME SPECTACULAR T.V SCENES FOR THOSE OF US WHO HAVE BOUGHT VIDEO RECORDERS TO RECORD THE REVOLUTION. BUT THE ORIGINS AND PURPOSE OF THEM REMAINED WELL OBSCURED. WE ASKED A COMRADE FROM 'ECHANGES' TO EXPLAIN THE BACKGROUND.

The Oldest Professions Strike Back

MAY '83 : THE FORCE BE WITH THEM

Looking at France from abroad during the Spring of 1983, you could be excused for thinking that it was a very disturbed country on the verge of chaos – living a kind of replay of May 1968.

From the 22 March until the 24 May, special medical training hospitals (about half of all French hospitals) were on strike. At first this involved just the teachers (a dynasty of big bosses) (1), later the medical students, and finally everyone at these centres.

Their strike was by no means passive: street demonstrations, blocking motorway toll houses, sit-ins at the Health Ministry, disruption of official celebrations etc. all took place. They were fighting a law passed some months earlier aimed at reducing the power of the top men and squeezing the total number of doctors in France (which was supposed to jump from 60,000 in 1970 to 150,000 in 1990).

From the end of April until the beginning of June, students all over France adopted the same sort of tactics to oppose a law already fought over in parliament which aimed at a profound reform of the French university system, adapting it to capital's present economic needs. The day to day life of Paris and other university towns was disrupted by frequent demonstrations, often accompanied by commando-style actions. These mainly involved young medical and law students but the biggest demonstrations involved no more than 15,000 people (and there are more than 600,000 students in France); most ended in sporadic violence carried out by small groups – handfuls of people, often not students, harassing the police and obstructing the streets with light barricades.

This opposition was apparently far from united: but political divisions masked a common interest and common class origins and expectations. On some occasions there were three distinct demonstrations:

right wing professionals, leftist 'modern' students, and neutral ones. All these demos suddenly disappeared because the students had their exams to think about, followed by four months' holidays.

ALL PEASANT AND CORRECT.

During the same month of May, peasants, mainly from Brittany and the south of France, angry about the price of farm produce and foreign competition, went on typically violent demonstrations (attacking public buildings, blocking roads and railways, destroying imported produce), to put pressure on the EEC debates for better prices. Shopkeepers, craftsmen, small building contractors and independent road hauliers led similar protests against taxes. Right wing policemen (2) also had a very confusing demo after two cops were shot dead by gangsters at point blank. The icing on the cake was the night of 22–23 May, when hard-core Corsican autonomists answered the Socialist moves towards devolution with 50 bomb attacks.

In Britain these events were used during the election campaign to paint a picture of France in chaos as a result of socialist misrule (3). But such a propaganda stunt is easy when you are dealing with a country in which violent street confrontations and small riots are commonplace. In France, it is part of tradition to fight the cops, attack public buildings and block the streets – nobody considers it a big threat to the government. Even small leftist groups can mobilize a few thousand demonstrators in an unauthorized demo at a marginal event. In May 1968, let us remember, demonstrations and riots brought several hundred thousands on to the streets of Paris every day for a

fortnight, and, *at the same time*, a general strike all over France: nothing that happened in May 1983 even bears comparison.

Nevertheless, despite their variety and very real divisions, all the events of May 1983 had something in common; and also something in common with the student actions in May 1968. All those involved in the events of May 1983 were middle class (or young, aspirant middle class) fighting to retain their privileges, roughly speaking, fighting to avoid proletarianization. This was also one of the causes of the student struggle in 1968 (4).

It is difficult to understand the political background in France without first considering the traditional importance of the middle class, the old professional classes, the small peasants, the shopkeepers and small businessmen on the one hand, and the new middle classes – the middle management – on the other.(5).

For a long time the rather weak bourgeoisie in France had to get the support of these classes; both to crush the workers





Peasants destroy imported Spanish farm produce at le Gard.

and resist the old aristocratic orders disrupting their political power. The money coming from the middle classes was very useful to this largely speculative banking bourgeoisie; and, together, they share a common greed (though operating at different levels) for immediate and high non industrial profits, affording a network of mutual self protection. This situation was for more than 50 years at the core of industrial stagnation in France, yet paradoxically, when they felt a threat to their privileged position they supported de Gaulle's 1958 coup d'etat — even though de Gaulle's function was to work for their political and economic elimination.(6) The modernisation of French capitalism — increasing its international competitiveness, involved the partial disappearance of this hyperdeveloped middle class, who absorbed an important part of the surplus value from any new capital.

