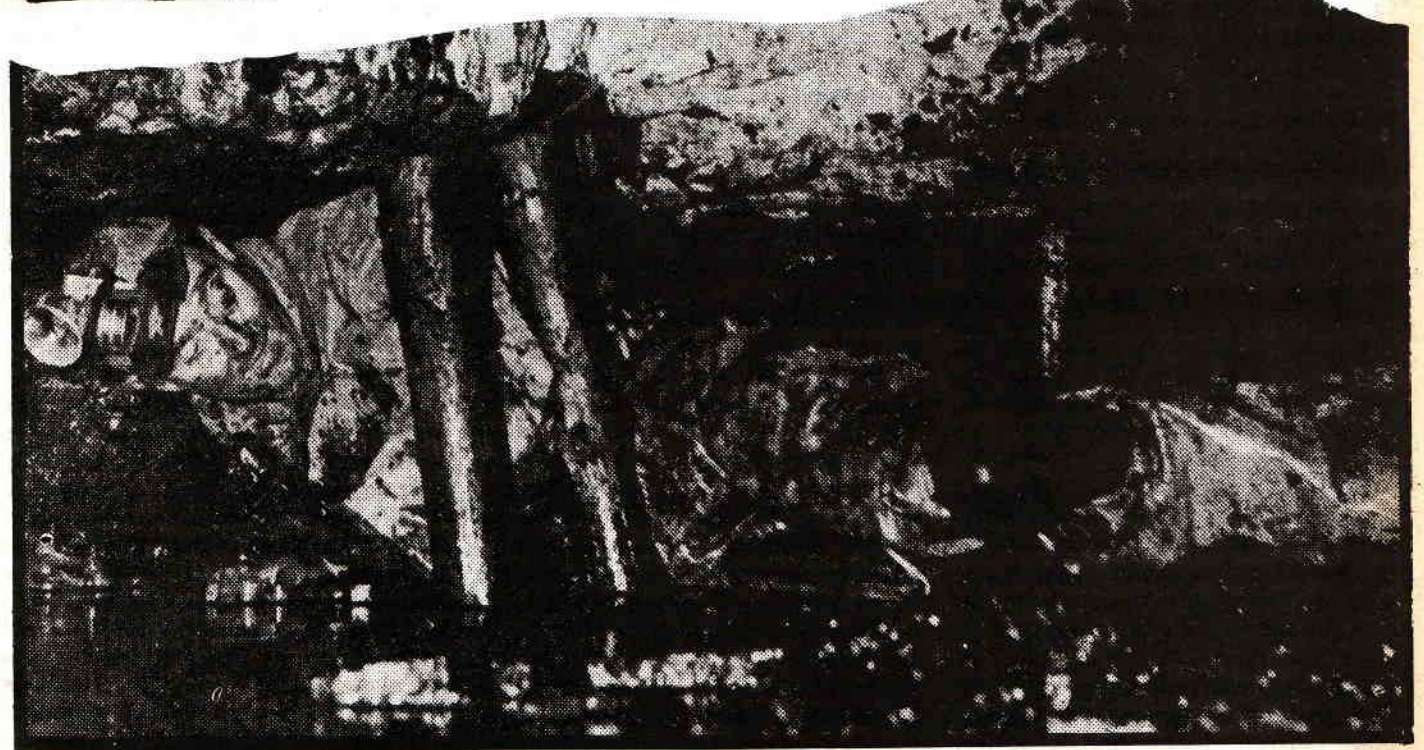


WORKERS

POPULAR YARNS OF CLASS WAR

August 1984 30 pence

PLAYTIME



UNDERMINING THE SELL OUT

WHAT WE'RE STANDING IN : Coming Clean on the Miners Strike

As this issue of Playtime is published the miner's strike enters its 24th week. A national delegate conference has rejected the NCB's 'final' offer, and voted to continue the strike indefinitely. The NCB's campaign for a return to work linked to the annual holidays has been a failure, as even their 'independent' house journal, the Times, has been forced to admit. The continued efforts of the women's support groups organising and distributing food has alleviated some of the desperate hardship caused by the strike, and provided a remarkable demonstration of practical solidarity. And in recent weeks there have been clear signs that many strikers have become more than ever determined to continue the fight to the finish. Not just evident in miners insistence that they would sooner see pits close than be starved back, but in the escalation of organised sabotage. A series of arson attacks on transport belonging to the NCB and private contractors has dramatically raised the level of attacks, which had already caused £1 million pounds worth of damage to NCB property to the end of July. Appeals by NUM officials to stop have been ignored and activities reached a peak on August 7th when several hundred strikers toured two Nottingham pits and the local NCB headquarters during the early evening (when police presence was minimal) attacking windows and cars and dispersing as the first police reinforcements arrived. Though evidently only involving a minority of strikers these are the first welcome signs of organised attempts to by-pass both the unions useless set piece mass picketing and the hitherto successful police operation preventing it from succeeding. Similarly the police assaults on mining communities are more regularly meeting violent resistance.

Against this it's also clear that the overall direction and control of the strike remains firmly in the hands of the NUM executives, and the majority of strikers are not actively involved. In this context the prospects for what can be won remain what they were 3-4 months ago. The gap between NUM and NCB at the last set of negotiations in July had narrowed considerably – the demand for the NCB to verbally withdraw its current plans was dropped and short term guarantees given over five pits. The difference was simply over how to set the criteria for closeability in future NUM/NCB bargaining. Scargill's 'militant' demands that a settlement will have to include items like a four day week, an improved wage offer and early retirement, are simply signals to the NCB that a settlement will have to include such items as sweeteners if an 'agreement' on the basis for future closures is to be sold to the miners.

For anything better than a face-saving sell out to be achieved the strike would need to become more solid and be successfully extended in conjunction with other groups of workers. Though the

In this issue of Playtime we're not going to go into a detailed account of events in the strike of the sort we have given in the past. We believe it's important for all militants and revolutionaries to be able to make for themselves as accurate an estimate as possible of the prospects and significance of any given strike (or any other instance of class struggle) in its own terms. One of the motivations for producing Workers Playtime was our dissatisfaction with the constant attempts to look at events through the rose tinted spectacles of preconceived ideas – and with the ludicrous ideas allowed to

prospects of another dock strike is there over the blacking of coal destined for Ravenscraig steel works, and the rail work to rule planned for September 10th will undoubtedly affect some coal movements, by themselves these are far from enough. As it becomes clear that coal stocks at power stations and existing pit head stocks will last until the new year the only hope of extending the strike significantly is to stop coal movements on a large scale. The miners could not achieve this themselves without blacking by transport workers. It's already clear that they cannot expect any widespread automatic solidarity – it is also doubtful whether official instructions to workers not to cross miners picket lines will be forthcoming, for all the bluster from 'left' union leaders. It must be faced that as things stand the prospects for the sort of victory many of the miners are determined on are not rosy.

In this situation the tasks facing the strikers are not hard to see. The physical maintenance of the strike through food collection and distribution must continue. The emerging attempts by the NUM bureaucracy to take control of this

flourish by this refusal to look at what's actually happening. At this level our ambition was to demonstrate the sort of basic account of struggles which is possible even where direct sources of information don't exist. In other words to do what anyone convinced of the importance of class struggle should be capable of doing for themselves.

But this certainly wasn't our only reason for producing Playtime. We also wished to contribute positively to the debate about the importance and direction of class struggle. We believe that no struggle

(assisted by the Communist Party) must be resisted. The lessons of national control of picketing and of national and regional control of strike funds are there for all to see – consistent inertia and active sabotage of local initiative.

