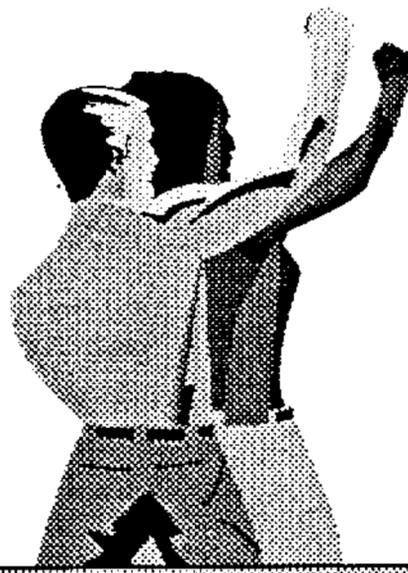


V Socialist **VOICE**



★ **ISSUE 46**
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MINERS
EDUCATION
TRANSPORT
UNEMPLOYMENT
COMMUNITIES

UNITE

COUNCIL
BLACK
INTERNATIONAL
JOBS
TENANTS

ALL

STRUGGLES

**Council Workers in Islington
Corruption, Unemployed and
Services in Lambeth ★**

POLISH MINERS STRIKE

New Feature
**BEHIND
THE
NEWS**
Pit Closures

n e w c o l u m n
REAL 
LIFE **PAGES 3**

NEW SERIES
WORKING
L I F E
Peter Kerrigan
Interviewed ~
**A Docker's
Story**
Starts on page

LOCAL AUTHORITIES SPECIAL ISSUE
Stories from Lambeth / Islington / Manchester

socialist VOICE



Monthly Paper
of the
International
Socialist
League



British Section
of the
International
Workers'
League
[4th International]

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*signed articles do not
necessarily reflect
the views of the ISL*

Contributions

We welcome letters, articles,
and comments from readers.

THE VOICE SAYS

Public services in Britain are being devastated. Labour, Tory and Liberal councils close services and sack workers as if they were bad players in a game of Monopoly. These attacks are part of the increasing brutality of capitalism which can find no way out except in the most vicious attacks on the working class: closing mines, increasing racism and sacking many thousands every week.

This issue of Socialist Voice concentrates on the fight for public services. As is shown by the interview with a tenants leader in Macclesfield and the articles on the struggles in Lambeth and Islington, council workers, the unemployed and the tenants are fighting, not only in the big cities but, in all areas of the country.

The scale of the attacks are such that they cannot be manoeuvred around as Labour and Trade Union leaders have tried to do in the past. To-day these leaders, in many cases set the pace of the attacks: jailing poor people, victimising council workers and even suggesting new ways in which the unemployed can be attacked. As Audrey Smith in her article on the Labour Party explains, the Labour leadership and those who follow their policies increasingly become part of the state machine for imposing the attacks on workers.

At the end of her article Audrey mentions that old enemies can be new friends. Such a statement obviously needs clarifying. There are members and former members of the Communist Party and the Labour Party who, whatever their past, are moved by a class instinct to fight against these new attacks. It is with these that there is the possibility of making alliances.

All the witch-hunts, expulsions and attacks from the Labour Party shows that party is on the move, as Kinnock said of himself after losing the General election, to "serve the nation in any capacity."

The class should respond to wherever the attacks fall and at the same time go on the offensive. Scargill is calling for a "massive stay away" on 18th February and maximum support must be

given on that day.

The working class must get behind the miners and the miners must get behind all others who are fighting. The aim is a united movement of millions.

The struggle of workers to defend their services, jobs and conditions has to be developed into an offensive against the government and the employers. In the case of Lambeth the working class should place no trust in an "independent" enquiry they have to make their own enquiry into the alleged corruption because it is only the council workers and the communities who have an interest in really rooting out corruption and defending the services.

While we support all struggles, their victories will not be based on fighting for more of a greater share of the government allocated money. That cake is already far too small. The rich must be forced by the movement to pay for these services.

In order to achieve these demands the movement has to be united. The February Conference (see pages 5,6 & 7), which is whole-heartedly supported by the Voice, is part of that struggle. To be successful the class must become conscious of what it is doing and what it is fighting. It must develop a programme which responds to the needs of the class.

But a class programme is not developed only out of the immediate fight. It must bring in the experience of its past struggles. That is why we publish an interview with Peter Kerrigan. The interview is part of the history of the class. It was done by Bill Hunter for a book which shows how the dockers built their strength and what happened to it. That book, three years in the making, will be published soon.

The massive dock's struggles are past and they will not be repeated in the same form but they help arm us in the present struggles - if we study what they did. The dockers struggle was a sectional struggle which had an effect on development of the working class. Today all sections have to be welded together as one.

ISL COMMENT

Socialist Voice

Crisis at Christies

Cancer patient David Dunnico explains what 'overtrading' means

MANCHESTER'S CHRISTIE Hospital is running out of money. The hospital which is the North West's main centre for the treatment of cancer, opted out of local health authority control two years ago. Last month, Mike Fry their Chief Executive, revealed that they had overspent their drug budget by half a million pounds, saying; "We are very worried about where it will end if this level of spending continues."

Mr Fry's remedy for the financial crisis included trying to attract more private patients, cutting costs in ancillary services and reducing spending on heating and lighting. He also mysteriously pointed to; "...income generating projects with various drug companies." Christies, which is also one of the worlds leading research centres into the disease, has been heavily criticised for the way it handles its finances. On one hand the hospital spent £2000 on a salmon supper for dignitaries, while on the other it had introduced car parking charges for visitors.

While Mr Fry maintains that patient care will not be affected by the financial crisis, personal experience shows that whatever financial games are played, patients suffer.

The consequences of the overspend on the drugs budget are being played down. Fry's statement that: "There is concern that we cannot afford the drugs we would use in an ideal world", blandly implies that patients might be inconvenienced but not made to suffer. In fact, patients undergoing chemotherapy for example, may find that without the latest drugs, their treatment may prove to be much more painful than their disease.

For five months last year, I spent one week in every three, having chemotherapy at Christie's. Patients are put on a drip for twelve hours a day and have five litres of chemicals passed into their blood. The chemicals are extremely toxic, they have terrible side effects, which can include a weakening of the body's immune system, vomiting and diarrhoea. Although the chemicals attack cancer cells, they also attack any

other fast growing cells, which is why your hair and eye lashes fall out. The lining of your nose and mouth is damaged by the treatment, so smells become overpowering and food tastes unbearable strong.

In my ward the food trolley was greeted

with the cry of "chuck wagon!" In our case this was meant literally. The sight of twenty bald men vomiting into their dinners made me wish away the hours until the drugs trolley came with my sleeping pills.

The only other relief during chemotherapy comes from anti-sickness drugs. This is where the truth behind Fry's bland statement about giving a patient one pill instead of another, is exposed. Most of the patients on my ward were given an anti-sickness drug called 'Zofran'. Most of them threw up several times a day. Others, myself included, were given an anti-sickness drug called 'Kitrol'. Most of us didn't throw up. But the hospital could not give more people Kitrol because it cost more than Zofran. In fact the Kitrol Christies were using had been given to them by the manufacturer, to try out. In short patients suffered because the hospital couldn't spend more on drugs. In fact, what happened was the nurses and the ancillary staff Mike Fry wants to save money on, spent more time cleaning up puke instead of supporting patients. The supply of Kitrol ran out before my treatment had finished, so I had to have the other less effective drug and could certainly feel the difference.

It would be wrong to think that this problem is unique to the Christie Hospital. All hospitals have to balance their drug budgets and in all cases patients must suffer. General Practitioners must also balance their drug budgets. After each course of chemotherapy, some patients had to continue taking anti-sickness tablets, which are incredibly expensive. These had to be prescribed by patients own doctors. In some cases the GP's were reluctant because it would have taken them over budget. In real life, that is what "balancing budgets" means. ■

"In my ward the food trolley was greeted with the cry of 'chuck wagon!'"

In our case this was meant literally."



POLL TAX AMNESTY

ANDY SHANNON, a 'Socialist Voice' sympathiser, has been given a Poll Tax amnesty.

Andy who has fought tenaciously against the tax and not paid a penny of it, has stated that he would go to jail rather than pay it.

However, Manchester's Community Charge Registration Officer has told Andy that he has been removed from the register of people who have to pay Poll Tax.

The council have stated in the local press that Andy's name had been removed because it had been duplicated when he applied for housing benefit. The council have never told Andy this.

It is obvious that Manchester's Labour council don't want to pursue residents who are prepared to fight - only those too frightened or weak to resist this 'Rich Man's' tax. ■

RECESSION GOES ON

THE CABINET might be able to see the 'green shoots of recovery', but thousands of workers can only see life on the dole. Newspapers such as 'The Guardian' make interesting reading. Here are just a few of the job losses announced over the last few months:

British Aerospace; 3000, Portland Naval Base; 1400, Blue Circle Cement; 500, British Telecom; 40,000, Post Office; 9000, Trustees Savings Bank; 5600, Regal Electronics; 2000, Jaguar; 200, Granada; 2500, Royal Ordnance Factories; 1300, ICI; 7000, British Rail; 15,000, British Petroleum; 12,000.

