

WORKERS

JUNE 1984

30p

POPULAR YARNS OF CLASS WAR

PLAYTIME



**PITTED AGAINST
THE STATE**

traditional barometer for testing militancy. In this case it was clearly hoped that the hardship it caused miners — tied into the circuit of mortgage and credit debts to a much greater extent than in '72 or '74 — would generate anger that could be channelled into a 'show-down' with the NCB this winter. (The overtime ban supposedly reducing the level of coal stocks before then.)

However it also came at the end of a series of pit closures, in which resistance (seldom solid in the first place) had been scuppered by the regional or national NUM executives. (Most notably at Lewis Merthyr and at Polmaise in Scotland last winter — both in traditionally militant areas). The direct catalyst to the present strike was the announcement of the closure of Cortonwood colliery in militant S.Yorkshire. Having established at a show of hands on March 4th that Cortonwood itself was 'nearly unanimous' in favour of strike action the regional executive called a regional strike confident of overwhelming support in their area. Scotland followed suit. Though rumblings of discontent were audible elsewhere the strike would probably have remained regional. However MacGregor at this point announced his plans for the industry. That production targets had been set which involved the closure of between 20 and 28 pits and at least 20,000 jobs over the next year. He also warned that this would involve 'if necessary' the industries first compulsory redundancies. This deliberate challenge brought out other areas, some by executive strike call, some after ballots. Some ballots were against striking however.

Scargill and the 'militant' NUM leaders waited for a 'domino effect' to occur — one area following another out on strike, or being picketed out by miners from other areas. This avoided a national ballot which they weren't sure of winning until some weeks into the strike, and which in some areas would clearly have been lost — risking a refusal to strike in those areas. On the other hand if the strike didn't spread or the militancy proved not to be there the 'militant' leaders would've shot their bolt — knowing that they would be unlikely to have a second chance for the sort of union run national strike they wanted. While this strategy of inaction worked its course, Scargill spent the first two weeks of the strike in the High Court, arguing over the unions pension fund strategy.

The 'domino effect' strategy suited the executive — it sowed the seeds of future problems. Though confrontation had been signalled for long enough for the NCB and Government to make preparat-

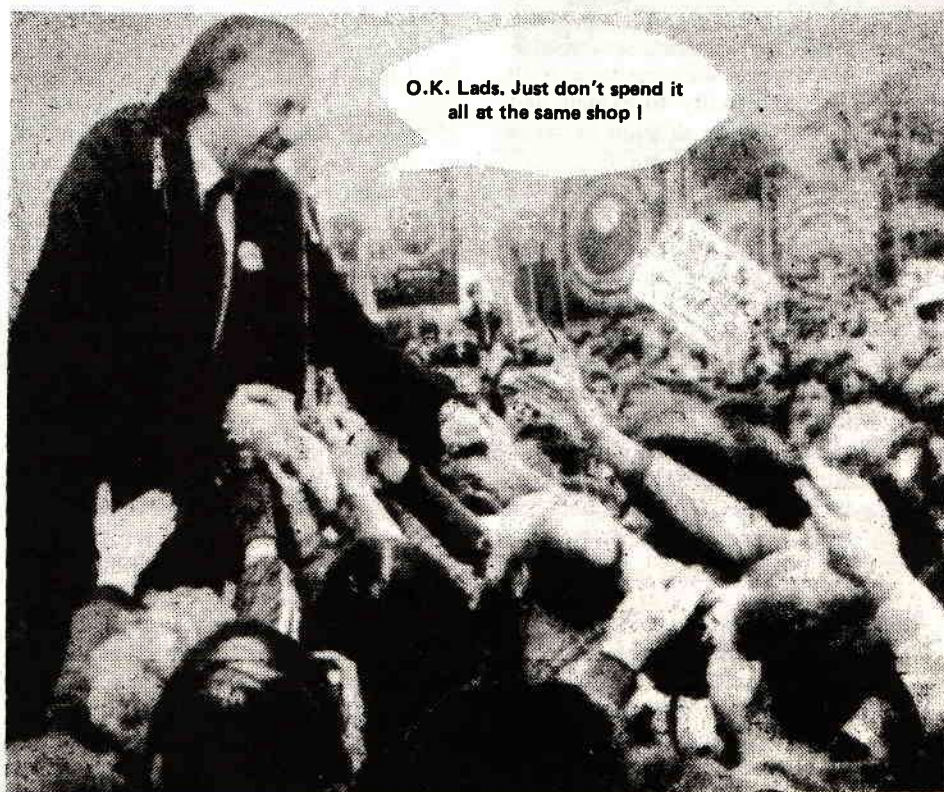
ions, the strikes 'spontaneous' development meant that few preparations were in hand on the part of the union or the miners themselves. Striking with coal stocks high meant a long financially damaging strike. The miners had little time to make financial or material preparations of any kind. In 'moderate' areas not even the unions basic case for a national strike had been put to the miners as pickets from other areas were to discover. The first priority target for picketing became not coal stocks or movements but other pits. In some cases picketing was successful. In others — and particularly in Nottinghamshire it failed abysmally.

Notts has always been a 'moderate' area, and this was not the first time Yorkshire miners had attempted to picket them out. This time it was done without any prior appeals to the Notts miners by either the union or by fellow miners. The national executive were letting matters take their course, and in any case wouldn't tread on the toes of the regional executive. The Notts executive without actually saying so were clearly signalling to the membership that strike calls could be ignored, and busily isolating those militants who had come out on strike. Sadly there was no attempt by Yorkshire miners themselves to go to the Notts miners before picketing. Perhaps they assumed that talking could be left to the union. In fact attitudes had been hardening before the strike began. Notts miners had been working harder during the overtime ban to increase production bonuses. When picketing began the police operation in the county made it all but impossible to approach Notts miners directly. And as violence

developed out of the frustrations of not being able to picket, divisions became set hard. To such an extent that a 'right to work'/'right to a ballot' backlash emerged which eventually turned on the Notts executive when it finally called for picket lines to be observed as a matter of loyalty to the union.

When the picketing began the NCB went to court for an injunction against it. They adjourned it a week later however — partly because they realised attempts at sequestering funds might unite the miners at a time when it seemed the strike might still crash on take-off. But partly because it was clear that the police operation was succeeding in making picketing ineffective. iv

The executive refused to call a national ballot, preferring to defer a decision from meeting to meeting. The furore over the ballot served its purpose in building tensions between militant and moderate executives. Eventually to maintain union 'unity' it was agreed to call a delegate conference instead. The conference endorsed the strike and handed control of it to the national leadership in an attempt to give it purpose and direction. The half-heartedness and lack of preparation on the part of the regional executives was already making itself felt in terms of weakness in picketing. But handing control over to the national leadership can only be against the interests of the miners, in terms both of waging the strike and what the strike will achieve. This is already evident. The unsuccessful picketing in Notts was stepped up. It remained unsuccessful and diverted resources from more important targets. Outside the power



stations and coal depots dispensations allowing coal through for essential services, negotiated between unions, has made nonsense of the picketing. Where other tactics developed such as the motorway blockades it has been on a wildcat basis and the executives have stepped in to stop it. Miners have been warned that if they picket anywhere except where they are sent by the union they won't be legally represented by the union if they finish up in court. More crucially the executives have taken tight control of funds, refusing travel and petrol expenses for any but authorised activities. Since the unions intelligence systems are far less effective than the police's this means that the only hope of making picketing more effective by responding quickly to events on the ground is lost. And since the strike has gone on long enough for the miners own financial reserves to have gone, it means that where they are unable to get their hands on donations direct they are restricted to what the union will permit them to do.

As a result the most innovative actions of the strike so far have been those of the women support groups. These groups have sprung up more or less spontaneous-

ly — admittedly helped by a social welfare worker or two. But unlike their role in previous strikes as a support group they have become active in furthering the strike in their own right. (It has to be said that as activity by 'wives' this has been welcomed by the miners. Attempts at solidarity by women workers like nurses and office workers has not infrequently run into entrenched male chauvinism.)

