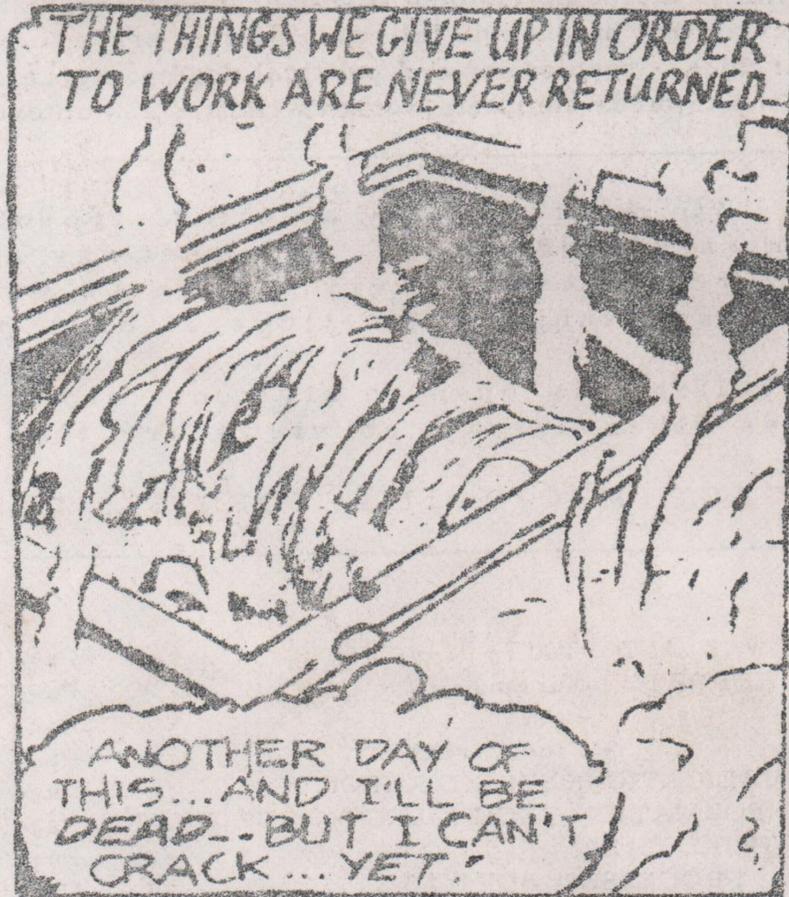
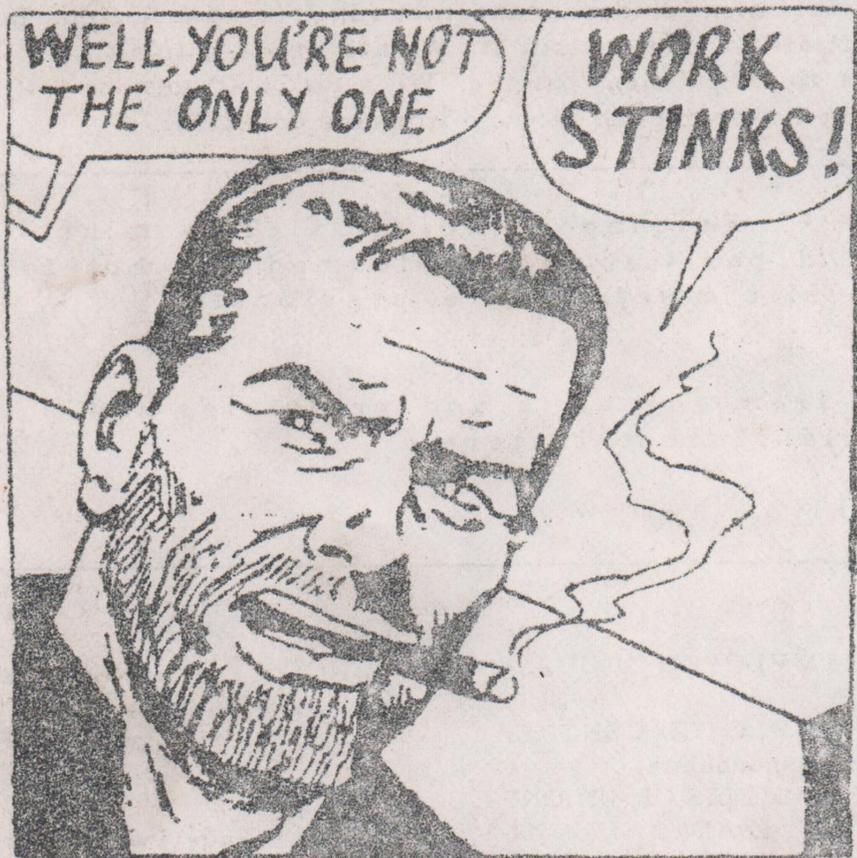


DID YOU EVER WANT TO KILL YOUR BOSS



Office Technology/BBC Publications Strike/Rail Strike Call/Unemployed Groups and Centres/Riots/Assemblies/(Riotous Assemblies ?)/Job Reports/Poland/Workers Autonomy/Hard to Read Microscopic Print/It Must Be.....

LONDON WORKERS GROUP - AIMS AND PRINCIPLES

The London Workers Group is an organisation of non-party militants working in the London area. Our aim is to establish and encourage communication between workers in all industries, in order to :

1. learn from each others experience and increase our understanding of industry and trades unions within capitalist society.
2. seek out and maintain links with other anti-capitalists and anti-authoritarians. While recognising the importance of organised struggle in all areas of life, we choose to concentrate on the workplace struggle. We believe that the formation of autonomous workers groups within each industry is vital. The function of these groups is to spread revolutionary ideas and create solidarity among fellow workers. We would also encourage the formation of local workers groups all over London, to complement the industrial organisations.
3. devise and produce effective propaganda including a bulletin covering industrial news, workplace reports, analyses and theoretical articles.
4. and provide support where asked for.

Our aim is the establishment of a non-governmental, classless society of producers/consumers in free association. It is clear that unions and left-wing parties serve to perpetuate capitalism, not destroy it. We are opposed to all hierarchical organisation and political dogma, hence our opposition to all political parties. We support all actions that tend towards complete workers control and autonomy as has been experienced through workers councils.