Not forgetting 45,000 local government workers, 3000 staff from government departments, 2500 transport workers, 9000 employees from the car, water, insurance and textile industries, along with 20,000 nurses and 128,000 factory workers. ■

PRIVATISING THE LAW

PAUL CONDON, the new £86,000 a year Commissioner of the Metropolitan Police, says that the thin blue line of the law is twenty years out of date, and the force should go back to the kind of basic policing the public demands; a fast response emergency service, visible policing and care for the victims of crime.

Condon could not have read 'The Observer' article published on November 15th under the headline 'Police to face privatisation shake up plan'. This reported that a Home Office inquiry into policing was recommending some radical reforms. Traffic control, administration and the guarding of people and property are all being considered for privatisation. Proposals that are likely to find a sympathetic ear with the Home Secretary, Kenneth Clarke.

Privatisation of the law has already started in jails. Group 4, a private security firm opened a prison last April which has been heavily criticised by a judge, after an inmate was injected with heroin and tortured by other prisoners. The prison privatisation plan ran into more trouble when the Home Office had to reverse an announcement that companies wanting to take over Strangeways in Manchester, could cut staffs pay and conditions. This U-turn will mean that companies tendering for the contract will have to revise their bids.

But this U-turn does not signal the end of the privatisation plans. Prison officers and prisoner organisations face a hard struggle to keep up resistance to the plans. Recently, the Prison Officers' Association finally started to oppose them, but no one should be fooled about the sincerity of their leaderships actions.

Experience shows what happens when security services are privatised or contracted out. In Wolds prison, where Group 4 Remand Services has a £25 million a year contract and boast about the conditions, there has been several riots. Private security firms are notorious employers, guards in some cases earn just £2 per hour and have no sick or holiday pay. Neither the prisoners nor the staff will benefit from privatisation, both will suffer. The prison services union have said the market testing of Strangeways is in disarray and should be halted. ■

WORKERS *t a l k i n g*

Second Class

Postal worker Peter Dee on the run up to privatisation

When your mail arrives late who do you blame: the postal workers or the management and the preparations for the government's privatisation?

Over Christmas many postal workers had more mail than they could cope with. For example, in one post office on a number of days they had to take three bags out. Normally a postal worker goes in at 5am and begins to 'throw off' (sort) the mail at 6.30am. They collect the mail from the area frames and then sort it into streets and into numerical order for delivery. Delivery will start at 7.30am and should take one hour and forty minutes.

After a tea break, the second delivery is sorted and then delivered which means that a postal worker should finish at 12.15pm.

Normally at Christmas, to cope with the extra load, overtime and extra days are used and are known as 'Christmas Pressure'. This year overtime was cut to a minimum and there was no Sunday delivery before Christmas. In the past, pressure conditions started earlier. This year they started ten days before Christmas instead of the usual three weeks. Until the pressure period starts postal workers get just normal rate payment, known as extended delivery, not the overtime rate.

All this meant that mail delivery was later than it would have been in past years. The workers did their best to get the mail out but delays became inevitable due to the cuts.

The Post Office recently boasted that in the six months to September they more than doubled their profits from £62m to £135m. Most of these profits came from the Royal Mail sector where the volume of mail rose by 1% from the level of April 1992.

The Royal Mail have increased their profits by increasing the workload and getting rid of jobs. Thousands of jobs have already been slashed and, in fact, they plan to get rid of 16,200 in the next three years. The Christmas delays highlighted what is a deep seated problem. Workers are being forced to work harder for less money. This 'streamlining' of the Royal Mail is being carried out because the government and the management are preparing for privatisation.

Michael Heron, former personnel director of the multinational Unilever, was appointed chairman of the Post Office in October. This particular 'job for the boys' is to oversee the destruction of workers conditions and make sure that other 'boys' make super profits out of the Post Office.

The government is determined to go ahead with privatisation. All those who use the post service, which is just about everyone, should know that they and the Post Office workers will be paying for all the future super profits.

The Labour Party and unions have already warned that privatisation will lead to higher prices and poorer services. But it is not just a question of warning the public and workers about what privatisation will mean, but of organising both the postal workers and the public in a fight against it.

The Post Office is the easiest service to defend because everybody needs it and businesses depend on it. A force could be built which would shake the government.

During the fight against the Poll Tax, postal workers were amongst the most involved in forming work based anti-Poll Tax unions and played a very active role at the height of the campaign.

An energetic campaign should start now of public meetings involving the public with Post Office workers and discussing together a plan of action. ■

In 'Workers Talking' readers tell us what is going on in their jobs. Write to us if you've got something to say about your work.

WORKERS *t a l k i n g*

UNITE STRUGGLES IN THE PUBLIC SERVICES AND COMMUNITIES

6th and 7th February
St. Alphonsus Centre
Aphonsus Street, Old Trafford
12 noon Saturday, 10.30 am Sunday

The following resolution is part of the contributions for the February Conference

The widespread support over the miners last year showed the wide feeling amongst the working people and sections of the middle class in Britain against the policies of the Government. Like the opposition against the poll tax it contains a strong concern at the growth of hardship for the majority, while wealth and privilege increases among the top minority and is flaunted amid arrogant self-seeking and corruption.

The attack on the miners, services and jobs shows that British capitalism is intensifying its attacks on the working class and these attacks will not go away. It seeks to divide our communities, the employed from the unemployed and white against black. The council cuts in housing, creche facilities, refuge centres etc will help to increase the divisions. No movement can be really united unless it defends the whole class. The racist and right wing groups seek to stir up divisions encouraged by the Tory government - it is only the working class who can consistently defend its own.

Old age pensioners, unemployed, disabled, youth and other sections of society who can't pay the Poll Tax are threatened and persecuted by the law while the law is flouted by water companies and industries who pollute our water and who ignore safety provisions at work and who break the law by the manipulation of pension funds, insider

dealing and financial speculation.

The callousness of government ministers is shown in that the government is cutting community care cash for councils in April and has told local authorities not to tell the elderly and disabled what care they need - if the funds are not available. This is to prevent these deprived people from demanding their legal rights after the cut in funds.

Labour councillors in control of 163 councils were sent a circular by Labour Party headquarters in November instructing them to be prepared to order compulsory redundancies, cut services and increase charges. In 1993 they are

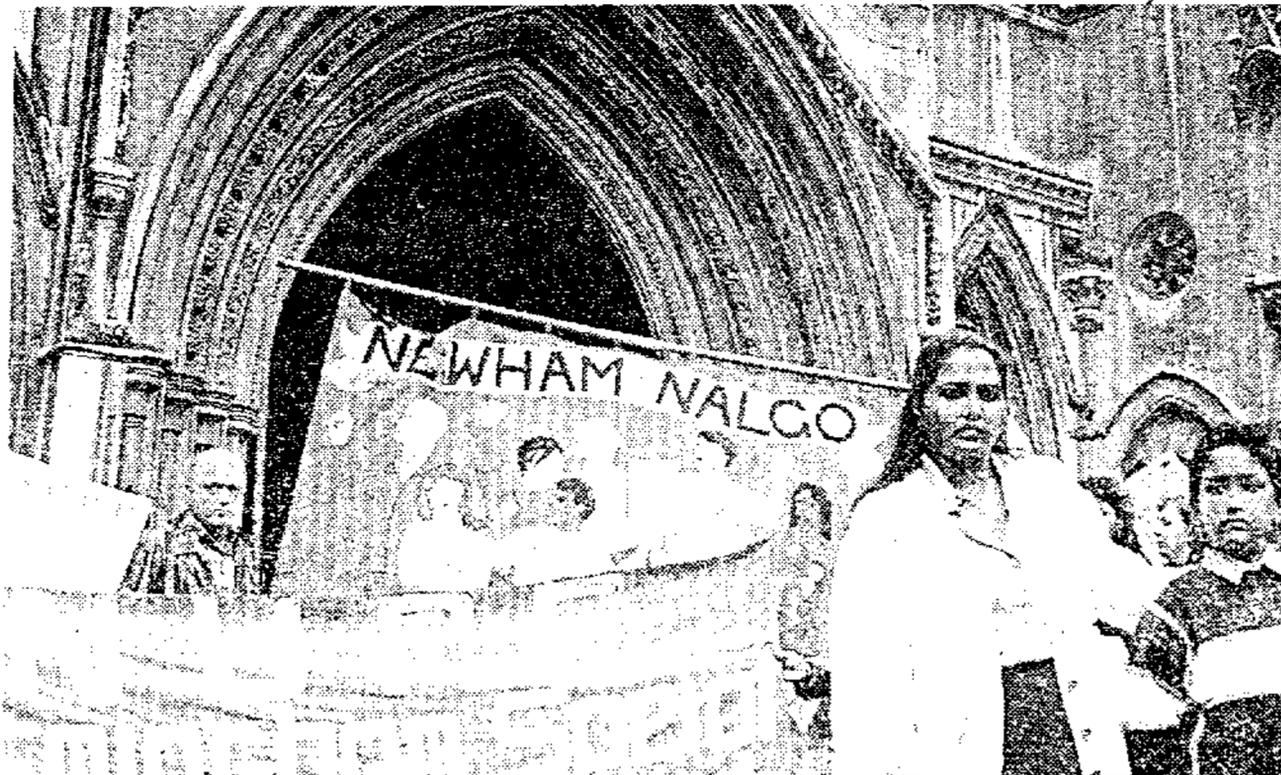
doing precisely this.

But this government does not act from any inherent strength it is not only opposed now by the majority but is more and more held in contempt.