IS THERE A DOCTOR IN THE RIOT ?

The student movements of 1968 and 1983 aimed at safeguarding the privileged access of middle class young into professional and middle management career structures. In both cases, students used extraparliamentary tactics: parliamentary methods were closed to them because of the decline of both their numerical strength and economic weight. But the social and political character and consequences of their actions differed sharply, because of the very different economic and political contexts. 1968 heralded the

close of a period of economic expansion and prosperity; this expansion, a kind of americanisation of French society, was the work of a new right wing party behind de Gaulle who also had gained the support of the French Communist Party. Reacting to this political situation, the student movement took on a leftist orientation, with the emergence of the core of a new ideology more adapted to the realities of the modern capitalist world. This involved a profound critique of the consequences of this modern capitalism, but not of its basis. Their critique centred on what they characterised the 'consumer society'.

THE RIOT WING OF CAPITAL.

In 1983, the affluent society is dying in a deep economic crisis and capital is confronted with the absolute need to rationalise and modernise. This implies reducing the workers and the middle classes, which has been the main task of the socialist government. Nationalisation has aimed at giving French capital the instrument for its transformation, by directing money towards industrial investment where it is badly needed. In this way French capital gets direct control over those classes whose support it formerly depended upon, but which now represent a dead weight upon its efficient functioning. This is a long task. But it is not surprising or by chance that the only students actively participating in the recent events were students of law,

medicine, dentistry and pharmacy, because their studies open the door to the most privileged professional classes: Due to their social position these classes are amongst the most conservative in France — and the students are traditionally recruited by extreme right wing groups.

UNSOCIAL ELITE

As is the case everywhere, the French university system is very elitist: out of 1,000 working class schoolchildren, 500 have the ability to go to university, but only 24 manage to do so, and of these, only one or two get the top degrees. We can see a difference between 1968 and 1983 in the fact that whereas in 1968 a law was enacted under the pressure of events which introduced the 'new ideology' into the university, in 1983, student demonstrations, are against a law which is aimed at reforming the university so that it works more efficiently for capital. All these people, both then and now, support 'the need for an elite'. The only difference is that the students and politicians opposing the present law want to maintain the traditional recruitment of this elite from amongst the top and middle classes; whilst the socialists want to promote a wider selection. As the Education Minister said, 'the democratisation of education is the best way to allow the selection of highly qualified managers which the country needs so badly.' So it is not at all a matter of 'democracy' or 'equality of opportunity'. It is, in the first place, a matter of introducing greater capitalist efficiency into the university, for the better functioning of the capitalist system.

BARRE - ICADES

This is the main point behind all the turmoil of France in the spring of 1983. It is evident that the 'opposition' (the conservative parties — centre-right and Gaullists) exploited this class antagonism in order to destabilise the socialist government. (We have to remember that the Fifth Republic was built up from a coup d'etat and also that the French political scene is a long display of revolutions and coups d'etat, some successful, some not.) This explains why so much protest, suddenly building up into a tidal wave of dissent, accompanied this strengthening of capital. It failed because the old middle classes have lost much of their former importance — both economically and politically.

On the other hand, the socialist government did not try to stop this agitation.

FRANCE

On the contrary, they more or less provoked it as a means of maintaining the 'social peace' within the working class at this crucial stage of its austerity measures and rationalisation of production. The display of traditionally reactionary classes taking to the streets, student demonstrations, and right wing extremists carrying out acts of violence allowed the socialists to call on workers not to strike in this 'difficult period' and protect the gains of the socialist government against 'fascism' and a return of the Right to power. Again, though in a different way, the middle classes are still helping the government to crush the workers.

We can also understand why the apparently common actions of students and workers in 1968 (which were in fact radically different and quite separate) cannot be repeated in 1983: because of the socialist government and what it has to perform in the direct interest of capital, with the support of the unions. All this means that workers' action will have to follow its own independent way out of the ideology and class confusion of May 1968. On the other hand, though for similar reasons any action by other classes will be forced to tread an independent path, more in conformity with their separate identities.