The NUMs strategy of vainly trying to match the police in set piece picketing and appealing to other union leaderships to police the blacking of coal movements can only lead to defeat. Its move towards staging rallies like those at Mansfield and Sheffield cannot compensate for this. It can only put in doubt even the 'victory' the NUM leadership is seeking — a new 'plan for coal' to agree the rate at which closures are staged and jobs are sold. The union has defied one court injunction and will defy any more. But that is as far as its 'militancy' will extend in practise. From the start the NUM has been dependent on rank and file initiative — the low level of active support amongst miners has led it to try to offset this by strictly controlling activities. That's not to say that they wouldn't welcome

miners initiatives to raise the level of struggle — knowing that the control of strike funds and communications they already hold make it unlikely it could 'get out of hand.' But the bureaucratic stranglehold they have already developed can only act to defuse militancy and initiative. Their strategy can only lead to a 'siege mentality' as greater and greater efforts are put into simply surviving the hardship imposed by the strike, in an almost certainly doomed race to outlast coal stocks.

The miners can only win anything by taking over the extension of the strike themselves. What is urgently needed are local victories — the closure of the steel-works, or the blocking off of non-union ports. Only some sort of success will encourage those strikers who are not taking an active role to get involved. The only alternative is to trust Scargill and follow his 'militant' lead into a drawn out and financially crippling strike. That is why the myth of that 'militancy' has to be exposed and cast aside. Scargill's role at the end of the day is that of every other union leader — not 'Mine Fuhrer' but Herr Peace.

MINERS! BY THE LEFT! QUICK MARCH!

The free spirit of working class solidarity is alive and well in East London if the enthusiasm and commitment generated there by the Miner's strike is anything to go by. The dispute has galvanised Labour party activists in the area as few recent issues have succeeded in doing — because once again the men and women of the NUM are in the vanguard of the fightback against a reactionary Tory Government and its coercive laws. As Chris Morris, press officer for the Hackney trade union sub-committee puts it, 'This is the one people have been waiting for. With the miners in the fight we know we can win.'

London Labour Briefing

There aren't any mines in Hackney, but you wouldn't know it from the way the offers of support and messages of encouragement have been pouring in. By

of myth and distortion, filling the air with their buzzing ...

WE'LL LET THEM STARVE!

Moss Evans, left wing general secretary of the TGWU, promised that his union wouldn't let the miners be "starved back to work". What altruism! (Visions of grimy, emaciated faces beaming with gratitude as Moss serves up the dumplings and gravy). Of course, if they are forced to submit by anything less than famine, tough. Charity begins at home.

Evans' sickening sanctimony is echoed throughout the left and its publications. Every week they print pictures of pickets getting shit beaten out of them by the police. What a morale-booster. Aren't we high enough on righteous indignation? Or is there another message for the working class? The left's journalism — showing miners getting humiliated, and writing up the strike in a 'positive' way — contains the same message as the mainstream propaganda it deplores. But at least on ITN we get so see some kicks going in the right direction.

Of course, nobody has to buy the left's papers or take their leaflets. But if I was on a picket line, and some grinning trot came up carrying a full-page blow-up of a pig atrocity in one outstretched hand, and a packet of pork sausages in the other, I'd have to think about how hungry I was before deciding on the next move.

Other things show the left's desire to portray the miners as martyrs to the bosses and state. When the police get flexible in their interpretation of civil liberties, the left screeches about tapped telephones and the right to move freely on the queen's highway. Well, the police aren't neutral, and it's important to point to the difference between official reality and what's really happening; but the left turns issues of struggle into moral points. What can they say when workers block motorways, burn down signal boxes and sabotage vehicles? In public they ignore it, in private they apologise — "oh, well the workers are forced to do these things". As long as they feel they can point to the other side using dirtier dirty tricks, as long as the workers take care not to outdo

"Surely the miners strike presents us with the perfect opportunity to explain and even clarify the deep division between state socialism and anarchism."

Freedom, May 1984

The working class is perhaps big enough not to give a dog's biscuit about the deep division between the Plan for Coal and the Anarchist Plan for Coal ("Abolish the Coal Board. The mines belong to the miners.") But *Freedom* has stumbled across a rich seam of truth: the strike has been the signal for every creeping variety of opportunist to mystify and even moralise upon the deep division between workers in struggle and parasites like themselves ...

... Swarming over the body of the working class, contorting grotesquely in the fight for improved positions, sharpening their needle-like ideological teeth, sucking out bloody validations, digesting them and trying to poison the host with their excrescences, secreting subtle webs

situation decisively. But unfortunately it is also likely that the strike will run its course without us having any such decisive effect.

So what can we do? The key weakness is a weakness of leadership. The key, thing we have to do — and we shouldn't be ashamed about this — is to build the network of revolutionary militants in the class necessary for the battle afterwards.

How do we get to that minority? First of all of course by going round trying to get support for the miners. That's the first step. But it means nothing if you just knock on the door, get donations and go away again. Any Labour Party person could do that. What matters is doing that, but making sure that you sell a copy of *Socialist Worker*.

the bosses in skulduggery, the left will turn a blind eye, or even defend them. The left always ends up promoting a double standard. In its efforts to extract political capital from the struggle, its posture of outraged surprise barely conceals the underlying cynicism.

LET'S RETURN TO THE 20's!

Digging around for sacrificial models to project onto the working class, the left turns its attentions to the past. What a rich haul it has plundered from the tomb of working class history. The long strike of 1926, which ended in starvation and defeat, is repeatedly held up as a shining example of noble struggle in the face of suffering. Thus the left tries to wrap the shroud of the past round the miners strike in 1984. If they consent to this kind of treatment, they'll deserve socialism. The left is promoting the sacrificial myth of the miners as the finest warriors among the ranks of the workers — the ones who might just be able to save us all.

Tribune (4/5/84) carried an article under the headline 'WHEN THE NOTTS MINERS STOOD BY THE UNION', playing up the appeal of the past for all it was worth. For 11 years after 1926, Nottinghamshire miners struggled bitterly against a scab union set up by George Spencer. The final outcome was a deal between the employers, the Spencer union and the predecessor of the NUM; one which angered many Notts. miners. And in 1984 Spencer is no longer around to set them up for division and defeat. Instead they have the NUM, which helped sow the seeds of disunity by agreeing to differential bonuses between pits; which repeatedly suppressed and isolated groups of miners struggling against pit closures, until it could get a dispute on its own terms; which even now is fettering the pickets by jealously controlling communications and money for transport.

In getting round this and the other obstacles they face, the miners will find themselves burying large chunks of their

'heritage'. They will need to rely on direct contacts among themselves and with other workers, in order to outflank the bureaucracy (fuck the Cripple Alliance); and on their own ingenuity to outwit a well-organised, tooled-up Plod.

The miners do not carry the burden of the whole British working class on their backs, no matter how hard the left tries to nail them to the cross, no matter how hard it tries to obscure the real issues of this struggle by flinging shit in peoples eyes.

DEMOCRACY : NOW YOU SEE IT ...

The left's line on the 'democracy issue' in this dispute betrays the double standard in another way. When it suits them, the left uses all the arguments to hand in democracy's favour. They will use democratic structures, for instance, to deny a 'platform' to groups they don't like. They make a distinction between 'workers' and 'bourgeois' democracy, the distinction being that 'workers' democracy, whether by ballot or show of hands, produces the right decisions. When necessary, the left will call for something called 'Active Participatory Democracy'. This means excluding part of the electorate on the grounds that they don't 'Participate' enough, i.e. they don't usually attend meetings.

But when, as in the early weeks of the miners' strike, the wrong side wants a National Strike Ballot, lo and behold! The left sees the light! Democracy is just a bourgeois charade! Only the miners on strike have the right to decide whether or not to stay out! They understand that workers' own struggles, which almost always begin with militant action by a minority, makes nonsense in practice of the 'majoritarianism' (the idea that nothing should take place unless a majority agrees) and the institutional separation of decision-making and acting that democracy enshrines.

Thus, they sneeringly point out that Thatcher is all in favour of letting the miners have their say, but doesn't want a GLC election next year because the result could be embarrassing. Precisely. The left's opposition to a National Strike Ballot is no less opportunist. It will attach itself to 'democratic' ideology wherever that ideology can provide a lever for its own bureaucratic ambitions. In private, a leftist will darkly admit that the 'real' issue is not one of democracy, but one of class power. They're merely trying to trick the workers into taking it. For themselves, of course. *After* the transition.