The LWG meets weekly at the Metropolitan Pub, 95 Farringdon Rd, EC1. (Two mins. from Farringdon tube). All meetings are open and participation welcomed (except for party recruiters). Every 4-6 weeks we hold a public meeting on a previously advertised subject. Meetings at 8.15 pm.

The bulletin is open to all contributions. Apart from the aims and principles and unless otherwise stated views are those of individual contributors.

CONTACT US C/O: 11 LEYDEN ST. E. 1 (Post Only).

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For the first time ever we had too much material for this issue, and some things had to be left out. One of these was a draft Liberation Policy produced by the Liberation Network of People with Disabilities, which campaigns around the problems faced by people with disabilities. They can be contacted c/o Housmans Bookshop, 5 Caledonian Rd, London N1. Our cover was taken from an old Fifth Estate (who in turn took it from Social Warfare/Wildcat who in turn I'm told lifted part of it from Point Blank - is this what they mean by proletarian internationalism).

We welcome correspondence, articles, cartoons etc. PLEASE NOTE OUR NEW POSTAL ADDRESS ABOVE.

This is the first issue done completely on photostencils (it shows) and on our duplicator. Anyone wanting any duplicating done (other than fascist or reactionary material needless to say) contact us.

Lastly - we've never charged for the bulletin and have no intention of starting to. However we're not millionaires and any contributions would be gratefully recieved. It costs us about 12p a copy to produce and its only cost preventing us appearing more regularly.

WE NEARLY HAD NOTHING ABOUT RIOTS IN THIS ISSUE! CALL OURSELVES REVOLUTIONARIES? SO WE GOT E.D TO WRITE UP OUR LAST PUBLIC MEETING WHICH WE'D CALLED

GLASS WAR - HAVE WE GOT THE BOTTLE?!

Our most recent public meeting centered on the state of the class struggle in Britain. The past months spate of rioting provided an obvious focus for the discussion, making the meeting livelier and more relevant than any in the recent past (some would say in living memory). Some present had themselves been involved in the riots, whilst others had much to say about the reactions to the riots which they had experienced at work.

Three main areas of discussion emerged from the presentations given at the start of the meeting:

- 1) The apparant division in the working class produced by the development of the crisis.
- 2) The reaction against 'welfarism' in the depressed inner-cities.
- 3) The revolutionary potential of the riots - where do we go from here ?

DIVISIONS It was pointed out that although in the riot areas large sections of the local population were involved in rioting or riot-related activity, the reaction of most "respectable" employed workers has been hostile to say the least. One or two present said that their fellow workers generally took the view that the government and the police had been far too soft on the rioters. Broadly speaking, employed workers in what they consider fairly stable employment felt that their "priviliges" were under attack, and expressed their fear through racism and authoritarianism, calling for conscription etc. One member of the International Communist Current sympathised with these sentiments, saying people had an understandable fear for the safety of their children and property. However it was generally felt that growing police repression was a far greater menace to workers, and that whilst there were inevitably many negative aspects to them, the riots were principally aimed, in an increasingly coherent fashion, against police and commodities, not against the working class community.

prosperity. As the crisis deepens, presumably this will change, but for the moment, the more cherished illusions come under attack, the more severe the reaction will be.

INNER CITY LIFE The riots have had as their focus depressed inner city areas, the areas left behind in capitals project of dividing up the working class, breaking down communities and shoving people out to the new towns and suburbs. In these areas long term unemployment has meant that a "criminal" or at least extra-legal subculture has grown up as a necessity for survival. Its equally based in legal activities which are an alternative for those who cannot afford the 'blessings' of the consumer society, and thus implicitly opposed to it. It has been the attempts of the police to break down this subculture and prevent it from developing which have engendered the riots as much as racism, or repression.

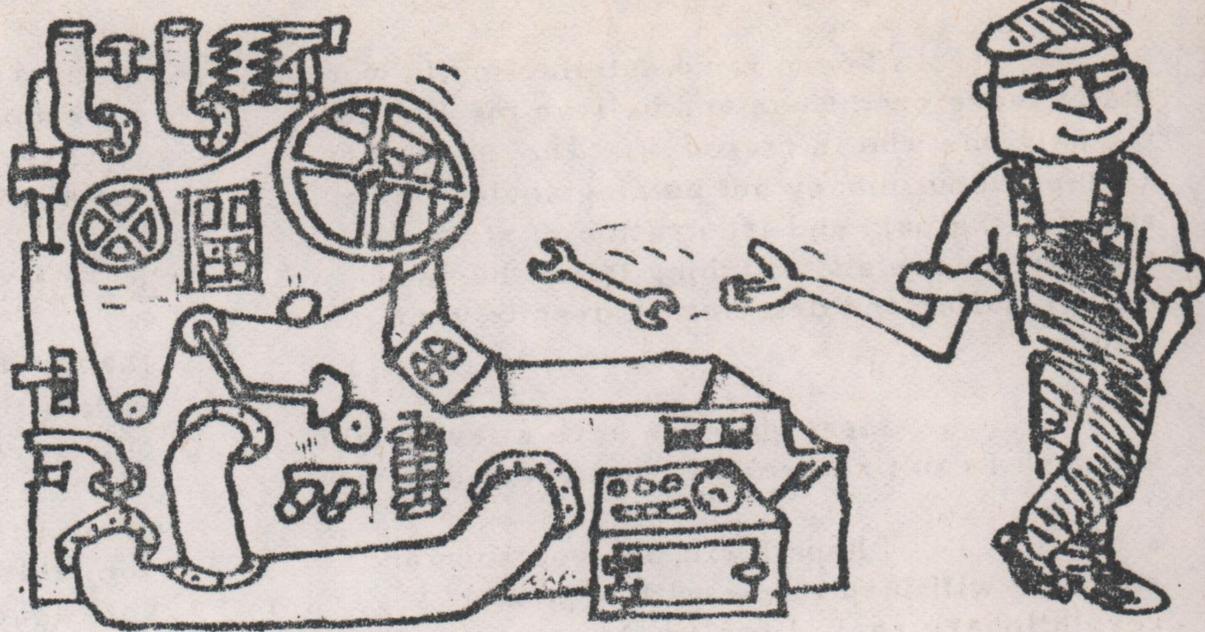
"CRIME" To highlight the "negative aspects" of the riots is to echo the lies of the media. We cannot claim that riots eliminate all the evils of everyday life. But the evidence indicates that in the course of a riot there is far less incidence of rape, mugging and other anti-social behaviour. On the other hand, it's likely that other "crimes" (as defined by the state) - for example theft - will increase as a result of the riots, reflecting peoples growing confidence that the police can be beaten.