And the growing anger of strikers must be turned in a practical direction. Direct links must be forged directly between militant pits and regions, and within mining communities, so that when one off closures restart after the strike ends, miners in the affected pits have a solidly based confidence in their ability to resist closure, or simply sell the jobs as dearly as possible. Miners must know already that when an agreement is reached over the basis for closures, they will be able to count on nothing from the NUM when closures restart – as miners in those pits closed over the last couple of years have found the hard way.

Lastly miners must directly approach transport workers to ask for blacking of coal movements. The results of relying on deals between union executives have already been seen – for example in the deals over exemptions from blacking.

however militant can win more than short term, sectional gains and that that will remain the case while capitalism dominates every aspect of society. That no change of government or system of government, no programme of reforms however 'radical' can significantly better our situation. Only the overthrow of capitalism – the system of state and exchange economy which exists in every country in the world – will end the social division and alienation, the exploitation and oppression that make up our lives. Only then will it be possible to achieve a genuine community, without racial,

sexual or class division or exploitation. The workplace clearly isn't the only place in which the revolutionary struggle to overthrow capitalism will take place. That involves overthrowing all capitalist social relations, for capitalism doesn't just dominate the workplace but all of society. However as the heart of the capitalist system — the place where capital itself is produced through our exploitation — it is where a crippling blow can be dealt by taking control of the means of production. Of course we don't simply want to run them ourselves but to create from the potential within them a society fit to live in — but that can only be done on the basis of workers seizing control away from capital. The debate about how to get from here to there was what we wished to contribute to through Playtime.

The reaction to the miners strike in those circles of people who believe like us that revolution is necessary and desirable has illustrated the scale of the problem. From the start we have seen divisions paralleling those in the miners own ranks. Some were convinced from the start that the strike was 'doomed' and that nothing could come from it relevant to revolution except an awful warning of what happens when workers don't overthrow capitalism, but stick to struggles for reforms. Others from the first were frothing at the mouth at the significance of the strike as if it meant social revolution was just around the corner. Its necessary to avoid both extremes — the first leading to a cynical passivity, the other to frenzied activity and then disillusionment.

It seems we need to go back to basic principles.

The miners strike is important to us as fellow workers or proletarians, because it has happened at all. The last four years have seen the effects of economic crisis on class struggle — a series of defeats of groups of workers, the steady growth of mass unemployment and heavy attacks on us as capitalism attempts to rationalise itself in unsuccessful attempts to restore profitability. With all its problems the miners strike is the first serious fight by a group of workers, not over pay but over jobs. And it's the first industry-wide strike to remain solid in the face of fierce resistance from not merely the employers but also the state via the police, and equally in the face of considerable difficulties. From the start it was seen on both sides as not merely an attack on the NCB's plans but as a challenge to the government. As such it has already had an effect in boosting the morale of other sectors of workers in pursuing their own claims — the relative timidity with which the opportunities have been

taken up testifying as much to the degree to which workers had been convinced of the need for the 'new realism', as it does to the cunning of the government or the manipulations of the unions.

But the importance of the strike goes beyond the fact that it raises the general temper of class struggle by setting an example. For us as revolutionaries it is important because the experience of being involved in such a mass struggle is a radicalising one. It creates the conditions within which talking of overthrowing society becomes more than daydreaming.

Participation in intense collective struggles has the effect of changing peoples sense of the inevitability of the everyday misery of capitalism, and of their ability to act to change it.

People acquire a heightened sense of how they are exploited, and as the system reacts to their struggle, of the meaning of class divisions and the violence with which capitalism will defend them. The experience of acting collectively can expose the hollowness of 'normal' relations at work. The experience of being abused in the media sets in perspective the same sort of attack on other strikers. Together with the contact with other workers the struggle brings it can deepen the sense of having a common class identity.

The experience of struggle can lead people to admit, and express class anger. At the same time it can provide an experience of autonomy, arising from the sense of individual and collective power in activity, and from the sense of freedom from the normal constraints and institutions of capitalist society. Both experiences are transient — but they are vital in the development of class consciousness.

People can come to see through the political institutions of capitalist society as a result of their experiences. Not just the class divisions separating them from their employers, but the class role of the state and it's servants in aiding them. Not just the openly anti-worker groupings but the false friends — the socialist and leftist parties, and the trade unions. People can come to an understanding that these institutions are not eternal and unchangeable, they can acquire a sense of the possibility of things being different, being better. The experience of acting collectively, of organising their own struggle can lead to a sense of class power. It can lead to an understanding of the need for organised collective struggle to resist and challenge capitalism, and that such struggle cannot be organised through or by the institut-

ions of capitalist society, whether unions or parties.

In a struggle on the scale of the miner's strike these effects aren't confined to the workplace — as we've seen they have embraced the communities within which miners live, even their families. The experience of the struggle breaking out of the original limits of the factory or pit can lead to a sense of how the struggle is linked to other struggles. How one's own oppression and exploitation are linked to the different oppressions and exploitation of others.

Some of these elements are present in all situations of class conflict, even the most isolated and individual. The significance of mass struggles such as the miners is that the degree and intensity to which they are experienced is magnified. And on the other hand they are no longer confined to the participants — a struggle such as the miners takes place in the public sphere in a way most strikes are not. It spreads the experiences arising from the strike to all other workers — even if it is only as passive spectators.

The fact that people come to a greater sense of class consciousness as the result of class conflict, says nothing about how that consciousness will be applied, or about what conclusions will be drawn from it. Much of the experience remains just that — something which people don't have the language to articulate or discuss. And the sense of the experiences importance which leads people to radical ideas to find ways of describing and understanding their experiences, mostly leads them to ways of thinking and systems of ideas which far from challenging capitalism reinforce it, and far from leading to revolution lead to the conviction that it's impossible.

Class activity and consciousness, which arise from the experience of class conflict are the necessary precondition for coming to understand the need for and possibility of revolution — but they do not automatically create that understanding. The purpose of revolutionary organisation is organised activity to develop a better understanding of class conflict, class society and what is needed to replace them. And to develop ways of making those ideas clear and accessible to other proletarians.

The real significance of the miners' strike is to impress on us the need to develop the organisational links which can make talk of an autonomous, collective class response a reality. For us as revolutionaries, this means coming to terms with the urgency and scale of what has to be done.

MATERIAL SOLIDARITY

As the weeks pass the question of material aid for the strikers becomes more important. Inevitably after an initial enthusiasm, the amount of contributions reaches a plateau, or even falls. Since for many this is the only form of support that is possible, its important that efforts are kept up.

It is also important that wherever possible people make sure that funds go direct to help the strike rather than into the NUM national funds to pay the £115,000 a week spent on administration costs.

As the precedent for sequestration of funds has been set in South Wales it will become increasingly important to see that money doesn't get caught up in wrangling between regional executives and sequestrators, but gets to branch or pit level direct.

For those not sure of where money will go (this is particularly the case in London where official collections have been sewn up between the NUM executive and the S.E. Region TUC) should try channelling resources towards the women's support groups direct. Many local initiatives exist collecting food and also urgently needed household goods for distribution direct. Less obvious than food but just as much needed are baby food and toiletries : soap, sanitary towels etc.