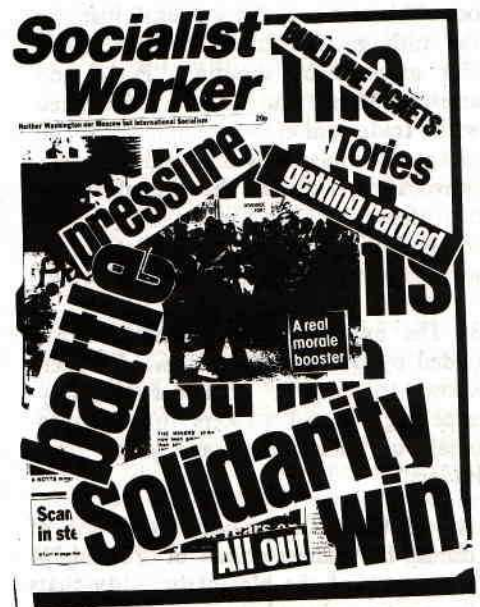
The point of course is that democracy,

with its fetish for the airing of opinions and the moment of decision as a preliminary to action, offers nothing to workers. It offers everything to those who would divert, institutionalise or block their struggles, whether from the left or from the right.

TOGETHER, WE CAN'T WIN!

The mindless triumphalism and empty sloganeering of the left has reached new heights during the miners strike. The more often they scream 'The Miners CAN Win', 'Solidarity WILL Win', the more abstract this Winning, this Solidarity, becomes. Rarely does the left venture to suggest what 'victory' might mean, or how long it will last (except of course that it means 'Maggie' being 'Out'.) Every week, *Socialist Worker* leads with a variation on the same slogan, Six weeks ago, they told the workers that Macgregor was 'rattled'. They told us he was 'rattled' again last week. Time and time again over the last 2 months it seems we have been on the verge of a general strike.

But the masses cannot be allowed on the more sophisticated insights of the left, for obvious reasons; the masses probably wouldn't take to them very warmly. In private, the left is gearing up for a defeat — not theirs, the workers' — no matter what they say in their papers. The theorists are already weighing up the 'balance of class forces' in their oily palms, calculating the probabilities, selecting scapegoats, perfecting the 'lessons' to be 'applied'. For in the end, it doesn't much matter to the left whether it makes its gains on the back of a victorious working class, or one demoralised and defeated.



The police tactics used during the miners' strike show that the ruling class have learnt a great deal from the class struggle (both in work-places and on the streets) over recent years. Now they are responding accordingly. It's time for a working class counter-response.

Many of the recent police actions are nothing new. Over the past three months we've seen :

1) The routine and fairly overt phone-tapping of union offices and similar intelligence gathering procedures (no doubt with the help of their fellow trade unionists in the civil service - the domestic counterparts of GCHQ). On one recent occasion a phone call from a journalist to a member of the Yorkshire NUM staff was interrupted by a police radio message about traffic, and in S.Wales on the 6th April a coach proprietor was asked by the police to reveal the destination of pickets 10 mins. after the union had phoned through their booking. Miners and union officials have responded to this by laying false trails - at one stage sending hundreds of police to a disused coal depot in Kent.

2) The use of infiltrators and agent provocateurs on picket lines. This has been done more or less routinely throughout the strike. On 9th April David Owen Chief Constable of N.Wales admitted using plainclothes officers at the Point of Ayr colliery and on 10th April Leon Brittan publicly defended the use of these tactics.

When 4000 pickets succeeded in getting to Babbington colliery on 9th April a number of police infiltrators (in NCB donkey jackets and NUM stickers) began throwing stones. When one of them was challenged he claimed to be from "a Doncaster pit" but was unable to name one. This sort of activity doesn't just give the filth good excuses to nick people (for example by shouting "Push" and arresting those who do), but combined with trade union accusations that all picket line violence is the result of police provocation it ensures that the miners are confused as to what's really going on and so hesitant about doing whatever is necessary to make picketing effective.

3) The extensive use of snatch squads (aided by police infiltrators who've been known to "target" particular miners by attaching cloured stickers to them) to break up picket lines and grab "ring-leaders".

All of these things were made use of during the miners strikes of '72 and '74 and much of the blatant brutality that's been seen - miners being roped to railings, car windscreens being smashed with crow-bars, pickets being beaten up and

interrogated about their political views, "saturation policing" in pit towns. . . . is all pretty standard stuff wherever proletarians confront 'their' law and order.

What is new is :

1) The level of national coordination of the police. The idea that there is no national police force in Britain has always been a myth. And ever since the First World War (and probably before then) the State has maintained some sort of permanent organisation to coordinate the police and other state agencies during periods of social unrest. Presently its the Civil Contingencies Committee. Nevertheless, there is no doubt that this coordination has been tightened up in recent years.

In addition to this coordination at governmental level there have also been weekly meetings of the Chief Constables and regular briefings from the Home Office (known about by Fleet St. hacks but almost entirely kept out of the papers).

2) The restriction of movement of flying pickets which began in the second week of the strike when Yorkshire miners were turned back from Lancashire along the M62 and Kent miners were stopped at the Dartford tunnel on the way to Nottingham.

3) Although the use of snatch squads is nothing new, the sophistication of "disturbance control" techniques available to the police has been considerably extended since the '81 riots. Police in full riot gear (flame-proof clothing, helmets etc.) were quick to appear on the scene during the disturbances at the mass picket in Warrington last November and the 23 man Police Support Units used in the present strike carry riot equipment as standard issue. It also must be remembered that the police now have large stocks of CS gas and rubber bullets as well as water cannons to make use of if they think it appropriate.

THE NORTH Wales police force is planning to halt recruitment because of the growing cost of policing pickets at the Point of Ayr colliery, near Prestatyn, the only pit in Wales still working. The operation, which involves up to 200 officers at every shift change, is costing an extra £350,000 a week — an estimated £3 million to date. About half the 620 miners at the pit are on strike, with the rest defying a union instruction to join the stoppage.

Guardian 14/5/84.

The point is that the agencies of the State have noted the problems associated with large-scale struggles like the '72 & '74 miners strikes, '78 lorry drivers strike, 1980 steel strike, 1981 riots and so on, and have made suitable contingency plans. On the one hand there have been strategic economic preparations like ensuring large stock-piles of coal at power stations, and on the other the increasing organisational sophistication and "tooling up" of the police and other State bodies.

The Civil Contingencies Committee is one of the standing Cabinet committees set up to deal with the major areas of Government activity. It was set up as the National Security Committee by the Heath government in 1972 to replace the Home Office 'Emergencies Committee' which had proved ineffective during the '72 miners strike. Its brief was to redraw the national War Plan on the assumption that the main enemy would be internal, to cover full-scale 'state of emergency' situations (prolonged strikes by key workers, insurrections etc). This was accomplished by 1975, at which time the Committee was renamed and continued with its other task of making plans for 'contingencies' — covering everything short of a full scale Emergency — terrorism, hi-jacking, flood disasters, maintaining essential services during strikes etc.

It is serviced by the Civil Contingencies Unit within the Cabinet Office which sets up interdepartmental teams to plan coordination between ministries, police and military with regard to specific threats of strike action. (This includes coordinating intelligence as to strike plans). Assessments of the seriousness of the strike and suggestions for counter-measures are presented to the Emergencies Committee, a sub-committee of the Civil Contingencies Committee, which takes charge if the threat materialises. Then during the strike the Unit co-ordinates the activities of the different ministries, and if necessary the regional and county emergency committees.

The police equivalent of this last function is the National Reporting Centre based at New Scotland Yard. Not as some have thought a new body established specifically to 'get' the miners this time — it was the main control centre during the riots in '81. However the miners strike in '72 was instrumental in focussing ruling class attention on the need for reform along these lines. "In November '73 Home Secretary Robert Carr announced that next time the police intended to 'stop the masses forming'. The police planned to set up regional 'intelligence units' co-ordinated by Scotland Yard." (Daily Telegraph 14/11/73 quoted in State Research 14). In fact this was

only achieved as part of the wide-ranging institutional reforms begun by Robert Mark in the mid-seventies, under a Labour Government.

Similarly the Police Support Units which have been in the front line of the control of picketing, were commissioned in 1974 – ostensibly under the need to 'meet situations before and after (nuclear) attack'. (Police Manual of Home Defence 1974). In other words as part of drawing up the ruling class War Plan against insurrection. As distinct from the SPGs which are permanent operational groups, the officers forming PSUs remain part of their division as regular officers, but available for call up when the need arises. Each of the 325 police divisions in Great Britain is required to have at least one PSU – an inspector, two or three sergeants and thirty officers. That's 11,000 specially trained filth to act as the 'foot soldiers' (to the SPG shock troops) in public order situations.