WELFARISM One of the aspects of inner-city life is that generally it is the Left which runs the councils : although all sections of the media tried to disguise the fact, far from instigating or encouraging rioting Leftist welfarism was as much under attack as the police. The meeting perhaps should have developed this aspect further : rioting occurred in areas where people have had a foretaste of the Left's general plans for dealing with resistance. People grew increasingly angry at two-faced "community leaders" twisting their demands and cooperating with the police they were pretending to criticise.

The division that exists within the working class is there because as yet only a minority have been radically affected by the crisis. Most workers are still desperately holding on to the illusions bred by thirty years of relative

REVOLUTIONARY ? The most vociferous arguments centered on the question of the "revolutionary potential" of the riots. Much of the discussion concerned

WORK REPORTS



CORRESPONDENCE / NURSING

Dear London Workers,

thanks for the latest bulletin. I am so often meaning to come and not making it due to working or being too tired or just forgetting.

Things are pretty dreadful on the workfront at present. I have just staggered home from looking after about 17 patients on my ward with 1 auxiliary to help me in the morning. 2 nurses come on at midday and are now there alone until the night nurses take over. We have 10 patients who are elderly (I mean over 80 years old) and very dependent needing 2 hourly turning and lifting out of bed or onto the bed pan + 3 other patients who are stuck in bed on traction 3 people need feeding and about 4 are incontinent. In other words there is no way 2 nurses can wash and sit them up between 8 & 12 noon let alone care for them properly - cleaning teeth, combing hair, making beds, taking observations (Temperatures etc.), giving drinks, chatting, giving medicines and going round with doctors to see what we should do next.

So last week we had a message from our head administrator to attend meetings where we were told we were over-staffed and would have to cut down on nurses. The next 10 or so that leave will not be replaced. Usually at a weekend we would have had agency nurses to help out on the ward but these have been stopped. The nurses at the meeting I was at were very angry. We feel we are only just coping and not caring properly for our patients at the moment but have been hoping things would get better - now it is official that they will get worse. We are being asked to cooperate - i.e. change wards whenever our numbers are less tragic than someone else's and squash resentment etc. The lack of money is being presented

as an act of God and our arguments fobbed off with - Well thats a political decision, as if we nurses would have nothing to do with politics. What they are going to do when the numbers of nurses are down to what we are funded for is ask for beds to be closed.

This is obviously not the answer for our old ladies with broken hips. Meanwhile 2 small hospitals are closing both of which take some of our convalescent patients making room for acute admissions on what is meant to be an acute ward. All the wards are getting clogged up with old people who are 'better' but not well enough to go home and live alone. They are also shutting a ward in this hospital which takes a lot of the 'social problems' before they get stuck on acute wards.

The nurses are agreed things are bad but very divided about action. Some see closing beds to maintain standards of care as the answer not appreciating that beds all over the country are closing and the National Health Service is being eroded into nothing. Mostly we are too worn out to do more than crawl home into bed.

Our nursing officer (next step "up" from sister) tells me that it is caused by everyone abusing the Health Service and the Senior Nursing Officer is away on holiday.

Tomorrow the two nurses on this evening will be there in the morning and myself and my colleague will have the afternoon & evening to contend with. Our old ladies have got sore, raw bottoms and black blisters on their heels due to pressure caused by lying in bed or sitting still too long. All we have to do to prevent it is move or lift them regularly and we don't have time. They will take longer to get better due to this and may be scarred for life (what is left of it).

There is no satisfaction in working in these conditions and believe me I'm not the only one who is pissed off. The unions are arguing about money but nothing could compensate for the pain and frustration of struggling the way we are and watching fellow human beings suffer and deteriorate despite your efforts.

Meanwhile we have a few laughs although I can't remember what about just now.

I hope I will see you soon and someone will inspire me with hope and revolutionary zeal. I can't help remembering the nurse whose contribution to our discussion was - they ought to put the stamps up.

lots of love

Z.

POST OFFICE : POST MORTEM

In Nov. 1974 I went down the Labour Exchange to get information about London Transport. They had none (!) so I got a job with the North London G. P. O. instead. I left October 1980, after six glorious years. It was a very important time in my life (early twenties) and I learned a lot.

I worked in a small sorting office - 70 workers, all men except canteen staff. Due to victimisation my 'probation' period of a year lasted eighteen months and I was forced to do different work and shifts every week. I was victimised because I was honest and individualistic. I learned to become more cunning (lying to supervisors) and organised (joined the anarchist movement). My take-home pay began at £33 per week. It was about £65 when I left. As I began my squatting career (refusing to pay rent since Jan 1975), and as I don't smoke, drink, or have others to support, the money was always adequate for me. But not for most of my colleagues, and there was always competition for and strong feelings about overtime, which is now being gradually cut back.

The work generally wasn't as bad as some wage slaves have to put up with. Most of it was done collectively, without the noise or rhythms of machines (until the eighties). The morning work involved a disgusting, six-day, 6.00. a.m. start, but had the attraction of being out on the streets and so without Authority standing over you, and by working at our own speed we you, and finishing around 1.00. p.m. I worked a five day week, 12.00-8.00. p.m., and by working at our own speed we managed to get about three hours of breaks during that time, to

sit around in the canteen, visit revolutionary bookshops, go to the pub, etc. I did night work ('graveyard' as they call it in America) once, for a week. Never again.

'STARRY-EYED' At first I was starry-eyed about the Union, which rather than being an organ of unity and resistance was in fact the tool of the branch secretary, and only rarely did more than a fifth of us go to meetings. I got actively involved, getting on the Committee (everyone at the AGM got elected to something). Gradually I realised that most colleagues were not only alienated from the Union but also from each other and the necessary solidarity didn't exist.

I became quite notorious and disliked in the office because of my strong anti-authoritarian views, although after a while I became part of the wallpaper, just another 'character' and I began to build up friendships. A sort of ad-hoc radical/satirical/bloody minded clique sort of developed, of mostly young, generally anti authority (and bored) dissidents.