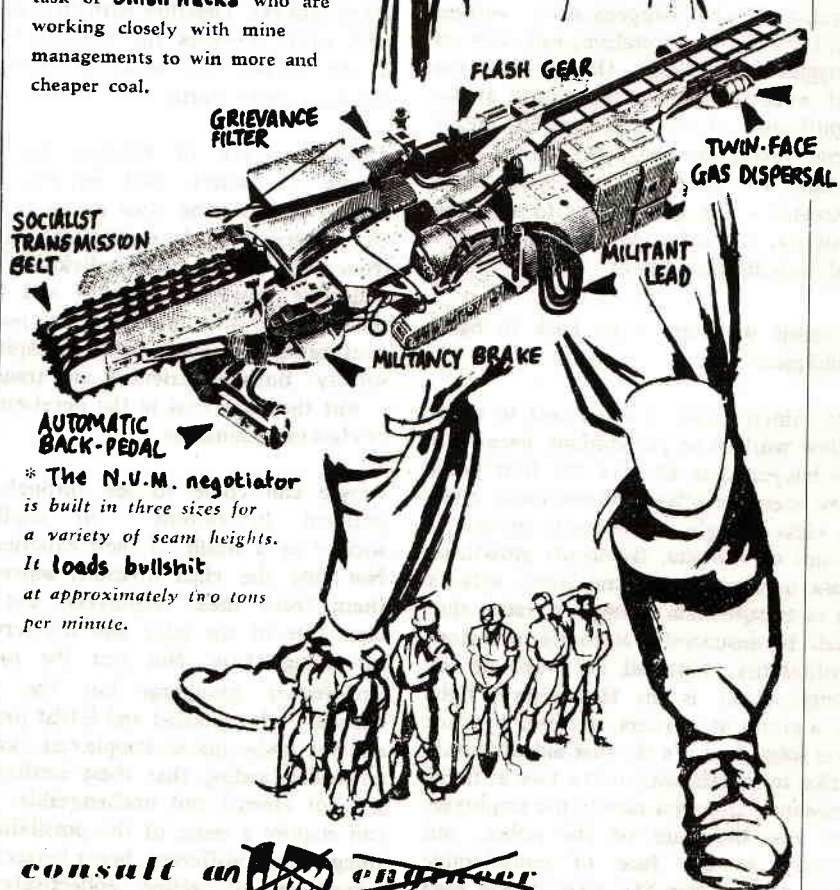
COMMUNIST PARTY COMMUNITY POLICING

In a recent issue of the New Statesman Beatrix Campbell, one of the CP feminists who have been intervening strongly in the womens support groups wrote that "The very act of collecting has been made political by a police force which appears to be desperately improvising devices to nail any public mobilisation of support for the miners". Its an accurate description of the activities of her fellow CP members on Glasgow Trades Council. Here the efforts of the CP nationwide to build their own dwindling ranks through support activities can be seen in their true colours. Local collections of various kinds - some by leftist groups - but also regular street collections by Glasgow anarchists, unemployed groups and others, were being handed over direct to local pits. The trades council circulated rumours that money was being misappropriated and threatened to call in the police if collections were not stopped. In the meantime they used their influence with the Regional Executive of the NUM to try to have the collections refused. The Exec. wouldn't go that far but did insist that pits return money - which they would accept however for their own regional funds.

NEGOTIATING MACHINES TO MAKE ~~MEN~~ GIANTS DWARVES

Given the tools to bring out the coal, to-day's miner has the output of a giant. His labour is multiplied a hundredfold by such machines as the **N.U.M. Bureau-Crat**, a continuous cutting and loading machine which is hitting new heights with production figures in British coalfields.

The harnessing of such great power and its application to mine mechanisation schemes is the task of **union hacks** who are working closely with mine managements to win more and cheaper coal.



* The **N.U.M. negotiator** is built in three sizes for a variety of seam heights. It loads **bullshit** at approximately two tons per minute.

consult an ~~engineer~~
N.U.M. negotiator

CLASS STRUGGLE AND THE IDEA OF REVOLUTION

When we were discussing our editorial on the miners' strike, different points of view emerged about the connection between class struggles and revolution. This article develops one of those points of view.

We do not believe that strikes, or any other mass class struggles, automatically lead to a growth of revolutionary consciousness — an awareness of the need for social revolution as the only real solution to oppression and exploitation, the alienation and loss of community that characterises this society.

To explain what we mean by this, it will be useful to look at two versions of the fallacy. One holds that workers are in possession of a merely 'trade union', or reformist, consciousness — that is to say, they behave like the dogs in Pavlov's experiments. On their own, workers may be able to work out which levers to press to obtain extra food pellets or avoid electric shocks, but by themselves they cannot divine the existence of the cage, or a world outside, since they have been born and reared under laboratory conditions (capitalism). They must therefore be either injected with a consciousness-raising drug ('revolutionary theory'), or else forcibly set free by a benevolent animal liberationist ('Revolutionary Organisation'). An obvious feature of this model of consciousness is that in order to be a revolutionary, or to fully appreciate the benefits of having a revolution bestowed upon us, it is helpful for us to be put through repeated doses of pain and failure, the more the better. For workers in struggle, repression and defeat are held to contain valuable 'lessons' which can be 'applied' later. How well we respond to the revolutionary imperative will indicate how well or badly we have absorbed these 'lessons'. In relation to the miners strike, the interpretations of the left are dealt with in Playtime 8. For now, we would point out two things. If this is a true model, it would imply that it would be possible for the working class to create communism without realising what they were doing. It would also suggest, in the light of the 'lessons' of 1926 and the last five years, that the miners would have to be worse than pig-ignorant to even think of going on strike in the first place. Our objection is simply that we are not animals, neither can we rely on capitalism and its ally, the left, to herd us towards revolution.

We can remain in the laboratory, however, to illustrate a second theory of 'revolutionary consciousness', the pathological (spontaneist) version. Certain dogs go mad or become infected with rabies ('class anger') due to the cramped conditions in the cage (alienation), or the introduction of foreign microbes (anarchism, situationism, autonomism), and go round biting all the other dogs, who in turn become so violent ('enragee') that the cage bursts open at the hinges. In one moment the scientist (bourgeois) is torn to shreds and the dogs discover absolute freedom ('take their desires for reality', "every dog will live in his own Battersea Dogs Home", etc). Apart from the fact that, in practice, rabies causes blindness, thus making it difficult to distinguish between the scientist, the cage and the other dogs, and normally ends in early and painful death, our objection would be that being mad to that extent would make it difficult to establish communist social relations, for which it will be useful to know the difference between our desires and reality, to communicate with one another beyond just foaming at the mouth.

Revolutionary consciousness is neither an automatic extension

of militant class consciousness, nor something which simply has to be added to it — any more than revolution is simply an extension of 'militant' class activity, or an application of revolutionary 'forms' of activity to the struggle. Getting back to the miners strike, revolutionary groups have variously identified *tactics* ('generalising', 'democratising' the strike); *strategies* (rioting, vandalism, blocking roads); or *social organisms* (womens' support groups, the 'community of struggle'), as containing the essence of revolution. We do not agree; revolutionary consciousness is just that — the desire for revolution — not an awareness of the best way to extend, consolidate or win a particular strike; and revolution is what it implies — the overthrow of capitalism and the development of a community in which the institutionalised divisions of class and market exchange have been dissolved; not simply the next step up from a general strike, or a mass insurrection.

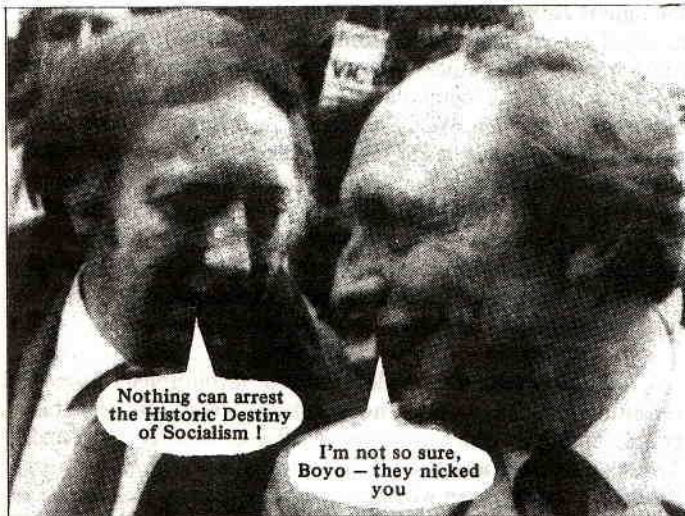
A revolution cannot take place without revolutionary *ideas*, and revolutionary ideas do not emerge automatically from reformist and defensive struggles, however massive or bitterly contested. The revolutionary idea is a recognition that revolutionary change is worth pursuing, even when revolution itself may seem so far away, or what lies beyond it so hard to imagine, that to believe in it is practically an act of faith. All the same, it is a cliché that when revolutions happen, the professional revolutionaries are the most surprised; rarely do our notions of revolution match up to the reality. The revolutionary idea does not in itself help us to get from here to the revolution we desire to see; moreover, the possession of such an idea is worse than useless if we do not constantly test it against our own and others' experiences of struggle — for then it becomes mere *ideology*, a barrier to understanding and effective action.