The vast amount of money spent on the police operations (already the cost to local authorities runs to tens of millions of pounds which the Government has now agreed to pay 75% of) may be seen by many liberals and leftists as 'a waste of public money' (irresponsible spending by a nationalised industry perhaps?). But for capitalism the pacification of the working class is always a sound investment. The Hampshire constabulary chartered a Boeing 737 to fly 126 officers to the East Midlands. Who else would have such lavish company transport laid on to take them to their place of work?

The flying pickets succeeded in 1972 because the government had no effective response to them short of bringing in troops to assist the police. The miners succeeded in forcing the government and NCB to withdraw closure plans in 1981

because they caught them unprepared for a strike. The government has been making plans ever since for what's been seen on both sides as an inevitable clash. Government and union plans were both geared to a strike this winter when the overtime ban had reduced coal stocks. The current strike wasn't planned by either side. But the NCB and the government have had few problems adapting their plans to the situation. The NUM leadership was clearly afraid that if it didn't take this opportunity for a near national strike under national direction as it presented itself, they risked not having a second chance.

The problem is that the miners seem to be using the same tactics as have served them in the past and expecting them to still work. The fact that MacGregor hasn't used the Industrial Relations legislation

POLICE RIOT

THE POLICE ended Monday's march with a rampage. It followed a pattern set after the rallies in Sheffield last month, when the police waited until most miners had left before setting about the remainder.

One eye witness told *Socialist Worker*, 'Groups of miners were standing around, with the police trying to provoke them. Scuffles broke out and the police baton charged the miners, forcing them off the car park where they were waiting for their coaches.

'Mounted police drove some demonstrators half a mile down a road, lashing

out at anyone who got in the way.'

Another eye-witness said, 'I saw coppers smash a guy against a coach. He fell to the ground and was jumped on by three policemen, crushing him. More

police came round to prevent the crowd rescuing him, but eventually they went because he was lying unconscious with the crowd shouting, "You've killed him"'

SOCIALIST WORKER 19 May 1984

This piece of defeatist drivel refers to the miners march in Mansfield on May 14th. What it neglects to mention is that many miners had been spoiling for a show-down with the Old Bill all day. Groups of miners had marched through the streets shouting "Seig Heil!" at every copper they passed and giving stirring renditions of "Harry Roberts is our friend" (for our younger readers, Roberts achieved folk-hero status after murdering a policeman), and "Wheres yer fucking snatch squad now?". In response to this the filth kept a low profile, rarely being seen in groups of

more than half-a dozen.

Towards the end of the afternoon when the march was over and the miners were spread about more, the force showed itself in greater numbers, but even then there were several occasions when they obviously wanted to nick miners but thought better of it.

The tragedy is that when the show-down did finally come it was on the filth's own terms with the miners too scattered, tired and, in many cases, pissed, for a united response.

to force the union to remove pickets or be savagely fined owes as much to his belief that the miners can be defeated without it as it does to his fear of a united class response.

The miners hesitation about taking the struggle on to the offensive can be seen in the dependency on their 'radical' national leadership. For example in the militancy at the mass picket of NUM headquarters on Apr 12th to pressure the executive meeting not to call a strike ballot. The police injuries that occurred happened when the pickets surged forward to shake hands with Mick McGahey. If that dependency is scarcely surprising given the way the strike developed from a series of local disputes – in several cases in opposition to regional NUM leaderships, it still illustrates the lack of confidence in their own strength felt by many of the strikers. Illustrated more crucially by the low percentages of strikers actively picketing in many areas.

On the other hand there are hopeful signs – the hundreds of miners demonstrating outside Lincoln Jail on May 5th demanding the release of 4 of their comrades from Kiverton Park colliery arrested on their way to a picket. The attempts to block motorways also showed a welcome break from traditional tactics which aside from causing disruption in

itself could be extended to tie police resources down or even prevent the movement of police reinforcements.

So far there have been no attempts to break through police road blocks on the approaches to pits. As one Kent miner said to a playmate "We shouldn't be in coaches, we should be driving those bloody great articulated lorries". All that's happened so far is that miners have taken up "cross-country running" – by parking coaches several miles from the pits. Nor have there been attempts to disable police control vans (or any other aspect of police communications), or develop tactics for dealing with snatch squads.

As with all other aspects of the struggle tactics must turn from defence to offence. Failing to stop coal moving can't be compensated by trying to generate public sympathy about the attack on the right to legally picket. Nor by relying on inter-union deals to limit scabbing, particularly in face of the NCBs advance planning to route imports through non-union ports. The battle against capitalist law 'n' order – at the immediate level the police – is one that should unite the whole working class. We should all be looking for ways to stretch the blue line as thinly as possible.



TIED UP IN NOTTS

The divisions between areas and pits in the current dispute are of course not as hard and fast as is being portrayed. From the first days of the strike, many miners in the Nottinghamshire area – supposedly solidly anti-strike – came out in support of actions in other coalfields. At the same time some pits in “union loyalist” areas have drifted back to work, often because their loyalty has been strained by closures which the NUM was not ready to fight in the past. But the fact remains that the government/NCB strategy has succeeded in softening up some areas and causing – on an immediate level – a division of interest between coalfields.

Up until now, closures of unprofitable pits have affected just about every coalfield in the country except North and South Notts. Nottinghamshire miners earn the highest bonuses in the industry, thanks to the incentive scheme introduced under Tony Benn in 1977, even though they've also seen these bonuses reduced in the last couple of years. Sensing that the majority opinion amongst their members would be against strike action, the officials in Notts, and other 'soft' areas such as Leicestershire, naturally thought that in terms of their career interests a local ballot was the safest option. It could justify their inaction before those miners solidly out on strike. Once the decision to ballot was made, the NCB and government concentrated on bribing some areas to ensure a big anti-strike majority. The board sent out a special edition of its monthly newspaper, 'Coal News', setting out the lump sums miners could expect for being made redundant. This 'offer' ranges from £5,217 for a 21-year old to £36,480 for a man aged 49, assuming average weekly earnings of £165. The government obviously realises that it will cost more to break unionism in the mines than the cut rate price of £1,000 per head at GCHQ!

After the area ballots, the NCB kept piling on the incentives to carry on working. During the overtime ban, maintenance work was undertaken on the Monday morning, so miners would be sent home on Mondays and lose a day's pay. Now, as an incentive to cross picket lines, miners in Notts and other areas are being invited to spend Monday morning drinking tea in the canteen, and receive their productivity bonus as well as their basic pay.

Also, whereas before the strike, miners

would receive an official warning if they left work 15 minutes early, now the management is inviting them to quit the coal-face half an hour before their shift ends.

Production is well down in the areas where pits continue working. For example, at Cotgrave in South Notts, output is down by about 20,000 tons a week. But the object of the exercise is to break the unity of the miners, and so production bonuses are not only being paid, but have been restored to the levels in operation before the overtime ban.

The media has of course done all it can to inflame local chauvinisms, by reporting the great picket line spectacles in terms of militant Yorkshire pickets versus moderate Notts. miners. Unfortunately this does correspond in some measure to the traditional reality in the NUM. Notts. has always been a problem for the NUM ever since the days of the Spencer union after the General Strike. The Yorkshire miners descended on Nottinghamshire early on in the 1969 and 1972 disputes. On this occasion, it would have been wiser for threatened miners to argue their case in Nottinghamshire at a rank and file level, and develop solidarity before contemplating strike action. Instead, 'Scargill's Army', organised and co-ordinated by the Yorks. NUM, turned up hoping to shame Notts. miners into supporting them out of a 'traditional loyalty to the union'. When this failed, the strikers had no choice but to try to picket out the scabs – although it was still by no means inevitable that attitudes should harden to the extent they have. Some of the acts of revenge (vandalism, threats to families,

etc.), have been tactless to say the least. But with resources under the control of the union, and a massive police presence, real contact became increasingly difficult.