Around this time the roof fell in. Being a brand new building, it was badly designed and built, and had to close for seven weeks when rain poured in through the roof. So we moved to the main North London, Islington, Sorting Office. That was a laugh. More supervisors than workers but no-one took much notice. The screws have been tightened a lot lately, with the imposition of mechanisation.

ALMOST A STRIKE Back at our place again, forty of us attended a meeting one Xmas to discuss opposition to 'Christmas Arrangements' (cut in over-time, same amount of work). The Secretary spoke for 45 minutes opposing action, and then the vote for a strike was unanimous! However, the decision to get it 'made official' meant it never took place. That was a rare occasion. Over the six years, GPO cost cutting and discipline got progressively tighter.

Talking of discipline, I seemed to be getting a lot of official stick, and one supervisor particularly seemed determined to make it his life work to get me sacked. I built up an impressive file and began to fight all 'offences' (of the most ludicrous kind) on technicalities, becoming an expert on the rule book. A sort of jailhouse lawyer.

When a guy I lived with got nicked in Euston Station, playing drunkenly with mail bags, I was questioned by the Post Office Investigation Branch (with Special Branch links) and accused of operating an 'anarchist mail robbery gang'!

contd ->

They never charged me but he got six months suspended. Earlier I'd got my name in the News of the World, nicked for graffitti - and was hauled up for 'bringing the GPO into disrepute'. They never noticed me in the Sunday Mirror - a nude picture taken at a free festival!

Back in 1977, a few of us around London doing various types of work, created the LWG. This helped to reduce my isolation at work. I collected money for a building site strike, (the only NF member in the office, a nice bloke more into Rock'n'Roll than politics, was the first to donate), invited a striking fireman to talk to us, and gradually our 'clique' had a sort of educational presence and almost started an office mag. Some of us started a Rock Group which practised in the First Aid room!

But as for collective resistance to the GPO, times was 'ard. In 1979, in desperation, me and another rebel were elected Secretary and Chair of the Branch. Three months later, just before the General Election voting cards were due to be sent out door to door, guerilla stoppages under shop floor control spread to nearly all offices in London, opposing a GPO/Union deal to bring in 'efficiency' (i. e. repression) measures. Mail seized up around the country and it looked like getting really out of hand. 4,000 P.O.W's (Prisoners of War, Prisoners of Work or Post Office Workers) demonstrated outside Union H. Q. An SWP-dominated Rank and File meeting brought 70 P.O.W's from all over the country. We won hands down but the lower levels of the Union saved face and discouraged or prevented further resistance except through Union channels. Next year, the same measures were brought in without opposition.

RESIGNATION I had seen amazing changes in the attitudes of my fellow workers during that exciting action. And since, any 'loyalty' has been replaced by fear. I was sent to the Union conference a month later and saw how the Union machinery of 'representation' was a millstone around our necks. A couple of months after, me and the chair resigned at a poorly attended meeting as we refused to become dictators or bureaucrats. When a new bloke took over, the Union room was again locked and placed out of bounds to members, and meetings became rubber-stamp farces. However, in or out of the Union structure, resistance was frustratingly low with that one amazing exception.

I began to take as much time off sick as possible and applied for twelve months release for Adult Education (usually routine decision). I'd been accepted at Harlech Adult College. I

was refused and asked if I was going to leave. I said "No". But I did.

REVOLUTIONARY Ironically, after 3 or 4 years of helping to create a leftist Rank and File presence in London and beyond (we did five issues of Post Office Worker, about 500 of each), I had just begun to create a specifically revolutionary network to spread ideas attacking Union structures, calling for autonomous forms of organisation and action, for seizure of all workplaces and for the abolition of money, employers and Authority in all its forms. This necessary project was unfortunately still-born. Although I wouldn't mind returning to the struggle inside the GPO, I doubt if I could get back in. I quite miss the people there. But of course, resistance continues wherever we are - in industry, at home, on the street or in prison.

** Remember the disciplinary hearings I mentioned? Well, despite more than a dozen alleged offences, arguments and insults galore, they proved fuck-all, and my reference on leaving states (through clenched teeth?) that I am "honest, hard-working and sober". In fact, I am fighting for the day when the GPO along with all institutions, is abolished and society transformed.

D. Livery.

P.A. POUNDSTRETCHER

After some six months of negotiations, the 1981 Press Association (PA) house agreement with Natsopa (clerical) was finally set in June at a £15 flat rate increase on the basic wage. Considering the present average going rates, this was not a bad deal for lower paid members - about 18½% on the basic in my case. Or so it seemed at first glance.

This years negotiations followed the breaking up of the British News Agencies (BNA) employers negotiating body of Reuters, Exchange Telegraph and the PA. The PA has always shelled out the lowest wages in the BNA, and it struck me at the time that the BNA's dissolution would mean that the relatively docile PA workforce would be lined up for an even bigger clobbering. In fact Reuters and Exchange Telegraph have succeeded in fixing the minimum basic above £100 this year.

A mandatory chapel meeting was called in May, with the managements offer standing at

£ 11. 35 plus pro rata increments on overtime payments and consolidation.

The union branch secretary addressed the meeting, arguing at length that the offer was an insult to the chapel, that it would put us even further back in relation to the other news agencies, and that it was high time we made our feelings known to the management by taking a firm stand.

This said, a couple of workers pointed out that on the last two occasions that the chapel had made its feelings known to the management the union had stripped the F.O.C's of office, and on one occasion had demanded an explanation from every member who had failed to report for work, and attempted to impose disciplinary fines! However, the branch secretary assured us that all that was in the past and under different circumstances. He said that he would ensure branch backing in rejecting the offer, stating that we should accept nothing less than a £ 15 increase on the basic.

The meeting was recalled a week later, and presented with the branch secretary's new improved deal. The magic figure of £ 15 was dangled before us, but the price of acceptance we discovered, was a delay in the implementation of pro rata overtime increases, of eleven months! It was stressed that it was the basic rate which mattered most, since it would boost future settlements. Perhaps so, but anyone averaging five hours per week overtime would lose out by the deal (currently average overtime is just over fourteen hours per month). So

give or take a few quid, the new deal was little more than playing around with the figures. Moreover, the relative fall in overtime pay provides an incentive for management to delay the replacement of staff leaving or returning.

