

# LONDON WORKERS GROUP BULLETIN

## ANOTHER CHAPTER IN THE HISTORY OF THE WORKING CLASS

IN WHICH MEMBERS OF ASLEF AND COHSE (AND SOME UNEMPLOYED TOO) GO SAILING, AND END UP ALL-AT-SEA

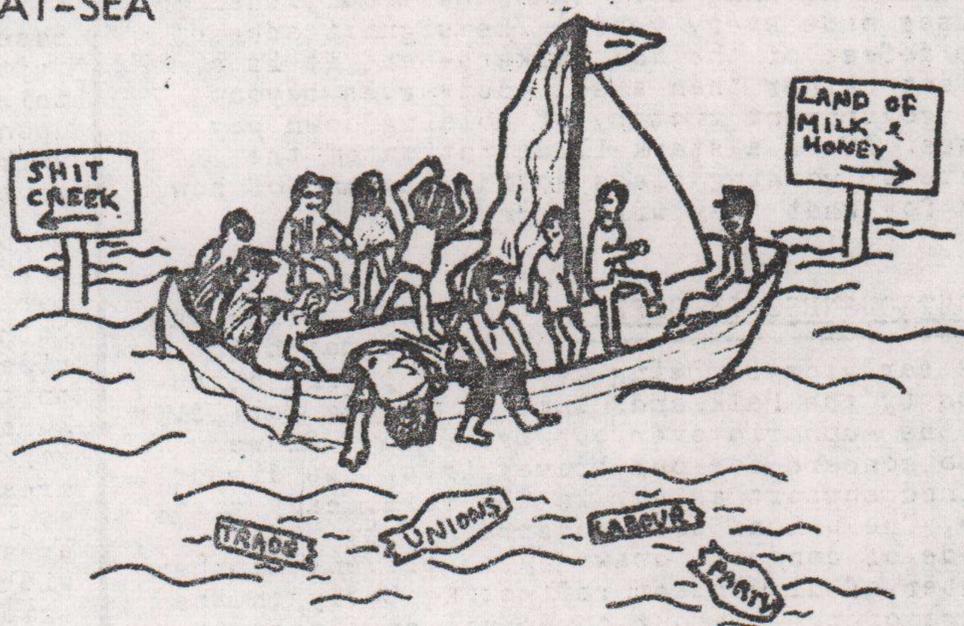
" Looks like we're headed for Shit Creek now."

" Yer - and the paddles are all broke."

" Sling 'em away - were never any good anyhow. Let's abandon ship."

" What'll we do then?"

" Dunno, but it'll be good to get on dry land and think it over for ourselves. One thing's for sure - we've got to stick together."



(cont. on back)

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FEBRUARY 1983

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# PHYSICIAN ~ HEAL THYSELF

With the miners rejecting strike action and British Leyland workers accepting a package deal tying up pay negotiations for two years, the National Health Service strike proved to be the focal dispute within the public sector. (The waterworkers and firemen are still threatening to take action but at this stage it seems nothing more than the traditional noises made every year.) The significance of the defeat of the NHS workers--and it is a defeat rather than a sell-out--goes beyond the government victory of holding down pay rises. It is a stark illustration of the state of working class solidarity and of how and for what they will fight.

## RIGHTEOUSNESS IN DEFEAT

The NHS strike was consolidated in its early days, being kept from public attention by the Falklands war. It gained publicity as the euphoria over our brave boys flowed into concern for our brave girls. The dispute gained support as an, in the main, easy-going one. The unions were constrained by their 'code of conduct' drawn up to prevent another winter of discontent reflecting badly on the image of the 'labour movement' and Labour Party. The dispute gradually emerged as the acceptable face of public sector trade unionism :- made more righteous by the result. This acceptance was mainly due to the emphasis put on the plight of the angels, rather than the workerist overtones of the ancillary staff.

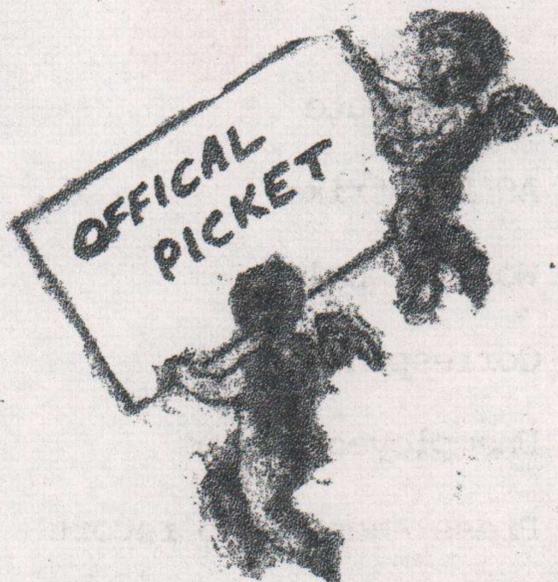
While the dispute involved nurses, ancillaries, and technicians, essentially it was a strike by the ancillary workers, not 'the NHS'. Taking the stance of moral responsibility, the nurses were carried by the ancillaries. In turn, the action of the ancillaries survived by living off the public sympathy given to the nurses. The ancillaries formed the picket lines, the nurses turned out to be photographed on the demos. This disparity of action did not arise from professionalism alone. The spur for action from the nurses was as much from bad conditions and appalling management attitudes as it was from low pay, which was seen as a precondition for starting the job. For the ancillaries it was simply a question of pay in a job with little glamour. Hence the limitations on joint action. Where militant action did occur it took the form of simple withdrawal of labour, in preference to the more positive occupations, disruptions of the administration, or the celebrated cases of picket lines deciding on admission policy.

## FIGHTING FOR A MORAL WAGE

The dispute was constantly seen by left and right as solely a matter of gaining higher wages. This led simply to a moral appeal for others to support. It was a fight for 'decent' wages, rather than a

linking of the common interests of the working class through a generalisation of the strike (--this is not a call to defend the public sector, but to realise the attack upon Capital.) Public support was manipulated into sympathy for sympathy's sake. The question of wages became a moral one--a 'fair' wage for the caring profession--rather than one based upon economic/wage labour analysis. The left, for all their rhetoric, simply took this one stage sideways : they were intent upon turning an issue of wage demands and working conditions into a campaign against government cut-backs.