The conduct of the strike in these areas has therefore been left to small and isolated strike committees. While we admire the stand made by these isolated groups, it must be said that in many respects their ingrained trade union outlook is only making things more difficult. Specifically, it is a mistake for them to think the main effort needs to be winning over drabs and drabs of waverers, those miners who are only working because everyone else is. Most of the miners' resources have been tied up in the concentrated effort to get Nottinghamshire out on strike. The secretary of the Notts. strike committee is reported as saying that once they can get out those miners still going in to work, “the broader trade union movement can really throw its weight behind us”. But this 'trench warfare' view of the struggle is unrealistic, for the simple reason that the miners must make rapid headway or starve – only the bosses can afford a drawn-out strike. With the resources they have at their disposal, the government and coal board are proving that they can tempt many miners across the picket lines. In these circumstances, which may mean compelling other groups of workers to stop work, the miners need big successes. These would show that the strikers have the ability as well as the will to win, and perhaps bring a greater unity – not vice versa. But this, of course, is not the way the NUM wants to conduct the strike.

ABOUT US

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. Individual articles reflect the thoughts, fantasies and inadequacies of their authors (in no particular order).

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.

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.

THANKS TO ALDGATEPRESS-2473015

Once again we are late – this is a June/July issue – the next will be Aug/Sept. Deadline for contributions is July 20th.

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NOTE OUR ADDRESS HAS CHANGED.

Write to Workers Playtime c/o
84b Whitechapel High St, London E1.

G.C.H.Q.

In the outrage over the Government 'disenfranchising' the white collar secret police auxiliaries at GCHQ one official secret remained a mystery — why on earth had they done it? Theories about American pressure probably had a grain of truth, but seemed unlikely as the only explanation (quite apart from being obvious products of rabid left nationalism). Talk about this being the thin end of the wedge in de-unionising the civil service and the public sector were obvious nonsense. The government didn't merely fail to make political capital out of the affair along these lines, it bent over backwards to insist it was untrue. Their actions throughout were hardly those of a body taking the first step in a co-ordinated campaign.

A more convincing explanation was given to a playmate by a CPSA union bureaucrat. Apparently the Government had

been anxious to counter civil service disaffection over low pay in institutions like GCHQ — the importance of keeping the loyalty of a crucial part of their planning for war was obvious. They decided they would do this by raising their wages significantly. However since they had no intention of extending this benefit to those state employees merely engaged in servicing British capitalism this meant separating the GCHQ workers from national negotiating machinery. Far from wishing to de-unionise them the government wanted them to have their 'own' union in the form of a staff association, which would then negotiate the pay rises. So much for theory — the Foreign Office then proceeded to comprehensively bollocks the whole thing up, assisted by some 'banana-skin' sabotage by First Division civil servants (the only effective industrial action during the whole affair).

If this is true it will be interesting to see how long they wait for the dust to settle before instituting the second half of the plan. It is in any case interesting to note that while this explanation was believed to be true by the leaderships of all the unions involved, not a word emerged about it in all the verbiage about the 'attack on our democratic rights'.



MUNICIPAL ANARCHY?

Your absolute dedication to politics and socialism involves an almost religious belief in what you're doing?
Well, although I'm an agnostic my sort of politics is very similar to other people's idea of religion. I am not one of those people though, who believes in scientific Marxism. I'm a left winger not because it can be proved correct. I just think there are different ways of running society, and think that socialism is a fairer and better way. Of course it requires an act of faith. There are too many bits and pieces of thought in me to find a convenient syndicalist.

Ken Livingstone
in The Face May 1984.

I'm willing to break the law—Livingstone

Mr Livingstone, speaking on LBC, said the Government's actions reminded him of the slogan often seen scrawled about London — "if voting changed anything they would abolish it."

"The Government has done exactly that," he said.

THE STANDARD,
APRIL 12, 1984.

PLAYTIME INTERNATIONAL

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, the vogue for austerity has spread through the predominantly 'socialist' governments of Western Europe. All were elected on the promise of creating jobs (as was the Conservative government here in 1979, in fact), at a time when inflation was high. In other words, a time when labour costs could be absorbed by price rises more easily, since inflation was around 15% and increasing, not 5% and stable.

Now the inflation rate is falling due to general crisis conditions — the falling real price of raw materials through a world surplus of commodities. Over-production has meant lower prices set against higher labour costs, resulting in lay-offs and unemployment. But it has also provoked a more direct attack on wages. Austerity preached by governments is to keep wage increases below the level of inflation. This attack, either through legislation or more indirect government 'guidelines', is more likely to provoke — or at least provide a focus for — workers resistance, than the 'natural' erosion of wages by inflation.

Militancy has materialised, notably in Belgium and Italy. In Belgium, a uniform wage cut across the whole public sector, made in the "national interest", resulted in a general strike last September, and another in April. The falling rate of infaltion in Italy has made it necessary to attack the 'Scala Mobile', the mechanism by which wages are related to the rise in inflation, and has provoked large-scale struggles last winter and this autumn.

After a short period of industrial expansion, the French government introduced a 1% cut for all workers — justified as being necessary to preserve social services and social security ("solidarity with the unemployed", comrades). This strategy has struck a chord with Neil Kinnock in this country, remarking that he was sure no-one would object to paying more taxes to defend the NHS. The new wave socialist leadership in Britain and France, as well as those in Spain and Portugal, are busily redefining socialism away from the idea of 'equality', which can only mean equality of sacrifice (as espoused by Callaghan in 1976). They are rediscovering the notion of 'Freedom' in order to justify centralised state action, and the perpetuation of inequalities which socialism has meant in every country in the world.

FREEDOM, is an item in the socialist equation which we neglect too often but neglect at our peril.

Socialism is certainly the gospel of equality. But freedom is an equally important part of the creed. Indeed freedom

Roy Hattersley, Tribune 18/5/84

West Germany, the country where wage restrictions are eagerly accepted by the unions, is also in the middle of a strike wave. Here, the struggle against austerity in its stark form has been diverted into a demand for a 35 hour week. The unions see this as a forward-looking, positive demand to create more jobs and a better standard of life for those already working. But for the rank-and-file, it has taken on the form of wage militancy, little known in West Germany. As one striker put it: "For 30 years the workers in this country have been good boys. Now there are profits around, and more to come with automation. It's our turn to cash in." As profits have risen, real wages have fallen, but a more equal distribution of what the unions hope will be ever-increasing profits is hardly 'cashing in'.

Continued on page twelve.

PLAYTIME INT

Continued from page nine.

Austerity programmes, of whatever national variety, are creating an attitude of wage militancy throughout the European working class. But this militancy is by and large only an attempt to *keep wages in line with inflation*. More depressing is the engineered fear of 'pricing oneself out of a job', and the resulting acceptance of *actual* pay cuts or productivity-linked deals on pay and hours.

Examples of class resistance to austerity and unemployment can be found in most countries in Western Europe, as indeed they can be found throughout the world — India, Bolivia, Tunisia. But the unions have tried to separate the two aspects of the struggle; against job losses on the one hand, against wage cuts on the other. Under their guiding hand, opposition has been channelled into Days of Action, which far from demonstrating their ability to 'mobilize' the working class in displays of unity, have been shows of weakness, several steps removed from strike action. Increasingly imitated by unions in Britain, these Days of Action are a continental speciality, having a great attraction for trade unions wanting to "organise" opposition in countries where union strength itself is not so great, enabling them to bask in the reflected glory of large demonstrations.

During the recession it has been easier for unions to muster support for token activities like this.

Unions generally behave more confidently when conducting disputes over pay than when jobs are at issue. A call to wage militancy is likely to meet with a greater unity of response, since it usually applies to whole sections of workers, than a call to fight redundancies, especially when it is only some peoples' jobs that are at risk. But when workers are affected by both austerity measures and redundancies, the token stoppages organised by the unions are often escalated by the workers into a more active mode of struggle — for example, the riots in Belgium, the intensification and extension of the strikes in Asturias, and the no-go areas in Lorraine (which were ended in order to let the unions organise their ineffectual march on Paris). The indications for the struggle of the working class throughout Europe are becoming clearer. Only by unifying the struggle against austerity in all its aspects can defeat be avoided.

ITALY

Renewed attacks on workers' wages by the Italian government have led to a resurgence of class struggle in recent months.

During January and February there were long negotiations between the 5-party coalition government* and the three union confederations† over various economic measures, including the cutting of the 'Scala Mobile', a mechanism which partially protects wages from inflation through automatic increases every 3 months, linked to but less than the rate of inflation. CGIL, CISL and UIL union leaders were all prepared to accept substantial cuts in the Scala Mobile, as they had done the previous winter.

