OUR OBJECTIVES

1. To report on, analyse and seek solidarity for important struggles amongst our fellow workers, especially in the Greater Manchester area.

2. To encourage independent working class activity outside of the control of the trade unions and in opposition to all political parties.

3. To aim at the overthrow of all governments, bosses and leaders by a revolution in which the majority of people, who at the moment are just expected to follow orders, all play an equal part. And we would like to see the creation of a world without the wage/money/market system where we can all have a say in how things are run, and where production is for human need not profit.

COUNCIL WIELDS THE AXE

Manchester City Council and the GMC along with other councils in the North-West and throughout the country are planning major cut-backs in expenditure this year. Although final decisions have yet to be taken at full council meetings, proposals put before the relevant departmental committees paint a gloomy picture for the future of Manchester residents and council workers. They include cutting maintenance on roads, open spaces, drains, public buildings and council houses to a minimum withdrawing many college courses and possibly even closing colleges altogether; closing playgrounds and nurseries; cutting school facilities and meals provision; withdrawing grants to many voluntary bodies; cutting social services to the old, sick and poor; cutting bus services; cutting library services and much more.

Along with these cuts in services are massive reductions in the number of council jobs. It is clear now that earlier scare stories about up to 12 thousand compulsory redundancies are not true. They were put out deliberately by the Labour Council and the unions in an effort to "soften us up" for their real plans. Nevertheless, thousands of jobs lost in the City alone and some of these will almost certainly be in the form of compulsory redundancies. It seems that particular care is to be taken to contract workers (particularly in education) can expect to be hit especially hard.

On top of this rates, council rents and bus fares are all to rise dramatically and Council office workers offered a derisory £4 wage rise if we're lucky. Manual workers have already accepted a cut in their real wages of about 8%.

Council workers faced with redundancies, increased work loads and cuts in real wages will have little choice but to take strike action, combining this with closures are concerned with occupations. In taking this action common cause needs to be made with those who use our services - Council tenants, parents of school children etc.

Would such a struggle be worth it? Could we really win? YES WE COULD WIN but only if we work to make our actions effective.

Let's look at some of the reasons that are being given for not taking any action:

1) "The money isn't there." This is the Council's argument. Its quite simple, they say, either we put up the rates by 30-40% or we get rid of thousands of jobs and cut services (and remember this assumes a 4% wage rise!, really a 12% cut compared to the 10% rise in the government's tax-price index.)

In economic terms government "makes sense". Just like it makes "economic sense" to have over three million people unemployed and to destroy whole sectors of industry in this country. The trouble is that "economics" and the economic system we live under don't make sense at all!

In economic terms Manchester will be better off if thousands of Council jobs are lost. We will be "better off" with poorer education facilities, with housing, more squalor and dereliction and road and sewerage systems that are literally falling apart. In economic terms we would be "crazy" to suggest that instead of getting rid of workers we should use these people and their skills to improve our schools, housing and environment.

Politicians and economists tell us to be "reasonable" and "accept the facts". Clearly the only reasonable attitude we can take is to accept the fact that what's crazy is the economic system itself! To struggle to win means rejecting this whole logic and arguing our case in terms of what facilities are needed and how best to use all our resources (including the most valuable of all - human labour) to provide them.

2) "There are too many council workers anyway. It's true that many Council services are bureaucracy and inefficiently organised, like any big capitalist enterprise. But cut-backs won't change that. We have to use our muscles - Are there too many good houses in Manchester - Are the facilities in schools too good - Are the roads in too good a state of repair? For too long council workers have been regarded (and have regarded ourselves) as "unproductive". The time has come to consign this idea to the dustbin where it belongs.

3) "A strike by Council workers (and tenants?) would be defeated in the end." It is understandable that many people are wary of people who have no hope to succeed in a strike not only against our own council, but also, at least by implication, against the whole of government policy as well.

It depends on how a strike is organised. If we all go home and let a few union officials run things for us a strike will be defeated. The unions accept the council's arguments. Their whole approach is based on looking for compromises. The idea of a "strike for a month" or a "months unpaid leave" for example is simply an attempt to avoid confrontation with the Labour Council (which the particular union official whose idea it was hopes to join next May). This kind of approach won't stop the long-term cut-backs they're looking for.

The only alternative to accepting the cuts is the most militant and determined action.

There is no point in kidding ourselves, its not a question of whether we go on strike but when we go on strike. The economic recovery are promised isn't going to come. Things will only get worse unless we start an attempt to avoid confrontation with the Labour Council (which the particular union official whose idea it was hopes to join next May). This kind of approach won't stop the long-term cut-backs they're looking for.

No political party offers any alternative. Sooner or later we will be forced to fight back, not only against more attacks on wages, jobs and services, but against the whole rotten system itself.