Despite the final differential pay settlement, the remarkable fact of the dispute was the partial unity of nurses and ancillaries--both campaigning together for the same pay rise. This was ignored by the press, except on the occasions when the Royal College of Nursing was locked upon to sabotage the strike. The NHS is notorious as a disaster area for solidarity and unified activity. Militancy within the NHS varied widely from area to area and from hospital to hospital within each area. There is a fragile relationship between ancillaries and nurses, added to which is the uneasy co-existence of the unions ; 'left wing' NUPE, 'genteel Tory' RCN, the relatively ineffectual COHSE and NALGO, plus the lumbering GMWU and TGWU. Despite the broad links of some of these unions, the publicity given to the dispute and the public sympathy given to it, it remained a predominantly insular one. In part this was due to the 'professionalism' of the nurses and the dichotomous attitudes of the ancillaries. Only in a localised and largely isolated way did the strike extend outside the NHS itself in an effective manner, that is, break out of the token activities proposed by the leadership within the NHS.



SOLIDARITY, SENTIMENTALITY

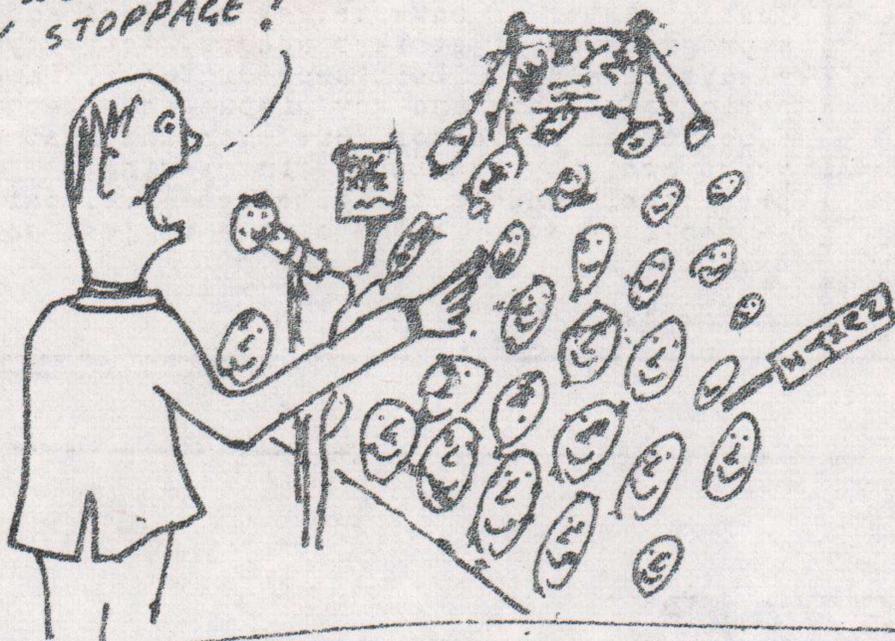
The strike was perhaps nothing more than a protracted series of activities that the health service militants and political milieu-tants were able to force upon a reluctant leadership. The activity was uncoordinated, partly because of the role of the leadership but also because the dispute was regarded as unwinnable by the majority of those taking part. It was action for action's sake. Sympathy and effective activity were diffused by an uninspiring, unimportant and overall totally banal programme of events dreamed up by the unions. The left's prophecies of a popular explosion were channelled, as ever, into radical corporatism. Activity became increasingly dependent upon leads given by the unions, which in turn were responses to the progress of the TUC negotiating committee. All that remained were opportunist measures for meaningless gestures of sacrifice by sympathetic workers--the regional and national days of action. These doubled as activities that needed vast amounts of organising, thus managing to tie up the energies of NHS militants--a neat move by the TUC bureaucracy.

in-hand with an unwillingness to lose a days pay--the essential obstacle to effective, unified action.

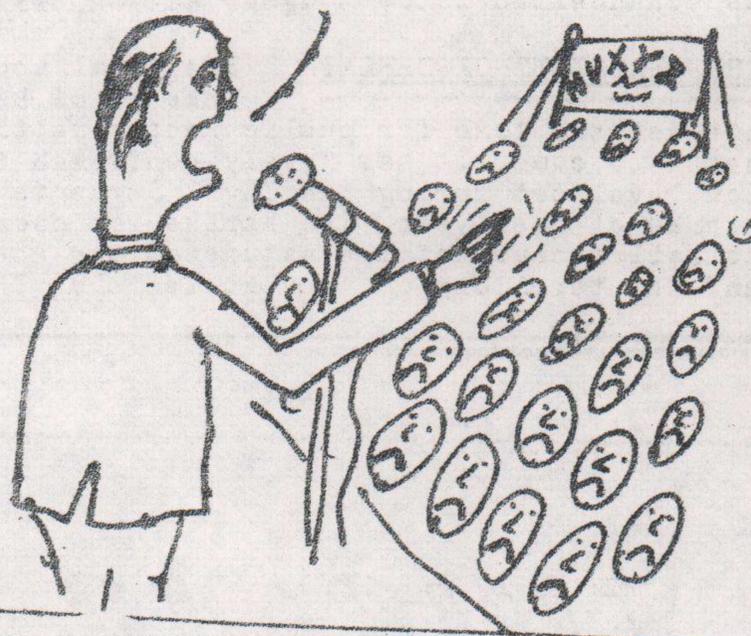
SODDIT '82

The example of SOGAT '82 sums it up. The union leadership were reluctant to call for action on Sept 22nd and had to be pressured into it by union militants. A howl of protest then went up against the leadership, reflecting the passive discontent of the majority of the members over losing a day's pay. The 'action' that did occur was purely token; dissatisfaction remained the issue. As a result, in the run-up to the regional day of action the union leadership was handed a superb revenge on the left. Who would force their hand knowing full well that there would be no response to their call this time? With the first mention of proposed action--the left's usual strategic first step--the outcry went up from the membership. No action occurred, and in the process the left was forced into hopelessly defending their hypocritical and uselessly symbolic call for solidarity.

BROTHERS AND SISTERS, IF WE ARE TO WIN WE NEED MORE THAN A TOKEN ONE-DAY STOPPAGE!



WE NEED A ONE-AND-A-HALF DAY STOPPAGE!