On February 8th — while the negotiations were still going on — a near-general strike broke out in Milan against the proposed reduction. Union leaders expressed concern at the "anti-union tone" of the 30,000 strong workers demonstration. In mid-February, the negotiations finally broke down. The CISL and UIL leaders were agreeable to the government's proposals, but the CGIL was split between a minority of Socialist Party leaders who wanted acceptance, and the Communist Party majority faction who were disturbed at the extent to which workers were taking things into their own hands.

The government decided to go ahead and impose the cut by means of a 'decree', which would become effective immediately and last for just 2 months (without any law being passed through parliament).

In response, hundreds of strikes broke out all over Italy on 15th. February. Railway lines and roads were blocked in several places, and in Pozzuoli, near Naples, workers stormed and ransacked the CISL's offices. Over the next few weeks there was a series of disruptions, including local general strikes, blockades, rolling 24-hour strikes and demonstrations involving tens of thousands (mostly workers) in most big cities. On March 8th, there was a general strike in Turin: the

80,000-strong demo was the biggest the city had seen for more than 30 years.

On February 22nd the CGIL/CISL/UIL United Federation of Transport Unions issued a statement that strikes in the railways must be conducted according to the trade unions' code of conduct, and on March 7th, government minister Spadolini said that behind the strikes lurked "the danger of a return to a destabilising form of extremism", and that there was the risk of all forms of self-regulation of strikes disappearing.

Some of the strikes have been organised through workplace assemblies, but most have been organised by the 'Factory Councils'. These are bodies of representatives elected by all the workers in a workplace (irrespective of union membership), which came into being as a means of co-ordinating struggles during the waves of unofficial strikes in Italy in the late '60s (in particular, the 'Hot Autumn' of 1969).

As with all organisations established in the course of struggle, the FCs degenerated pretty rapidly when there was no longer any large-scale struggle for them to relate to. This happened to the extent that before the present wave of struggle the FCs had been involved in virtually nothing except minor chores like organising works outings. However much these organisations might get up the noses of union bureaucrats, the fact that workers have chosen to conduct their fight through pre-existing institutions will put definite limits on how far it can develop. For a start, they take a form which automatically excludes non-employed sections of the working class (even though the class struggle in Italy has often produced joint assemblies of workers and other proletarians such as housewives and the unemployed.) Secondly, meetings of FC delegates will tend to act as democratic structures in which the initiatives of delegates from the more militant departments/workplaces will be suffocated by the passivity of those from the less militant areas (exactly as happens in an ordinary union set-up).

However, the FCs were by no means the

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only game in town. Many strikes took on a classic 'wildcat' character, with striking workers marching to other workplaces to demand solidarity action.

On the 27th February there was a meeting of the Milan FCs. Some wanted a general strike, but the majority opted for a 3-hour strike and a national demo in Rome. The leftist daily *Il Manifesto* took this as indicating that there had not been a serious break with the unions, and the next day the CGIL boss and CP heavy Lama warned that the FCs must not come into conflict with the TU organisations.

On March 6th the first ever national assembly of FCs took place, with 6000 representatives from all over Italy. Strong criticism was made of the authoritarian practices of the union leaders, but unionism itself was not attacked and a document was approved calling for democratic unions controlled from the base. A national demo was fixed for the 24th, in Rome.

The next day, the CGIL leadership announced its support for the demo, in opposition to the CISL and UIL. The meaning of this gesture was clearly spelt out in the right-wing daily *Resto del Carlino*, which said that it was better for the Communist Party's Lama to take control of the strike – to prevent extremist elements becoming too strong. The degree to which the CGIL succeeded in assuming control is seen by the fact that they and the CP were able to force a postponement by 10 days (until April 10th) of the next national assembly of FCs, called to discuss the possibility of organising a general strike if the decree to cut the Scala Mobile was not rescinded.

In the end, the 2,500 representatives decided that if the government were to renew the decree after it expired on 16th April, the 18th would be a national day of struggle (not a national general strike, but a series of regional ones.) As it turned out, the decree was not made law, but was extended to the end of June, after which the Scala Mobile would operate as it did before the February cut-back. This took the heat out of things enough to prevent the 'Day of Action' from taking place, although there was a widespread part-day strike in Milan the

following day.

As the strikes raged, the Italian bourgeois press carried hysterical articles about how the '*autoconvocati*' – literally, the 'self-convenors' – were indulging in mob-rule and were fascist provocateurs. At the same time, union leaders expressed horror as some workers publically burned their union cards and struck without warning.

Workers displayed a high degree of unofficial militancy, but this does not automatically mean the strike movement represented any real break with the unions and left parties. To a large extent, the CP/CGIL was able to manipulate the movement simply by putting on a more militant face – this, despite the years of the 'Historic Compromise', during which the CP openly supported the Christian Democrat government's attacks on the working class. When Lama spoke at the 26th March demo in Rome, which was attended by 500,000 people, saying that the CGIL was the only union not manipulated by the Socialist Party government, it was the first time in years that he had been able to speak to a workers rally without being physically attacked. This can be contrasted with the 'silent general strike' of last winter, when the union leaders dared not announce the deal they

were about to make with the employers.

At the time of writing, the socialist government is trying to make the decree permanent as quickly as possible. The Communist Party, having done everything they can to divert the struggle away from the streets and workplaces, and into parliament, are now putting on the greatest display of parliamentary opposition seen from these cringing apparatchiks for many years. After all, the workers *have* paid good money to see the clowns perform.

*This is led by prime minister Craxi of the Socialist Party, although the largest party is the Christian Democrats, who always retained a clear majority in the period 1965–77, and subsequently ruled with the help of the Communist Party.

†CGIL, CISL and UIL. Most Italian workers are organised in unions according to nominal political/religious affiliations. The CGIL is for CP'ers and Socialists, the CISL for Catholics and the UIL for Socialists, Republicans and Social Democrats. The level of unionisation is comparable with Britain (i.e. about half of all employed workers.)

SPAIN

Spain has been experiencing a series of disputes in the greatest unrest since the strikes of 1976 which greeted the death of Franco.

Official statistics for the first 3 months of this year gave 488 strikes involving 1.4m workers, and a loss of 22m working hours. Most of the action has been directed against state-owned industries – public transport, the petrol industry, schools, steel, mining, shipbuilding and construction. In Asturias, a 2-day strike called by the mining union over pit closures (unreported in the press here, surprise surprise) was turned into a confrontation by miners extending the action beyond the limits set by the union. Riots continued after the 2-day strike and involved workers from other industries in the region.

The industrial action is against a socialist government elected on the promise of creating 800,000 jobs, and now presiding over 2.5m unemployment – the highest rate in Europe at 19%. The government is pursuing a policy similar to those of the French and Italian governments; austerity and modernisation. The unions are being urged to moderate wage claims of 8-10% (in line with inflation), to the government target of 6.5%. Industrial cutbacks are planned, for instance the closure of pits and steel plants, with the loss of 60,000 jobs. The government is looking to scrap the job security workers had under Franco, in compensation for their trade union rights being abolished. Now trade unions are being encouraged, the price is unemployment for the workers.

FRANCE

At least 200,000 more jobs will go as Mitterand's socialist government presses on with its restructuring of French industry. Finance minister Delors, in line to become the new Prime Minister, has forecast more austerity in the run-up to the 1986 election. Deflation and fiercer competition are to be pursued. Government expenditure is to be cut as a sweetener for the bosses, behind the rhetoric of encouraging industrial investment.

Workers have responded with a number of strikes in the public sector and heavy industry. Against a background of 9% inflation, a 3% pay limit affecting 9m workers (4.5m civil servants, 2.5m on index-linked pensions and 2m in the public sector), has been greeted by a one-day strike involving hospitals, schools, post, power, transport and the civil service. Redundancies announced in the car, steel and mining industries have been met with strikes and demonstrations.

This response is under the control of the unions – specifically, the CGT, whose Communist Party sponsors continue to hold their seats in the government, from where they denounce austerity and the redundancies. On the outside, the unions are abetting the measures by limiting and separating struggles over pay and jobs. The ruling socialists' union, the CFDT, has denounced as "irrelevant and harmful" the one-day public sector strike, when 30,000 marched in Paris. Marie, leader of the CFDT, refused to support opposition to the government, claiming the strike was by "privileged workers" wanting to keep up their purchasing power at the expense of others. The CFDT instead emphasises the government's efforts to create more jobs, which they say would be jeopardised by workers making irresponsible pay demands.