To tell workers that revolution is a Historical Necessity, and that revolution is the inevitable consequence of an understanding gained through a direct experience of mass struggle, is usually an act of self-mystification. Very few of today's revolutionaries could honestly say that they first perceived the need for revolution in that way (unless, of course, we use that argument to 'prove' that there are no revolutionaries, as some have tried to do.) For most of us, it has been a matter of *finding the words* to express a feeling about our own lives and the world; words which we did not invent ourselves, even though we may have had to modify, edit and add to them again and again in the process of understanding what revolution means. We do not often get a chance to test this understanding by participating ourselves in mass struggle.

Little wonder that the miners, faced with a barrage of propaganda telling them that the best way for them to win the strike would be to follow a course of action which (by the way) leads logically to revolution, and that they should 'link up' with other workers because it is in their interests 'as workers', have remained impervious to such 'revolutionary theory': *as workers*, our only interest is revolution, precisely

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to put an end to that status. Moreover, the assorted leftists and ideologues who infest picket lines, for the most part carry proletarian credentials which even according to their own criteria of correct consciousness would have to be forged, made up or borrowed from a friend. The most that many of them have done in the way of 'class struggle' is worrying about whether they'll be found out, or lying awake at night fantasising about a mass movement in whose ideological embrace they could hide their (self-inflicted) shame. They have forgotten that what brought them to revolutionary theory in the first place was a revolutionary *idea*, the *proposal* of a revolution which would put an end to the 'thousand dull blows and daily humiliations' which fill their lives under capitalism. So instead of using revolutionary theory as a weapon of clarity, making sense of their own experience and activity, they turn it into ideology, a shield which they can use to blank out their own past, and a mystifying veil with which they will disguise to themselves and others the possibility of a different future. This is the origin of the Party



WORKERS PLAYTIME COMPETITION : What do YOU think Scargill and Kinnock are saying to each other? Secondly : what title shall we give to the new Leftist Communist party we will be setting up in the new year? The 10 best suggestions will win FREE and EXCLUSIVE life membership.

mentality. 'Revolutionary' groups are full of people who claim to have come from nowhere in particular, and, in practice, seem to be going straight back there. But today's 'revolutionaries' cannot be compared with the generation of proletarians who will overthrow world capitalism. At least we hope not.

There are moments during struggles, those moments when autonomy is experienced, when revolution may seem an immediate possibility. When the strike or riot is over, the experience fades to a memory, frequently one that people don't have the words to express ; and the idea that revolution is possible comes to seem quite utopian. In the attempt to retain hold of this experience, people look for the language to describe it in the existing political traditions. It is at this point that every variety of leftist Creeping Jesus slithers out to meet them. For every one of these reptiles, the strike is just an opportunity to sell more papers. For those of us who believe that the only solution to the horrors of capitalism is revolution, not leftist palliatives, the need to make our ideas available is just as great . Not because holding them gives us any advantage or privilege, nor because we believe they are the last word or the definite answer, but because in spite of their failings they have helped us make sense of our own experiences, thereby convincing us that the revolutionary solution they point to is correct. There is nothing 'special' about revolutionary ideas ; they are not the property or domain of 'intellectuals', but the product of the experience of generations of revolutionary militants.

It would be tempting to fetishise the moment of clarity when anything seemed possible ; or else fall into the other trap, of trying to account for the apparent 'impossibility' of revolution – the fact that it seems so far away – by filling in the gap with comforting notions about the 'inevitable march of history', which will cause the old world to collapse and reveal communism as the only alternative to annihilation. But revolution will not be the end of history, and communism is not inevitable. There are times when capitalism appears to create conditions favourable to those who wish to destroy it ; but it will not destroy itself.

Class analysis is essential to understanding capitalist society, but it does not give us the key to the revolutionary process which will put an end to all classes. Capitalism will not lay the social, economic or political foundations of communism. The increasing integration and co-ordination of production and the market (the 'socialisation of production') which takes place under capitalism cannot create a unified proletariat ; in fact, this 'socialisation' has gone hand-in-hand with increasing social atomisation. The proletariat will only discover itself in the process of revolution. Until then, it can only be defined negatively, as all those dispossessed by capitalism. The proletariat emerges as a community of *opposition* to capitalism and *for* communism ; it starts to actively reject the divisions imposed by capitalism, as well as the roles capitalism assigns us – 'workers', 'unemployed', 'dependents', etc. Society is polarised into the most fundamental class division of all : for and against the revolution.

This 'community of opposition' is not the same thing as the sort of 'community of struggle' which has emerged during the miners' strike – an alliance between different groups (local retailers, miners' dependents, etc) acting in support of the strike and in defence of their own sectional interests, closely tied to the sectional interest of the miners. The experience of the strike is certainly extremely important, because in practice it reveals interdependence, demonstrates that social relations are not 'natural' fixed or 'eternal'. But this kind of semi-autonomous organisation is also developing in the mining communities where most of the miners are working, where the 'resolve' of the scabs has 'hardened' during the course of the struggle. Scabs are now actively campaigning for a return to work, supported no doubt by other sections of their local community (miners' families, shopkeepers, police, local employers etc), also intent on defending 'their' interests. The difference is that this last sort of revitalised community is renewed precisely around the defence of *normal* capitalist social relations – narrow self-interest, class conciliation, and so on. While the scabs have been justifying their miserable, craven posture in the way scabs have always justified their actions – HP installments to pay, TV licences to buy – the possibility for a change of attitude to capitalist reality exists among the strikers (many of whom have found that since the strike began, they hardly watch TV any more.) Significantly, some have begun to talk about the future in such a way as to suggest that in some sense they prefer being on strike to being at work, in spite of the hardship.

The kinds of organisation and activity generated by mass struggles like the miners strike cannot be said to portend revolution, or prefigure human activity and social organisation in a communist society. Nevertheless, isolated and partial struggles can disrupt the routine of daily life under capitalism to such an extent, that they give rise to moments when a proposal of revolution can suddenly seem the most blindingly obvious proposal of all. In these moments, the exhilaration of struggle, a sense of power and freedom, the intense feelings of solidarity, can make the return to normality an unbearable prospect. Such moments vanish, just when they began to seem more real than reality itself. But they leave behind them a sharper awareness of the misery of daily life, and the possibility of something different.

The executive of the Union of Communication Workers (UCW) is recommending that the membership accept a "5.2%" pay rise. The union's propaganda claims that this is a tremendous 'victory' of negotiation – pats on the back all round for the great and glorious leadership?

Before we examine this 'victory' in detail, it would be of value to look at the 'fighting record' of the union (which used to be called the Union of Post Office Workers : UPW), from the time of the disastrous defeat of 1971.

In '71 the executive, led by ex-CP member Tom Jackson, reached an impasse in pay negotiations, and called the members out on all-out strike. They had given the Post Office two weeks' notice of this action and agreed, on the members' behalf, to give full assistance in clearing the postal system first. Nothing in the sorting offices – no bargaining power. This was the first tactical farce of the strike.