The solidarity of those involved in the dispute--both within and without the NHS--should not be ignored. Nor should we be blinded by the sentimental illusion, that the overall response to the unions pathetic gestures were in turn pathetic. Even in areas of traditional working class solidarity, after an initially promising start (e.g., nurses going into workplaces encouraging walkouts), the response to the days of action was muted. Perhaps the most depressing aspect of the strike was that, after all, it is the only dispute for a long time that has had any degree of public support. But in order to make clear the reality of this public support, it should be measured not in positive but in negative terms: by the degree of passive hostility shown during the days of action. It was a commendable rejection of the call by union leaders, who were jumping on the bandwagon and pledging their willingness to go to prison on behalf of the nurses. Equally, the disillusionment with the token solidarity formulated by the TUC, and a rejection of their political manipulations, went hand-

SEPTEMBER 22nd A COHSE ENDING After calling off pay negotiations which were nearing completion so that the 'performance' could go ahead, the Day of Action on the 22nd. September was a double relief to the TUC. Firstly it did not prove to be quite as much of a fiasco as the steel workers demo of two years ago. Secondly, it was not a great success. Things did not get out of hand, i.e. out of the TUC's control. It simply provided a harmless outlet for militants to organise and for sympathetic workers to join in. This image of solidarity was of great importance at a time when autonomous forms of action were beginning to develop. The one problem for the TUC was what to do next. There had never been a successful one-day stoppage and the TUC therefore never had to think beyond its implications. The answer was the regional days of action--designed not to decentralise or advance the strike by creating more regional solidarity and activity, but rather to dilute the action. It was effective in that it managed to bring down the level of militancy in the

previously most responsive areas. While tying up the militants in their small-scale, stage-managed activities, the longer term effect and effectiveness was shown in the run-up to the planned second national day of action (November 8th.) There was a massive exodus of the previous, admittedly feeble, public sympathy resulting in widespread disillusionment among NHS workers. Seen in this light the calls for an all-out strike are less a revolutionary demand than a measure of desperation--that the attempts to formulate unified working class pressure had failed and this was the only action left to try--not to force a victory, but to show that something 'credible' had happened.

Having run down the dispute, there was no chance that it could be resurrected--even on a much smaller level than all-out strike. After over a year of negotiating and eight months of industrial action, the leadership of the TUC, through the TUC Health Committee, were finally in a position to accept an insulting but essentially face-saving settlement--as they put it 'reluctantly'--on behalf of the members. The offer accepted was little better than the one the TUC rejected in favour of pursuing the Days of Action. Despite opposition from some of the unions the settlement ran over two years. It thus dashed the hopes of a few NHS workers who imagined that discontent over this years pay negotiations would be a foretaste for, and channelled into, tougher action next year.

#### THE CERTAINTY OF DEFEAT

The final acceptance of 6% has not set the tone for public sector settlements to come. It has merely confirmed the low level set during the Civil Servants strike of last year. The strike was doomed to fail because of the nature of the action and the territory of the battlefield. The

government, increasingly faced with public opinion against them, gave a small increase on the original offer with the advantage of no action being taken next year. The strike had in fact bolstered the government's stance and saved the state money on wages not paid to strikers. The government has proved it can outlast any challenge to it over pay--be it from groups with industrial strength--steelworkers; public sympathy -- nurses; or political significance -- civil servants. The unions have proved they cannot learn. Even now, the civil servants are formulating strike action in pursuit of a 12% pay claim. More likely, though, is a rejection of pay campaigns in favour of one to defend the public sector--spending cuts and job losses--hoping that this emphasis will unite the unions and public opinion. This attempt to direct attention away from pay negotiations will have the full support of the Labour Party, who in election year will have to come to terms with an incomes policy.

The significance of the NHS dispute is as a barometer of the mood of the working class. Excuses about a betrayal of leaders and ideological gibberings about 'the classes combativity' being undiminished sound exactly what they are; stupid. Of course leaders and unions sabotage strikes, and of course a minority of workers will fight on to the end if given the chance. It is not just a matter of how strikes progress and if a progression of strikes occurs. Activity can always develop, albeit unpredictably, in a period of crisis and any dispute can become a political detonator. But over the last few years activity has become increasingly predictable and so the outcomes--i.e. defeats--even more so. The NHS strike is just one example.

Undertaker

THIS IS THE  
AGE OF THE  
SLAVE



# BARRIER NURSING

## DISEASES UNDER THE MICROSCOPE

### REPORT ON LWG PUBLICISED MEETING of 27.7.82

This meeting, publicised under the heading Rail and Health Struggles--how do we overcome Isolation?, was one of the most numerously attended ever, with about 30 people, all direct contacts. Charlotte began by posing the question of support and extension of the strikes. She had been active in the ASLEF dispute, and noted that the strikers were not properly informed of their Social Security rights by the union. Also, the propaganda about the strike being impossible to win, was difficult to counter effectively because of limited resources. What was possible had to be aimed at the immediate issues and not party building or disseminating anarchist ideology. Evidently, we were in a period where strikes were not enough. Nobody is indispensable, and the bosses have shown that they are prepared to invest heavily in strike-breaking. Papers and post were still getting out of London.

On the NHS dispute, Zelda complained of lack of information from the unions. Action was minimal, with only pickets by some porters. Workers involved felt generally that the strike was unwinnable.

Adam, fresh from the reconvened ASLEF conference that day, reported on the executive sellout which had shifted the blame to the TUC and let Buckton off the hook. The executive resolution carried at the conference stated that there should be no agreement to flexible rostering due to duress, and left branches and depots to demonstrate its impracticability. The threat of redundancies was particularly serious, since if ASLEF membership fell below 20,000 the union would no longer be viable. In the general discussion it was agreed that the role of the TUC is to collude in ending strikes at any price. Adam noted that disputes involving the defence of working conditions are hard for the general public to understand, and praised a pamphlet on flexible rostering by the British Society for Responsibility in Science, for setting out the issues clearly. In the miners strike of 1972 and 1974, public sympathy was aroused in the mass media by examining such issues, but this practise had now ceased.

A written report from a male nurse in Leeds described several pointers to success. A nurses action group had been set up for five months, with 20 nurses extended to 40 or 50 in the strike, including ancillary workers. Calls for support consisted of entering factories and offices asking for help with picketing and solidarity strikes. In one factory a third of the workforce walked out immediately. A mine shaft was entered to get support through leafleting, which an NUM official



tried to stop. Finally the transport depot was picketed with the result that all West Yorkshire pits closed.

Since there was no all-out strike, meetings were held in canteens to involve more workers. 50 picketers staged a 10-day occupation of the sterilisation unit due to scabbing.

At the Whittington Hospital in North London an all-out strike by Irish nurses forced management to toe an emergencies-only line. It was felt that occupations were more likely to win support from nurses. Joe reported that SOGAT 82's executive were falling back on a by-now familiar line of calling for support and promising backing. This response was partly cynical, in view of the known immobility of



the rank and file due to union restructuring at local level, involving the amalgamation of the old SOGAT and NATSOPA. An NHS march in London which Joe attended found its best support from ASLEF members, but Barts, a hospital much used for Fleet St. industrial accident victims, was receiving good support from printers on its picket lines. It had proved possible for print workers to panic the Sunday Telegraph into removing an anti-union editorial, although the editors forgot to remove the reply to the editorial by print workers! In general in Fleet St., there was a need for a long period of education and building of autonomous workers groups.