(Written by Manchester City Council workers. 25th February 82)

CONTACT

We would like to hear from anyone who agrees with the ideas expressed in WILDCAT and who would like to help us or join our group. If you don't agree with us we'll like to hear from you too - we'll try to answer letters, either personally, or in WILDCAT. We would also like to hear from people in other areas who are interested in what we are doing.

If you would like to mail you copies of WILDCAT as they appear, please write enclosing £1 to cover postage:

Wildcat, Box 25, 16/165 Gorn Exchange, Manchester M 3 2BY
The strike at British Leyland's bus and truck plants is over. We talked to workers on the picket line while they were still out. 3,500 workers at Bathegate and 8,400 in Lancashire were on strike in defence of their jobs. Over the last two years there have been several rounds of redundancies, each being presented as the only way to restore the company to profitability. This reasoning was accepted by the workforce and the redundancies were reluctantly agreed. Nevertheless the company did not return to profitability. This time, with plans to shed over 4,000 jobs, the workers said enough is enough and came out on strike. When we went to Leyland people were saying: "They have had two lots of redundancies already. If we let them get away with this one, when will it stop?"

The shop stewards obviously agreed with the company that the only way to keep jobs is to restore profitability. They proposed an alternative to the company's "Corporate Plan" and used this as justification for the proposed redundancies. As if fighting for your job needs justifying! The whole of the union's action is based on the company's profitability. With more and more unprofitable companies around now, this seems rather unlikely. So the three official strike demands were:

1) Stop implementation of the corporate Plan and use this as justification for the proposed redundancies. As if fighting for your job needs justifying! The whole of the union's action is based on the company's profitability. With more and more unprofitable companies around now, this seems rather unlikely. So the three official strike demands were:

1) Stop implementation of the company's Corporate Plan.
2) Discuss the alternative Trade Union Plan.
3) No victimisation of workers refusing to cross the picket lines.

The shopfloor was out solidly. Various office and lower management sections were also on strike refusing to cross picket lines. In what seemed a contradictory action some of the "corporates" (lower management), whose jobs are under severe threat, decided to continue working.

The company didn't try to fudge the issue. They said the TU Plan was complete, out of the question, as it would require £500 million investment which the government would never agree to. They said they were losing £2 million a week before the strike, and the longer the strike continued the more orders would go elsewhere. In the danger of losing a vote to return to work they said quite starkly: "The future of the company is in the hands of the workers. They will be the ones who press the red button with the recovery of the business or whether BL should move out of the truck business altogether." In another sense the TU Plan was presented by the company as clear either go back to work or we'll sack you all. This was backed up by a vast media campaign by the workers that these were the only alternatives. In a final act of truth the BL executive issued a directive that a letter outlining the company's position, from BL's chairman Edwards to Terry Duffy, be read out at the mass meetings. The shop stewards were so sickened by this action that they all refused, and it was left to a local AUEW official to read it out, although he said it gave him no pleasure. He then read out a local AUEW resolution saying they were appalled and disgusted at the use the AUEW leadership had made of the letter, and urging workers to stay out.

In the face of this concerted attack by the company, media, and union leadership, no one in the union was giving any sound reason why the workers should stay out, or how they could win. It is clear from the vote that the majority of workers could see no other alternative but to return to work or be sacked.

There is no doubt that BL is in desperate financial trouble. There is no doubt that the company needs to sack 4,100 workers. There is also no doubt that the TU's alternative plan would not work without massive government investment, and an end to the recession. Both company and local union leaderships plans of profitability. When are workers everywhere going to understand that profitability is not our concern? It is for the bosses.

"It's your system that is creating vast unemployment, and you are responsible; as workers we have nothing to do with capitalism and are going to fight to protect our jobs and wages, recession or no recession. If you can't pay, that's your problem." 

The shop steuards obviously read this out to the workers. There has been considerable local support for the BL strikers. According to the Lancashire Evening Post most wives of the men on strike were supporting the workers wholeheartedly. One said: "It has been hard - like living on the dole I suppose. That makes me support the strike even more, we would be living on the dole if the men didn't make a stand now." However the article containing this quote was the only one of many daily articles warning the workers of their foolishness in continuing the strike.

The workers have given in and returned to work with no concessions from the company. One worker I had spoken to had told me: "This is going to be a long strike. If we give in they'll play hell with us when they get back the jobs they said they were withdrawing."

The DHSS office strikers.

The Social Security offices in Rusholme and Withenshaw were recently shut down as workers spontaneously walked out following the government's mise-en-scene, which had less than 4% for most and nothing for the lowest paid! A spokesman said their action was a warning to both the government and the company executive. Before the government's announcement, similar walkouts had occurred in Scotland, this time over the activites of the government's new 'Specialist Claims Control Unit' which the Scottish workers accused of 'harassment, bullying and lying in order to ensure they could withdraw their claims for benefit.' This unit may also be operating in Manchester. Clearly a lot could be gained by united action amongst social security workers and claimants in the hard times ahead.