By Post Office standards, the strike was a long one, lasting 7 weeks in all. But although the postal service was at a standstill, a key section of the union's membership – the telephonists – were not called out. Instead of completely paralysing the communications industry, the executive effectively turned a blind eye.

During the strike, the Tory government (led by Heath) more or less ended the Post Office's monopoly on letter carriage and allowed various cowboy outfits to set up in business, effectively scabbing on the strike.

The pay claim was for £3 'consolidated' (i.e., included in the calculation of pensions and overtime rates.) After seven weeks of hardship, the union recommended the workers return for only £2 – fractionally above the Post Office's initial offer – of which only £1 would be consolidated into basic rates of pay. After the strike, the rumour in TUC and ministerial circles was that the government had been on the brink of caving in to the full demand.

The workers returned disheartened, lacking any faith in the union leadership, and totally disorganised.

The effects of this bureaucratic sell-out are still felt today in the postal industry. There is a reluctance to take any kind of industrial action. Until recently, the union executive was constantly reminding the rank and file about the defeat of 1971, every time there was a stir of militancy.

1977 : SIGNS OF A REBIRTH

In 1977, when the Cricklewood branch

unanimously refused to deliver mail to Grunwicks – and a number of large District Offices 'stacked and blacked' Grunwick's mail – the executive bore down on the members and threatened them with expulsion for taking unofficial action. By this time, local management had locked out the Cricklewood workers. The executive said their actions were the result of a court order obtained by the National Association for Freedom (defenders of democracy, when it suited the extreme right.) The workers were not intimidated, but the Grunwick issue – which was on the brink of involving the whole union membership – had the wind taken out of its sails by the bureaucrats of the TUC and various unions, who were bowing to legalities. Thus, potential solidarity action

point for these militants was an organisation known as 'Post Office Worker'. It transpired that this was backed and given resources by the Socialist Workers Party. Those who wanted to become active in POW, but who were not prepared to follow the 'Party line', were frozen out. A good many militants were lost in this sectarian way.

POW produced a magazine which appeared every couple of months (more often, if a specific issue needed commenting upon.) All of this propaganda was, however, subjected to the approval of party hacks before it was published. When, in 1981, the SWP's Central Committee decided that workplace organisation was not the way to achieve the Trotskyite ideal, the mantle of

CHANCE OF STRIKE LOST IN POST

An Article from a postal worker
in the rank-and-file group
'Communication Worker', about
the recent 'victory' over pay.

was sabotaged.

In the same year, postal workers were involved in the 'South Africa Fiasco'. They had agreed to black all mail going to South Africa, as a protest against apartheid. NAFF went to the courts once again, and again the union leadership suppressed this popular action.

Twice in the space of twelve months, the union leadership had proved it was more concerned with upholding the 'rule of law' than supporting the workers' wishes. On two occasions, rank and file initiatives had been hindered, suppressed and finally defeated by the leadership.

At Branch level, a tiny minority of militants were beginning to flex their muscles. From about 1976, the rallying

Rank-and-File organisation was handed over to the Militant Tendency's 'Broad Left'. This, while still in existence, has proved to be of a poorer nature than the old POW. The Broad Left, as its name suggests, entertains any individual from the Labour Party and all points left; however, its record of activity within the workplace is non-existent compared with POW, which had, at least, been very active around the Grunwick dispute, and effective in combatting the National Front's attempts to organise within the industry. The Broad Left, which is an arm of the Labour Party, stands on the platform of firstly; Trade Union reform, to be achieved via the ballot box by having its candidates elected to bureaucratic positions – replacing one set of corrupt officials with equally corruptible ones (the Broad Left's Gerry Casey was elected in 1982,

whereupon he denied all knowledge of the Broad Left. Subsequently, he was instrumental in conning the workers at Basingstoke back to work after they had struck in solidarity with a sacked colleague). Secondly ; propaganda aimed specifically at the carnival of the Annual Conference. No serious attempt at organising in the workplace has, or will be, undertaken by these reformist individuals.

Recently, a revolutionary alternative to the Broad Left – Communication Worker – has appeared. Not under the wing of any organisation, CW is limited at the moment to propaganda, due to its size. CW's organisation is collective : all items published in its name are discussed, altered (if needs be) and agreed before being printed. The group



has grown in spite of opposition from the Post Office, the union and the Broad Left, and the feeling of the members of CW is "from little acorns ..."

WHAT'S BEHIND THE 5.2% 'VICTORY'?

Now that some light has been shed on the attitude and background of the union's membership, let's look at the 1984 pay round.

The executive fronted a deal that would mean a 5.2% rise (meagre in the light of five years of pay rises below the *official* rate of inflation). The claim had also been for an extra day's holiday and a three-hour reduction in the working week (no improvement on this has been obtained since the 1960's. The majority of postal workers are on a 43 hour week.) All of these demands

were to be met without 'strings' being attached.

The Post Office's initial offer was 2%. At the union's Annual Conference, the executive sought and got a mandate to call industrial action (the shape of which would be determined by the executive), if the claim were not met. The cynical and those with long memories among the membership were very dubious about the shape of their tactics and plans for industrial action.

Then, quite spontaneously, wildcat strikes broke out up and down the country. Firstly in Cambridge, where the action was linked to a number of local issues as well. From there the action spread – Milton Keynes, Peterborough, Luton, London SE1, SW1 and so on. On May 30th, an unofficial rally, held in a park next to the building where negotiations were taking place, took up the slogan that "5.2 is not enough, we want 15%!" General Secretary Alan Tuffin reluctantly addressed the crowd. In concluding his rousing speech, in which he promised "your executive would not settle for less", he insisted that everyone should return to work immediately! The wildcat action spread.

By the middle of the next week, the Post Office had upped the offer to 4.9%. With a little bit of financial juggling with the overtime rates (strings, effectively), the offer was made to appear as 5.2% – the massive 'victory achieved by the union's skilled negotiating team'.

None of the improvements in work conditions were included in the offer, but the executive promised 'urgent and meaningful negotiations' (the cynical and those with long memories are definitely not falling for this.)

Laying aside the wildcat action (which obviously helped), the miners' fight for survival has, as with the railworkers, forced the government's hand in agreeing to improve the Post Office's offer.

Odd pockets of militants within the industry realised that the executive's readiness to accept the offer was effectively scabbing on the miners' fight. They also realise that the wildcat actions were instrumental in changing the Post Office's mind in the first place. The fight now is one of propaganda and organisation. Communication Worker sees the immediate task to be one of informing workers in the industry of the reality of the executive's con, and to encourage and assist in the formation of more groups like CW up and down the country.

For further information about CW, contact:

**'Communication Worker', Box 15,
136 Kingsland High Street, London E8**

About Us

The editorial group of *Workers Playtime* are mostly members of the London Workers Group (see details elsewhere in this issue). *Playtime* is however an organisation in its own right, and not the public face or theoretical journal of the LWG.

Unless otherwise indicated individual articles reflect the thoughts, fantasies and inadequacies of their authors (in no particular order).

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

We especially welcome accounts of class struggle by participants, or people with a closer perspective than we have. We won't change things without consulting you but we may add an introduction to fill in background. We'd obviously prefer to do that with you so means of contacting you easily would be useful.

The content of *Playtime* has largely been accounts of workplace class struggle, and commentary on capitalist politics. That reflects the interests and knowledge of the people who write for it. We do not see the workplace as the only site of class struggle, or as more important than its appearance elsewhere. We'd particularly welcome accounts or correspondence from people who have experience of other areas of struggle.

Contrary to the impression we might give its not necessary that articles be very long and stuffed with quotes, facts and so on. Short punchy stuff is equally welcome.