Nurses felt that unions were useful only for such things as legal support. They were hopeless as fighting organisations. In the general discussion it was argued that 'public opinion' is formed by treating people as atomised individuals, where they are weakest. Therefore the need to organise apart from, and break from, the trade union structure was the only way to raise consciousness and generate effective action.

A report from a CPSA member told of the need to wear masks to give lunchhour support to the NHS dispute, due to sacking threats. It was felt that what we are going through is a repeat of the 30s attack on workers, with the only optimistic prospect being that sooner or later there would have to be a fightback, where one victory would lead to a sense of the tide turning. There was a need to go beyond the old forms of trade union struggle, so the fightback would need time to develop. More disruption was needed, such as happened when the unwaged involved themselves in picketing at Islington hospitals, and entered hospitals to pull staff out in support. This raised the question of the political regime of the workplace, which reduces peoples self-confidence and willingness to think for themselves. Hospitals were run for the glory of the consultants who were antagonistic to the strikes because porters knew better who needed emergency treatment. In the lorry drivers strike, the old rules of struggle were ignored so that strikers could co-ordinate with local communities and start to take control of their own activity.

Martin argued that all reforms were worthless anyway. What was needed was for atomised individuals to start taking collective responsibility. There followed some speculation as to the current ebbing in the level of militancy. The present economic crisis produces more discontent, but paradoxically less open class confrontation. Was it just a matter of letting things get so much worse that people would just explode and make an insurrection spontaneously? The barrier to this seemed to be that people hesitated to engage in a struggle which would only deepen the crisis and so ultimately make them worse off again. The tendency for revolutionaries to take a waiting attitude had to be resisted.

This is just an outline of the way the meeting ran. No clear idea of how to overcome isolation emerged. People seemed to have come to the meeting without having thought out positive proposals. Many questions were asked but few answers were suggested. Perhaps we should urge people more to leave the floor to those who would suggest solutions once the report stage of meetings is over? A circulating chair could also have led to more continuity and development of the discussion. But it was very encouraging to hear so many people with genuine passionate concern for the future of class struggle and with an intelligent approach to the huge problems.

Peter Freeman.



**NATIONALISE THE TOP 200 COMPANIES? JOLLY GOOD SHOW!  
I'M ALREADY ON THE BOARDS OF 15 NATIONALISED BUSINESSES.**

# THE RAIL STRIKE

## 1 UNIONS DERAILED

The failure of the engine drivers to win their struggle with British Rail over their proposed introduction of flexible rostering of driving shifts, is not only a serious defeat for the workers concerned but also shows clearly that their union--the Associated Society of Locomotive Engineers and Firemen--is no longer able to organise their defence. The attempt to introduce flexible rostering which has succeeded, wipes out the great gain which ASLEF achieved in the 1920s, when it obtained a drastic cut in engine drivers hours to 8 a day and regular driving turns of duty.

With the principle of flexible rostering now to be introduced (generally in September), the saving to the Railway Board will be small compared to the enormous losses which the railways are making and which the government has indicated they will not subsidise out of public funds. So ends the dream of the railway unions and the general labour movement that nationalisation would lead not only to improved wages and working conditions but also to a profitable transport industry which would benefit, so it was claimed by the first post-war Labour government, not only railway workers but also the travelling public at large and even more importantly the transport interests of capitalist industry as a whole. The sorry story of Labour's state capitalist schemes was, in reality, introduced to stabilise the bankrupt industries, i.e. to modernise with new technology, reduce wage labour costs by reducing the number of workers and to mute class struggle by a complex system of conciliation and arbitration.

Such is always the role of reformist Labour governments and is basically no way different from that of the Tories when they administer

the affairs of the capitalist state. Indeed the Tories have shown no inclination to de-nationalise the railways when they have been in office, for it is not a sector of the total capitalist economy in which substantial profit can now be made. If it were, then a Tory government would take steps to privatise the industry, as it is attempting to do in the case of Telecommunications.

The railway unions have failed to face up to the fact that nationalisation can never give railwaymen a decent standard of living, nor ensure that the railways are run in the interests of the people as a whole. True, in the early 1920s, following the growth of syndicalist ideas just before and after the first world war, led the National Union of Railwaymen to include in its long term objects the idea of "workers control" of the railway system. So long ago was this idea mooted that most ASLEF, NUR and TSSA members today are completely unaware that the NUR once stood for such a policy.

With its 70,000 odd staff in the 1920s now reduced to some 20,000 odd, dieselisation, electrification and the massive closure of 'unprofitable' lines under Beeching and subsequently, the future under nationalisation is bleak indeed. There is no solution to the problem within the framework of the capitalist system, whether it be private or state, or in a mixed economy. The future of the railwaymen is intimately bound up with the class interests of the working class as a whole, transcending capitalist reformism and the complete rejection of social democracy: the need now is to once again begin the task of the re-education of the class in revolutionary terms.

S.O. Gatt

## 2 FIRST BRITISH LEYLAND NOW THE BRITISH RAIL WAY

It is only too clear that the NUR (National Union of Railwaymen) are happy in seeing the industry contract, and members whittled--or, at present, hacked--away, and thrown to join the unemployed masses (who still make the reactionary demand for the right to work and be exploited, rather than the right to well-being.) This behaviour is an attempt to make the railway industry a financially buoyant one, therefore maintaining domination over the workforce.

The workforce is greatly influenced by the prolific amount of propaganda put out by the management (British Rail Board and Unions)

talking about the need for a more productive and effective system, and how nobody's job is safe from the clutches of this economic crisis. This obliges, or forces, the union into considering political and financial restraints--more often than not due to their co-operation and participation in running the railway--which are imposed upon the railway by 'higher beings', and then selling out their members in accordance with this. For instance, flexible rostering and the 'open station' concept were only superficially opposed because the NUR understood that for a railway to survive in a capitalist society, radical changes were needed. Some have been implemented and there are a lot more on the way.

**NUR STRIKE** The NUR 1981 Annual General Meeting (AGM) decided that the pay award for 1982 should be a substantial one, and one with no productivity strings attached. The NUR executive, in response, submitted a claim and proceeded through the machinery of negotiation only to find their claim rejected by the BRB, who said they could only afford a 5% pay increase from September (which meant 3.1% overall), and this on condition of better productivity. This was too much for the NUR executive, who instructed their members to withdraw their labour on the 28th June until further notice.