After the violent confrontation at Talbot

(see WP March '84), when the CFDT was in the forefront of resisting (i.e. negotiating and helping to implement) redundancies, the CGT has wrested back the initiative from other unions and from the workers in the steel and car industries. Their action has been described by Marie as "leading unionism towards suicide" (if only!) His role as Samaritan, talking over problems with the government, has led him to claim that the "real battle" is for "meaningful leisure", where shorter hours will be paid for by higher productivity and a drop in real pay. This reflects Mitterand's recent claim that the emphasis of his policy is less on economic benefits than on 'social reforms'.

These reforms were soon to be enjoyed by the steel workers, whose 'economic benefit' consisted of 25,000 redundancies (1 in 4 of the workforce). They responded by implementing their own brand of social reforms – attacking local branches of the Socialist Party and CFDT, rioting, blocking roads with burning barricades and tearing up railway lines.

The restructuring of heavy industry entails 60,000 redundancies in the steel, coal and shipbuilding industries over the next 5 years. The brunt of the steel redundancies will be borne in Lorraine, which is to lose 20,000 jobs out of a total of 93,000. This is on top of 3 previous redundancy schemes in the last 7 years, which took out 48,000 jobs. 100,000 workers demonstrated, or rather rioted, in Paris. This time, a restrained 30,000 were marshalled by the unions in hopes of a better deal from a socialist government.

The government's strategy has been to take on one group of workers at a time in each area. 2 months before the redundancies were announced in steel, 28,000 were proposed in coal mining. The north of France was to suffer most. Lorraine, in the north-west, would escape lightly. Thus, the miners were taken on in areas where the steel workers were least affected, and vice versa, limiting the potential for joint resistance among workers in the two industries and regions.

Mitterand came to power promising an expansion of heavy industry, and is now running it down in much the same way that Wilson's labour government did in Britain in the '60s. Mitterand's white heat of technology would raise coal production from 24 to 30m tonnes by 1990. The reality is a projected decline to 17m tonnes this year, and 12m by 1988. France has the legacy of Giscard D'Estaing's fetish for nuclear power, and

the government has secured alternative energy supplies in the form of gas from Russia and Algeria. In addition, 9m tonnes of high-grade coal is being imported, while low-grade French coal, surplus to requirement, is costing Fr750 per tonne to produce, and selling at Fr450. A dozen pits are to close with the loss of 30,000 of the remaining 57,000 jobs.

Steel was to be expanded in the same way. Two firms were nationalised and given large investment subsidies. They continued to make vast losses, and production has had to be cut in line with EEC quotas. The EEC has also directed that all subsidies must stop. The left and CP have simply advocated protectionism, devaluation and a continuation of subsidies to cushion the immediate effects of the crisis.

With the CP employment minister predicting an increase in unemployment by 350,000 to 2.6m by the end of the year, the government has promised that the restructuring will not put more on the dole queues. It has devised a two-year retraining scheme on 70% pay for 15,000 steel workers, Lorraine being one of 14 'restructuring centres' for new industry, with a £43m investment programme to entice Renault, the Electricity board and other firms to the area. Immigrants are being offered £6000 to 'return home' (many of them came to France in the '50s), with the approval of the CFDT, whose deputy general secretary Chereque – leader of steel strikes in the past – has accepted a government post to implement the programme, buying out workers in an official capacity.

The irony of promising Renault to Lorraine was highlighted a few weeks later, when the government turned its restructuring attention to the car industry. A strike and occupation at the Citroen plant outside Paris, in protest at 1,300 redundancies there (part of 6,000 in the Peugeot/Talbot group, which includes Citroen), coincided with the government's announcement that the state-owned Renault would shed 7,250 workers. The unions have been at pains to take up each strike as it comes, and drop it when the next one occurs, fostering disillusionment among workers by their willingness to enter into negotiations with the government. Both the CGT and CFDT have supported the strike at Citroen; the CGT in line with its argument that Citroen should stop manufacturing in Spain, and import jobs rather than cars; the CFDT in order to press for better compensation and retraining. Or even shorter working hours, if the German dispute gains a hold on workers' imaginations.

PORTUGAL

With the 10th anniversary of Portugal's glorious democratic revolution out of the way, the socialist government has announced price increases of 15-20% on basic foodstuffs and transport, with further rises expected soon. This socialist austerity package for one of Europe's poorest countries is to meet IMF demands (remember? That's the excuse the socialists used here in 1976.) Portugal's novel way of getting the working class to pay for the crisis is not to pay them at all. Thousands of workers in state industry have not received wages for up to a year, many afraid that if they demand some, they will be sacked, leaving them without even the hope of being paid.

WEST GERMANY

West Germany is experiencing its first big strike wave since 1978, when a 6-week strike for shorter hours ended in collapse. Print and engineering workers are in dispute over a union-formulated demand for a 35-hour week. With the biggest union – IG Metall – claiming they have 14 weeks' funds for strike pay, the strike could compare with those of 1957, when workers were out for 4 months for better sick pay.

The unions did everything they could to avoid a mass strike. IG Metall claims that a 35-hour week will create 1.4m jobs. The employers have countered that it will increase production costs by 18%. As they put it, "A four-week strike is preferable to a one minute cut in working hours." Both sides are publically ignoring the probability of speed-ups – 40 hours' work compressed into 35. This would raise profitability, and meet with the government's approval ; it has taken the stance that to move out of recession, the workers need to work harder, not less hours.

With neither side admitting the implications of a faster working week, and both sticking to their 'principles', negotiations had been going on since December. The first industrial action did not take place until March. It was limited to demos and token disruption, such as turning up to work 2 hours late. The employers took little notice, and after 3 weeks of thinly-spread actions involving just 30,000 engineering workers (out of a total union membership of 2.6 million) in the car, steel and electrical industries, the union called off the stoppages. It thought concessions could be got from the employers, who were offering 3.3% on pay, flexible working hours and retirement at 58 (based on a government initiative to thwart the 35-hour demand, by offering a 35% subsidy to employers on the cost of filling the resulting vacancies.) IG-Metall had not pushed a pay claim for the current round, preferring to concentrate on hours ; now it was getting cold feet.

IG-Metall was the prime sponsor of a 35-hour demand, not because it was the most militant union, but because it is West Germany's biggest. 6 other unions were involved, and 200,000 workers had taken action. IG-Metall's membership was opposed to the calling-off of the strikes, but the union trotted out the usual argument to dampen militancy : "We

BELGIUM

The general strike in Belgium last September over austerity measures was derailed by the unions which left a great deal of resentment among the workers. Again virtually unreported in the British press, a second general strike erupted followed by days of action, including demonstrations and riots in Brussels.

The austerity programme was part of a 3-year plan by a centre-right government. The hardship heaped on the Belgian working class, with unemployment already 15%, is partly a result of the scrapping of wage indexation to keep pay

could be facing the biggest defeat for organised labour for many years." The union was quite happy to lead the workers to defeat without a fight.

It was workers in the militant print union IG-Druck who stepped up the tempo with a series of wildcat strikes and disruption in the national and provincial press. Because of pressure from the regions, IG-Metall convened a special delegate conference, which voted for a strike ballot. A week later, the union executive announced that this would be held in a further weeks' time, thus carving out a 3-week cooling-off period since the previous strikes. Opinion polls showed only 30% in favour of a strike. Since 75% would be required, the union hoped that matters would be left at peaceable negotiation. Also, ballots would be held in only 3 regions, and at different times, limiting the potential for a national strike movement. Other regions would merely stage supportive or token actions.

On May Day, a 100,000 strong rally indicated growing enthusiasm for a fight rather than tokenism. IG-Druck, with 145,000 members, called for an immediate strike on the papers. 20 were stopped and 25 disrupted. When the IG-Metall ballots came out in favour of a strike, the union called out 13,000 workers in selective strikes at 14 car component factories – emphasising all the while that this was a gentle application of pressure. There was to be no direct disruption of car plants ; they only wanted to resume talks.