If you do want to write a full article, get in touch. *Playtime* is collectively edited, and articles are discussed at *Playtime* meetings before a decision is made to publish. Disagreements are discussed and stuff is frequently rewritten. So its best to contact us as soon as possible with an outline of what you want to write.

We don't guarantee to publish stuff sent to us but we won't change things (Beyond adding or subtracting spelling mistakes, subheads and illustrations) without consulting you. (We may cut letters but we will indicate we have done so). If we disagree we may publish a response alongside it.

If letters are intended for publication please make it clear what you're arguing about so people aren't obliged to read back issues they may well not have, to fully appreciate your genius. In any competition for space short snappy letters will win.

If you fancy helping to produce *Playtime* get in touch. If you just want to see what sort of idiots produce it, or have a discussion about it then meet those of us at the London Workers meetings every Tuesday.

DEADLINE FOR CONTRIBUTIONS FOR THE NEXT ISSUE (PLANNED FOR THE END OF SEPTEMBER) IS TUESDAY 18th SEPTEMBER.

NEW ECONOMIC MIRACLE !!!

BOSSSES GET QUART FROM A PINT POT

One of the central tasks of the revolution will be the reduction of working time to the absolute minimum. Communism will mean the progressive abolition of work *as such* once wage labour has been overthrown. Whereas at present capitalist technology requires workers to devote a lifetime of labour to create free time for their superiors, under communism, technology would be developed and applied to create free time for all.

In the meantime, we have to fight for the best deal going. Under capitalism, it was not until the second half of the nineteenth century that working hours began to be reduced; up until then, capitalist accumulation depended largely on the extension of the working day, ultimately, to the limits of human endurance. Workers' struggles to impose the implementation of regulations limiting the length of the working day accelerated the introduction of technology and methods of production which could increase the productivity of labour (output per worker/hour). By the first half of the twentieth century, many workers in western Europe had secured a 40-hour week; but the increased *intensity* of labour more than compensated for the surplus value capital had lost from the imposition of shorter working hours.

Today, in the midst of a recession which has no end in sight it is all the more necessary for businesses to raise productivity whilst squeezing wages.

For capital, the less business there is, the more profit has to be made on the business done. In spite of the promises and the sci-fi propaganda, the "new technology" does not mean a life of leisure and abundance, but only hard work and unemployment.

The continuing intensification of labour demands that workers' lives be strictly organised around the demands of capital. This is precisely what they mean when they talk about greater "flexibility" and "mobility" of labour. And the unions' response in timidly "demanding" a 35-hour week only shows that they are ever ready to fulfil their role as the

agents of any planned rationalisation.

In Germany, the land of "economic miracles", workers have been fighting for a reduction in working hours. After a series of skirmishes in the spring (see Playtime June 1984) 58,000 engineering workers in Bade-Wuerttemberg were called out on strike.

It was the response of Europe's biggest union, IG Metall, to the metallurgical employers' federation's refusal to enter negotiations on the demand for a 35-hour week, without any reduction in wages. IG Metall had no choice but to call some sort of strike. For three years on end it had accepted compromise after compromise on wages. The result of this has been a cut in workers' purchasing power, and a consequent rise in discontent amongst the rank-and-file.

When the bosses' federation snubbed the union bureaucracy, IG Metall proposed a members' ballot for a strike. The union's rule-book requires at least 75% of the workers concerned to vote in favour of strike action before they can be called out. If the union leadership was hoping this would let them off the hook, they were deceiving

themselves — an enormous majority voted for a strike. The bureaucrats now had to show that the union had teeth. As the president of the union's Company Committee at Mercedes-Funk said, "The young ones are more political, and also more impatient. They would like to see faster reactions". He himself was to experience evidence of this new combativity, in his own factory.

The demand for a 35-hour week with no cut in wages had been concocted by the union. But any discussion of its implications was restricted to the usual empty posturing as far as the "public debate" was concerned, although more could be learnt by reading the small print.

In issue no. 21 of the 1983 edition of the union journal 'Metall', the union's president Hans Mayr had made one thing abundantly clear: "What is spent on reducing the working week will no longer be available for increasing wages". Such a declaration showed in no uncertain terms the labour movement's acceptance that any reduction in working hours would be indirectly an increase in wage rates, and consequently, the workers

In the true spirit of proletarian internationalism (and further to the cause of confusing our leftist-communist critics), Playtime is proud to present the combined efforts of ourselves and two overseas groups. Based on a piece by the Bremen Marxist Group (West Germany), amended and translated into French by Echanges (France/Netherlands), the article has been further updated and amended to its present form.



German worker shows far-sightedness of the trade unionist perspective

would have to abandon any wage claims whilst pursuing the demand for 35 hours. This also implied that wages lost in previous years — fairly substantial losses — would not be recovered. What's more, the union did not even foresee an improvement in wages if, eventually, productivity was to rise. This would normally be cash in hand for the haggling over the renewal of Germany's unSocial Contract. Mayr and co. even had the audacity to declare, "With the claim for a shorter working week, we can put an end to all the ridiculous wage demands of past years". In effect, IG Metall was informing its membership that all future wage claims were being dismissed as "ridiculous" in advance.

Working for 35 instead of 40 hours for the same wages may appear an attractive proposition, and the union leadership was counting on the workers seeing it this way. But the demand also presented great advantages for the bosses. History has often shown that a reduction in working hours is accompanied by a rise in the productivity of labour. The following statement, which can be read in a union pamphlet entitled "The 35-hour week: The Right Track", is not without foundation. "Half of the working hours which would be lost in a weekly shift can be made up for by an increase in productivity." (And this is assuming the same methods of production). So if wages are kept down, whilst hourly output per worker is increased, then the result is a relative reduction in wage rates. The union was giving, in advance, a green light to the bosses for this relative wage reduction. There is no getting away from the fact that, whilst on the one hand, the union issued a call to struggle, supposedly in the interest of the workers, on the other hand it gave all sorts of guarantees for a modernisation and restructuration in the interest of capitalism.

The same pamphlet also says, "When we have reached agreement on wages, we want to fix very well defined limits on overtime, and come to a settlement which will make up for it by way of extra time off". Overtime would obviously be an important issue if a cut in working hours was implemented; also, the situation of those already working less than 35 hours would have to be considered.

In general, anyone doing overtime gets an increased rate of pay. The plans for the 35-hour week presented by IG Metall suggested the possibility of not paying overtime in money, but compensating for it with time off. But not at any specified time, and especially not at a time suiting the worker. Various union publications clearly show that the bureaucracy running IG Metall wanted to give the bosses a free hand in forcing the

Companies should share out work

Company personnel managers were urged this week to take a lead in sharing out work as a way of reducing unemployment.

Writing in the August issue of *Personnel Management*, Professor Peter Warr says: "We surely need to revise our traditional attitudes to employment and how it is structured."

Professor Warr, who is director of Sheffield University's Social and Applied Psychology Unit, suggests that personnel managers "should be leading the debate at both company and national level.

"If they can draw union or worker representatives into this debate, so much the better, for most unions have so far viewed the problems of unemployment through a traditional and narrow perspective."

His most radical proposal is for a system of unpaid leave. For instance, he says, employers might have contracts for a minimum working year of 40 weeks plus four weeks' paid holiday. Employees could be encouraged to take unpaid leave for the remaining eight weeks, in segments of at least one week at a time.

Such a scheme, he says, would allow

This sort of 'radical' proposal for disguising unemployment is becoming increasingly familiar, as the failure of traditional (Keynesian or monetarist) attempts to solve the problem becomes clearer. In so far as it represents a serious managerial strategy, it makes short-time working a more 'attractive' proposition by introducing an element of voluntarism. The effect would be to produce a more atomised workforce, such as exists in the new-technology industries, where more 'flexible' working arrangements are already fairly common. The 'debate' in the recent German dispute saw the two 'sides' of industry struggling to find a common ground on these strategies.