This, at Willesden No.1 NUR branch, caused a small amount of confusion as it had been such a long time since the previous NUR strike, also our chairperson was away on annual leave.

A special meeting was called for all NUR members in the Willesden area to sort out problems and discuss the strike. The feeling at the meeting was one of uncertainty as to whether the strike would be a successful one and whether there was any truth in the stories put about the BRB, saying members returning to work after the strike had finished would be confronted with station closures, workshop closures, reduced services, a new, more repressive contract of employment etc, plus union reprisals for those who didn't strike. The chair announced 'The strike is on regardless.'

It was decided (predetermined by NUR officials) that because the Willesden area was so large and incorporated workers who were in Willesden No.1,2 and 4, Harlesden and Old Oak branches, a joint strike committee would be formed. This solved their problem of interbranch communication and also centralised all activity.

**STRIKE COMMITTEE** People who wanted could opt into this strike committee. At first it was said that only union officials and local departmental committee members could do this, but ordinary members were soon granted the privilege (much to the disgruntlement of the older LDC members and union officials who like their authority and having a kind of 'mystique' as to their movements and behaviour.

The first day of the strike on Monday June 28th. was 'pretty solid' in our area. Only a couple of guards turned up at Willesden Junction and the odd few at the Traction Maintenance Depot

and sheds at Stonebridge Park. The Permanent Way and Signal and Telecommunications were practically all out, as were the signal boxes. But scab management (Gannet and Co.) were responsible for operating whatever boxes were necessary to move blackleg trains.

What few trains there were, the BRB managed to gain excellent publicity for, from a more than willing media, showing trains running up and down the country; one from Euston, one from Watford, one on the Western Region (there were so many I can't remember where they were all being run to and from!) In fact the media coverage was so good I had people coming to Willesden to catch trains, thinking things were nearly back to normal. When it was explained that 'Yes, there was a train 12 hours ago', they seemed shocked! The real point of this media propaganda was to convince the public that the BRB was supposed to be winning.

**IN THE END...** Picketing was sporadic in the Willesden area, though I believe Old Oak was well-covered. Some people worked very hard and long at it, there was a little spontaneous flying picketing but the strike committee was quite positive that Head Office instructions and rules should be adhered to. Most people just stayed at home and watched the World Cup!

Meanwhile in Plymouth the 1982 AGM was in session (the executive of the NUR is dissolved for the duration of the AGM.) By the evening, news had been fed to the media that the strike was to be called off at midnight Tuesday 29th. The AGM decided that the pay decision should be taken to arbitration and pondered over by Lord McCarthy.

On Tuesday the strike was still officially on, but a lot of the workforce saw no point in staying out 'just to lose another day's pay', and many drifted back to work, as urged to do by a jubilant Peter Parker. As to why the AGM took that decision I am still not sure, as our strike position was very strong, what with London Transport out as well and London at a standstill.

After a three-month wait the McCarthy report has been published. It recommends we are paid 6% from September and should be more productive. As a result of this the AGM has been recalled to consider the next move, the NUR executive wants a strike recall decision. We will have to wait and see. //

## 3 BACK TRACKING

### NOTES ON THE ASLEF STRIKE

**8/8/82** How did the Executive Committee manage to sell us out and get away with it?

--By blaming the TUC Finances and General Purposes Committee. Did we ever expect their support, and why was it accepted in retrospect?

--By blaming it on the scabs (2% of the membership). The Executive Committee was obviously prepared to lose from the beginning. A sense of hopelessness was subtly

engendered, in league with the media etc. There was no sense of spreading the strike-- its only hope of success--although scabbing did have an effect on morale. The operation of alternative transport gave bosses the upper hand, morally.

**29/8/82** After our humiliating defeat at the hands of the BR management, the TUC Finance and General Purposes Committee and the ASLEF executive committee, we are told that our union leadership is to shift its priorities from defending principles to securing rewards for any impending changes in working practices, i.e. more money for more productivity.

Gone already is the fundamental principle of one rate of pay for all drivers, with the introduction a couple of years ago of the distinction between the shunt driver and the train driver. Now gone is the fundamental principle of the guaranteed 8-hour paid day, and with it our bargaining power of the threatened national strike, as we lick our wounds and sit tight in expectation of the bosses onslaught.

While health workers continue to step up their campaign, using methods that come to hand from what would otherwise appear a futile struggle, it can be seen how the traditional stance of ASLEF, formerly a union to be reckoned with, was just not up to the combined force of

management, government, media, TUC and Labour Party pressure.

From the start of the July strike it looked like ASLEF were prepared to lose this one. They were in no way prepared to fall foul of the law or TUC directions. Where they could have officially called out all its members on London Transport and fouled up London's roads, they preferred to call in the LT branch secretaries and refuse to lead them (which in my experience is as bad as leadership in general). ASLEF has done a lot of this equivocation lately. While making sure they are our leaders, they have consistently let down the militant sections by leaving them stranded--our only choice is to obey them in the end--like lose the strike.

**trouble in mind -  
or just laying  
your head  
on the line?**



## 4 SABOTAGE!

### IT'S NOT AS EASY AS IT SOUNDS

London was infested with scab coaches bringing workers in during the ASLEF rail strike. Outraged by this, two intrepid revolutionaries, armed to the teeth with a very sharp bradawl, set out to sabotage them.

The slashing of tyres, quick and reasonably quiet, seemed a good easy beginning, but alas the meaning of 'steel radials' became clear when the bradawl would go in no further than  $\frac{1}{2}$  inch.

Back to the drawing board. 'What about a bradawl backed up (as it were) by a 24 oz. claw hammer?' Off they set again--but were foiled as the drivers were by then back in force.

The next day loomed and our intrepids felt their street credibility was at stake, two trips out and not a coach grounded. They had been given advice by the bus load, everyone, it seemed, was a proficient coach saboteur. Except in the field. It became clear that the advice had been largely theoretical and did not stand up in broad daylight with drivers and passers-by about.

And so, clutching their tattered revolutionary pride about them our intrepid two sallied forth again armed thus:

1. A bradawl
2. A 24oz. claw hammer for use with 1.
3. 1 Kilo of granulated sugar should petrol tank be accessible.
4. Key for initial lock of 3, picked on an earlier sortie.
5. Square of foam for placing against headlights prior to hitting them with 2 (this seemingly brilliant and not too noisy idea was never put into practice due to lack of privacy.)
6. 1 tube Superglue with which to fill locks (this had to be purchased as due to its dangerous qualities in the hands of children it is kept behind the counter. This kind of responsible thinking is giving shoplifters a hard time.)