It is now absolutely clear to a great number of people suffering under the economic crisis and under this government that the remedies will have to come from below and will take place despite, and in opposition to, the leaders of the Labour Party and the trade unions.

From people at miners support group meetings, from activists in the defence of those harassed by councils collecting

(CONTINUED PAGE 5)



The support union members have given to fights against deportations and the Asylum Bill is an essential part of developing working class unity, which is needed now more than ever.

Make Socialist Voice Part of Your Campaign

Socialist Voice supports workers and communities whenever and wherever they fight for their rights and against injustices.

In this issue we have highlighted the way national and local government are attacking ordinary working class people.

Every month we open our pages to campaigns, groups and individuals.

Send us articles, news, stories, photographs etc.

ISL PO Box 9 Eccles SO Salford M30 7FX

PUBLIC SERVICE SPECIAL

(CONTINUED FROM PAGE 5)

the Poll Tax, from people active in defence of communities, in meetings in defence of jobs, services, safety and conditions, in meetings on hospital and other cuts, we now hear the cry: "why can't we have a united struggle for the defence of communities, workers' organisations, jobs and the weakest" That cry is increasingly going to be heard in Britain.

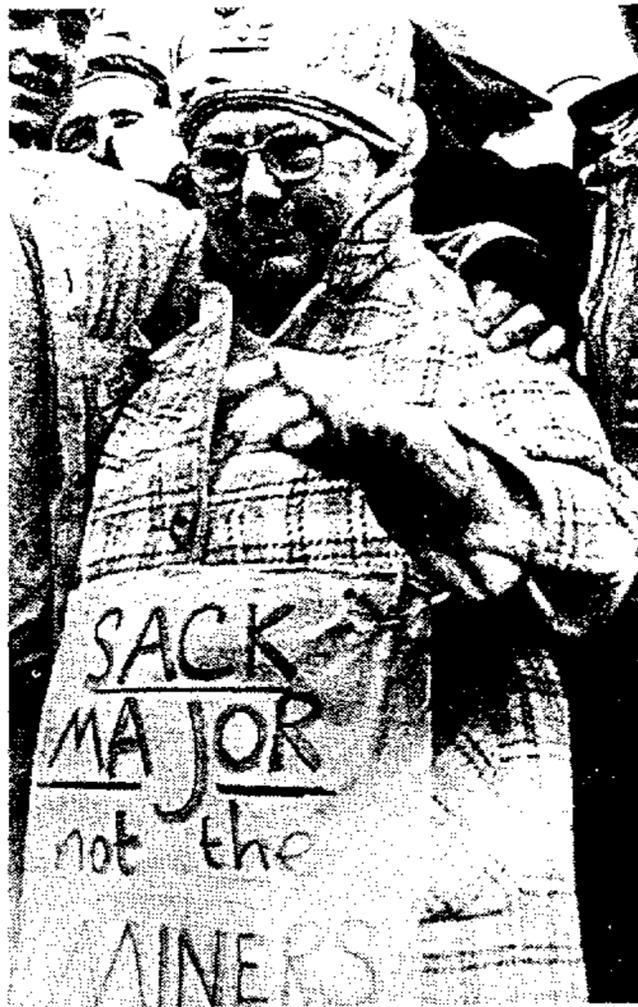
After the wide spontaneous support for the miners in October the movement appeared to go back. But the feelings nor the urge to struggle which brought these upsurges has not gone away. On the contrary. But it needs organising by people who are consistent because they are confident that these various struggles can be united around policies that will move us together in developing a powerful mass movement. The question we have to answer is how to maintain a mass opposition because that could certainly increase the political crisis of a weak government and win some decisive victories.

The central point of this conference must be to discuss this need to unite all those who want to develop a struggle against the descent into hardship and poverty with shattered services, education and health provision, steadily increasing unemployment and the drastic decline of working conditions.

We, therefore, propose the following resolution:

The attack on the working class is on all fronts and is co-ordinated and led by the Tory government. It is continuous, unrelenting and accelerating. The working class can defend itself only by using all its united strength against the enemy. We believe that has been indicated by the response that workers have already made in their desire to join with the miners. We consider, therefore, that we must campaign to link together workers and communities in struggle around policies that will involve them in the wider struggle with other workers.

We work for the organising of a movement where the strongest sections give support to the weakest struggling against increasing hardship and difficulties - those, for example, fighting against closure of hospitals, against closure of homes for the disabled and the



The miners demonstration in London was one of the biggest since the second world war

blind and against all forms of racism; so that the strongest help the struggle of the most defenceless.

Thus we seek to link struggles against unemployment, closures, cuts in jobs and services, into joint action by workers and communities; to develop control by those who run and those who use services. We support the maximum unity in opposition against the Asylum Bill and all forms of racism.

That we assist and seek to develop support for the campaign for safety of construction workers and widen the campaign into other industries, for example, among seafarers. The advance of production methods, speed-up and lengthening of hours has meant the struggle for safe ways of working and the operation of legal safeguards had become an issue in many industries, including the schemes and jobs in which youth is employed.

That we demand that Labour councillors break completely with what has become their central role - acting as a direct agency for the attacks of the Tory government. We demand they return to the old slogan of the Bermondsey councillors, seventy years ago: "Better break the law than break the poor" and help organise a mass movement.

Public services exist because of need. They are being destroyed because the

Tories say services must make a profit. The measure of success amongst council bosses is to force council departments to make a profit out of their service. Their slogan can be summed up as: no profit, no service. But communities and families need these services. They have paid more than enough in terms of poll tax and income tax. In fact in most councils their money goes to pay off huge bank debts not fund services.

Those who want services because of need should control them. We do not need the council's false "consultation" we need control. This applies across all services and industry and it means we are against all privatisations. The Tory governments, banks and others have milked billions from privatisation first in manufacturing and now in services. Illness, old age, disability, children etc all become items in an accountant's balance. That is why even council users are referred to as customers or clients. Nobody who agrees with this is fit to run a service or an industry. It means we must re-nationalise under workers and users control all that has been taken away from us - without paying these fat cats any more money.

That we repudiate the policy of the trade union leaders who very clearly in relation to the miners in the past few weeks have been working consciously to prevent a united movement of solidarity and struggle in support of the miners. We will seek to make the unions what our fathers and mothers built them for - as independent working class organisations meant to struggle for the betterment of our class.

Clearly, the present leadership of the Labour movement is opposing these united struggles, we, therefore, have to build a leadership of those in the ranks who are convinced of the need to organise this unity in struggle, to defeat the Tory Government and build democratic fighting organisations of the working people.

Finally, unity in struggle is necessary not only nationally but internationally. We, therefore, think it is absolutely urgent that in all our struggles, we take every opportunity to link with sections who, today are in similar struggles in other countries.

in Public Services & Communities



PUBLIC SERVICE SPECIAL

Socialist Voice talked to Terry Cullen, a member of the Western Tenants Association which represents the residents of the biggest council estate in Macclesfield. Terry who is a member of the Labour Party, heard about the February conference at the Socialist Movement Conference in Sheffield. Here he talks about the problems in Macclesfield and what he hopes the conference can achieve.

Socialist Voice: "What are tenants facing in Macclesfield?"

Terry Cullen: "One of main issues is Compulsory Competitive Tendering for housing management services. This will result in higher rents for tenants, managers who we do not know and who don't us and services at a lower quality.

"Compulsory Tendering is being pushed through even before the six trial areas have been completed. It means tenants will lose their right to veto and they will be made to finance the cost of the introduction of the CCT.

"George Younger admitted on 10th December in Parliament that this change may cost tenants money in the short term but they would gain benefits in the long term.

"But councils will become nothing more than contractors as they have with refuse services. When the contracts first went out for council refuse services 80% went to council workers now it is only 40%. As companies find out how to cut costs and make more profits so more are tendering for these services. Every town is just getting worse.

"We have informed the tenants the best we can. The local press are not doing it and national press don't want to touch the issue. The government is saying they already have the legislation for CCT for repairs and services and one amendment in the Urban Development Bill, due to be read March, means they can introduce the same for housing management services very quickly.

"I must admit I am ashamed of both Tory and Labour councillors, the Labour councillors did not even bother reading the consultation documents. It was only because the Victoria Tenants Association sent the Labour councillors the consultation documents over housing management services that they had an idea of what was really being proposed.

"In addition to that rents will already go up this year by at least 9%, after a 12% rise last year, and the council has run out of money for most repairs.

"Some tenants in Macclesfield are being thrown out of council houses they thought they were buying. Because of redundancies and getting into debt, with money lenders, they are immediately out on the street and become homeless. But the council is not building any more council houses the only houses being built are by housing associations or private builders on land given to them by the council. In exchange for that only 20% to 40% of the new houses they build are going to council tenants - the rest will be private or housing associations whose rents are about £76 a week. People cannot afford it. The average take home wage in Macclesfield is £80 per week. For a skilled worker it is about £140 but most of those have gone."

SV: "What do you think the conference in February should discuss and propose?"

TC: "The conference in February should co-ordinate the movements and keep them going as a movement not just let it stand still and go down. We need to come together as one movement - as one party. We are all members of the working class. The thing is we do not want what we had in the thirties: low income economy and 50 people for each job. Mass unemployment is not just by accident it is a policy if the government.