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workers to do overtime in return for a promise of time off, but only when this wouldn't upset the course of production. The factory would be able to mobilise and demobilise its manpower according to its requirements, and would in this way gain a much greater flexibility. Here is a form of mastery of labour power that every capitalist will find ideal. The worker wouldn't be able to refuse overtime if the order-book was full, and would then have to take his days owing in slack periods. The unions even invented a neat phrase for this, "the concentration of free time". It is quite clear who would be doing the "concentrating, and who would be "concentrated". And indeed, the compromise deal eventually cooked up to end this dispute assured the bosses exactly this sort of flexibility.

So that there would be no doubt as to the nature of the work process aimed at, the union spoke of a "levelling" of time off and a "levelling" of overtime. With an unexpected consequence: some workers would receive lower wages than they do at the moment. However, this is true to the present orthodoxy in IG Metall, as well as the DGB union confederation (the equivalent of the TUC), which thinks that many workers are earning too much. The July 1983 issue of 'Gewerkschaftliche Monatshefte' (Union Monthly), which reflects the views of the unions' social-democratic leadership, said, "A situation in which some can do overtime whilst others are unemployed is intolerable". IG Metall also argues that the state unemployment scheme would profit from the 35-hour week, since it has to pay out benefits for those who, at the moment are not

working full time because of the recession. The union argues that the money the scheme has to pay out will be either saved or reduced. This will also benefit the national economy, which seems to be much closer to the hearts of the trade union movement in Germany than the condition of the working class.

But the union's line of argument was at its most specious in its attempts to play on workers' solidarity with the unemployed. In underlining the advantages that the bosses would draw from the 35-hour week, the union's principal argument was that it would bring a reduction in the costs of production. The union also argued that the state could make savings. This idea is developed in the pamphlet mentioned above, 'The 35-hour week: The Right Track'. "The 35-hour week can contribute towards promoting a more favourable situation in industry and in the national economy by means of a reduction in the costs of production. We should not forget that each person on the dole costs the state 24,000 marks (£6,500) per year." This is a completely erroneous argument. If a higher productivity of labour actually improved company profitability, the company would make use of any extra profits to introduce new technology and machines with which it could produce more in less time. Far from leading to a reduction in unemployment, it does not require a very vivid imagination to believe that unemployment would actually increase.

At the start of the strike, a journalist wrote, "If things go according to the

wishes of IG Metall, the conflict will soon be over". There is no reason to doubt it. The union never launched an all-out strike, which would have posed a threat to the union's institutional interests. The union's principal action was to call out car components factories around Stuttgart. It's certainly no fluke that these factories are in a region with no reputation for combativity. This was no warning shot, as the union bureaucracy declared. They hoped that the bosses would immediately come to the negotiating table. "We wish", declared union negotiator Hans Janssen, "to give the bosses one last chance". Janssen did not hide from a journalist another reason motivating these tactics: "This way of conducting the strike will not hurt the union's funds", adding straight away that, if necessary, IG Metall would not have any problems in supporting a long strike.

But 'fighting talk', even as half hearted as this, is no indication as to the way a union bureaucracy intends to conduct a dispute. It was quite clear, early on in the strike, that IG Metall was ready to negotiate with the bosses immediately, and work out a compromise. "In principle, any compromise is possible", declared Janssen. This could only mean that the outcome would be more advantageous for the bosses than for the workers by comparison with the original plan put before the public.

After the bosses had offered a two hour cut in working hours for night and shift workers only, IG Metall responded on

June 6 with a proposal for a three hour cut by 1986. They promised to renounce the 35-hour week if unemployment was down 500,000; the bosses and the government felt confident enough to be able to dismiss this as "unrealistic". Further attempts to find a settlement that could be sold to the workers failed, and on June 15 a mediator was called in. A deal was finally struck on June 27. This was immediately hailed by union leaders as "an achievement of historic dimension". Mayr said, "the door to the 35-hour week has been pushed open, despite the economic recession". This great victory — a cut in working hours to 38.5 from April 1985, with this year's wage rise held to 3.3% and next year's to 2.2% — was immediately greeted by angry workers storming the negotiating hall, complaining of a sell-out.

It soon became clear who had really won this dispute. The 'small print' in fact allows individual companies to negotiate 'flexible' working hours within the 35-40 hour range with workers' councils (factory staff committees). Opel was soon announcing that it would introduce its rationalisation plans before the cut in working hours was implemented. And on 5th July BMW announced that it would scrap plans to hire 1,200 workers. Glee-fully rubbing salt in the wound, BMW's chairman chortled, "It's more than ironic that a labour conflict which started with the apparent aim of creating jobs has exactly the opposite effect".

But complaints of sell-outs are not

enough. The fact is that the unions did not want to lose their authority over the rank and file: the strike had to be led exactly according to their strategy. After calling out workers in Bade-Wuerttemberg and Hesse in the first two weeks, the union took no new initiatives, leaving the employers to punish some 400,000-500,000 workers with lockouts. The union focused the dispute on the courts — contesting the legality of the lockouts and the withholding of unemployment benefit — and on the negotiations. Hans Mayr said he would not "extend the conflict so long as arbitration was in progress".

There were some attempts to wrest control from the bureaucrats and lawyers. For example, at one point early on in the dispute, workers at Mercedes came out on strike on their own initiative. IG Metall's leadership was furious and did all it could to stop their action. But when the workers stuck to their guns, refusing absolutely to accept the order to return to work, the union had no choice but to recognise the strike — grudgingly, of course.

Generally, though, IG Metall, and IG Druck, the printworkers' union which reached a similar deal on July 6, kept a firm grip on the conduct of the dispute. But as 'The Observer' commented on June 3, "The crisis suggests the country is heading into choppy waters". In other words, there is evidence of renewed militancy in the West German working class.

PLAYTIME TRAVEL : Roumania

DRACULA LIVES !

FANCY A wee holiday on the sun-kissed shores of the Black Sea? Then why not take a trip to beautiful Roumania!!! Not only will you get a great tan but you'll feel really good knowing that your foreign currency is contributing to the exciting socialist economy...

For these are, to quote the state-controlled press, "the years of enlightenment" Under the benevolent rule of President Ceausescu you will discover all the delights that the decadent West can offer but enjoy them in an environment unspoiled by capitalist exploitation.