NOTES:

(1). The 'Conseil de l'Ordre' — a very authoritarian and right wing professional regulatory body governs all medical activities including medical teaching, and is extremely jealous of its great powers.

(2). There are several different varieties of filth in France, often in competition. The town police is under the control of the Minister of the Interior. The country police — the Gendarmerie — is a body drawn from the army, ultimately under the control of the Minister of Defence, though very proud of its independence. The anti-riot CRS are drawn from the town police, whilst the Garde Republicaine — a veritable elite of state thuggery — are drawn from the Gendarmerie and are deployed when riots etc. pose a real threat.

(3). The Tories were especially fond of pointing to France as an example of the failure of 'socialist' economics.

(4). In 1968 most of the students involved in the demonstrations came from the new middle classes. Their numbers had grown, partly as a result of the post-war population boom, partly due to the new affluence which was already on the wane. Job prospects were especially bad for those in the new faculties — psychology etc. Many of the new intake of students were frustrated at not being able to get a place at a prestigious Paris university — Nanterre, a barren building site on the outskirts, was a poor substitute for the Sorbonne. For all these reasons, there was a gradual build-up of protest against their exclusion from 'Society', which exploded in May 1968.

(5). In France the old middle classes were traditionally afforded a high degree of protection from the rigours of the market. For example, before World War II it was forbidden to build supermarkets. Politicians of the Third Republic were wise to be attentive to 'les petits' — the peasants and small craftsmen who still formed the backbone of French society. The transformation which followed the War moved at a slow pace — it is always difficult to reduce social strata which have been vital to the state's survival in the past. Poujadisme, a political movement centred on shopkeepers and aiming at easier tax evasion, represented an attempt by these classes to dig in their heels against modernisation, but was absorbed by other right wing groups who were to lend support to de Gaulle. Today, the new middle classes — industrial middle management, public administrators, teachers etc. are also feeling the squeeze of a new wave of rationalisation.

(6). It was the threat to the 'pieds noirs' in Algeria which brought about, in 1958, the last united front of the old middle classes. (The 'pieds noirs' were the white colonial settlers.) De Gaulle, through his masterly silence during the crisis, managed to appeal to the fears of these strata without committing himself to any definite acts until voted powers of decree by the Assembly on 1 June.

NEW MEACHER OUTRAGE : I'M BENN-ING OVER BACKWARDS FOR SOCIALIST INTERNATIONALISM !

Anyone who happened to tread in Labour deputy leadership contestant Micheal Meachers arguments that French inflation is better than British deflation, in the back pages of the Guardian, will be wondering why Fleet St. are farting and squealing at the prospect of this Bennite Beast occupying a wholly symbolic post. Quote : the problem with Thatcherism is that its not just a question of "getting down inflation regardless". What matters is "the balance between inflation and unemployment and the consequential gain or loss in output, growth and", yes last and least as usual "living standards".

More astonishing is his praise of Mitterands policy. It is damned with faint praise by contrast with our own dear Alternative Economic Strategy of course, but is more effective than Thatcherism. This is amazing hypocrisy. Mitterand is doing exactly what the Wilson and Callaghan Govts did

in the sixties and seventies — and the Bennite analysis on them is that they were effectively 'Social Democratic' Govts and opened the door to — that's right, to Thatcherism. That he should define Socialism as balancing the books is no surprise. That he should be justifying 'Social Democratic' policies as Socialism places in perspective the "principles" with which even his detractors credit him.

Our only interest in the leadership race is in which candidate is likely to do terminal damage to Labour — not because it makes any difference to our class interest in destroying capitalism — but because it will be a good laugh seeing this collection of trendies and unemployables tasting a dose of their own rationalisation. The stock line on Meacher is that he's too rigid and principled and would lead the party off into the history books like a latter day James Maxton. Through Meachers (end-

ess) stream of jolly serious analysis, a rather different picture emerges — of a devious left-speaking capitalist middle-manager. Our tip on the man most likely to toss off the Labour party must be the Welsh bladder, with Hattersley as his 'right-hand' man. While the Labour party is Neil-ing we can only feel taller.