In all, these two made several trips a day, sometimes in other areas, over a six-day period during the strike. They managed to put out only one coach and a possible second. The moral to this tale is: if at first you don't succeed, try harder, but don't listen to the bar-room experts. They will raise your expectations unrealistically.

Hissing Sid.

Telephone:  
01-435 6300/2180  
01-784 7220

Telegrams  
"Aslocobrom. London. N.W.3"

**ASSOCIATED SOCIETY OF  
LOCOMOTIVE ENGINEERS & FIREMEN**

General Secretary:  
R. W. BUCKTON

9 ARKWRIGHT ROAD,  
HAMPTSTEAD,  
LONDON, NW3 6AB

Asst. Gen. Secretary:  
D. K. PULLEN

Ref. No 16/1982

23rd July 1982

Dear Branches and LDCs

Fellow Members

SELL OUT 1982

In Head Office Circular Number 15/1982 dated 20th July 1982. Branches and LDCs were informed that due to non support from the TUC and in order to save the Union, strike action was called off. It has been suggested that this was a beauracratc sell out by union officials to our members at a grass roots level. This is of course nonsense.

You may well be wondering why you were asked to strike and suffer loss of pay - scurrilous attacks in the press, the difficulties of persuading fellow members not to scab, for two weeks only to be ordered back to work with flexible rostering accepted, no pay rise in the offing, redundancies looming and loss of morale. Well, you have to understand that there are sometimes more important issues at stake than your working conditions, pay and morale.

Some might say I am only out to protect my job, for instance, that my pension was at risk if the union were to be smashed. What would the consequences have been regarding my inclusion on a future Honours List, if I was heading a union that defied a sacking notice and brought out other workers in sympathy?

That was not why we had to go to the TUC - talk to other leaders, men of ability like Moss Evans, who are practised in organising solidarity with fellow workers; and experienced negotiators like Tom Jackson, whose record speaks for itself. You need leadership and I am proud to lead you.

To those of you shocked and dismayed at what has happened I can only say "What did you expect?" To those of you demoralised and no longer proud of your responsible job, redundancies will give you an early escape from further wage slavery.

We must face up to our responsibilities as Trade Unionists to the trade union movement. That means being clear-sighted about the purpose of strike action. As Rail Workers we are all angry and frustrated about the intransigence of the Board and the Government. We must channel this anger into responsible activity not become an undisciplined mob. Strike action today is a matter of expressing that anger without putting obstacles in the way of negotiation and agreement between labour and management, which is the point of our activities at the end of the day.

The industrial situation today is not what it used to be. The days of the long strike to allow us to vent our anger without damaging reasonable discussion are over. It can only occur when

From the days of the Luddite death threats to employers bringing in machinery one of the favourite weapons in the proletarian arsenal has been the anonymous letter. The enormous growth in capitalist bureaucracy and the circuit of paper has made new openings for mischief. Inside offices there is generally an informal circulation of jokes (mostly sexist or racist) as people relieve their frustrations at the expense of fellow proletarians). Much of it is of the "You don't have to work here but it helps" school of humour, helping to defuse discontent with the job into self mockery. (Humour is a political act, geddit). Occasionally it crosses the fine line between that and challenging the status quo - turning the joke onto the boss for example. A few issues ago we published a letter that was circulated in Lambeth council offices signed by Ted Knight but actually produced "on his behalf" by disgruntled workers. The text of that had in fact been taken almost word for word from a similar letter circulated "on behalf" of Michael Edwardes inside BL. But its possible to go beyond jokes into actually trying to cause trouble or screw things up. The above was written after the Rail Strike sell out and sent to delegates to the recall conference which had to ratify the sell out. Buckton was speechless with rage at having to explain it was a forgery. Then the Guardian diary got hold of it, thought it was real and quoted it as Buckton's own thoughts. Correspondence about this went on for some time and the letter was referred to the TUC general council, Moss Evans said he thought it was a "professional" piece of sabotage. There's obviously endless scope for the creatively malicious. For example a couple of years ago NUPE dissidents circulated fake caucus briefings to right wingers at the union congress with fake instructions on which way to vote. The forgery had to be exposed from the platform - in turn exposing the real behind the scenes activities "organising" the vote. Whatever your situation the possibility for a little destructive fun are there - relieve the boredom.

management are prepared to adopt a sensible attitude to negotiations. When they use sheer muscle to force us to accept a wage freeze and worse working conditions we have two choices - we can descend to their level and reduce industrial relations to sheer anarchy or we can refuse to descend to their level - confident that if we suffer humiliating defeat at the end of the day the reasonableness of our position will be clearly seen.

In face of this total refusal of management to indicate any willingness to compromise we were forced to assume that they meant what they said. We took the decision to cut short the strike even though members had not been able to fully vent their anger before an agreement was reached. ASLEF are not bully boys or wreckers - we are not prepared to jeopardise British Rail even if management and government are.

We cannot conceal the fact that we have endured a massive and irreversible defeat. But in this context I think that the membership should reflect with pride on the sensible attitude they have adopted towards strike action. No destructive and irresponsible actions were taken - members did not circulate unauthorised inflammatory leaflets explaining their position to the public, engage in irresponsible confrontation on picket lines, or refuse to return to work when instructed to by the executive. I am confident that no members will take unofficial action in the weeks to come, whether refusing to work rosters, working to rule or going slow thus prejudicing what will be very hard negotiations to arrive at satisfactory formulas on new working conditions which the Board intend to impose on us.

I am confident too that when members have considered the facts objectively they will realise that we have adopted the only position available to us. That we have not, as the press would have it, prostrated ourselves and allowed management to walk all over us, but have taken the action necessary to allow further negotiations to take place. With this in mind I believe that delegates will ratify the action we have taken at the re-call conference on Tuesday 27th July and will not allow bitterness to surface in hasty decisions to replace executive members or negotiators whose familiarity with the negotiating situation will be vital if a sensible outcome is to be reached in all the similar situations that will occur in the hard days ahead.

Yours fraternally

R W BUCKTON

GENERAL SECRETARY

# whose benefit?

There is a great deal of political concern over the 3.3m unemployed, or rather it is over the 3.8m. More to the point, it is with the nearly 5m unemployed ... These various attempts to formulate the 'real' number of unemployed arise from the government's conjuring of the figures. This act was a small part of a series of changes in the Social Security system -- for which the LWG has produced a leaflet intended for widespread circulation. These changes have mainly gone unnoticed or ignored, and opinion polls show a majority of those unemployed having little hope for the future.