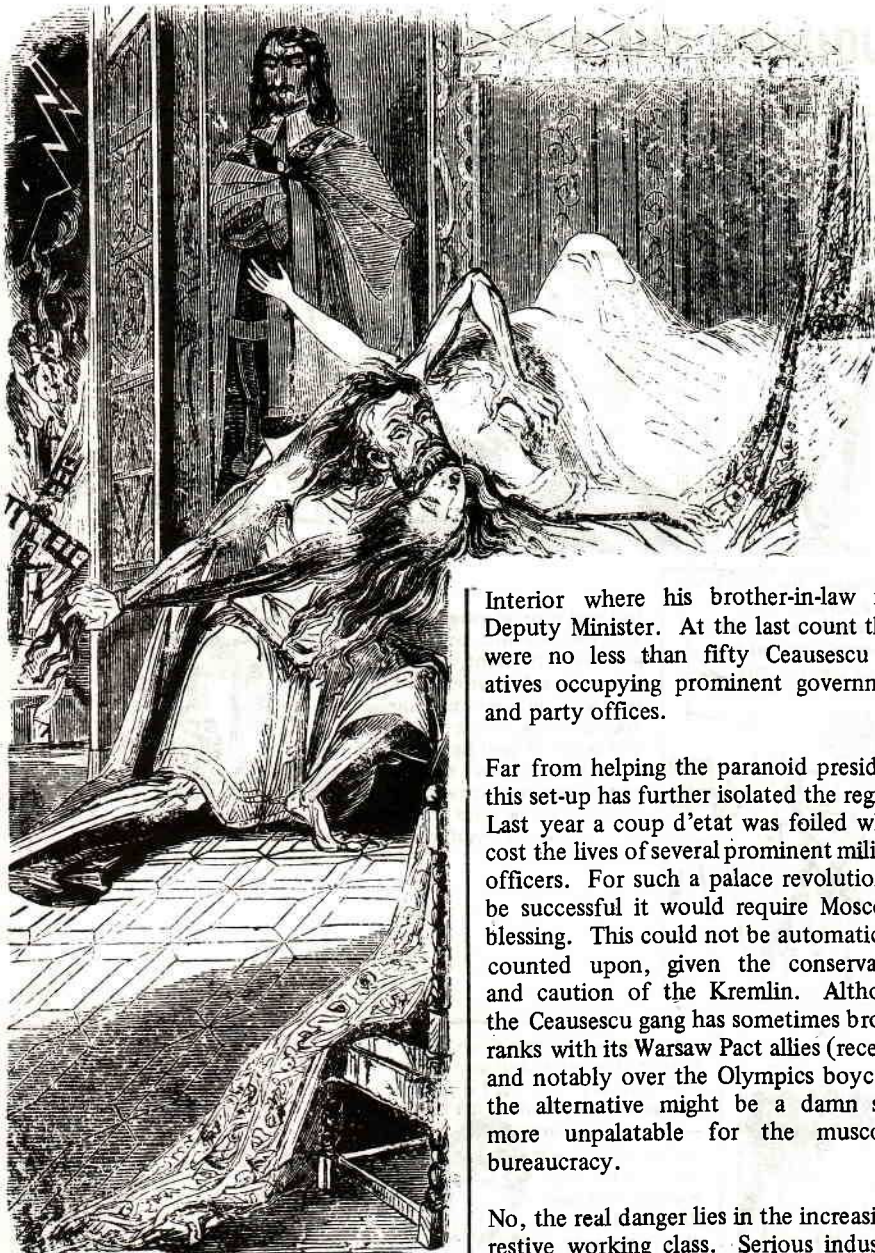
Unhappily, here the travel brochure blurb must end and awful reality take its place. Stray a little from the holiday trail and you will see what really takes place under

"the Great Benefactor's" rule.

In the early hours of the morning the streets are dark — the lamps are unlit due to power cuts. The consumption of electricity has been reduced by 50% because the regime is unable to pay for oil imports to fire the power stations. Room temperatures may not exceed 15C in winter. Television programmes end at 10 pm (except on the birthdays of Mr. Ceausescu and his wife Elena). Elevators only run from the third floor. The Police

have the right to enter any apartment to check on the number of lights in use and to cement-up any sockets deemed by them to be superfluous. The miscreants are liable to heavy fines.

The darkened streets do not prevent people queuing outside shops from 2 am to buy necessities. However, they are often disappointed as there is not enough to go round. With a truly Orwellian touch (typesetter's note: in more than one sense; during WW2 Orwell himself was a strong supporter of capitalist stringency — provided there was a show of 'equality of sacrifice'), Mr. Ceausescu blames the population! "Roumanians eat too much", he asserts, claiming that 30% of illness is due to gluttony. As a result, an official diet has been proclaimed: 10 eggs, 100 grams of butter, 1 kilo of cooking oil, 1 kilo of meat etc. per person per month. Not starvation rations, perhaps, but the trick lies in trying to obtain them. Actual famine conditions exist in some parts of the countryside, in what was known before World War 2 as "the breadbasket of the Balkans".



As the tide of resentment against this so-called 'Communist' government rises, the state becomes ever more authoritarian. Police permission is required to have contact with foreigners (strains of "The Internationale" in background) or to own a typewriter, which might be used to publish a leaflet.

The beleaguered regime is increasingly suspicious of everyone. Intellectual life is at a standstill. 20,000 were 'encouraged' to emigrate last year. The concentration of power into fewer and fewer hands has resulted in a unique development of nepotism in Roumania. President Ceausescu holds no fewer than seven government and party posts. His wife, Elena, is second in command. His brother, Ion, is Deputy Minister of Planning, while his other brother, Ilie, is Minister of Defence. Nicu, his son (alas, not the brightest of lads) has been given the fun job of Minister of Youth. However, the third brother, Nicolae, holds the most important Ministry of the

Interior where his brother-in-law is a Deputy Minister. At the last count there were no less than fifty Ceausescu relatives occupying prominent government and party offices.

Far from helping the paranoid president, this set-up has further isolated the regime. Last year a coup d'etat was foiled which cost the lives of several prominent military officers. For such a palace revolution to be successful it would require Moscow's blessing. This could not be automatically counted upon, given the conservatism and caution of the Kremlin. Although the Ceausescu gang has sometimes broken ranks with its Warsaw Pact allies (recently and notably over the Olympics boycott), the alternative might be a damn sight more unpalatable for the muscovite bureaucracy.

No, the real danger lies in the increasingly restive working class. Serious industrial unrest has expressed itself recently in strike action in the mines at Marmuresh, in the port of Galate, in the city of Brashov and even in the capital, Bucharest.

The possibility of the sort of upheavals that hit Poland 1980-81 is something that exercises the minds of the entire stalinist ruling class. Hence the promise made by Russian Foreign Minister Gromyko during a visit earlier in the year to increase deliveries of oil and coal on very favourable terms. Whether it will be enough to save Ceausescu's decrepit apparatus remains to be seen.

What is beyond dispute is that even the most generous assessment of Roumania's 'People's Democracy' must give members of the Communist Party, and adherents of the 57 varieties of marxist ideology cause to hesitate and ask themselves searching questions about the State and the Party, and the nature of power itself.

As the anarchist Bakunin observed more

than a hundred years ago:

"...in Mr. Marx's popular State, we are told, there will be no privileged classes at all. All will be equal...at least we are promised that... though I doubt whether that promise can ever be kept... There will be a new class... One can well see how, beneath all the democratic and socialistic phrases and promises of Mr. Marx's there survives in his State everything that contributes to the truly despotic and brutal nature of all states."

Bakunin: "Perils of the Marxist State" (1872)

For the people of Roumania it is no longer a theoretical question — it is the living nightmare of state socialism.

The marxists argued that the state could only be ended by creating a strong State, that monopolies could only be abolished by creating one central monopoly, that the Party was needed to lead the working class which was incapable of anything more than a trade union consciousness, that discipline, obedience and military virtues were prerequisite for liberty. To them the anarchists are children, utopians. The state socialists have made the words "internationalism" and "socialism" stink in the nostrils of the working class the world over.

The country which gave us the legend of Count Dracula (Vlad the Impaler) finds his bloody appetites embodied in a new corrupt and brutal ruling class. Dracula lives on in the Orwellian world of "Big Brother" Ceausescu.

This article was sent to us by an anarchist comrade in Glasgow. Those unfortunates who were still awake several hours into the opening ceremony of the great Los Angeles Festival of Nationalism will recall that one of the biggest cheers in the parade of athletes was reserved for the Roumanian team. Their popularity — enhanced, not diminished, by the number of gongs they carried off — exposed the shallowness of the American/Western criticism of human rights violations, corruption etc. in the 'Communist' world. If socialist countries can be encouraged to break with Moscow, anything can be excused, or at least brushed under the carpet. This confirms that the ideological aspect of the rivalry between the superpowers is only secondary (though still important). Yugoslavia and China have already been 'rehabilitated' as a result of their diplomatic and economic ties with the West. All of these countries are capitalist, whatever the political superstructure, and whatever the pressures they feel to strengthen, weaken, renew or renounce alliances and trading ties.