NEIL AND PREY.

The ragged arsed widower of Fleet Street



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 automate and streamline some of the production tasks carried out by craft workers, particularly compositors.

The 11-month lock-out at the *Times* newspaper in 1978/79 is just one well-known episode in a long and continuing struggle by skilled printworkers against new technology.

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.A.A.A.A.A.R.R.G.H

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 may 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 Waterflows 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 retaining scheme. In the longer term, it looks towards mergers with other unions, particularly FOCs 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



TEN WAYS TO WRECK A VISUAL DISPLAY UNIT

- 1) Coffee poured into the keyboard is effective in gumming up the works, but instead of using sugar in the coffee, use salt — about 3-5 times as much salt as you would use sugar. Saltwater is quite conductive to electricity and very corrosive to the foil conductors on the circuit boards. It will short circuit the integrated circuit (I.C) chips on the board and screw things up very nicely. (A lye solution is even better).
- 2) If possible, remove the cover of the VDU. Then try unplugging the circuit boards with the power-on and replugging them in again. This is a very effective way to blow-out every I.C. chip and transistor on the board. They can't stand this sort of treatment and will blow out every time. (Beware: very high voltages are present at the transformer - after all the idea is to give the boss a shock!).
- 3) Try reversing the ribbon-cables connectors is possible. This will really screw things up.
- 4) Bring nail-clippers to work and cut a few conductors in the ribbon cable. This will cause endless problems.
- 5) Dump metal paperclips, staples, ball bearings, tacks, aluminium foil pieces etc. into the VDU cooling slots. Hopefully they will land on some circuit boards, and cause short circuits and other nasty problems.
- 6) Cigarette smoke causes problems with the circuit boards. It condenses and coats the slip-connectors and then they wont make contact any more. So

blow as much smoke as possible into the VDU.

7) Be creative: remove the I.C. chips from their sockets, and put them in backwards. This will cause untold problems and drive the repair technicians crazy.

8) Floppy diskettes are very sensitive to magnetic fields. Some diskettes have the software programming on the outer edge of the disk. Run a magnet a few times across the disk in different directions. This will make life interesting for your supervisors and bosses and a magnet leaves no trace, unlike staples paperclips, and ball point pens which create visible damage on the disk.

9) A bulk tape eraser (used for erasing stereo tapes) is very effective in erasing all digital bits from a diskette. Even a tapehead demagnetizer can be used effectively this way.

10) Put a plastic magnet or a rare-earth cobalt magnet (the most powerful magnet made) inside of a finger ring. No one will ever suspect it is there, provided you dont get paper clips or staples stuck to it. So when you handle the diskettes, run your ring across them a few times.

Adapted from Processed World 6. (An excellent American journal about office struggles. Available in some radical bookshops or from A Distribution, 84b Whitechapel High Street, London E.1.).

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 technology 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 skilllessness 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 ■■■

REPLY TO CO-OPS ARTICLE *Continued from Page Nine.*

We must not mistake the squabbles and rivalry of political cliques for 'anti-capitalist' reforms. The municipal socialists know the rules of the game and generally they don't transgress them — even with inconsequential schemes such as 'Fare's Fair'. Meantime they get on with discharging their duties regarding the police, schools and other 'services'.

At Lucas the Corporate Plan demanded the intervention of a 'benign' capitalism. In this respect, the demand that the state should suppress a part of its nature is based on an illusion, and in the long run this always ends in dependence and demoralisation. True, Mike Cooley got sacked — but there are always casualties within any serious dispute over policy (Francis Pym?) — you cannot make any great claims on that basis. On a superficial level, the Corporate Plan offered a critique of capitalist priorities.

