

BOOT

No. 3

FREE

feb/march '86

Em!



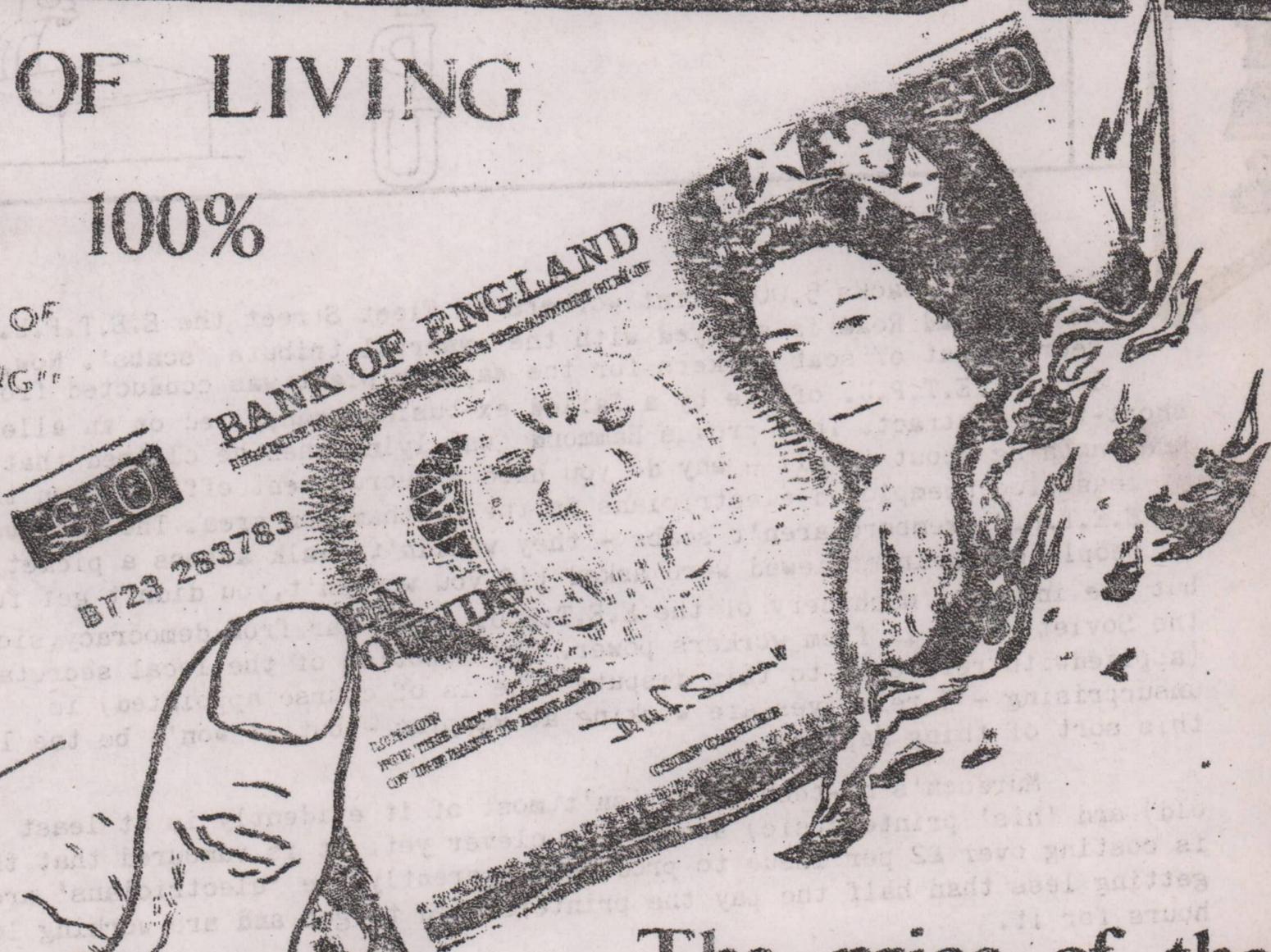
a southampton
anarchist paper

FOR AUTONOMOUS CLASS STRUGGLE

COST OF LIVING

DROPS 100%

THE END OF
"RATIONING"



The price of the
theft of our time and
activity in work -
the repression of desire....

PILLAGE THE RICH!

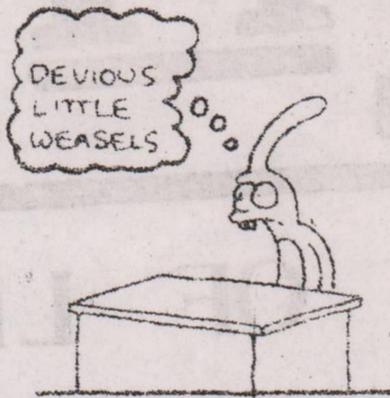
AND REPOSSESS OUR LIVES, OUR TIME, OUR ACTIVITY.....

ORGANISATION

R

WAPPING

THE
E
T
P
U



As Murdoch sacks 5,000 print workers in Fleet Street the E.E.T.P.U. office in Henstead Road is sprayed with the immortal tribute 'scabs'. Now, the recruitment of scab workers for the Wapping plant was conducted from the local E.E.T.P.U. office by a failed ex-businessman, hired on an allegedly short-term contract. This proves Hammond was lying when he claimed that they knew nothing about it all - why do you need a recruitment officer when there at least 100 unemployed electricians in the Southampton area. The massive majority of E.E.T.P.U. members aren't scabs - they wouldn't 'walk across a picket line' as people being interviewed were asked (if you wouldn't, you didn't get further) but the internal machinery of the E.E.T.P.U. is as far from democracy (sic) as the Soviet Union is from workers power. The nepotism of the local secretary (applied with reference to this dispute - he is of course appointed) is unsurprising - 3 relatives are working at Wapping - but it won't be the last time this sort of thing happens.