"We should propose united action or a mobile conference which keeps going monthly and keeping in touch with the groups all the time. We should try and bring not only public sector workers and tenants but also private sector workers for example like builders, I was in UCATT myself and many are now doing contract work for the council. A job on a three month contract or six month contract and then on the dole again. So many workers are being effected. Perhaps we could set up regional meetings or branches so people could keep in touch with all the activists. It does not matter which party they belong so long as they are active and we can find out what action they are taking."

"I WOULD like to see discussed a perspective of how we fight not only to defend the services but actually to start to build an alternative. We need to go on the offensive. To do that, to unite people, we need policies on public services.

We have to develop a policy of a fight for services based on need. We have to look at the billions of pounds that have been taken from local authorities, the high levels of taxation of ordinary people, council tax etc. People are being bled dry and they are getting nothing back in return. So all these questions have to be looked into and a programme developed because the only way of uniting people is if we discuss what is needed and develop a strategy to fight for it.

We have seen a change particularly since the development of the attack on the miners. There was a big movement against the government which, coupled with the attacks on services, has brought people together. They are looking for an alternative. As part of that we should discuss standing alternative independent candidates. We need to discuss how we are going to fight in the unions against the right wing labour leaders and officials. I think we should only support and sponsor those MP's and councillors who agree to fight against the cuts and if they don't we don't support them.

I think the defeat of the Labour party last spring created a great shock amongst workers, it has become clearer that the Labour Party no longer represents the struggles of ordinary workers.

For example, the Labour party policy on community care was almost identical to the Tories. They never discussed the anti-trade union laws, they never discussed the question of rising unemployment, the youth or the elderly. They had no real policies, the fight for socialism, nationalisation, national health service, and public services based on need was not mentioned. They were almost frightened to raise these issues.

There has to be an alternative organisation, of one form or another, that is based on the needs of the people in this country and which develops its policies around that."

Celia Ralph

Scandal Against The Working class

The press recently exposed corruption in Lambeth Council. The Labour Party has seen the scandal as an opportunity to sack employees and privatise services.

THE alleged corruption at Lambeth council has immediately been used to attack council workers, council services and as an argument for rapid privatisation.

It is not only the press and Tories who are whipping it up but two Lambeth Labour MPs, Kate Hoey and Keith Hill the newly elected MP for Streatham, issued a letter on the 20th January to Steve Whaley leader of Lambeth council in which they state, "we fully support moves to take all appropriate disciplinary action and to call in the police to investigate wherever any criminal activity may have occurred; to disband the DLO forthwith; to externally tender service contracts held by DOS."

The DLO is the Direct Labour Organisation of Lambeth which includes the manual workers and the DOS is the Directorate of Operational services. There are about 1000 council workers in the directorate.

These Labour MPs, just like their leadership, fail to protest and organise

"Labour MP's who fail to protest against corruption at far higher levels like BCCI, Maxwell and the Lloyds names"

against corruption on a far higher level such as over BCCI, which involved governments the CIA and others, Lloyds Names (insurance underwriters in the city) or over the pension scandal concerning Maxwell and many others. And it is strange how they leave alone the Tory councils which themselves are even more corrupt than other councils.

Their record proves they are not concerned by corruption but they join the chorus of the press which uses the scandal to attack council workers and those who have raised resistance to the attacks on Lambeth council. The picture of Ted Knight finds it way into the stories on Lambeth corruption into the pages of the Guardian, the Observer etc

because they are trying to have a go at anyone who fought in the past; there are posting a warning to all councils, if you fight we will investigate you as well. So the fact of corruption is being used to mount a class attack.

Into this sewer will pore all the hatred against those who fought against the the poll tax and discrimination.

It joins with the witch hunt of left councillors who have been expelled for fighting for the poor and the essential services of Lambeth.

It is no accident that the past leader of Liverpool is being taken through the courts. The point is that, whatever he did, they use the case to continue a relentless attack on services and council workers.

This is why we call not for an independent enquiry, since when have independent enquiries been independent but for an enquiry under the control of the council workers and users of the services. The pressure which the press the Labour MPs and others are creating in Lambeth must be resisted. We say only the workers and their organisations of Lambeth can find out the truth about the corruption and widen the question not only to corruption but to demand that services must be based on need and demand the government pay for them. The money to run services and the services themselves cannot be run by corrupt people they can only be run by the working class.

The government goes from one scandal to another, it ignores the law over pit closures because at that point it has no interest in following the law. All that shows is that law and corruption are class based. It means that only the working class can look after its own.

On Friday 22nd January the union called a demonstration at lunch time at which 200 workers protested outside the town hall calling for no cuts in DOS. They are joined by forty dust carts which blocked Brixton High street as they drove past the town hall. This led to a lobby of the council in the evening of



Lambeth Workers will get no justice or equality from an "independent" enquiry.

★ On the page 10 we have another report from Lambeth in our Public Services Special

ISLINGTON STRIKE GOES ON

2000 workers demanding the same thing.

At the centre of the scandals and witch-hunts is the attack on the democratic rights of the Lambeth people to control their local services. The attack now is so great, as it is throughout Britain, that we are witnessing the end of many local services.

The Voice thinks, along with many others, that it is no longer a question of creative accounting, reshuffling the budget or any other financial manoeuvres the fight must be now how do you get a struggle against the government and its attacks on local government.

Lambeth NALGO and NUPE have called a Lambeth Borough Conference against cuts and privatisation. We think it should seek to unite the Labour movement and the service users in a defence of the services the council provide. It should link the demand for a working class enquiry with what services the people of Lambeth need.

The conference will attempt to organise a demonstration from the Council to the House of Commons. In addition to this Lambeth NALGO is balloting for strike action and is also demanding that the Metropolitan district calls for London wide action and national action with other public sector unions against cuts and the pay freeze beginning with a national demo and one-day strike.

The Voice supports all these initiatives and we also ask readers in Lambeth to support the conference to be held on the 6th and 7th February. ■

**Lambeth
and Borough
Conference
Against Cuts and
Privatisation**

**Saturday 27th February
10 am-4pm
Lambeth Town Hall**

NALGO members have acted decisively and voted to stay on strike against further provocative threats from Islington's Labour council. A report from Robert Shaw and Carol.

After six months of strike action against threatened cuts and compulsory redundancies, preparations were being made for a return to work. Then on Christmas Eve, ninety five staff from the Architecture Department were issued with ninety day redundancy notices and fifty others offered inferior contracts.

A mass meeting of council workers on January 8th called for a lobby of NALGO's National Emergency Committee the following week, to pressure the union leadership into action against the council.

NALGO workers began striking in June, when the Labour council announced that it was planning to 'wipe' previously agreed staffing contracts and no longer guarantee re-deployment and introduce compulsory redundancies. Four hundred jobs were to be axed in a blatant attack on hard won conditions. Workers demanded no cuts in jobs and services, but were forced to go on strike when the council declared that due to 'financial constraints' they would not negotiate.

Key sections within the council were initially brought out on strike. Since last June, Neighbourhood Services, Social Services, Housing, Resources and Environmental Health have been on strike. With other sections joining the action, more than 1100 workers are now involved in the dispute.

Throughout this period the council has attempted to intimidate workers by sending threatening letters stating that their contract would be terminated if they did not return to work. The council also sought legal action against NALGO in order to stop the branch from using supposed 'illegal' picketing tactics. The police were called to escort scab staff into council offices and to control pickets. Despite these attacks, the strikers have remained solid and refused to resume work.

It is estimated that the council has lost up to £25 million in rent arrears throughout this period. It exposes the fact that the attacks on jobs and services is politically motivated. Initially the excuse for the cuts was to save £16.5 million.

It has also been discovered that the council has prepared a hit list of workers who were active in the strike to be disciplined after a return to work. Workers are demanding no victimisation of strikers and the maintenance of their current contracts without the threat of compulsory redundancies. ■

UNEMPLOYED Community Comes

Last month Lambeth Unemployed Action Group reported some successes in the battle for concessionary/free use of council leisure and recreational facilities for unwaged people in the borough - those on Income Support, pensioners, the homeless, ET and YT trainees and people on low incomes. We now have to report that all the promises and agreements made with the council, the result of a year long campaign by LUAG members, have been broken and reneged on.

Just one week after the extremely limited concessions the council made - a few extra hours concessionary admission, two hours on Friday evenings, and four hours on Saturday and Sunday, the Policy and Resources Committee voted them down.

A LUAG spokesperson who addressed this meeting on 15th December discovered that proposals have been put forward to close some of the very facilities that we had been promised free admission to, in addition to two libraries, an adventure playground, six luncheon clubs and a long list of day centres. The response from the Labour leadership? Laughter, titters and denials! Yet three days later, in the 'South London Press' of 18th December, lo and behold, Steve Whaley, with his selective memory, is saying that Lambeth Council is preparing to make £29.1m cuts this year, and "services almost certain to be cut include libraries, swimming pools, sports centres, and some home help care." He said that compulsory redundancies among the council's 11,300 workforce were also "under consideration" - in fact according to the 'London Evening Standard' of 5th January, 1,000 workers are to be sacked.