The employers responded with the threat of lock-outs if supplies of components dried up. BMW proposed a complete shutdown of 4 plants employing 30,000, and Audi 2 employing 17,500. Daimler Benz, Porsche, Opel and Volkswagen (who threatened to close their plant in Belgium) took a similar stance. This escalated the dispute, and IG-Metall was obliged to call out 11,000 workers at Daimler after 20,000 had been laid off. This was the first action directly against

2% below inflation. The government is also pushing through cuts in social security benefits. This is all justified as "in the national interest". The working class is evidently expected to follow the lead of the royal family, who have accepted a pay freeze, and government ministers, who have taken a 10% cut in their salaries. The trade union response has been to call various stoppages and demonstrations, one month against wage cuts, the next against unemployment. Belgian employers are complaining that the government has no strategy to raise productivity – a clear warning that there is worse to come.

car plants.

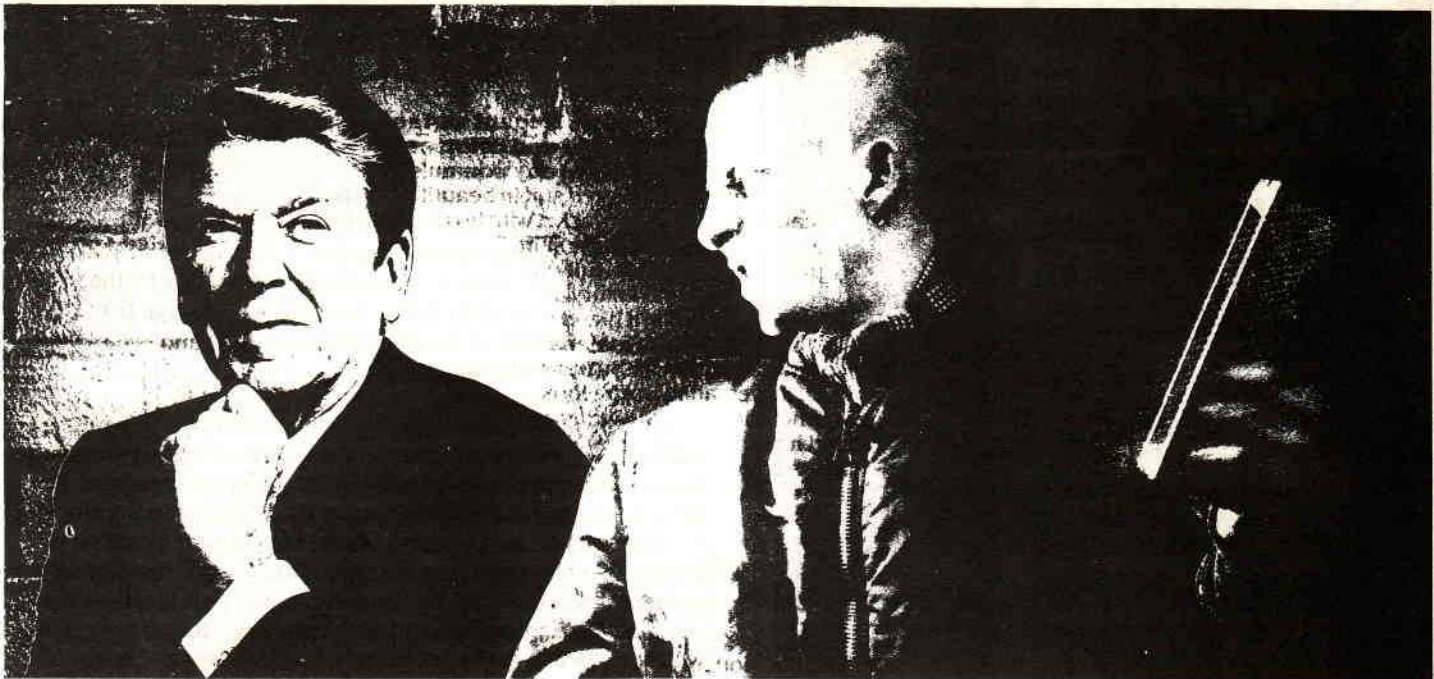
IG-Druck stepped up the action with newspapers and magazines disrupted in 150 plants. Workers in heavy industry in the Ruhr began stoppages. DAG – the white collar union – called for a national strike ballot. The banking and insurance union called a strike, and the trade union federation called on all 14 member unions to stage "sympathy stoppages" against the lock-outs.

As we go to press, 70,000 are laid off with 14,000 on strike in 19 component firms. The Federal Labour Office has refused to pay unemployment benefit to those locked out. A demonstration is planned in Bonn for May 28th, by which time all car production may have stopped.

The dispute has already cost £1 billion in lost car production. The government has called for new negotiations, saying that even a short strike will set back a West German economic recovery dependent on car exports. Now, the employers have said they will meet the unions without preconditions, going back on their previous refusal to discuss any cut in the working week.

Whether the workers stand to gain anything from this situation will depend not just on their willingness to take action, but on their ability to cut through the swathes of mystification in which both unions and bosses have been wrapping the real issues. Any 'victory' along the lines of a shorter working week could turn out to be worse than hollow, unless it is accompanied by fierce resistance to speed-ups and redundancies. French workers have already found this out : the 39-hour week introduced by the Mitterand government, and hailed by the socialists as a blow against unemployment, has merely helped the bosses raise the rate of exploitation without touching the unemployment statistics at all.

WELCOME TO BRITAIN !



REAGAN IS coming to town on June 7. Which means one thing is certain — there will be more huff, puff and guff from the “opposition” than if the devil announced he was weekending in Salt Lake City.

The Labour Party and its leftist hangers on will be demanding an end to the reactionary Reagan-Thatcher Axis, and the senseless dogmas of Monetarism, which are destroying our vital industries, the lifeblood of the nation we hold so dear.

The Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament will be pulling out its big guns for the occasion. They intend to tell Reagan, in no uncertain terms, that unless he takes his cruise missiles back with him, there will be BIG trouble. Didn't he know that Britons never, never shall be slaves? Yes, the mass die-ins will go on until the message sinks through his thick head that nuclear war is not a good thing.

We, too, say quite unreservedly, that we are not happy to see Reagan. “But what is this?” you ask. “Has Workers' Playtime finally gone soft in the head? Have they abandoned their incisive proletarian critique and thrown in their lot with the left? Don't they know that Reagan is simply a figurehead for the U.S. and western imperialism?”

The answer is that we want to see Reagan (and the other world leaders, including socialists like Mitterrand and

Craxi) get the only welcome they deserve: NOT one of protest, but one of outright hostility. Our answer is that no bourgeois politician, let alone those at the top of the pyramid, should feel free to travel anywhere unmolested and unthreatened.

But this does not place us alongside the miserable band of leftist hacks or the ranks of grubby peaceniks.

The left deliberately concentrates its attacks on figureheads such as Reagan. The intention is to impress on people the idea that Reagan is the only problem, American imperialism is the only imperialism, and western or U.S. backed capitalism is the only capitalism. This is hardly surprising.

The Labour Party wants us to believe that electing a government ideologically opposed to Thatcher and Reagan (i.e. a Labour government) is the way to fight capitalism. Labour's leftist allies may only give “critical” or “conditional” support to this great project, but they too bolster this socialist reformism. Their argument is that Thatcherism/Reaganism represents a creeping fascism, and that the fight for socialism begins with the defence of democracy. And so their anti-Reaganism ends up being another line of defence for capitalism, an alternative ideology to defend our misery and exploitation.

CND likes to portray Reagan as the macho cowboy who thinks he can ride

into Europe for the big shoot-out. But they are the prisoners of their own phony imagery. They merely want to update the cinema cliché, so that the tough guy gets put in his place with a few moral platitudes.

BEYOND ANTI-REAGANISM: ANTI-CAPITALISM

Yet these summits are a suitable target for our anger. From June 7-9 they will be telling US that the major western industrialised powers have come through the recession, and that prosperity is around the corner. They will be telling EACH OTHER that they need one last effort, and the balance of class forces will be turned decisively against the proletariat. They will be telling US that the west has closed ranks against the “Evil Empire”, and peace through strength is guaranteed. But they will be telling EACH OTHER that if there is a major hitch to their projected economic upturn, the war machine is in good running order.

And so, wearing our heaviest steel-capped boots, let's kick shit out of this summer picnic. It's not our moral outrage we want to impress on “our leaders”, just the tread of our footwear. Our message should not be for the politicians, but for our fellow proletarians internationally — that we are taking up the fight. For the world's premiers and heads of state, we have only one thing to say: GET CANCER YOU SLAGS.