Money matters apart, the whole charade was politically detrimental. The militant posturing of the branch official convinced many workers that the union was a faithful buddy after all, when attitudes to the union had been fairly hostile (generally in a passive sense, though union dues were withheld for several months after one of the unions recent outrages). Although a few voices were raised to point out that the improvement on the offer was negligible, the unions authority seemed pretty well restored when the recommendation of acceptance received a favourable vote of 60 to 6.

The National Graphical Association has been negotiating concurrently (but of course separately). Naturally no reference was made to the fact that NGA members were also dissatisfied with the progress of these negotiations, or to the effectiveness that a joint response by all PA workers would bring. As it is, the NGA chapel has given two weeks notice of strike action (against branch instructions, apparently) following ballot rejection of the firm's 12% offer. Now that NATSOPA has already settled, its members are generally expressing their disgust against the 'greed' of the much higher paid NGA membership, plus the attitude "they've never helped us - why should we help them" etc. etc.

E. D.

STRIKE REPORT - BBC PUBLICATIONS

On Thursday 28th May, the National Union of Journalists BBC Publications chapel voted to come out on indefinite strike. The BBC publications chapel has as its members journalists working on the Radio Times, the Listener, the staff newspaper Ariel and BBC books and pamphlets. Within the BBC, the publications journalists are certainly the lowest paid, and a recent 're-grading' exercise did nothing to change the situation. Last summer, the NUJ and ABS (Association of Broadcasting Staff) filed a re-grading claim on our behalf, calling for parity with newsroom journalists. The BBC said they would consider it, and it promptly sank without trace. Around November, the chapel began to get a little restive, and threatened to stall the

Christmas issue of Radio Times. After a few days go-slow, the BBC took the issue to ACAS, where they reluctantly agreed that we were journalists, and as such, were poorly paid. They agreed to consider our claim, and to do something about it by the end of February.

Come March, there was still no answer from the BBC, and the chapel began to pass a series of motions urging the BBC to get moving. After several hasty high-level committee meetings, the issue came to a 'National Conference' meeting - the last stage of the BBC's disputes procedure, which we had invoked earlier in the month. A representative from each section of

contd ->

the chapel went to this meeting, once again to point out to the BBC why we considered ourselves badly paid, but the BBC were obviously not interested. They proposed that the majority of the chapel should receive no increase at all, while the others should be awarded very minor increases. Our officials went away from the meeting to get official backing for a strike.

The chapel went into mandatory session on 28th May, a meeting which culminated in the overwhelming strike-vote, which was much applauded by our officials. Our big advantage in striking at this particular point was that we could halt production of the Royal Wedding issue, but if the BBC settled within two or three weeks, we could still save it.

THE STRIKE The strike itself was of no great interest to revolutionary voyeurs for three reasons.

1. It was not an innovative strike. We were striking to increase the wages of the lower-paid members of the chapel (programme subs, art assistants, picture researchers) but whether this was to be achieved by reducing differentials or simply upping everyone's pay was not clearly thought out. We were not striking to do away with differentials altogether. (although there is a growing body of opinion which says that this should be our next objective) it was more a matter of raising and consolidating our status within the BBC. Our own pay horizons had been firmly nixed by the BBC, and our objectives were grades and pay already pre-determined within the BBC.

2. It was a very naive strike. Very few members of the chapel had any experience of strike action, and we therefore placed great trust in our officials. We had very little idea of what the outcome would be, and rather let our own moral indignation bear us along. Our chapel is also very young, in terms of both its members and its own existence. Many are fairly new to the BBC, and its mysterious ways.

3. It was not a strike with 'street credibility'. Journalists are not famed for their unbiased viewpoints as realised through their work, as one taxi driver who crossed our picket line made clear. Many of us felt for the first time the middle class guilt-pangs of already earning more than the workers in the canteens, and being out on the streets for still more. Also, the Radio Times has as its grass-roots readership people like 'Disgusted of Tunbridge Wells', people who are far more interested in a possible rise in the licence fee than in poorly-paid workers.

The strike itself progressed quite happily - we held jumble-sales, maintained the picket lines, met other chapels to receive their support and their money, distributed leaflets and demonstrated outside Broadcasting House and Television Centre. Meanwhile the BBC, the NUJ and the ABS were at ACAS (our officials having stupidly contacted ACAS on the first afternoon of the strike) attempting to persuade the BBC to change their minds.

The chapel held daily meetings, the nastiest of which being called at the behest of the negotiators - they wanted us to regrade ourselves as we would wish to be re-graded, so that they could put a new 'seven-grade' plan to the BBC. We gave them the formula we had eventually arrived at, only to find, a few days later, that they had taken upon themselves to 'improve' it. The original trustfulness was past crumbling. After just under two weeks, our negotiators came back from ACAS with an offer which, they said, they had to recommend. This offer was very similar to the one which we (and they) had originally rejected, and it was obviously an exercise in paying off Radio Times staff at the expense of the others. Picture researchers (the worst paid) got nothing while assistant editors on Radio Times, who had not wanted any more, got a substantial increase. Some people actually lost money as they could no longer claim overtime. But we had to accept this offer, said our negotiators, or it would be a very long strike, and the BBC had made it clear that they would withdraw this offer and probably not come up with anything to match it. Our negotiators also told us that the BBC were not unwilling to lose the Listener altogether, and that the Radio Times could easily be sold off to commercial interests, despite making a yearly profit of £3 million for the BBC. Eventually, the chapel voted to accept this offer, although with nearly as many abstentions as votes in favour.

SUMMING UP What we learnt from the strike will probably turn out to be far more important than what we gained financially. In terms of what we have learnt about ourselves and each other, as a chapel and as individuals, the strike was a vital experience. We all feel the need for education. Few of us knew anything about ACAS and its processes. We did not know that we were being committed to a course of action by our negotiators; a course of action which really made a mockery of our efforts. ACAS is in the business of compromise, whereas strikes are (or should be) about non-compromise. The processes of ACAS, and its eventual demands upon our negotiators, were a secret known only to a select few. Ordinary members of the chapel

rail workers resist

In June the government announced that it will partially grant British Rail the cash it wants to electrify more routes. Providing of course that staffing is reduced by a further 38,000 or so. This means that BR management and the rail unions ASLEF, NUR and TSSA will be hard at work producing schemes to soften the blow of mass redundancies through natural wastage, early retirement, a block on recruitment - which means inevitable chronic staff shortage, low wages and high overtime in a period of high unemployment.