But the content of the demands must themselves be criticised. Exchanging, for example, high technology weaponry for high technology medicine — even if this was a choice which workers could be invited to make — hardly explodes the evils of capitalist society. The celebrated

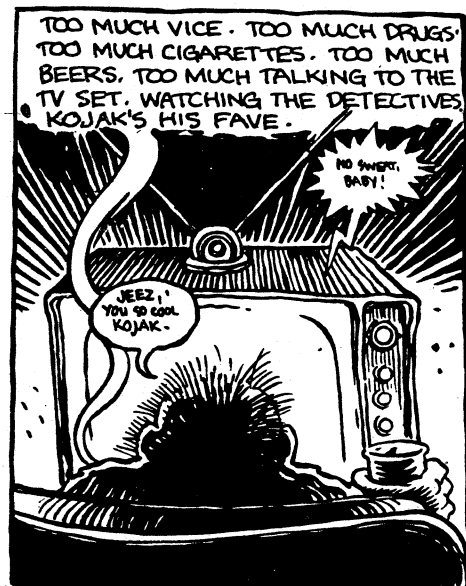
kidney machine meets a need which is indisputably created by post-industrial sicknesses. Over 50% of people living on kidney machines are there as a result of a lifetime on medically-prescribed stimulants. And so the nexus of misery continues. We have to offer a critique of capitalism as a society which has approached a more or less total domination of our lives. What I was raising was not so much the subjective intent of capitalism's would-be reformers, but the nature of the system within which they must operate and the limited scope it offers for reform.

If we can obtain funds from the GLC or other local authorities, then let's take them for everything we can get. But we should not forget that, far from having a 'revolutionary communist perspective', such bodies are representatives of the state at local level. The fact that they patronise their friends' co-ops is hardly cause for celebration — especially as this is paid for by screwing the local working class, who have to pay exorbitant rates and live in the most squalid housing. Is it any wonder the people of Hackney and Islington get pissed off with these 'schemes'?

THE Labour-controlled Greater London Council and Brent Borough Council began moves yesterday to recover money from the most ambitious workers' co-operative so far funded by the GLC under its drive to create more jobs in the capital.

It was an attempt to rescue about 180 jobs after GEC decided to close its telephone equipment factory. Yesterday Brent council applied at the County Court for the payment of a summons for the work payments or £125,000 in rates. Accountants working for the council also studied the books of the co-operative.

The GLC lent the co-operative £405,000, secured against its premises in Dudden Hill Lane. It also lent a further £332,000 as a subsidy of £20 a week to keep people in work.



TOILERS' PAPER

THE PAPER THAT SUPPORTS OUR WAGE SLAVERY.



HELLI

EXCLUSIVE

VANISHES

SHOCK!

A NEW SECURITY SCANDAL BROKE TODAY WITH THE NEWS THAT DENISIO HELLI HAD VANISHED FROM HIS CELL.

Helli, imprisoned in a cushy number in the Shadow Cabinet while investigations continued into his role in the UB40 lodge scandal and the mysterious death of Michealangelo Footi. The alarm was raised when a journalist was unable to contact him for a routine unattributable scare story about Mike 'The Mouth' Meacha.

It was widely believed that Helli was about to make important revelations about the Footi case. Footi was found stabbed in the back in the Walworth Road on June 11th, having suffered terminal injuries to his marginals. Investigators insisted that it was a clear case of suicide but a shock open verdict at the re-opened NEC inquest led to widespread speculation that he had been victim of a ritual crucifixion.

One theory is that Footi — known as 'Lens Wanker' because of his seminal role in the diffusion of Labourism — was silenced to prevent him revealing what he knew about the disappearance of £2½ million of union funds. These were channelled into a network of offshore political funds, and then siphoned off into 'The Socialist Campaign For A Labour Victory', in a controlling interest.



PLAY LABOUR LEADERSHIP MONOPOLY !
Five Million Block Votes Must Be Won — Pg.5.
EQUITY BROTHERS TRIUMPH ! — Adamson acquitted of pre-entry closed shop violation — 7.
IS THE ROYAL FAMILY GETTING TOO MUCH PRESS EXPOSURE ? — 3 Page Special.
ARTHUR SCARGILL reviews the weeks videos.
WORKING CLASS ASTROLOGY — Do The Movements Fortunes Lie In The Heavens ?
WHAT MAKES A MAN SCAB ! by Terry Duffy.
IS YOUR STEWARD A CLOSET MARXIST ?
Twenty Signs That Always Give Him Away !!
ALL THIS AND MUCH MORE IN YOUR TERRIFIC TOUGH-MINDED TOILER !!!*