The unemployment problem is manifesting itself as a problem of the unemployed: how and why has their lack of activity resulted in them simply being passively counted?

## DOLEFUL PROSPECTS

The significance of the reorganisation and "rationalisation" of Social Security payments is more than the bureaucratic and political alterations, the state control of unemployment.

With 3-million plus unemployed, it is financially expedient to statistically reduce the number of unemployed. But more emphasis should be placed on how the changes capitalise on, or may have resulted from, the inactivity of the unemployed and unwaged, given their economic and social position. There has been no active and direct opposition to unemployment, the number of unemployed, the level of unemployment and supplementary benefits. The acceptance of the first two could be understood, were it not for the third aspect. The new regulations have been introduced on the back of this apathy, and for the government the timing has proved correct given the lack of response, tempered by ignorance, to the results.

Attitudes towards their situation vary among the unemployed, which consists of three mainly distinct groups. Firstly those on SS benefits--traditionally claimants due to family circumstances, illness, invalidity etc. For them unemployment is not an issue--they are unlikely to want or get a job. Secondly there are the long-term unemployed--people in the industrially depressed areas, those with redundant skills or no skills at all who cannot be retrained, and those over the age of

50-55. (Retirement virtually begins at 55 for those without a job.) By definition these people have been out of work for a couple of years or more, and will probably be waiting for a few more years--well into any economic upturn that might occur--before they have the prospect of employment. The third group is the short-term unemployed--those who, when made unemployed, can expect to get another job within three or four months. Most movement on and off the unemployment statistics is from this group. Studies have shown that the increase in unemployment results from an increase here: that more people are becoming "short-term unemployed" for longer stretches, more often.

### intimidation

While they do not affect the levels of benefit, the new regulations are aimed financially at the long-term unemployed and claimants: for example, the loss of cash in one's pocket because of Unified Housing Benefit. Politically, the measures are aimed at the short-term unemployed: with pressure to prove you are searching for a job and will take any one that becomes available (an attempt to reverse the refusal to take up badly-paid jobs), and intimidation to de-register through pressure from the Special Claims Control Units (also aimed at selected long-term unemployed and claimants). The overall direction is for the unemployed to be intimidated and comply rather than for the DHSS bureaucracy to attempt to enforce--at least until computerisation arrives.



# the frying pan or the fire??

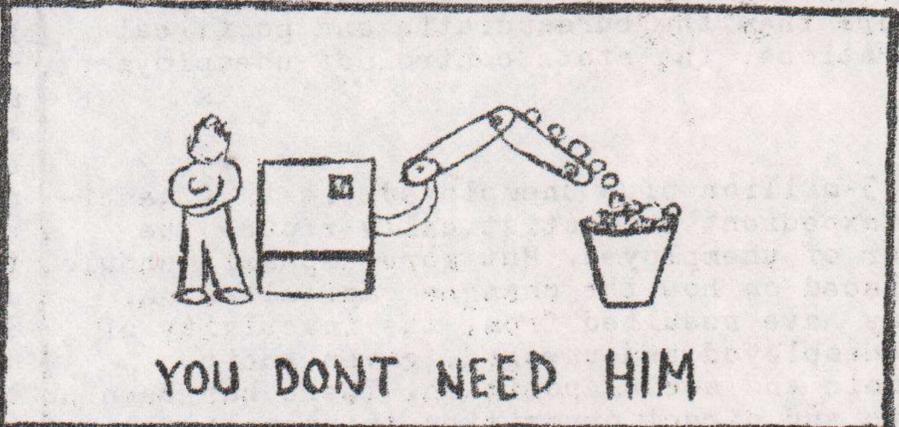
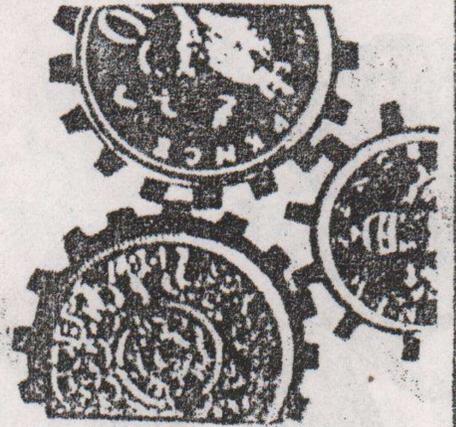
## WORK: forced labour

### SOME ADVANTAGES...

1. Lots of money, if you're lucky.
2. A sense of "doing something", being occupied.
3. Meeting people, getting out of the house.

### SOME DISADVANTAGES...

1. Up to a third of your life being stolen.
2. Being watched over hour after hour - constant pressure to work harder.
3. Not controlling your own activities.
4. Petty rules, regulations.
5. Doing the same, boring, routine tasks over and over again.
6. For many, doing things which mean nothing to you (only the bosses know what they're really for) and may actually be socially harmful, like making bombs, asbestos, hamburgers...
7. Getting up at the same time day in day out, rushing to get ready, using a packed, smelly, unfriendly bus or tube, or hassling with other drivers on the roads, or cycling with lungs full of fumes and the risk of being run over.
8. The money you get buys their wonderful commodities like cars, electric toothbrushes, tellys, most of which you only need 'cos you've got no time 'cos you spend most of it at work.
9. According to the government, 4% of workers would be better off on the dole!



## WHAT YOU CAN DO...

Give life a bit more meaning at work - steal back some of your own time: skive, take long breaks, fuck up production (spanner in the works), obey stupid rules to the letter (the Polish workers have led the way on this one. The media are always telling us how great the Poles are - lets start putting their ideas into practice!), nick from work, use facilities like photocopiers (good for leaflets, fake letters from the bosses, copies of secret documents).

Join together with other pissed-off people at work, at home, in the streets. Start to take control of your own life. Organise wildcat strikes, occupations. Turn strikes into "social strikes"; work but use the products of your labour as you see fit (free services ...)

Fuck up the bosses plans, their work, their economy. It doesn't mean anything to us anyway.

# DOLE:forced poverty

## SOME ADVANTAGES...

1. Lots of free time
2. No-one telling you what to do, most of the time (except when down the Dole, when watching telly etc)
3. Can organise your own activities.
4. Can do odd jobs/black work

## SOME DISADVANTAGES...

1. Boredom.
2. Feel isolated, away from other people.
3. Feel powerless, useless, on the sidelines of society watching the game going on.
4. No money and nearly everything must be paid for.