It's funny though, how when these management economists talk about more productivity/efficiency they really mean getting more work out of us poor sods rather than sharing the benefits of technology with us to make life easier.

While sectors of BR are being sold off to private enterprise, and some, like collect and deliver parcels are being done away with altogether, attempts to cut services have met with considerable resistance from union membership.

A threat from local management on Southern Region to suspend the guaranteed 40 hour week in response to a threatened 3 day unofficial stoppage by combined grades of rail workers over service cuts, was called off when the unions called for an official one day strike.

In April, action by refusing to take fares for one week was sanctioned by the NUR in protest over the planned closure of the Manchester-Sheffield trans-Pennine line. This won a reprieve from BR to put off the closure from 1st June to 20th July, and a public enquiry called from the unions. It also shows that 'striking' does not always have to mean withdrawal of public service and stopping work but can actually keep workers and community united, & hit the bosses directly by not taking fares as has happened in Italy and Rotterdam in recent times.

Resistance to cuts in services on Southern and Eastern regions, through unofficial stoppages.

Resistance, through unofficial stoppages, to cuts in services on Southern and Eastern regions which were to be introduced in the new timetables this June, ostensibly because it would mean less overtime, forced BR to reintroduce the cut-out trains as "specials".

While planned cuts in services have not been too severe this year, and no actual lines axed as yet, redundancy continues to creep up, and distrust of the union executives spreads amongst

the membership. The union leaders are now even talking quite seriously about forming a rail union "federation", to concert "united" action from the top down. While wealthy socialist BR chairman Parker negotiates a massive pay rise for himself he is seen by the establishment as the right man to deal with the potentially very powerful railway trade unions.

Now, in August, following the arbitration decision of the Railway Staff National Tribunal, the unions acceptance of it and the BRB's refusal to implement the whole award, ASLEF and NUR have called for industrial action from Monday 31st August. The BRB, who originally offered a 7% pay increase, accepted the tribunals award of an 8% increase backdated to April but refuse to pay the extra 3% recommended which was to be paid from August 3rd, without a commitment from the unions to allow the introduction of cost cutting measures, assaults on workers basic conditions and redundancy measures which will lead to lay-offs. There is no doubt among the workers that acceptance of any "productivity proposals" will pave the way towards super exploitation, and that it would be better to accept 8% on our terms rather than 11% on theirs.

Nevertheless, strike action has been called by the executives and preparations are being made. (It is recognised by the leadership that active picketing will have to be organised and they are calling for the formation of strike committees).

Most railworkers hate the management for their patronising and stingy attitude and are quite happy to strike against them. Of course there are those who get taken in by the media con but there is no substitute for actually working for BR, and understanding amongst the workers that the job is done by us despite the management. A breeding ground for workers councils?

Trade Union organisation is weak precisely because it tries to function as a democratic hierarchy. This does allow for unofficial horizontal style organisation, but this is undeveloped and hampered by leftist sectarianism. But now, with the strike still going ahead, the general level of workers combativity begins to rise, and should pass the point where the unions will be afraid to call the action off lest they lose any semblance of control over the workers, as we decide to call the strike anyway.

The BRB may concede defeat, and we will have won a small victory, but if they do want to fight to the end we must spread the strike. So get prepared. Start linking up. Show the bosses we intend to rise from slavery, not get further into it.

Stepney Hack.

NEW INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY - FOR WHAT?

"The computerised control of work has become so pervasive in Bell Telephone's clerical sector that management now has the capacity to measure how many times a phone rings before it is answered, how long a customer is put on hold, how long it takes a clerk to complete a call... Each morning, workers receive computer print-outs listing their break and lunch times based on the anticipated traffic patterns of the day... Before computerisation, a worker's morning break normally came about two hours after the beginning of the shift; now, it can come as early as fifteen minutes into the working day. Workers cannot go to the bathroom unless they find someone to take their place. "If you close your terminal, right away the computer starts clacking away and starts ringing a bell." "

- from 'Brave New Workplace' by Robert Howard. Working Papers For A New Society Nov/Dec 1980.

Between the lines of the publicity for the "office of the future" we can catch glimpses of the treatment in store for office workers. Bell Telephone may be the furthest along in automating office work, but this "future" is in store for hundreds of thousands of clerical workers as new technology gets installed.

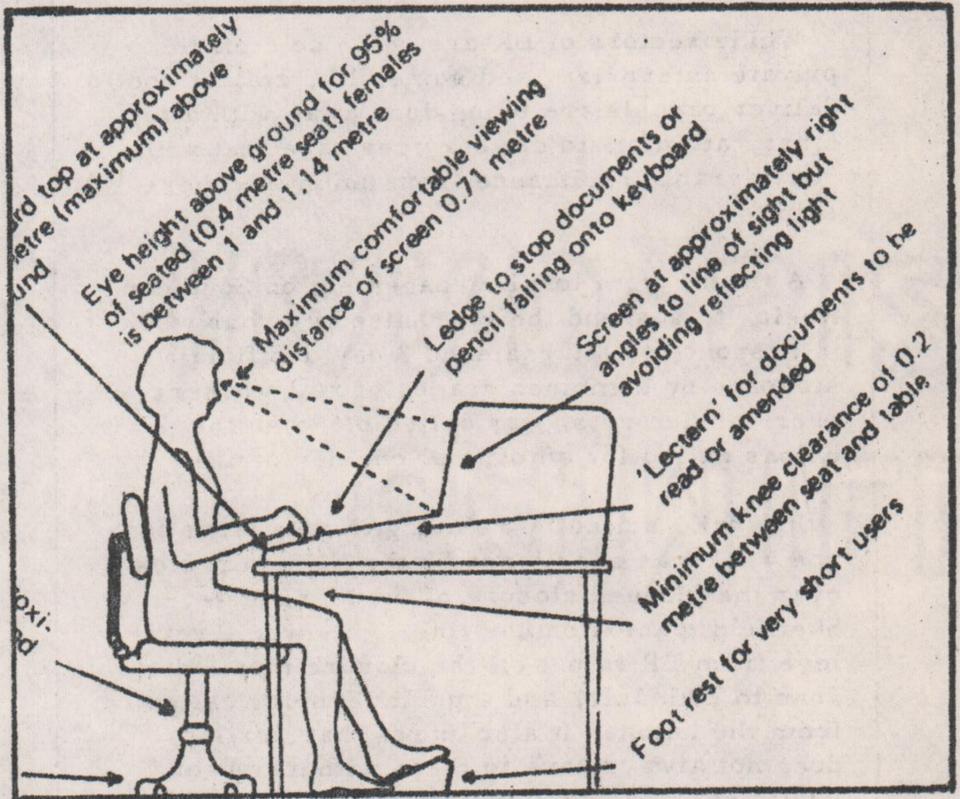
In manufacturing, automation is already well advanced, though nothing like what's coming when the new robot technology gets installed. This makes blue collar workers a lot more "productive" than office workers. As the salesmen from Xerox and IBM never tire of telling corporate managers, the average industrial worker is backed by \$25,000 worth of equipment, compared to only \$3,000 for the average secretary and next to nothing for low-to-middle level managers.

With modern word processing equipment, one typist can do the work that previously took three. And in today's increasingly internationalised and conglomerated world, there is a lot of information to be handled. Everyday, millions of economic transactions are tracked by the corporations and the banks, and with each one comes the interminable complexities of a world choked by MONEY and its logic: billing, accounting, insuring, financing, advertising, researching what people can be made to buy. No wonder there has been a tremendous increase in the number of office workers. It is they who file, sort, type, track, process, duplicate

and triplicate the ever expanding mass of "information" necessary to operate the global corporate economy.

As office employment has increased so has the cost of pushing around the continually growing body of bureaucratic detail. It has become high priority for management to reduce costs at the office by eliminating as many clerical jobs as possible, and to gain as much control as possible over the ones that remain.

In the office of the future, even middle managers and computer programmers will become unthinking drones. Since they make their living by pushing information, they are prime candidates for "job redesign" — in other words, job elimination for many, tighter control and more boredom and repetitiveness for those that remain.



YOU CAN'T LAY OFF MACHINES, BUT...

As markets stagnate around the world, international competition sharpens. Faced with soaring prices for energy and raw materials, businesses of every variety are struggling to cut costs in order to maintain or expand their slice of a shrinking pie.

Between 1976 and 1980 companies that wanted to step up production were likely to hire more workers rather than buy more equipment. They were afraid to invest in new machines because they didn't want to be caught with excess production capacity in a time of economic slowdown. Unlike new plants and equipment, workers can always be fired, or, better still, they can be

hired as temps.

Meanwhile, the cost of electronic control and data processing technology has been steadily dropping. Today they are "economical" on a larger scale than ever before and intensified competition gives wavering firms the necessary push towards automation. If your company doesn't use the new technologies it will be driven under by one that does, and if your country doesn't use them, perhaps because of union pressure to preserve jobs, it will be blown out of the market by Japan — or whoever else does.

UNEMPLOYMENT, AUTO —
MATION, REVOLT

Some computer industry mouth-pieces still

persist in proclaiming that the new systems will "create" as many jobs as they destroy. But this is a self-serving lie. The "business machine" and automation industries are rare islands of prosperity in an otherwise crisis-ridden economic picture, and they are, if anything, more automated than other sectors. In reality, large-scale unemployment unlike anything we've known since the last depression is just around the corner.

Automation isn't new, and neither is the unemployment it creates. During the fifties, workers in auto, steel and mining waged bitter fights against the mechanical "job killers". But the unions bargained away jobs and skills for improved wages and benefits. The result was a permanent pool of between twelve and fourteen million skill-less, jobless people, culturally, geographically and often racially segregated from the employed population.

Through the last two decades, this segregated "underclass" has provided management with a ready answer to unskilled and semi-skilled workers who resist speedups and takeaways. If you won't do twice as much work for half the real wage there's always someone out there hungry enough to do it instead of you. Added to this threat and the other well known classic, the runaway shop, the new automation gives management a blackmail "triple whammy". Once powerful and militant groups of employees are bullied into accepting brutal cuts in wages, benefits and conditions, with their unions lending a hand. The current plight of auto and steel workers is example enough.

As unemployment grows and real wages fall distrust and competitiveness between employed and unemployed may prevail. But there are other possibilities. People who thought of themselves as "middle class" may realise that they can be dispensed with just as easily as the janitor, the busboy or the nurse's aide who live "on the other side of the tracks". The newly

unemployed, who have been taught to expect opportunities for career and salary advancement that the system can no longer provide, may not passively accept being thrown aside like garbage.

During the last depression, unemployed people joined employed ones on the picket lines, while the employed helped the unemployed fight for better relief or against evictions. The new wave of unemployment may help recreate such unity by minimising differences of sex, race, skill and culture.

HOLDING ACTIONS

There are various ways to try to counteract the impact of the new technology and the economic forces behind it. Unions and workers' support organisations have proposed reduction of the work week with no cut in pay, demanded better working conditions and more control over the work process, and resisted management-imposed job redesign. The methods of unions, however, are limited to the traditional end-of-contract strikes, interminable grievance procedures, or lobbying government for better labour legislation.

Successful actions on any of these issues are always subject to renewed attacks by management. While workers in a given office or factory may prevent implementation of a particularly loathsome technology, the pressures of survival will eventually force the company to take a harder stand. Even if massive social unrest succeeded in winning a four-day work week the wage gains would rapidly be taken back by inflation. Though it is certainly desirable to reduce time on the job and improve working conditions, no amount of "job humanisation" will change the basically wasteful and useless nature of most work.

As long as the existing set-up endures there will be no end to the problems created by automation. In the short run, successful actions on particular issues will gain some breathing space and provide people with concrete experience in overcoming their separation and passivity. But in the long run the system itself will have to be challenged. A world where technological progress doesn't mean ever more suffering and loss of freedom will never be created by a system so paralysed by its need for fast profit and centralised control.

COMPUTERS, WHAT ARE
THEY GOOD FOR ?