Nothing

The determination of the Labour group, and especially it's leadership, to give nothing to Lambeth's near 36,000 unemployed (over 27%) was demonstrated at the 15th December meeting when an expelled Socialist councillor proposed a three month trial for very limited free hours of access to leisure centres for the unwaged. This scheme would have cost £10,000 to operate. The Labour group could not find it in itself to support even this, in a borough with a budget of £315 million. The only support came from another expelled councillor and two suspended Labour councillors. The proposal was voted down by the Labour group yet this

**By Martin Mitchell &
Marcel Richards of
Lambeth Unemployed
Action Group**

group has given the go-ahead for £56,000 to be spent on another three month 'trial' for a team of telephone 'canvassers' to harass people who can not afford to pay their poll tax.

Wet Tories

What Labour in Lambeth dies for is to offer everything in principle and nothing (but attacks) in practice, backing up what a lot of people feel - that the Labour Party are only wet Tories. Thus Councillor Janet Crook says in the "South London Press" of 31st December "We have agreed in principle to free access to all our sports centres for various groups but..." in principle, Lambeth has an "anti-poverty strategy" and an impressive-sounding "Lambeth Unitary Development Plan" (UDP) is being launched this month (January) to "guide development within the borough over the next ten years". The hypocrisy of Lambeth Council is spelt out in the draft copy of this document published in November 1992. On pages 37 and 38 under Employment:

"Lambeth has the highest unemployed total in the whole of London and there appears to be no sign in the foreseeable future that the unemployment rate in the borough will be significantly reduced... the Council aims to address the needs of the unemployed, taking into account the fact that the unemployed are heavily reliant on public transport, have low incomes and need localised leisure and shopping facilities and have accommodation problems [like homelessness!]... policies contained in the plan aim to provide for the needs of the unemployed by providing better public transport (with free travel for the unemployed), daytime adult education courses, better high street shopping facilities, local leisure facilities and

affordable housing accommodation."

Under Recreation & Leisure on page 153 the report goes on to say:

"...the council recognises that the unemployed have particular needs given the increase in enforced daytime leisure for large numbers of people and will support relevant projects and services. The Council recognises that the low paid and unwaged need to be encouraged to take up and use council services..." All these fine words amount to nothing, indeed the Lambeth UDP could be compared to the cynical Citizens Charter. Whilst services are cut, workers thrown on the dole and centres closed down, we will see more and more propaganda issued by councils to cover up their acts of butchery against the working class and our communities. Maybe they are trying to fool themselves, they fool nobody else!

Again, with the poll tax, Lambeth Council is preparing further attacks. An expelled Labour councillor and member of Lambeth Against the Poll Tax (LAPT), Ann Hollifield, by interrogating the Director of Finance in Lambeth, Gary Moss, at a Central Services Committee meeting in December, discovered his department had fixed two committal dates for December at the magistrates court. The councillors knew nothing of it! Under pressure from LAPT they voted to cancel the committal hearings and at a special committee meeting on 11th January will discuss 'whether to go ahead with committal procedures.' Steve Whaley, when again confronted outside the meeting and asked about the committal hearings may have had another memory lapse when he said, quote, "I didn't know a f***ing thing about it!"

Whaley said in the local press on 5th January, "We have not jailed anybody but in the end it could be a possibility. It's a complex issue." Yes, very complex, defend the poor or jail them!

So the gloves are off in Lambeth, we as a community face attack upon attack from the Tories and their Labour stooges.

BETRAYED

Under Attack

Not only that, the leader of Lambeth council, Steve Whaley, who met the Group in discussions and negotiations, has denied making the promises to the Group. When confronted, after the committee that voted down the proposals, he had previously drawn up himself in conjunction with LUAG and Janet Crook, chair of Environmental Services, and accused of being a liar, he moved from denying making the promises to saying that he could not remember!

Those who want to defend the community must stand up and be counted NOW! LUAG will be holding public meetings and be seeking to extend its activities to unite with leisure centre users, leisure workers, workers faced with the prospect of being sacked and all members of the community or groups who want to fight and take on the council and the government. We have already started what is to be a systematic leafleting of council estates, giving out vital information and 'phone numbers of community self defence groups and campaigns.

LUAG seek to give people in Lambeth some truth and give them the chance to join the fight. Similarly, LAPT is to hold local meetings in Lambeth to explain the council tax and let people know what is really happening in the community, and what they can do to fight these savage attacks on us. It is also to put forward an alternative budget for Lambeth, one of the main elements of which will be the exposure and broadcasting of the fact that on the housing account alone, Lambeth is paying £100 million in interest to the banks! Here we have it - people in the fourth most deprived borough in Britain are directly subsidising some of the richest people in the world. Every cut and closure in Lambeth is to help pay the bankers. As Lambeth Unemployed Action Group and Lambeth against the Poll Tax say, 'NOW IT'S WAR.'

Unemployment in Some London Boroughs, September 1992:

Brent	23.4%
Hackney	32.8%
Haringey	29.4%
Islington	26.3%
Lambeth	27.0%
Newham	26.8%
Southwark	27.7%
Tower Hamlets	31.9%

Figures supplied by
The Unemployment Unit

In the last issue we reported on the fight to save Oakwood Lodge, a Manchester City Council residential home for the disabled. Here we reprint a letter sent to councillors by Celia Ralph, Oakwood's Nupe Shop Steward.

"Dear Councillor..."

I am writing to you to ask for your support against the closure of Oakwood Lodge residential home for the physically disabled.

In an article in the Manchester Evening News a council spokesperson has admitted that when the decision to close Oakwood Lodge was made there was no concrete alternatives. The statement is as follows, 'We have about 18 months to put the plan into operation, so there is plenty of time to find acceptable alternative provision.'

Surely, if anyone was thinking of moving or selling their home they would first think about alternative provision. By acting in this way they are denying our residents any democratic right to choose.

Alternative provision would cost more than the amount needed to keep Oakwood Lodge open if the level of care is equivalent and what is required.

The residents of Oakwood Lodge have not been given proper consultation and an opportunity to make their own decisions, as is stated by the equal opportunity policy.

The method which has been adopted has frightened residents and staff. It is a method which forces disabled people into accepting what is offered against their wishes.

It took four weeks after the decision was made by the full council meeting, at which no carer, resident or member the families was allowed to speak to the meeting, before any of our residents received a letter stating officially that Oakwood Lodge would close. I have been informed by my manager that 12 residents wish to live in the community. When some of these residents have wished to attend meetings and join in the campaign against closure they have been stopped. The reason given was they cannot make an informed decision. Yet some of their names have been put forward to live in the community without any real concrete alternatives being given to residents. An informed decision can only be based on what alternatives there are.

It took a visit to Oakwood Lodge by some the families to establish that residents who wished had a right to go to meetings.

As a councillors you are elected to be their representative. We are asking that you fight for the democratic and civil rights of the disabled.

We are asking you to fight to:

- 1) Rescind the decision.
- 2) Consult with the residents, their families and staff.
- 3) Assess the residents needs and wishes.
- 4) Identify exactly what alternative provision there is.
- 5) Ensure that the managers of Social Services properly inform and consult with residents.

The Loyal

BY 1995, fifty years since the end of the Second World War, the Conservatives will have been in power for thirty three years, nearly twice as long as the Labour Party. Whatever new media presentation the Labour Party tries, whatever new rhetoric it adopts, it has to explain this fact.

The government is coming apart at the seams, sterling has collapsed, Maastricht, the Pit Closure Programme, falling house prices and increasing unemployment make the next election look a certain victory for Labour. The voting coalition of self interest Thatcher cobbled together with pay offs from privatisation, lure of home ownership, deregulation of industries, education and the professions is crumbling into the abyss of the recession. Almost incredibly, opinion is changing, the government is creeping back to confidence and the Labour Party is helping them.

Labour Councils

It is an old story that when Labour gets into power it forgets its socialist promises and abandons workers, but now it can be argued that the behaviour of Labour local authorities throughout the eighties is a major reason why Labour could lose the next election. It is the long term effects of their policies which have helped to strip Labour of its ideological base and fundamentally change the character of the party. Ultimately it could deprive workers of any chance of real Parliamentary representation.

In the early eighties a group of 21 Labour authorities claimed they were determined to fight rate capping and the cuts. None are left. It was not a simple capitulation. All kinds of excuses were made. When local authorities accepted the task of making cuts they convinced themselves and their supporters as well as rank and file Labour Party members that they were making them piecemeal, as though each one were to be the last. When they identified 'front line services' care of children and the elderly, the assumption was these were to be protected come what may. Instead it meant that these were the services that were cut last; but cut they were.

Throughout the eighties Labour local authorities opted for an accommodation with the government sowing the seeds of their own destruction. The Tory plan to dismantle 'the Labour fiefdoms of the great metropolitan areas' was already in place by 1979. It was canvassed openly at the Conservative Conference of 1981 and continued throughout the eighties. After the 1987 election in her victory speech, Thatcher declared that the most immediate tasks were to continue reform of the inner cities and education. From 1979 onwards councils trying to work out non racist equal opportunity policies were labelled 'loony' and attacked for squandering money, the Metropolitan authorities were abolished. It was always clear what the Tories intended to do, but the Labour Councils had no contingency plans and did not consider making any, meaning that no matter what claims they made they did not really see themselves as being a real bulwark against attacks on workers.

Their role was to be the agent of the government. To give the appearance of vigour and independence they competed among themselves for government hand outs, the urban clearance schemes, the money to bid for the Olympics. Why should the people who live in Monsall, Salford be so ecstatic that they have won a government grant to clean up the area? It should have been theirs by right. The more the authorities compete the more they lose any chance of independence. The worst thing they have is never to ask themselves the 'how far?' question.

The Labour Party claimed to be an ideological party. Labour councillors claim to represent values of social justice, the Welfare State, protection of minorities, how much further can they go without saying 'no'? Will there come a time when they realise that they have closed one home too many, put one non Poll Tax payer too many before the courts, made one too many home helps redundant? Up to now, no!

Dented Shield

They needed a new language in the attempt to justify the cuts. Pushed into making more and more cuts they adopted the language of the government. Labour authorities could claim that there was no money and that non poll tax payers were the cause of cuts. They add phrases of their own to the Tory rhetoric the 'dented shield' policy, claims to make 'kinder cuts'. This is the language of capitulation, no signs there of any resistance. The massive transfer of wealth in the eighties from poor to rich shows that there is money. Non poll tax payers can have little effect when the government can spend over £100 million to advertise 'give away' privatisation

The result for the Labour Party and its still loyal voters is confusion, and diminishing hope. If there is nothing that local authorities will not cut at the command of the Tories, if there is no point at which local authorities will say 'no further' then there can be no ideological base no system of core values for the Labour Party at local level. It cannot make coherent policy because it has no ideological framework to give direction. Policy drifts and prestige projects are substituted for ideas, the bid for the Olympics, drama city of the year.

It is then that at local level the party's main function and reason for existence is to service the state. It obeys the bidding of the government and fills the committee places the governerships of schools still available, the bids to become J.Ps. Ultimately there is little reason for the existence of a local party focusing on local needs and it no longer has the means to do it.

Put simply if the local Labour parties continue to do what the government allows them to do then they will do nothing except act as agents for the government. They will become like the parties of the United States acting at state level. The main characteristic will be that there will be no unifying ideology, groups will come together on single issues, individuals will see the parties as the distributors of patronage and a means of a career structure.

how Labour councils went from taking on the Tories to doing their dirty work.

Opposition

The party will draw its political life from the candidate, often moribund between elections. The comradeship that sense of shared values from John 'o Groats to Lands End will go.

Expulsions in the eighties have hastened this process, the influx of members from the struggles of the Poll Tax the Miners' Strike have gone. The Kinnock 'reforms' did nothing to encourage them. All over the country for example during the Miners Strike wards reported increased attendance. When these members realised that the party was not about struggle they left disillusioned. Couple that with the expulsions of Militant when many other socialists just walked and what does it leave.?

It leaves a party which has attracted a new membership small in number but one which believes the rhetoric of 'justification'. The new membership comes to the party from outside the culture and experience of the Labour movement. It imports into the party and imposes upon it, its own experience. The understanding of historic struggles is replaced more by the culture of the Civic Society than the experience of struggle, attracted by the promise of office not by the need to fight. It is the experiences of the petite bourgeoisie imported into the party and then imposed upon it that pushes out socialist ideology.

Image

The concentration upon the politics of the capital, parliamentary office and the leadership of Neil Kinnock as the mover and shaker of a new image Labour Party has obscured what is happening to the real party the ordinary membership. This is a party whose roots are withering away. The opportunities of leadership have been avoided at all levels. The posturing, the acceptance of attacks on workers while claiming a socialist agenda have produced this fundamental change in the party. The membership now see their task as offering a manifesto which avoids the worst excesses of the last thirteen years but which is detached from the Labour Movement's historic base. The socialists still left in the party are squeezed between the constant reorganisations the search for a big idea and the disintegration of the organisation. Total membership is now so low that it cannot perform its traditional tasks of canvassing, educating and organising.

The painful conclusion is that looked at objectively socialists from any of the different left groupings can more easily make common cause with some of the proposals of traditional opponents than with the new thinking within the Labour Party. ■

The next issue will look at the Labour Party and the future, the prospect of a fifth election defeat and the long term prophecies that the Labour Party will disintegrate.

KIDNAPPING PATIENTS

IN AUGUST 1992 National Medical Enterprises Inc of America was taken to court by eight US insurance companies. It was charged with, "massive, systematic fraud in the running of its 70-strong, nation-wide chain of psychiatric hospitals. The suit alleges hundreds of millions of dollars in fraudulent claims...Lawyers for the insurance companies said NME had undertaken a 'co-ordinated national scheme to admit thousands of patients to psychiatric hospitals, without regard to psychiatric need, in order to bill insurance companies vast sums'...the suit, which includes charges under the Racketeer Influenced and Corrupt Organisations Act, was based on 'sworn testimony, NME's own documents and other reliable evidence'." Lloyds List 6th August 1992

The scandal concerning NME started in 1991 over its unethical methods of getting patients into its psychiatric hospitals, including the payment of 'bounties', and over-billing insurers and public authorities.

According to the Economist 22 February 1992: "In August 1991 Texas joined Virginia in specifically banning the payment of fees for the delivery of patients [to hospitals]. Undaunted National Medical Enterprises - by 1991 one of the country's largest hospital-management companies - continued to fill Texas television screens with glossy commercials. But, as the Houston Chronicle reported in a detailed investigation, the reality behind the pretty commercials was anything but attractive.

Not only were bounties allegedly being offered to police, probation officers and school counsellors who recommended patients, but international brokers were bringing in Canadian patients and other company representatives reportedly infiltrated Alcoholics Anonymous groups to solicit recruits. The Chronicle series attracted widespread attention.

When the first damaging disclosures appeared NME responded with a series of full page advertisements protesting its innocence. But additional newspaper revelations (including a series by the Dallas Morning News) and hearings by the state Senate's interim committee on health and human services brought more horror stories to light.

At a public meeting at Rice University in Houston a police chief testified how a 22-year old woman accompanying her four-year old daughter, had been wrestled to the ground, put in a straight jacket, and treated at an NME hospital. He said he and his officers frequently receive calls for help from people wrongly detained at the hospital"

NME was sued by the state of Texas "...for medical fraud and abuse, kickbacks, illegally recruiting patients and falsely billing a state compensation fund for crime victims...". In June 1992 NME settled this dispute, paying \$9 million.

These exposures and the court actions have forced NME to close many of its psychiatric hospitals in America and it is also under investigation for its activities in other areas. However, the problems NME is having in America has not stopped it in other countries and it has recently been extending its activities in Australia, Spain and Malaysia and also in Britain.

Its subsidiary, Westminster Health Care is one of the two biggest care home operators in Britain. In November 1991 it owned 23 homes with 1,415 beds. At least two health authorities, Plymouth and Cornwall, have already transferred NHS nursing homes to Westminster Health and West Berkshire District Health Authority is planning to do the same.

Westminster Health Care do not as yet run any psychiatric hospitals in this country but, with the Tories privatisation plans expanding at such a pace, how long will it be before it an other companies like it start adopting the similar methods here? ■

INFORMATION FOR THIS PIECE WAS FROM 'PRIVATISATION NEWS

Pit Closures

Energy Privatisation

Cecil Parkinson was brought back into government to privatise the energy industry after he resigned over the Sarah Keays scandal. He promised the Conservative Party conference that he would bring real competition into the industry. That promise was forgotten when he found no one would touch the nuclear industry. The costs of decommissioning nuclear plants were unknown and likely to be enormous. He had to leave the twelve regional electricity suppliers and two generating companies, National Power and Powergen.

Nuclear

The government forced the industry to take around 20% of electricity from nuclear power stations. Nuclear power is subsidised by £1.2 billion a year, which is why Arthur Scargill can say, if coal were subsidised in the same way, British Coal could give coal away with a present of £10 a ton.

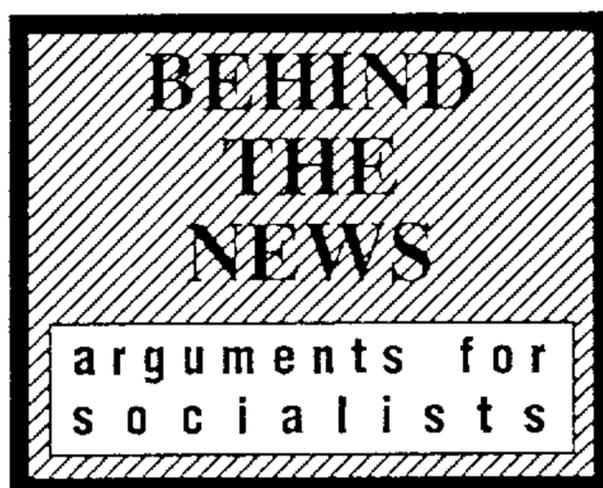
The electric boards must by law, use the cheapest fuel (except for 20% nuclear fuel). They have only two suppliers, Powergen and National Power. Their contract with British Coal runs out in April.

What the electric boards have done is to go into the power producing industry themselves, buying shares in the construction of Gas fired power stations.

The law restricts the profits they can make from selling electricity, but there is no restriction on the profits from producing their own power. This explains the 'dash for gas'.

The industry watchdog Littlejohn in his report says that gas is cheaper than coal. British Coal in a powerful counter attack say that the figures are rigged. Coal fired power stations have had their cost written off, and for the next fifteen to twenty years can produce the cheapest electricity.

Gas reserves are claimed to be limited and will run out before coal, so it is folly to close pits and effectively lose the reserves they have.



"The miners have defied the elected government on three occasions. It made it impossible for us to rely on them to produce the fuel we required. The miners themselves are the best reason why we have searched for alternative sources of supply"
Cecil Parkinson.

"British deep mined coal is undoubtedly the cheapest in the world but you mistake the difference between price and cost. Your cost may be cheaper but we buy at the cheapest price. That is why we buy imported coal because we are charged less. I want a British Coal industry but you must learn to be competitive"

Harris, Chairman of
Midland Electric

BEHIND THE NEWS
Is a new feature where we look at
the background to current events

Subsidy

The National Union of Mineworkers' argue that British deep mined coal is the cheapest in the world.

It is produced at an average of £35 a ton, compared with the German price of £66. Germany effectively pays £100 a ton for its coal, while Australia subsidises its coal with a £100 a ton 'research subsidy'.

There has been no talk, even with the renewed threat of war with Iraq, about the price of oil. This shows that the government are determined there will not be a full debate. The pit closure review is merely a way of dissipating protest. Imperialist nations have always fought to control the supply of oil, making most of the producing countries volatile. It is only the world recession which has kept oil plentiful and cheap at around \$20 a barrel. If the Shetland oil accident causes people to demand the same marine safety laws as the USA passed after the Exxon Valdes disaster, then the price of oil will go up, as will the price of all fuels.

Politics of Coal

Sentiment has taken an about turn since 1985. Workers now realise that when Arthur Scargill said 20,000 jobs would be lost, it was an underestimate. There is also a realisation that when coal is subsidised and dumped in another country, it is a means of using one set of workers to attack another. There is no competition. You buy the electricity from the regional board at the price they set and everyone has to subsidise nuclear fuel, even the miners. ICI in Cheshire, which uses as much fuel as the city of Liverpool, cannot buy electricity from Fiddler's Ferry a coal fired station across the Mersey although it wants to. There is no real fuel policy. What we have is a policy based on using dumped coal and a grab now attitude which will not secure future supplies. Oil prices quadrupled in the 1970's, but it seems it is more important to leave Britain's fuel supply at the mercy of world politics than to recognise Britain's workers. ■

Working Life is a new series where workers talk about the experiences that made them fight!

A Docker's Story

Peter Kerrigan is still remembered as the pyjama clad George in Alan Bleasdale's 'Boys From The Black Stuff'. But many know him better as a life long militant fighter on Liverpool docks. In the first of a two part feature, Peter talks about his early working life and the struggles that lead him towards Trotskyism.

This piece is taken from an interview by Bill Hunter which forms part his forthcoming book on the history of the docker's struggle.

IN BOOTLE on Merseyside where I grew up, it seemed that you became a docker, a seafarer or a ship repairer. My old man was a coal heaver on the docks, he filled the bunkers of ships going to sea. But my first job was with British Enka artificial silk works in Aintree. I worked with sulphuric acid, it would put holes in your shirt, make your teeth bad and turn silver coins black in your pocket. We didn't think about what it was doing to our guts.

I joined the Chemical Workers' Union. Coming to work one night, I found a picket line of striking spinners. Although I wasn't a spinner I joined the picket. The spinners went back to work without getting anything. Later that night the chargehand told me Nobby Clarke, the little wig wearing personnel manager, wanted to see me the next morning. So at the end of my shift, I went home, had a black pudding and bacon butty and then cycled back to Aintree. Nobby Clarke gave me my cards and told me I was sacked for taking part in the strike. I took the cards off him with one hand and took his wig off with the other and ran off.

WORKING L I F E



PETER KERRIGAN - Speaking at Rae Hunter's memorial meeting

I then went to work on the railway as a fireman. One day I was going to pick up some coal wagons with a light engine. The driver said "What colour's the signal Peter?" I said "Green". It was red. We landed in a pile of coal. I found out I was colour blind and found myself sacked again.

Then I went to work on the docks. In those days you had to pay a pound and four pence for your tally, which made you eligible for hiring. Without a tally you couldn't work. I didn't have a pound and four pence, neither did

my dad, so he couldn't give it me. I had to get it somehow.

So, I went to a fairground and took on men at boxing. After each fight I got a collection out of the crowd. In all, I got about thirty shillings. I gave ten shillings (50p) to my mother and kept the pound and four pence for my tally.

In 1935 at the age of nineteen, I became the youngest coal heaver on Liverpool docks, and joined the Transport and General Workers' Union.

Continues on the next page

Working Life: Peter Kerrigan

The War

The terribly hard conditions made terribly hard men. There was not enough coal heavers to man all three shifts, so we had to work around the clock, especially after the start of the war. We would carry on working until we finished loading a ship, then we would just go on and start loading the next one. Sometimes, it would be four or five days before you could go home to sleep. Instead, you would try to sleep down in the bunker while your mates worked on. There were no lights, we had to use candles hung by a bit of wire from the iron girders in the hatch.

During the war I was in a Stevedores Battalion in the Royal Engineers, working on bomb disposal during the blitz. One morning at parade, the officer called out: "All

those men who want to can volunteer to be posted nearer home". The Scotsmen thought they would move to Glasgow, the Geordies to the North East coast, and I thought I would get sent to Liverpool. The nearest I got was Birmingham.

A year after the war ended, I was back on the docks handling cargo. The conditions were just as terrible as before. Even when we were handling very dirty cargo, we were not given any overalls. In the army we would have been given a denim suit. A lot of the dockers who had been in the army, especially those who had been in the dockers battalions, would discuss things together. During the war we always said: "When the boys get home they won't stand for this". The ex-army lads were amongst the foremost agitators on the docks. Danny Brandon and others who formed the unofficial committee in Birkenhead were all ex-army. The ones who had been in the army, particularly those in the Dockers' Battalion, used to discuss things together.

There were fourteen different sections of workers banded together in the Transport and General Workers' Union and they were supposed to fight together if need be. We quickly found that the T&G bureaucracy did not operate that way and that you could not act officially. We soon ran into the

Dromore

I had been involved in half day stoppages here and there, but the first big strike I was involved in was the 'Dromore Strike'. The Dromore was a ship that had been blacked in a strike of Canadian seafarers, so it was manned by members of another union. The seafarers union was lead by Communist Party members and the strike was opposed by right wing union leaders here and in Canada. This was backed by a big witch hunt against the strikers in the press. The whole of Bristol was out, Glasgow, London and Liver-

pool were out. In Glasgow the Scottish TGWU made the strike official. When the ship sailed into Bristol, the dockers refused to unload it, bringing it round or throw the ropes off. When it sailed on to Liv-

erpool, Bristol dockers came to Merseyside and we stopped work.

Constable, the best known of the dockers unofficial leaders in the 1940's and 50's, came to Liverpool and spoke to us. Later, as a result of the Dromore strike, he and Timothy Saunders, another leader, were expelled from the TGWU. The bureaucracy thought that by expelling them they would not be able to get work and so be removed from the docks. But the London dockers forced the employers to hire them.

After Dromore came the struggle against Regulation 1305. This was a piece of war time legislation under which dockers could be arrested for striking. In Liverpool Crosby, Johnson and Harrison were arrested, in London Constable, Saunders and Dickens. They were put on trial at the Old Bailey. In court Saunders made the best speech, it was a class speech. I remember Harrison saying how he thought it was a land of hope and glory, but he found out it wasn't. T&G officials, including the Liverpool District Secretary, were the main prosecution witnesses.

"The bureaucracy thought that by expelling them they would not be able to get work... But the London dockers forced the employers to hire them"

A Docker's Story

The Dock Labour Scheme

The Dock Labour Scheme was a two edged thing. It gave the benefits of a guaranteed minimum sum if you didn't get work, but you had to pay for it with a certain loss of liberty. The people who ran it were T&G officials and employers; the people who punished you were also the people who were supposed to be your representatives.

Under the Dock Labour Scheme you were obliged, if required, to work two hours overtime of an evening. In 1954 there was a strike against this compulsory overtime. The National Amalgamated Stevadores and Dockers (the 'Blue Union'), made it official, the T&G dockers leading it were unofficial. Constable and others came up to Liverpool to gain support for the strike and the whole of the North; Liverpool, Garston, Birkenhead, Manchester and Hull responded.

The conditions in London were better and the 'scousers' who went down to meetings there felt that we should have an organisation like London all over the country. We began to think the 'Blue Union' could be that organisation.

In Liverpool and Hull we felt like second class citizens. For decades getting parity in pay and conditions with London was a big question for us. In Liverpool, you only began to make bonus after you got an initial amount out. Say you were working cases of butter. The employer would want say, a hundred tons for a days work out of eight men. If you managed to get two hundred tons out you would get two days wages. If you only managed a hundred tons you got no bonus. In London it did not work like that. They got paid so much per case or so much per hundred right from the start.

In Liverpool, if you were working on a fridge hatch and it rained, you would have to close the hatch down and so your piece work would go by the board. You would get stoppage money, but that was only coppers. In London they still got their piecework. In Liverpool, we would have to lay and fill our own slings. In London they would have a man laying the

Conditions

In London they at least had some decent toilets. Here, you went out into the 'avenue' (the road that went from dock to dock). The toilets had open ends, so people coming up the avenue could see you sitting there with your belt around your ankles. At one end of the toilets was a locked annexe for the bosses to use. There was a drain that ran along the full length of the toilets, you would sit there with your behind over the drain. If you had had an argument with a boss, you would light a paper and send it floating down the channel to scorch

him. The primitive toilets were still used during the dock strike that happened in 1967.

In London, piece work rates were double that of Liverpool. If you got sixpence

per carcass in London, you would get threepence in Liverpool. When bulk sugar unloading was introduced, the trade union leaders agreed that we wouldn't get the London rates but rates applicable to the district. Instead of using changes to get us better conditions, they continued to keep us below London. Some of these differences had been discussed during the war in the dockers battalion. Also, a lot of London dockers had come to Liverpool during the blitz when their docks had been closed, and were able to compare conditions. We wanted to make the 'Blue Union' what the T&G was meant to be. ■

In next months 'Socialist Voice'
Peter Kerrigan continues his story. He talks about the rank and file fight to get decent conditions for dockers in Liverpool and throughout the country in the second part of our new series **'Working Life'**

Peter Kerrigan was talking to Bill Hunter. The full interview forms part of Bill's forthcoming book on the struggle to organise British dockers. See next months issue for more details.

"The people who punished you were also the people who were supposed to be your representatives"

Silesian Miner's

THE STRIKE began in twenty mines in Silesia in the South-Western area of the country in the middle of December. It came in response to Solidarity's call for a two hour stoppage and for other miners' unions to support them. The other three main trade unions are the OPZZ, a miners federation and Solidarity 80.

All of them supported the strike but argued that a two hour strike was not enough. As the hours passed more mines joined in until all 64 mines had joined. The strike involved both miners and administrators.

According to Solidarity, 75% of their 1.5 million members joined the initial stoppage but in Silesian, which is the most industrialised part of Poland, the action was continued.

During last summer Solidarity did not support the strikes called by other trade unions and within Solidarity there was opposition to the strike by NET (SIEC) who are opposed to the Krzaklewski leadership of Solidarity. They were opposed to the strike on the basis that this leadership betrayed previous strikes. But many workers who belong to this NET supported the strike while many who belong to the national leadership did not.

I interviewed some miners from the ROZBARK mine near Katowice in Silesia:

"I have been working all my life and I have never seen a strike like this. We belong to four different trade unions but each day we discuss together what should be done next and there are not many differences. We understand the necessity for this unity. Let us not talk of 'my' strike or 'your strike'. This is a strike of all the miners. The government chooses to negotiate only with Solidarity but, as soon as possible, all the other unions should join the negotiations.

"We are not being given any details about the 'restructuring' of the mines. We are told that 12 mines are supposed to raise the money needed to close 3 mines. We are not interested in closing mines. If the government wants to close the mine let them pay for it.

"It is easy to understand that sometimes a moment comes when a mine has to close. Nobody knows better, when and if this moment has arrived, than a miner. When you know this moment has come it is always a great tragedy. Like when somebody in your family dies. The least you can do is let the old man die with dignity.

"In Yugoslavia thousands die and it is nothing but a statistic. Well we do not want to be part of their blooming statistics. Whole families have linked their lives for over 175 years or more with mines and they are not prepared to sit and wait for their death certificate to be issued in Warsaw as part of a statistic.

"Rozbark has produced quite a lot of coal and we were going to export it, then, in the spring, we were told that we could not export. Why? We have no proof but everybody knows that it was due to the orders of the IMF. Only we don't know why. What I mean is this: if the IMF wanted to prevent us from exporting, they issued an order and the government obeyed. But who got something instead, and what did it get? This we cannot find out.

"Last night the Prime Minister spoke on TV and it became clear that we have to prepare ourselves for a long strike. Each time those big guys in Warsaw speak about mining we have to start guessing what he really means. He said that 3 years of advance has been wasted. But the only thing we have advanced in the last three years is unemployment and this is something we would gladly waste.

"How can anyone suggest restructuring when in three years we haven't had a clear energy policy. Nobody knows really how much is produced, or how much is stored. How can anyone plan anything like this?

"Another absurdity of the government is that everybody owes money to everybody else. Nobody can pay and percentages are growing, but if we say a word about needing subsidies for mining they give us a hell of a yell. If accounting books were to be opened we would probably learn that mining brings in more money to the state Treasury than it has ever received in subsidies. And it has always been like this.

Many countries subsidise their mining. There was a time when they all had great hopes in oil. More oil was going to spell the end of coal mining. Just one Gulf war was enough to prove that this was a dangerous and short-sighted policy.

"Then came big talk about ecology. All of a sudden wizards discover that coal mines are unhealthy. But let them tell us where we can get energy from that does not produce even more dangerous contamination.

"The government is saying this strike is political. Now a days all strikes are political. If it suits the government they tell us to go to the board of directors. But if we arrive at any agreement with the board of directors they will immediately say that they have something to say in the matter and that we have to think of the whole country."

I asked them if they thought that Krzaklewski would try to bring the strike to a halt. Two answers developed simultaneously: 'Yes' and 'no'. Those who believed he wouldn't said:

"That would mean that he has darned fools for advisers. Workers just will not put up with agreements with nothing to back them up any more. If there was a serious discussion we might suspend the strike but never call it off.

"How can anyone suggest restructuring when in three years we haven't had a clear energy policy. Nobody knows really how much is produced, or how much is stored. How can anyone plan anything like this?"

Elizabeth travelled to Silesea and spoke to miners about their strike which began just in December

Strike



But there will be no serious conversation unless the Minister of Economy comes with money in his pocket. Telling us that this is not the right moment for our strike does not make sense. This is the best moment for our strike if we can make their arses freeze off.

"If the government decided to import coal that would mean total confrontation. It would force us to teach them a lesson. The British miners strike was broken in this way but Suchocka, the Polish Prime Minister, is no Thatcher. She just can't do it. She doesn't have sufficient support from the people.

"If the worst come to the worst we shall have to start thinking of something more than just a strike. If they treat us like enemies we shall act as such. We have no other way out. What future can I offer my children? There are too many unemployed young people in the streets as it is."

I then asked them what they would like to say to readers:

"In the first place they should read our demands. We do not go on strike because we are lazy. A miners' strike is a lot of work. You can't just walk out of a mine. We have to take care of ventilation and we have to control the level of the water. A miner can leave his wife alone for a few hours a day but not a mine.

"At the moment we get full payment on strike but probably we shall have to think of something like a strike fund soon."

Finally, I asked: What do you expect us to do? "Wish us luck and write the truth about us." ■

TURKEY

A Lesson For Workers

JUST OVER a small packing factory, part of a large glass producing firm called 'Pasabahçe Cam', was occupied when the employer attempted to sack some of workers.

Workers decided to occupy a third of the factory and reduced the production to 10% of full capacity. They immediately set up an occupation committee and made some small cardboard houses

The committee began to search for supplies of food, money and fuel, they also looked for support from other organisations. Four groups visited the Social Democratic Party, trade unions and other democratic organisations.

The occupation got support and was provided with money, food, fuel and visits. In the first month everything was great, but after that problems began. The democratic organisations left the workers alone to face the employers' offensive and there was a shortage of money and food. It became difficult to maintain close relations with other factories.

Then security forces surrounded the factory. Their own union did little to help them. The employer threatened to close the factory if they did not give up the occupation. Meanwhile, they were suffering from lack of supplies and there began a discussion on whether to continue. The subsequent ballot was won by one vote.

Meanwhile the Social Democratic Party had just formed a coalition government and they appealed for help from them in negotiating with the employer. This initiative was left hanging in the air by the party.

Eventually the employer gave them five days to give up the occupation threatening to use the security forces to break it up after that. Three days later the security forces broke in at 3am and dragged the workers outside.

Our comrades saw this happen and we think that the lesson of this dispute is that none of the strikes, occupations and demands for social rights will be won unless the working class develops its own independent 'organisation' making connections with the other factories as well as international combines. ■

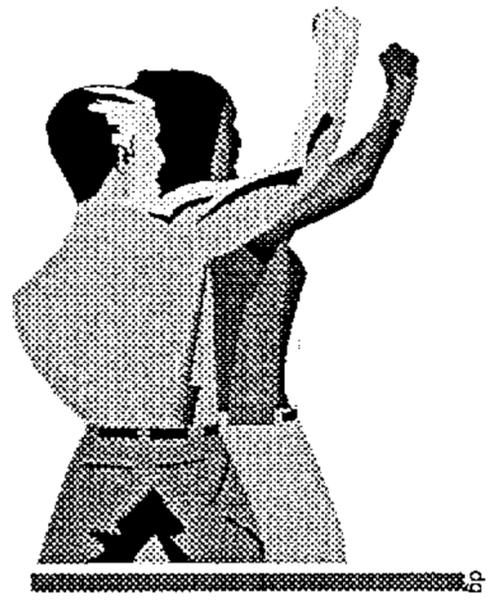
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Our paper has supported many struggles in this country and abroad. It seeks to give a Marxist analysis and leadership to the major events developing in the world in order to help the working class fight for socialism.

In this issue we have published material about the struggle for public services and we are supporting the All-Britain conference which aims to help and develop the struggles in the public sector and the communities.

If you are involved in a strike, campaign or struggle, let us know the details and we will do our best to support you.

£3000 Fighting Fund

We raised the £3000 fighting fund by the middle of January which helped us buy a computer and with our international tasks. Our next fund, which we want to raise over the next three months, will help extend the computer facilities in London and Manchester.

If you read Socialist Voice, if you support what we say, join the ISL.

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