## WHAT YOU CAN DO...

Refuse the isolation and poverty of life on the dole. Get together with other pissed-off people in the streets, workplaces, homes. Share money, goods, washing machines, looking after kids. Why pay rent? squat. There's all sorts of fiddles you can pull: don't pay on busses/tubes, try ripping-off the goods all the adverts tell us to buy, but we can't afford (mass shoplifting, barging into gigs ...).

Why accept poverty -the people made all the goods, they belong to the people. If we're strong enough, we can start to re-distribute goods on the basis of need not profit (not a return to the law of the jungle, but the spirit of Robin Hood).

## SOME IDEAS...

Lets face it, life in this society stinks, whether you work or not. The only way to improve our lives in any real sense, is to start to steal back control of our own lives, by gathering together as groups and seizing control of whatever fragments we can, when we've the chance.

If this movement for real control of our lives grows, we can start to think about extending these struggles till we take back the whole of our lives. That means social revolution -setting up organisations through which people can control their own activities, without bosses, parties, unions or elites of any kind, where we can talk about and decide issues as equals, collectively. When everyone's views and desires are respected, we can all contribute. The exact forms will vary (maybe "workers councils", "assemblies", "communes", "action committies" etc) but the content -direct control by those involved- does not.

## DONT FOLLOW ANY LEADERS, NOT EVEN US...

The people who wrote and distributed this leaflet are not another elite who want power. We're not recruiting for some organisation. We dont want followers. We don't give a fuck for labels: "socialist", "communist", "marxist", "anarchist", etc, etc, just like brands of soap-powder.

What we do want is for you to take up your own struggles, finding your own power, creating with whoever you want to work with, your own organisations, making your life and those around you better.

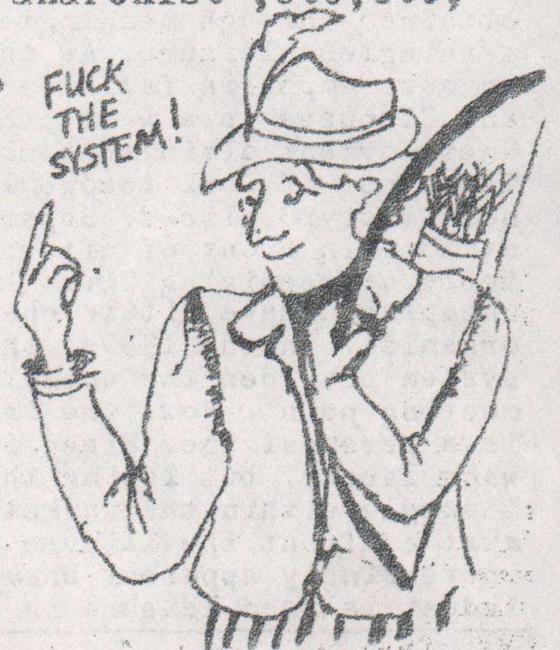
Some nice slogans...

WE NEED A NEW WORLD!

SEIZE THE STREETS, FACTORIES, OFFICES AND SHOPS.

EVERYTHING IS OURS!

p&p Latter-day Robin Hood Group.



This pattern has implications for unemployment as a traditional wage-lever. Capitalism relies on a reserve pool of labour to keep the price of labour down. But unemployment has been tacitly accepted by the working class--to

unemployed cannot afford financially. Industrialised unemployment is something they cannot afford mentally. Hence the distaste for YOPS, unemployment centres, Rite to Work campaigns.



some extent bought off by redundancy payments --in contrast to the predicted clamour for jobs in return for wage-cuts. Redundancy remains a threat to those in work, but significantly not to those hoping to get back into a job. Vacancies remain for low-paid jobs: unemployment is preferred by many. This has occurred without there being a 'life of luxury' on the dole, and with low levels of benefit being seen as inevitable by the majority of those claiming them.

## illusions

There is an increasing unreality about unemployment for those in work. The contact they have with the unemployed is with the previously short-term unemployed--those who have not undergone the full financial and psychological impact of wagelessness. They view unemployment as transitional. Along with the need to break the work ethic by realising that unemployment is not the worst thing that can happen to you, it is equally important not to foster the 'good time on the dole' myth. (Even revolutionaries may not enjoy themselves, or put their opportunities to any good effect.) The need is to change ones outlook and perspectives within or without employment--not to see one as an alternative to the other.

The essential aspect is: policed employment versus policing unemployment. The problems of unemployment and employment are to be realised within this framework. Social stability is obtained through meaningless jobs and meaningless leisure. As the former declines, so more emphasis falls on the latter. Bread and Circuses is a well-proven solution. Unemployment diminishes class solidarity. Those out of work become less individual and more individualised. Separation is completed at home in front of afternoon TV. The convenience of receiving Giro's has meant that the unemployed have little chance to meet and organise. In the 1930s, the personal issue system provided the unemployed with a focal meeting point. Now, the issue of unemployment is a personal one. Freed from the control of wage-labour, but losing the solidarity of struggle within the workplace, the unemployed must confront the leisure industry and the increasingly apparent unemployment industry. Industrialised leisure is something that the

## crisis of solutions

The unemployed are becoming increasingly distanced from the traditional means of both political and economic control--trade unions, wage labour, the circulation of commodities. This has led to confusing attempts at recuperation. While the Right sees unemployment--that is, their attempts to control the unemployed--as a social problem rather than an economic one, the Left persists in seeing any manifestation of 'social' problems as simply an issue of unemployment. As recent By-elections have shown, there is an almost total lack of interest from the unemployed and employed to 'Unite for a Labour Victory' which promises only 1 million unemployed. The predominant theory (sic) is that if the working class won't fight for jobs they won't fight for revolution--a convenient means of limiting class and individual perspectives for struggle. The Left's solution to the crisis is nothing more than a crisis of solutions. One result of unemployment is to foster the disillusionment with political parties and the political system. But as of now, there is little movement towards a positive alternative.

## NOW ONE KNOWS

THE OLD YEAR ended with yet another ship-launching bottle of champagne failing to break at first or second fling. The *Daily Mail* caption writer said that the "combined strength" of Prince Charles and the Princess of Wales managed it at the third go.

"Strength" has nothing to do with it. Every wartime maker of "Molotov cocktails" knows that a deep, horizontal score made with a triangular file ensured that the bottle broke--and the rubber in tank tracks caught fire--at first fling.

U.K PRESS GAZETTE: