

COMMUNICATION WORKER

Number 11

November/December 1988



POSTMAN RUDOLPH SAYS:



"CHRISTMAS IS CANCELLED"

NO

Recent weeks have seen a series of one day strikes around the country by counter and clerical staff. These have been in opposition to the planned re-grading of 750 Crown Offices (with 5,000 job losses) thus paving the way for privatisation. Despite the narrow majority in favour of striking, the response has largely been solid, though patchy in one or two areas. This is partly because the UCW has asked them not to put up picket lines, this is to stop the strike spreading to letters and parcels. Not surprisingly though, the PO has not backed down.

Privatisation has been one of the big economic attacks on the working class under the Tory government. Along with cuts in public expenditure, it has been the main way of making us poorer, whilst the middle classes get richer. Privatisation has inevitably led to job losses, lower real wages and loss of beneficial working practices. In the end, workers work harder for less money. If the UCW believes that they can stop the governments main ideological and economic weapon by a series of one-day regional strikes by a small section of the workforce they must be living in dreamworld. But then they spend so

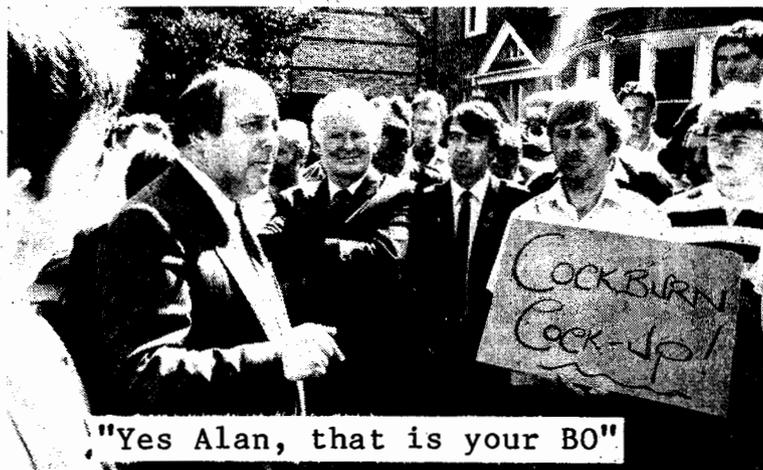
much time hob-nobbing around with these kind of people they've probably come to believe that they're reasonable human beings, whereas we know different; having to put up with them and their stupid ideas day-in, day-out.

Privatisation affects everyone in the PO, sooner or later they'll try and privatise everything. They are doing it one step at a time, knowing that the union will follow their lead in dividing the workforce and the action we take. We need united militant action if we are to stop one of the major assaults of this government. It is highly unlikely the union will organise this, they are as scared of our industrial power as management is. The recent strikes show that we're capable of independent rank and file national action. This is the only way of defeating the PO and the GOVERNMENT.

Some people say that we'll be better off privatised, (especially the bosses, their propaganda sheets, national newspapers and the govern-

ment) but this is highly unlikely. The authorities rarely do anything to benefit us, unless it is forced upon them by industrial action, an accident or its profitable. We cannot afford to take the risk that we might be better off, especially after seeing how workers in other industries have suffered under privatisation eg Steel and Telecom workers. Things have been getting worse in recent months, we cannot afford to let them go any further.

Postal workers in South East London showed solidarity when the Counters and Clerical staff came out on a one day strike. They came out in support of them and some did not go back until a few days later. We have to unite, when counters and clerical walk out, all other workers in the Post Office whether they be Postmen/women, PHG's, cleaners, catering or engineers should be out with them, and stay out.



"Yes Alan, that is your BO"

ALL FOR ONE

In February a wave of strikes shook Britain, the nurses and the car workers being at the forefront of these strikes. This wave involved one million workers from all sectors. The extent of these strikes forced the government to partially give in to the defensive (economic) demands of the health workers in a calculated move in order to stab them in the back at a later date, when it was quieter.

Ten months on the nurses have proven that they have not given up the struggle, and are very much alive and undefeated, like any other section of the working class.

Of course it would be an exaggeration to compare the latest waves of the nurses struggles with those of February from depth and dimension. Never the less we ought to point out the weakness of today's struggles and expose the anti-working class institutions (ie their unions leadership) whom have adopted a new sabotaging approach towards the nurses.

SHOULD WE DEFEND THE NHS?

The thing that is shared by those who falsely claim to be on our side is their claim that the defence of the nurses means

defence of the NHS.

The NHS is not an institution related to the working class. The formation of the NHS in 1946 (along with social security in the 1930s) was not for the benefit of the workers. The bosses were very honest about it;

"The plan is one to secure income for subsistence on condition of service and contribution in order to make and keep men fit for service" The Beveridge Report

Inefficiency and inadequacy have always been associated with the NHS. Today the inefficiency of the NHS has reached a stage where a patient has to wait upto four years for a small operation. In addition to this one could add the huge cuts in the NHS' remaining budget, that has resulted in job losses and hospital closures

The struggle of the health workers and defence of the NHS are completely different things. Only defence of the health workers can prevent further

deterioration of remaining health care.

THE ROLE OF THE UNIONS

The unions involved in the NHS are COHSE and NUPE as well as bodies like the RCN

(who pretend to be a union), have their own shares in any defeat imposed on health workers.

In the last wave of health workers struggles we witnessed that the above unions managed to set nurses up against each other, by their own rivalries and claims and counter claims.

The sole function of NUPE, COHSE and RCN is to control the health workers by bringing in sectorial divisions. Even when they take 'actions' (due to pressure from health workers) these have been pseudo militant gestures like useless 24 hour strikes (with prior notice!) or work to rules or petitioning the public...

In the present wave of health worker strikes the unions have already taken lessons and prevented any extension of the strike to other sectors or even within the NHS by making the struggle on the issue of grading alone.

The system of grading itself is so obscure that it is difficult (if not impossible) to say at what stage a nurse is doing a higher or lower grade job since all duties in a ward are interlinked. The governments objective when introducing the grad-

ing system was to cause competition and disunity amongst health workers.

Because of the sabotaging role of the unions involved in the NHS, we have seen a growth of suspicion of the health workers towards the union leadership. On the Hyde Park March (19/3/88) nurses anger at the union leaders forced Norman "Useless Sod" Willis (TUC boss) and co to hurriedly abandon the platform.

SOLIDARITY ACTION

The term solidarity has been misused by the unions and leftists. Solidarity does not mean making a collection of money. What can money do compared to all the money and resources the bosses have?

During the February strikes the true meaning of solidarity re-materialised. A small number of nurses picketed the Frickley Colliery in Yorkshire and

as a result the miners in that region came out in support. On February 3rd Postal workers, Council workers, teachers, London dockers etc joined the nurses demonstration. These were genuine attempts by workers in other sectors to break isolation and link up with nurses. This is the only practical way forward. Only through united action of the working class can we hold back the massive cuts planned by the bosses.

WHAT IS AT STAKE?

In the short term it appears that the health workers have suffered yet another defeat because the bosses, unions and their leftist friends have managed to isolate their struggles. But these partial defeats are short lived and temporary.

In the long term the prospect is promising. Small numbers of militant have been drawn in to the stru-



uggle on an independent field. We have to implement the lessons learnt from past experience that isolation means defeat. The forces confronting us are strong and experienced and by confronting them in just one sector we will be defeated just like the miners and printers.

As far as a decent health service is concerned, under the present system where profit comes first it is impossible. A decent health service can only come when human needs come first. A preventative service not a curing one.



AFTER HOURS

The farce over the 41½ week issue seems to be drawing to a close. It has been a story of the union doing the best to prevent any strikes last Christmas and management refusal to negotiate reasonably about the issue. As reductions are introduced nothing has really changed.

Offices in London who have yet to get any agreement have been told by the LDC to get one quickly or the LDC will impose one. This basically means postal workers who have to work Satu-

rday will get 1½ hours knocked off on that day. Elsewhere we see the odd 15 or 18 minutes removed from the shift each day. Some places want to count tea breaks as the 1½ hour reduction.

West Central had a temporary agreement. This means some workers doing a 41½ hour week while others were still doing a 43 hour one.

The real testing time will come after workers vote for a 41½ week schedule that is not the one favoured

by management. A number of offices have done this and are now negotiating.

These reductions mean very little for postal workers. We find tea breaks being shortened so there is no difference really. As it stands we are still working longer hours than most other workers.

The lesson is that we should have been all out last Christmas and got what we really need. A 5 day, 35 hour week.



STRIKE EARLY FOR XMAS

As ever the PO are trying to get away with paying out as little as possible over the Christmas period, this has gone on for so many years that everyone is saying they'll see reason and back down before Christmas.

This year we can't see that happening, the mood is not one of compromise from either workers or management. At the time of writing Nottingham is locked out for refusing to accept the scrapping of the seniority system. Despite, (or rather because of) the unions' token stoppages they're still proceeding with the programme of closures.

District postmasters throughout London have been instructed to give nine and a half hour block shifts and at a maximum ten. Of course this is completely unacceptable and is being rejected all across London. Most offices are preparing to work normally, with a work to rule and an overtime ban.

Of course if this happens the Post Office will be forced to take action. Either bring in hundreds of casuals and/or force us out. They must realise after the strike that we are not willing to sit back and take more and more crap.

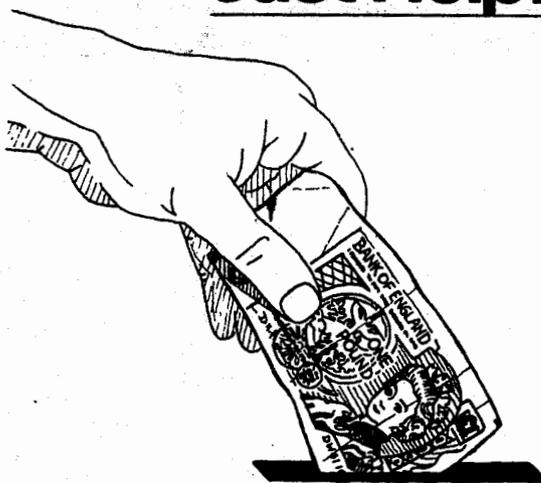
This means at Christmas we must have an overtime ban (that includes scheduled attendances) and a work to rule. We must also not accept any casuals. If your office is forced out, flying pickets should be sent to bring out nearby offices and any other

workers nearby. ONE OFFICE OUT, ALL OFFICES OUT.

But of course if you are still out after Christmas there will be no reason to stay out unless you issue other demands. The demand could be for an immediate, no strings attached, 10% pay rise, and no casuals when you return.

In recent years Christmas has been a time for management to attack us. Together we can stop them. Christmas is traditionally a time for celebration. LETS CELEBRATE BY WINNING.

Donations Aren't Just Helpful



They're Essential

Cheques/Postal Orders made

payable to "D. Greenfield"

COMMUNICATION WORKER,
BM BOX 3644, LONDON WC1N 3XX