Though automation threatens livelihoods by eliminating and degrading jobs, there is nothing inherently bad about computer technology. In a different society, it could be used to improve our lives in all kinds of ways.

wise and control the population would be eliminated. Millions would be freed to learn and share other tasks, along with the formerly unemployed.

Products would be made to last instead of to fall apart in a few years so that the owner has to buy a new one. Very quickly, this would reduce the amount of work that has to be done. Meanwhile, as many jobs as possible would be transformed to make them interesting, pleasant and safe. The unpleasant work that remained would be shared around, so that before long no-one would have to do them more than a few hours a month.

But how would all this be organised? Who would decide how much time and resources should be spent on a particular project, and how scarce resources should be allocated? How can the rise of a new structure of power and hierarchy be prevented?

Obviously we can't foresee all the problems that might arise, nor propose definite solutions. However, it's reasonable to assume that the more people participate in decision making, the less chance there is of power concentrating in the hands of any particular group or groups.

This is where the new information technologies come in. At present, at least a third of all computer time in the U. S. is used for military and "national security" purposes - monitoring telephone, radio and TV signals, tracking U. S. and foreign military forces, industries and raw materials, planning for present and future wars. Much of the rest is used in the electronic transfer of funds from one corporate account to another. And all this information is tightly guarded, placed under coded "locks", and made accessible only through an elaborate hierarchy of classifications and clearances.

However, in the context of a growing movement such as the one described above, operators and programmers could begin sorting through the immense computerised files. A lot of information, like cash flow accounts and secret dossiers, could be simply wiped. The computers used for spying can be put to other uses or dismantled. Inventories of actual goods, equipment and raw materials, along with any other useful or interesting data, could be kept, made public, and reorganised. With the design of the proper systems and the installation of easy-to-use terminals in accessible places, work groups, communities and individuals could continually update, index and tap into the growing pool of information.

Most production would be planned at the local level. Work groups could organise their tasks as they see fit. The amount of milk or bread needed in a region could be produced locally right there, eliminating fancy packaging and

long transportation efforts.

But for other purposes elaborate plans would be required. Many projects would have to be co-ordinated at an inter-regional level. Computers can help here because they can digest enormous amounts of data into summaries that enable participating communities to set up the broad outlines of a plan: what products they need and how much, and what resources and skills they have available. Computers could match needs to resources and pinpoint potential surpluses and shortfalls.

Once plans were agreed upon, communications systems could facilitate their smooth follow through. When conflicts and shortages arise many of those affected could be brought together "on line" to discuss strategies for their resolution. Potential suppliers could respond to shortages with information about available stocks and perhaps negotiate to expand production. Final discussions could be handled by phone or in person.

Of course, it's not the computers that are actually doing the planning, it's people. And no-one really wants to spend a lot of time in front of a Visual Display Unit or sitting through dreary meetings. So "planning committees" would probably be designated by communities to make analyses and suggestions that they would bring back for approval. The "planners" could be delegated on a rotating and recallable basis to ensure both that they do a good job and that their temporary responsibilities don't "go to their heads".

Decision making would be decentralised to the maximum extent, and everyone would have a chance to participate. Gradually every area and community in the world that wants to join in could be linked together. The right mix of autonomy and interdependence could be approached in the context of a massive public discussion about the best ways of doing things.

In such a world automation, like computers in general, would mean something entirely different than they do today. Instead of being used to throw millions out of their jobs and squeeze more and more work out of the rest, it would be applied to eliminating necessary but repetitive and boring tasks, and to reduce the amount of less-than-enjoyable activity required of everyone. The time freed could be spent learning, playing, socialising, travelling....

PROTOTYPES : NON-HIERARCHICAL INFORMATION SYSTEMS

These may seem like totally un-

realisable fantasies but they are as much part of the potential of the new information technology as the unemployment and degradation it engenders today. There have already been several



recipes, personal advertisements. According to a Community Memory publication,

"Community Memory is an open channel for community communications and information exchange, and a way for people with common interests to find each other. It is a tool for collective thinking, planning, organising, fantasizing and decision-making.



attempts to demonstrate the hidden social potential of information technology by creating system systems that take some first halting steps towards public access and community control.

One such system, named Cybersyn, was being developed in Chile until the 1973 (U. S. - backed) coup put the present military dictatorship into power. The idea of Cybersyn was simple : to install a computerised information gathering system that could be used to observe the Chilean economy in process, and to help predict the effects of various decisions upon it. Cybersyn was to be capable of producing detailed output, or of boiling down large masses of data into easily comprehended graphs and tables. In experiments done just before the 1973 coup, it was found that workers were able to use the system as easily as professional managers.

"By being open and interactive, Community Memory seeks to present an alternative to broadcast media such as TV. It makes room for the exchange of people-to-people information, recognising and legitimising the ability of people to decide for themselves what information they want.

"The projected incarnation of Community Memory is a broad dispersion of computer terminals in public places, such as community centres, libraries, stores and bus stations....

"The designers of Community Memory would like to see a world not broken up into nation-states, but one built upon many overlapping regions of concern : from household to neighborhood to interest group to work group, from geographical region to globe, where decisions are made by all those affected. This would be a world where power is distributed and governance is the process of collectively trying to determine the best action to be taken, via general discussion and complete dissemination of information. With this vision, the Community Memory system has been designed to be a communications tool for a working community."

Cybersyn is not presented here as a model to be adopted. On the contrary, this system was built on request by a central government and was implemented in the context of a national economy intricately bound up in the world market, which functions on the basis of profit, wage-labour and military force. In its very conception, therefore, it was meant to accommodate centralised power and the money economy. These institutions (which eventually put a bloody end to the Chilean experiment) are precisely what must be abolished for any attempts to change society to succeed. Cybersyn does, however, demonstrate the simple logistical feasibility of the widespread installation of easy-to-use computer communications facilities.

Today in the Bay area of San Francisco, a related kind of system is being developed. "Community Memory" is being designed to facilitate the decentralised, non-hierarchical sharing of information, needs, skills and resources, or anything else that can be typed into a keyboard : philosophical or political opinions,

WHAT KIND OF WORLD DO YOU WANT TO LIVE IN ?

In a world where everything and everyone is treated as an object to be bought and sold, the new technologies - and most of the old ones for that