Murdoch's hi-tech plant isn't (most of it evidently is at least 20 years old) and 'his' printers (sic) aren't too clever yet. It is rumoured that the Times is costing over £2 per issue to produce. Apparently, the 'electricians' are getting less than half the pay the printers used to get and are working longer hours for it.

If the E.E.T.P.U. is suspended and eventually booted out of the T.U.C. people are talking about setting up a parallel or alternative union (gathered, around the C.P.) or staying within the E.E.T.P.U. and fighting. The first is likely to happen if expulsion occurs as we gather electricians in Fleet Street are itching to leave - as they have been wanting to do for at least 3 years; the second, supported by the SWP and Militant enclosed within the Broad Left seems to have some support at least in Southampton

However isn't it about time we asked - so what? The question of the sacked 5,000 remains the crucial point. It is obvious that picketing and direct action are needed - picketing the E.E.T.P.U. offices is all well and good but it won't win any jobs back.

EDITORIAL (cont.)

The very least that could and should be done is a picket of the distributors in this area - this is not as easy as it sounds since it is evidently done on a franchise basis from Romsey by a businessman who was given the franchise in October to start on Jan 1st. The following firms could also be given some attention:

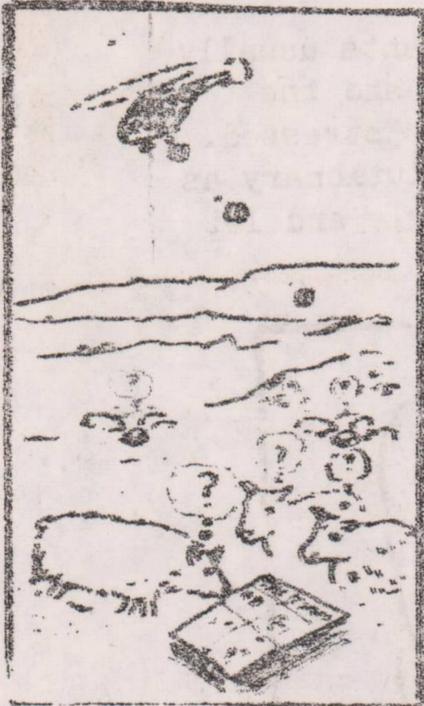
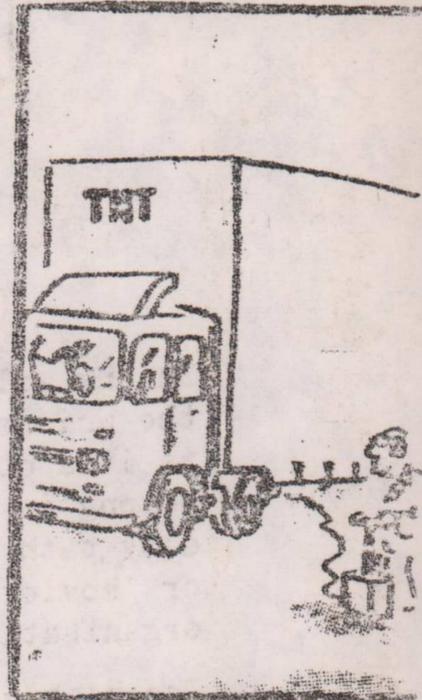
a) the TNT depot in Parham Drive, Boyatt wood, Eastleigh (Tel. Eastleigh 619221.)

b) Coliseum Coaches in Botley Road (Tel. 472577) and in West End.

c) Marchwood Motorways in Salisbury Road, Totton (Tel. Totton 869033).

the first distributes Murdoch's papers and the other two transport his scabs to Wapping.

All of this could be done but it's certainly not going to be done by the unions. These pickets should be set up by groups of workers organising together.



Obviously the battle won't be won purely and simply down here - that battle must be taken from Fleet Street (why aren't the rest of Fleet Street out on strike) and the distribution of the papers from Wapping and generalised. Local groups of workers could co-ordinate together independent of the unions - frankly if the print workers wait for the TUC (Totally Useless Clowns) to do something they'll freeze to death outside Wapping. The battle has only just started - it can be won but if people are going to wait until the unions do something (as opposed to talking about doing something) then the fight won't even start. It'll be a hands down win for Murdoch.

At the centre of this dispute the question of 'trade unionism' rears its dainty little head. We hear screams from the so-called revolutionary left about 'defend the unions' and 'Stop Murdoch - the union basher', etc., etc. One of the basic questions that will come out of this is whether unions serve any useful function for working-class people any longer.

The term 'scab union' has been bandied about for some long time - it has in recent years been applied to the GMAU (now the GMEATU), the TGWU and also to the NGA (and ironic it ain't). However, whilst this term has been applied to some unions it has left the impression that there are somewhere, somehow clean non-scabed trade unions. Despite a diligent (and if it's one thing we are it's diligent) search none has yet been found. We won't go into the internal workings of the unions but this writer alone has been threatened with suspension from a union by a national officer, has been made redundant with the connivance of national full-time officers and has seen a fellow worker doing a collection threatened with suspension (not by management) but by the union branch secretary.

So, what of the unions - well, we have often remarked in our conversations with people that trade unions are to workers what the AA (or RAC) is to your average motorist - basically no use and when you need them you can't find them, etc.. In many ways the degree of control, recall and involvement in the two sets of organisations probably infact correlates - approximately 0.01%. Indeed, it makes us gag that the RMTU is moving into the home loan game and is going to offer a 'financial services' package to their members - exactly right up the AA's creek. Perhaps, it won't be long before your average high street has not only 6 different fast junk food stores, 6 shoe shops, an AA shop and of course the union shop.

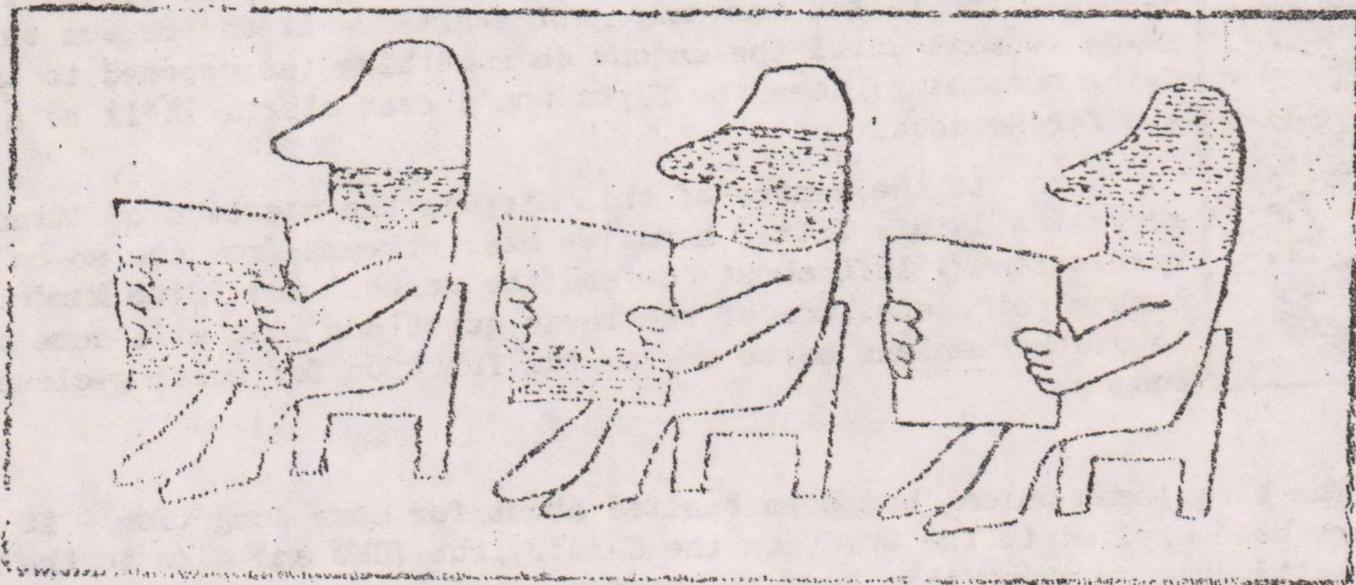
The left blather on about 'defend the unions' - isn't the RMTU a union? Somehow, god knows how, SOGAT and the NGA are portrayed as being really good unions. Take a look at the deals these unions were offering Murdoch - essentially they were 'no strike' deals and tried to give Murdoch a supine labour force. So, that is what we are supposed to defend. No way. Sure, we defend the 5,000 sacked print workers and yes, we hope they all get their jobs back. Admittedly we have our doubts especially now they have got the twin kiss of death - i.e. whole-hearted support from the 'labour movement' (which no doubt miners everywhere will be anxious to see - if only to see what it actually looks like!) and the support of the TUC.

continued overleaf

EDITORIAL - yet more

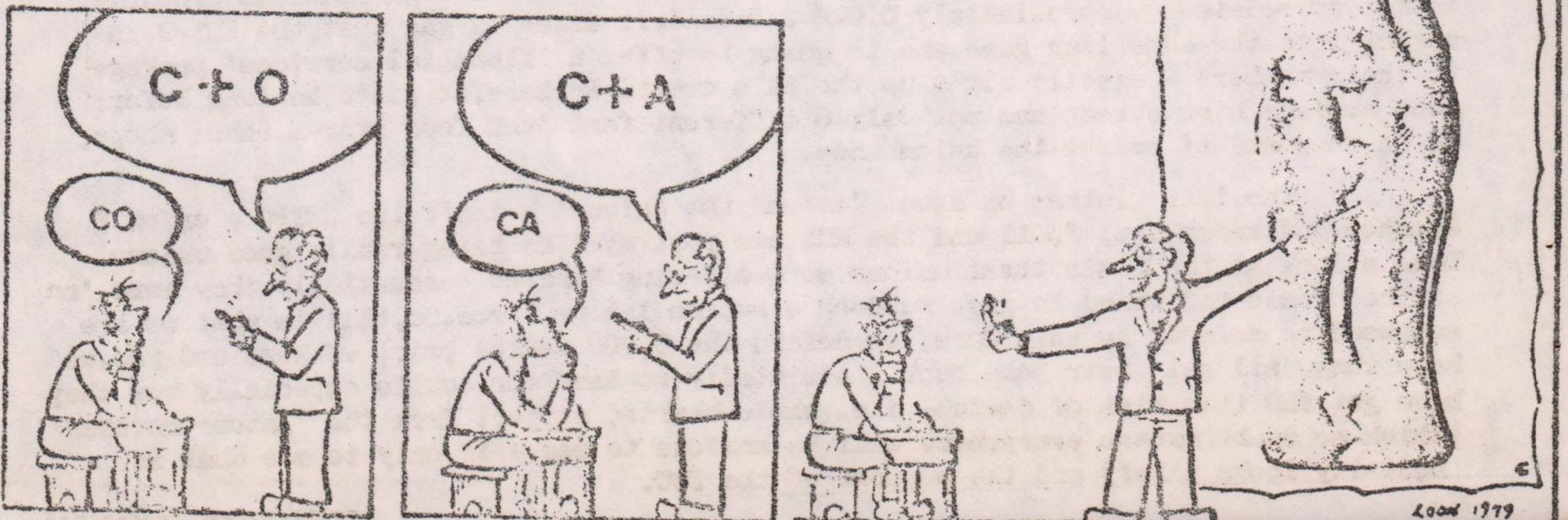
Unions will nowadays change nothing - yet, it isn't a question of rushing out of the unions (like headless chickens looking for some subterranean maturation) nor is it a question of building new unions or even one big union. Such theories belong in the dustbin of history. We do not claim that there is some fantastically easy path to go on by bandying around such terms as 'assembly', 'workers' councils or 'soviets'. It can only be started by the creation of autonomous job organisation linking workplaces and ultimately class wide.

The path of caucuses, broad lefts, etc. are but a graveyard of militants usually from leftist groups. The whole set-up of unionism has to be fought and the possibility, indeed probability, of workers organising for themselves stressed. It is no good just to see workers attacking unions as somehow revolutionary as some groups do but once again to look at the content of that struggle and let that decide.



As usual any donations (NO CHEQUES), abuse, proceeds of expropriations, etc. to us at:
 "BOOT 'EM", Box A1, 4, Onslow Road, Southampton.

Donations; £1 - J. (Leicester); 36p - T. (Manchester); £1 - S. (Gateshead)
 £1 - K. (Southampton).



NEWS

NE

WS

NE

WS

MINERS' GIG

At the gig we organised in December last year for sacked miners we raised £95 which was handed over to miners in the Fitzwilliam area. We would like to thank The First Men in Space, IAm 7, All the Glory and the Mad Thatchers (and special thanks to C. of the M.T.'s for all his help).

A Tale of a Bank, a Cheque and.....

A little dicky-bird has told us the following story;

Sometime in late November/early December a gentleman walked into Barclay's Bank in Eastleigh and informed the teller that he was from Share Drug Stores in the High Street and that they had run out of cheques. Consequently could he have 2 emergency cheque-books issued so that they could continue to pay their bills. The teller issued the cheque-books and the gentleman concerned left the bank.

Some ten minutes later he returned with a cheque made out for 46,000 pounds. The teller refused to cash it and took it to the manager who agreed to cash it. The gentleman took the money and left.

A few minutes later, Share Drug Stores rang up and it transpired that the gentleman was an impostor.

Two further facts;

- 1) Barclays asked the police to hush it up and not release the story to the press.
- 2) The bloke was black.....

INDUSTRIAL NEWS

As ever the wave of redundancies and sackings continues apace in the 'prosperous South Coast'.

At the British Rail works (BREL) in Eastleigh 1,500 redundancies are threatened as the works are to be reduced to a maintenance depot employing only 500 workers (the leaflet in this issue entitled 'Give Blood... The Bosses') was distributed by us to workers at BREL).

Redundancies have also occurred at Warners in Eastleigh, 60 more jobs have gone in the docks, 100 clerical jobs at Vospers and 22 jobs at Vosper Hovermarine.

Meanwhile, there have been strikes by officers on Townsene Thoresen's ferries at Portsmouth at the end of January whilst in December there was a walk-out by postmen in

INDUSTRIAL NEWS (CONT.)

Southampton (see enclosed article by a participant.)

Elsewhere, the dire situation continues in Southampton's hospitals. At least one patient has died in the South Hants from hypothermia; whilst it's that cold in the General that the electric typewriters take a couple of hours to warm up and work - even then they're likely to type gibberish. The area hospital management is desperate to cut costs which explains the 3 strikes (the first of which started as a lock-out) by porters at the General and the Princess Anne maternity unit against the imposition of new duty rotas which has resulted in wages in some cases being reduced by nearly half and in other cases by at least £20 - £30. It makes us laugh that the spokesperson for the hospital, a certain Ms. Humphries, is always harping on about costs, how expensive it is to employ the porters and how this new scheme will spread overtime more evenly (which is a lie - in essence, it will reduce overtime for most) when in fact she is reputed to earn more than the Prime Minister.

Referring to the nurses who are having a new rota system imposed on them, the RCN (Royal College of Nursing) has advised the nurses to refuse to implement the new rosters and to work the old rosters. It should be interesting to see if the management lock them out and claim that they're too expensive to employ !!!

IT MAKES YOU WANNA LAUGH, CRY, THROW A BRICK OR.....

Reading newspapers is quite a laugh at times, for instance, the other week the News (the Portsmouth local evening sheet) obviously had its headline, 'Leon Brittan resigns - shock, etc., etc.' set up but he didn't resign in time for the deadlines. So, the News covered itself in glory by exposing a new anarchist group... (no, not us).... Class War. Demanding it be banned it worked itself into a fury saying it couldn't really be called a newspaper - which the News should know about, 'cause it certainly isn't - sending copies to John Duke, the Home Office, etc., etc.. A real exposure.... but where have they been for the last 18 months or so. They put the fuckin parasite issue on the front, tastefully putting stars in place of 'fucking'. They must have desperate that day !!

WICKHAM TRIAL



FINAL

U
P
D
D
A
T
E

As most people will probably have heard by now, the Wickham trial ended with 12 defendants being acquitted and 7 being convicted of conspiracy to burgle. (Although that figure can be reduced to 6 when you forget John "The Grass" Quirke - hopefully by the time he is released he will have learnt a very important lesson.). Despite the fact that, people are now doing time for the 'crime' of caring, is depressing, the whole fiasco should be viewed as a victory over the state, and in particular a big 'up yours' to the filth.

The amazing thing is, that 12 people can admit taking part in raids, damaging property and taking documents and still get off on a point of law - namely that there was no evidence that they actually conspired with others or knew that three raids were going off at the same time. This is due partly to the ineptitude of the police and prosecution in drawing up the charges, and partly to the brilliance of the defence solicitors and barristers. You could see the embarrassment pouring off the filth when they 'd realised that they'd been beaten at their own game.

Judge McCreery, as expected, lived up to his reputation in every way possible but especially by being biased in his summing up and vicious in his sentencing. His treatment of some of the defendants was also disgusting, the most obvious case being that of Sue Baker (a district nurse), whom McCreery described as an intelligent, caring and respectable member of society (whatever one of them is), and then sentenced her to 9 months. We sincerely hope that this piece of shit is put out of his misery as soon as possible.

The main lessons to come out of the Wickham case are; first, that if everybody had kept their mouth shut inside and outside of the police station then the trial would probably not have happened at all - HOW MANY MORE TIMES DO PEOPLE NEED TELLING.

secondly, that although the state fucked up this time it would be most surprising if they do so again, so there'll be no second chances.

thirdly, the value, if you are on trial of having a good solicitor - not the shitbrains that the police encourage you to get.

and finally, that if the state thinks that this case has discouraged us in anyway they are badly mistaken. We will carry on fighting until every living being has the total freedom that is rightfully theirs. **WE WILL NEVER BE DEFEATED.**

A list of the prisoners follows;

- MIKE NUNN (3YEARS) J92297 -HMP' ROMSEY ROAD, WINCHESTER SO22 5DF
- GORDON BRIANT J92309 - HMP, ROMSEY ROAD, WINCHESTER SO22 5DF.
(21 mths - 9suspended)
- SALLY MILLER (18 mths - 6susp.) -HMP EAST SUTTON PARK, SUTTON VALLENCE, MAIDSTONE, KENT.
- SUE BAKER (9mths - 4suspended) -HMP EAST SUTTON PARK, SUTTON VALLENCE, MAIDSTONE, KENT.

GIVE BLOOD- NOT OURS- THE BOSSES

Quite ironic really, that on the very day the blood transfusion van came round to the works it was discovered that many of us would be giving more than an armful, and not even voluntarily. And the patient? - B.R.'s quest for profitability. What management call 'adjustments in workload' will lead to thousands of redundancies at the Eastleigh, Doncaster Wolverton and Glasgow workshops when they are passed to regional maintenance; and the privatisation of what remains of BREL at Crewe, Derby, Horwich and York. Management say it's to compete on the open market, and as if to emphasise that, in the week the changes were announced, four American locomotives were unloaded at Southampton docks - to become the first private locos to run on the British Rail network, and on the same day it was announced that £110 million worth of railway business would be generated by the building of the Channel Tunnel.

Railworkers aren't the only ones getting their faces rubbed in it ;

* Hospital porters at Southampton General Hospital are going to lose £20 -£30 per week because of a new rota system imposed by management.

* Health workers in Fareham face being employed by private cleaners Crothalls, which has already cut the wages of its Barking employees by two-thirds and imposed stricter working conditions.

* London Transport - a 'good' public company has docked the wages of its bus drivers in preparation for competition with private operators, whilst a 'good' Labour council (Soton) wiped out 60 jobs when the new 'no change' machines were installed.

The introduction of new technology on the bosses' terms - notably among office workers and printers - leads to a faster rate of work, tighter control over the work process by the boss and of course, job losses. Those of us who end up on the dole face petty bureaucracy, harassment and a slide into poverty especially when dole and social security benefits are cut.

Privatisation isn't some weird monetarist fad, it is purely and simply a weapon of the owning class to attack our living standards and concentrate wealth into the hands of the rich. Whether we're railworkers or unemployed, we're paying for the bosses' crisis.

WHAT ABOUT THE WORKS?

It's because this attack is experienced by our class as a whole that we have to overcome union barriers and link up with the battles of other workers and the unemployed by our own initiative and overturn the market system as a whole. During the miners' strike council workers didn't need union directives to block the entrance to Armthorpe with their vehicles; miners' wives who did so much to keep the strike going weren't in the NUM; and unemployed fought alongside miners against the police. why wait for a TUC Day of Inaction?'

There can't be many who actually like working here, but as things stand what's that between going on the dole or being transferred to York at the management's pleasure to be a trainee labourer?

So what can be done to keep the works? One suggestion:

OCCUPATION

Sit tight. Don't allow a single bolt to leave the works on road or on rail. This means blocking the gates and making 'minor adjustments' to the rails in the yard.

(Interesting fact : last year French Renault workers were threatened with redundancy because of a move to Spain. They stopped a train carrying equipment across the border by digging up the tracks....)

By occupying the works in force and indefinitely along with, hopefully, the other threatened workshops the B.R. bosses won't be able to proceed with their plans. But in order to win, direct contacts have to be made with other workers (not just on the railways) by sending delegations to other workplaces to explain the situation and get support - strikes, blacking, occupations, etc. . The miners were largely isolated in their battle with the NCB and the government - We can't afford to be in ours.

THIS IS A
FIGHT FOR ALL
OUR CLASS

THE FINAL FRONTIER.....

"There is no longer any science that is not in the service of the economy, the military, and ideology..."

TO BOLDLY GO WHERE NO MAN HAS GONE BEFORE

The growth of profitable 'space - related' technologies and projects doesn't represent an innocent exploration of great uncharted wildernesses. Space technology revolves, ultimately, around the quest of rival powers to hold sway over us more effectively. Saturation sports coverage via satellite, live television link-ups with more earthly stars, the transmission of all the lies that are fit to broadcast around the world: the propagandic value of such toys to the rulers is enormous.

Meanwhile, all the hard facts that those who run the show need rebound from Frankfurt to London to New York, and the military/political balance which has frozen the world in its place extends heavenwards. Technology has never before been refined to such a degree to intimidate mere mortals. Beneath the 'giant step for mankind' mankind has never featured so small.

In the case of American capital, however (notably NASA, the Pentagon, the Reagan administration), the necessity to maintain ordinary people's fascination with a scientifically planned future out of their control has to be balanced with the need to foster a sense of participation in an 'exciting human endeavour' - if only to guarantee financial support for its plans. A superficial commitment to abstract democratic ideals meant that American capital had to be more manipulative than its Russian competitor to get its way. The majority of American citizens couldn't give a shit about the space programme any more, and some congressmen were questioning the cost of it all. It was in the context of so much public apathy that a school-teacher, an 'ordinary' citizen, was selected to go on the 25th shuttle mission - with the aim of focussing the public gaze on one woman's journey to the wide blue yonder. It was a move, not only to raise public support, but also to gloss over the blatantly military aspects of the programme - i.e. 'Star wars' (a ludicrously impractical proposition, even in the strictest scientific sense). NASA was still angling for more funds from Congress and the Pentagon wanted 'Star Wars' funds doubled.

THE FIRST CASUALTY

However, the space programme still suffered from media 'under - exposure' - perhaps the reason that Christa McAuliffe's 'mission' was to be followed later this year by a journey into space by a member of the news media thereby not just manipulating 'news events', but inventing them. Already, hundreds of newsmen and women had filled in applications.

Even so, at the launch of the Challenger only two cable networks broadcast live coverage

NO WHEELS ON MY WAGON

Panic. After the explosion the Pentagon moved swiftly to shore up support for 'Star Wars'. General James Abrahamson went straight to Capitol Hill and tried to persuade Congressmen that the apparent failure of technology should not be allowed to affect 'Star Wars'.

(continued next page)

A
D
A
Y
O
F
A
C
T
I
O
N

The day in question the December 9th of last year when a majority of local postal workers on the late shift in Southampton's Mechanised Letter Office situated at the Western Docks decided to take matters into their own hands and walk out, I was one of these. The 9th represented the first day of 'Christmas pressure' at the M.L.O., the few weeks leading-up to Christmas when casual labour is employed and postmen have to work a set number of hours overtime to allow for the seasonal increase in mail going through the office. This year the number of hours of more-or-less compulsory overtime had been set at a figure of 18 hours.40 minutes on top of the basic 43 hour week postmen work. Taking this into consideration in may seem strange to think that the dispute was actually over the availability of additional overtime, however this was the case.

For as long as anyone can remember Christmas time at the Post Office has been known as a 'nice little earner', for most of the year postmen have to subsidise their pay by working on average 10 to 12 hours a week overtime as a guarantee, against a small wage packet. The pay for this overtime is calculated on a rising scale of time plus a quarter, time and a half and double time - the latter of which is seldom reached, at Christmas time, however on top of the basic the 18 hours 40 min. additional overtime reaches double-time. . . quickly -i.e. two hours pay for one hour's work. To secure this additional overtime at Christmas an agreement was reached with the bosses allowing postmen to turn-up and do overtime at anytime when the casual labour was employed doing postmen's work. This gave the postmen top rate overtime and gave the bosses the opportunity to employ cheaper casual labour in return. However back to the 9th, that day the rules changed.

THE FIRST WALK-OUT

A rumour began to spread that postmen asking for overtime had been turned away and at about 1.30 that afternoon we slowly drifted out of the building some led by a cause, some by curiosity. We gathered outside on the loading platform outside the main entrance, in the middle of us stood a handful of the victimised postmen, one of whom proceeded to fill us in 'on what had happened. After he had finished a few of the others added their twopenny-worth but nothing much was done until a couple of union reps showed up. They were told of the situation and in return they told us that what we were doing was unofficial but agreed to mediate and went inside to talk to the bosses. They returned a few minutes later with the excuse that the casuals that were working were not performing postman's duties thus making our previous overtime agreement void; and also the threat of being sent home if we didn't return to work. We knew for a fact that the casuals were doing our work, hadn't we been standing next to them a few minutes earlier, however the threat did have the desired effect and we went back to the promise of further negotiations and a fresh meeting outside at 5 o' clock.

THE SECOND WALK-OUT

Five o'clock came and once again we left the building and gathered outside the main entrance (our numbers noticeably fewer though still a majority, the price of indecision). The union reps greeted us again, no agreement had been reached, we stood around talking amongst ourselves while the reps went back inside. Then the bosses came out, to threaten us with being signed-off we thought, then Johnson -the head of the M.L.O. -told us to leave post office property since we were causing an obstruction, in amazement we shuffled across the road, here exposed to the elements and angered by what had just happened our resolution strengthened. Next the top union branch official arrived, good old Joe.

IN THE LIFE

W
E
E
E
O
O
S
T
P
O
S
T
T
H
E
O
F

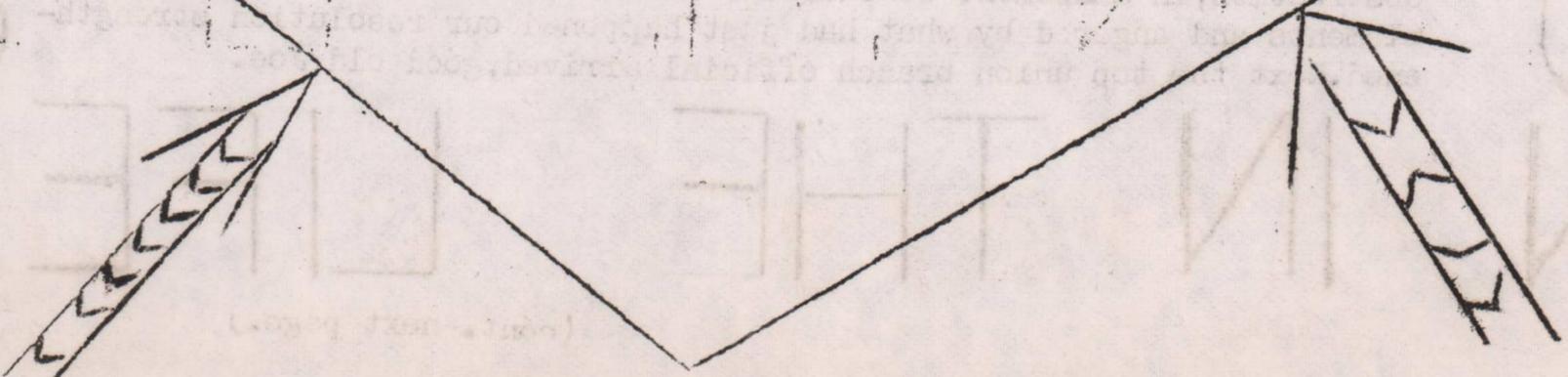
A DAY OF ACTION (CONT)

Once again we were told that our actions were unofficial and that although the cause was a worthy one it was not in his power to call us out and make it official. He went inside to talk, we stayed outside. Devoid of leadership we stood around watching a mini - procession of postmen mount the bonnet of a post office van, spout a few words of wisdom and then dismount making way for the next, a few laughs were had but nothing much was said nor done until one of the P.H.G.s began to organise things, at last. A delegation, it was suggested should be sent to each of the other offices to try and encourage others to come out. The adjacent parcel office refused to budge but that was to be expected, however the men at the station did down tools, a real bonus. It was then decided to try and turn some of the trucks carrying incoming mail back, this we did and with surprising success as the first one we asked did indeed turn around, but then the suggestion that this was in fact against the law brought the practice to a halt.

It was now approaching 7 o'clock, talks had reached stalemate we were told but they would be resumed tomorrow on the arrival of a member of the National Executive of the UCW, the only man who could make the strike official. The P.H.G. who had more or less taken command by now arranged a few pickets, volunteers were few and far between. Apparently a few of the night shift at the Head Post Office (HPO) in town had turned back and gone home. Spirits were high we all agreed on a day of action to give the negotiations a chance and to gather again in the same place 5 o'clock the following afternoon. Slowly we drifted away, as we left the gate we could see the PHG's standing around talking amongst themselves, as is their wont we went home.

After we left that evening the PHG's agreed to go back allowing the despatch of the mail that the casuals and the scabs had managed to sort. That evening, phone calls were made between postmen informing one another that an agreement was in the making and that they were expected to return to normal working practice the majority did. The next day the workforce returned - most at the official starting time (11 a.m.), some at 5 o'clock wondering what had happened to change things so drastically only to find out that the union executive member had been, agreed that overtime could no longer be taken for granted and gone.

We had lost, however the loss of nearly a day's work caused a backlog which created enough overtime for everyone during the next few days and in fact miscalculations over the amount of mail and in particular parcels going through Southampton meant that there was even overtime for the casuals. We heard rumours of disputes in other offices and when a couple of van loads of mail from Exeter arrived for us to sort we knew they were not just hearsay, all the same we sorted their mail acting as a kind of scab labour in doing so. I used to wonder how we were going to manage to knock the last nail in but we're getting there.



WORKING AND NOT WORKING IN

Every now and again the local Post Office hierarchy advertises tours round the Parcel Concentration Office (P.C.O. - the Parcels often being transposed to Postmen) so the great local public can see how the whole mechanical apparatus works. The public is kept at arms length from the occupants of the zoo in case some of the truth about the tedium and boredom of working there escapes. The PCO is the distribution centre for the whole of Hampshire and Dorset, plus the local area delivery as well.

It resembles an aircraft hangar with large helter-skelters coming down from the ceiling (known as chutes). It has a marvellous system of parcel sorting; basically the parcels come in at ground level and via a complex set of conveyor belts are taken 50 feet in the air and they come back down again in one of the chutes. One of the early effects of this system was to give people jobs as parcel repairers - I often had the impression that the PCO was a parcel hospital and we were the hospital staff. Unfortunately we never got the chance to lobotomise the management. Anyway back to struggle in the place, the major complaint revolved around the content of the work you were supposed to do. This is best explained in the following manner; people would have a duty number - I075 for example - and to find out what you were supposed to do you looked up number I075 in the duty book. This book would give you the exact content of the work - for example I075 might say 'bag and tie on parcel chutes I2-I5' which would mean that all the parcels coming down chutes I2, I3, I4 and I5 were yours to put in parcel bags, tie them up and stack them on a trolley if there was one available. It did not mean go and load parcels

anywhere else. Management had tried to get round this by having 'assist as required' on the bottom of the duty sheets. However, they could not put someone else onto your job whilst you were busy elsewhere. There was constant skirmishing with the lowest form of management over this. On one particular occasion I was asked to do the 'bag job' - which consisted of standing at the end of a chute where empty parcel bags came down and stick them in a trolley - by some management trainee. He got a trifle upset when told I wouldn't do it, went off to get the inspector-in-charge who promptly instructed me to carry out the order. After some discussion I agreed to do it as long as nobody was put on my job which was accepted. The trainee smiled at me as if to say 'got one over on you this time'; well, his joy lasted about 25 minutes when the town distribution system totally closed down as all the chutes were blocked. As a result, the engineers had to be called in and god knows how many parcels missed delivery the following morning. We never saw much of that trainee again and he never asked me to move again. If only he'd have asked me what would happen if he moved me - he wouldn't have been told. It was a small but nice victory.

Bollocks to the mail -
Here comes the bus,
let's go down the
pub!!



THE POST OFFICE
PART 2

CONT. OVERLEAF

W
O
R
K
I
N
G

a
n
d

A tactic much used in resistance is the 'work to rule'; this is often glamourised when union bureaucrats cop out from a strike. It's a very useful method if applied properly - I remember when I was a bus conductor thinking that if I actually carried out all the safety and security checks I was supposed to then the bus would never leave the station. The unofficial 'work to rule' can often be very useful; here's an example. The management insisted that all we had to do with the parcels coming down the chutes was to put them in bags, tie them up, etc., etc.. We were told not to check to see if the parcels were going to the right place. This was done by the coder up in the heavens above; well, that might be so but they weren't automatons plus any machine can go wrong. Any machine the Post Office has usually does - at fairly frequent intervals. Well, we used to check the parcels just to make life a little more interesting and more crucially to drag out the work. However every now and again the management got a bit stropky so we did 'work to rule'. This had the result of parcels ending up here, there and everywhere. One particular night a switch wasn't pushed and Dorchester - usually the recipient of 2 parcel bags a night at the most - got 50 bags of mail. All the parcels were actually destined for the Channel Isles but of course we were not supposed to check them. Still, maybe someone in Dorchester got a few hours overtime. The other main 'work to rule' was over the condition of parcels - the machinery being notorious for its mangling effect - normally, if it was in one piece it went on its way. However after a row one night we decided to apply it stringently. This resulted in about 30 times the normal amount of broken parcels (aided of course by a few tactical tears in wrapping). A few hours of overtime accrued for the following shift and we were left alone.

n
o
t

W
O
R
K
I
N
G

Referring back to the content of work, one particular job that seemed to divide people right down the middle was known as 'working on the platform', which meant humping parcel bags onto a conveyor belt all night long. Now it seemed you either loved it or hated it - its only advantage was that you were outside - a bonus in summer but certainly not in winter. So, if you wanted to do it, you signed for it and vice-versa. However, whenever management were short it was always on this particular job. Management usually picked on the same group of people to dig them out - and for a while it included me. As a result arguments occurred, people suddenly going sick, disappearing for half an hour, etc., etc.. Eventually slowing down the work and a generally unco-operative air got us it. In essence, it was a case of 'work to rule' paying off for us. The final straw came over the weight of parcel bags from other offices. Despite repeated complaints about these and the consequent danger of hurting your back etc., nothing was done. One night we got a bag

weighing 85lb. and yet nothing was done (the limit was 50lb.). So next night I went and got the weighing scales. The management - a creep called Moody - asked why, was told forcibly but he didn't seem too convinced. So we let him sweat for about 3 hours when suddenly we got a bag weighing 52lbs. and dumped it on the scales and left it there. Moody came over and demanded to know why I'd left it there, so, I pointed out the weight and told him to do what he was supposed to do - i.e. take the label off, write down the weight of it and send it back to the place it came from. He didn't seem too bothered so we just left it there and by the end of the night we had 30 or more overweight bags. That was it - we weren't asked to do that job again!

cont.
overleaf

i
n

t
h
e

P.
O.

WORKING

MORE

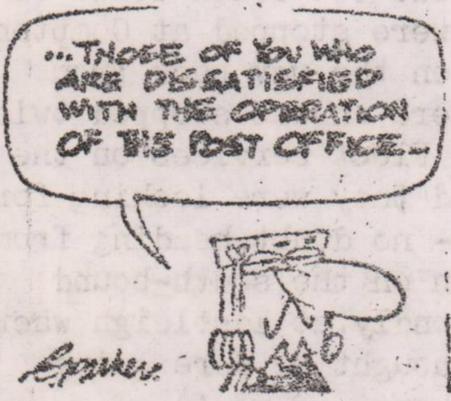
A
N
D

Now, every so often in the press you'll see stories about postmen stealing parcels or getting caught out on some fiddle or other. Well, the only time I got involved in the former was with some bottles of wine that came through. There were a dozen bottles in a case and one was broken which had leaked out over the casing. So we were a little thirsty, it was a hot night and so we gave the bloke in charge of parcels that were badly broken a bottle and told him to tell the recipient that all the bottles were smashed. We'd provide the labels later, which we did of course having disposed of the contents. The night went especially quick and I don't think any of us had trouble sleeping that morning.



NOT

W
O
R
K
I
N
G



The whole period in the parcel office was distinguished by continuous argument and battles primarily because it was a new office, with new working conditions and we were trying to establish our strength. In essence the union never really reflected that battle and eventually the 'assist as required' clause was removed but that came at a point when the UPW (now JCW) executive agreed with the PO at national level to agree to cut jobs - this was the infamous Jackson letter telling us to agree with whatever management wanted because of the alleged financial state of the PO..

I
N
T
H
E

The other main office in Southampton is the Mechanised Letter Office (MLO) - a place infested, with noise and postwomen and men trying to get out of the place. I managed to avoid working in there most of the time; mornings were alright because most of the machines were turned off and it was nice and quiet - a situation no longer true. The afternoons and evenings always reminded me of watching ants work with one main difference - the ants were organised and seemed to have an idea of what they were doing. Here, the resistance focussed on doing whatever you could to get out of the place - be it going off to the loo repeatedly, stringing out meal breaks or just vanishing.

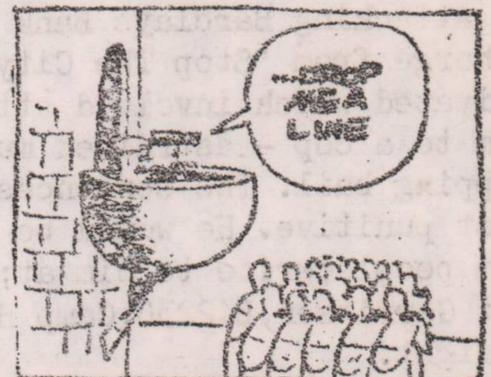
POST

The main point of this article has been hopefully to show that resistance goes on all the

time - not just at demonstrations, violent upheavals, riots or whatever. Hopefully this small article will be of use in spreading that struggle onto a greater and wider level.

OFFICE

As a result of conversations with present-day postal workers it is obvious that conditions have worsened quite considerably in the last 8 years. To some extent this is a result of the economic situation, also as the newly-gained confidence of the management has snowballed plus the smashing of the group of militants I was involved with. The deliveries have got longer, the introduction of cadets and other forms of cheap labour and the stress on uniforms are but a few signs of this. We hope to have an article by a current postal worker about conditions in the post office in a future issue.



Courtesy Publishers-Mail Syndicate

