

Socialist ORGANISER

Paper of the Socialist Organiser Alliance No.175 April 19 1984 25p
Claimants and strikers 10p

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STOP THE PITS!

"Stop merely saying you support us. Come out and join us. We are facing a fundamental challenge to the whole working class, not merely miners. We are facing the organised might of the state machine. There is a police state in Nottinghamshire".

Arthur Scargill,
speaking in Nottingham last Saturday, 14th.

The Scottish TUC is calling on all its members to act in support of the miners. The date has not yet been set but it looks like the day of action will be May Day (May 1).

That's the way to help the miners and beat the Tories!

Now we must fight to make it a Day of Action throughout the whole of Britain.

Demand that the TUC comes off the fence and organises a national strike on May 1.

Demand that individual unions support the Scottish TUC.

Convince your mates to come out with the miners on May 1.



JOHN SMITH (IFL)

STOP THE TORIES!

Socialist ORGANISER

Paper of the Socialist Organiser Alliance No. 174 April 12 1984 25p Claimants and strikers 10p

**Demonstrate
this Saturday**

Saturday April 14 in Nottingham

Assemble 12 midday at The Forest

Speakers at rally include Tony Benn MP and
Yorkshire Area NUM President Jack Taylor

POLICE OUT OF THE COALFIELDS!



Martin Shakeshaft (IFL)

SUPPORT THE MINERS!

Socialist ORGANISER

Paper of the Socialist Organiser Alliance No.173 April 5 1984 25p Claimants and strikers 10p

Enforce unions' decisions

DON'T MOVE COAL!

Police out of the coalfields!

A demonstration has been called in Nottingham on Saturday April 14, 11am from the Forest, on the slogans 'Police out of the coalfields' and 'Support the miners'. An ad hoc 'Nottingham coordinating committee against the police presence' called the march, but support is expected from the NUM in Yorkshire and maybe wider. Contact: Ivan Wels, 11 Osborne Ave, Sherwood, Nottingham (0602 624827).

By Rob Dawber (Sheffield City NUR)

THE miners are fighting for the life of their industry. They fight for their jobs and for their future. Indirectly they are fighting for all of us.

For the first time since the steel strike of 1980, a section of workers with the weight, the muscle, the experience and the will to humble the Tory vandals has gone into a stand-up fight.

They have laid it on the line for Bloody Margaret and for Ian MacGregor, her trained pit-butcher.

MacGregor, the sinister professional industrial thug who rampaged through the steel industry for Thatcher, throwing tens of thousands of workers and their families onto the dole. MacGregor, the fifth horseman of the Apocalypse, who ruthlessly fought Mrs Thatcher's class war against the steelworkers and without shame, conscience or humanity brought ruin to the steel communities of South Wales, South Yorkshire, and elsewhere.

Now the militant majority of the miners are saying to Thatcher and MacGregor: No you don't. We've had enough. You are not going to bring destruction, unemployment, poverty and hopelessness to Britain's mining communities.

We can stop you. And if we can't, we'll go down fighting rather than go peacefully and quietly to join the dole queue.

The miners' fight is every worker's fight. For five years we have suffered defeat after defeat. The slump, and rotten leadership, led to setbacks and retreats, which brought depression and even some demoralisation to the movement.

Now the miners have given the signal for an attempt to turn the tide. Listen to the Sunday Times on what's at stake for them.

"If Mrs Thatcher loses, she will be left presiding over a country which is not worth governing".

They know that despite the police they can be beaten.

The Times wrote: "If, for example, the Yorkshire miners, assisted by large numbers of sympathetic trade unionists, decided to besiege the big coal burning powers stations in the Trent Valley and Doncaster area, the backbone of the national

Continued back page

Lea Hall, Staffordshire



JOHN HARRIS

SOCIALIST ORGANISER

We can win!

THE Tories think they have got the miners boxed in. Either the momentum of the struggle will be deflected by a national ballot, or massive police operations can keep the impact of the area-by-area strike limited.

And the Tories have their anti-union laws as their second-line weapon.

They are reckoning without the power of working class solidarity.

The transport unions are committed to boycotting all movement of coal not licensed by the NUM. That is a vital first step. We should demand that the TUC adopts, advocates and fights for this policy throughout industry.

We should argue for railworkers, power workers, gas workers, water workers and others to bring forward and link their claims and strike alongside the miners. We should hit the Tories with a clenched fist.

We should oppose exemptions for steelworkers and argue with steelworkers for a common working class struggle to save jobs in all industries. This is the only way to save steel jobs.

A general strike could stop MacGregor's pit closures plan and rip up the anti-union laws. It can win this struggle. And it can do more. It can make it impossible for the Tories to govern; and the level of mobilisation involved would open up big possibilities beyond that. We should call on the TUC to organise for a general strike.

Local Labour Parties and trade unions have rallied to the miners — sending delegations to picket lines, helping to set up support committees, organising collections, providing accommodation.

Labour activists want to know why Neil Kinnock isn't taking a firm stand in support of the miners! And they want to hear him back up Labour's condemnation of the police operations with a clear, bold demand: Police out of the coalfields! Control over the police by elected local committees.

Well-organised miners' pickets at the power stations, depots, and steelworks have to be the sharp end of the struggle now.

To drive them forward, a network of rank-and-file strike committees will be needed, linked up as closely as possible with each other and with the broad support committees being set up in many areas.

The miners can win! We can make Britain ungovernable. In 1974 when the miners forced him to 'go to the country' — which rejected him — Edward Heath also had a big, stable Parliamentary majority. We must bring down this Tory government.

Labour under Kinnock cannot be relied upon to implement the working class policies we need. Nevertheless, the Labour Party is the only conceivable immediate alternative to the Tories now. We must fight for a Labour government.

At the same time we must fight in the labour movement to commit such a Labour government to anti-capitalist measures. That means continuing the battle in the Labour Party for democracy, accountability and for socialist policies — and insisting on rank-and-file self-reliance and commitment to direct action, whatever the Labour leaders do.

The more we can move towards a general strike, the greater the political possibilities from this struggle will become.

Against the rundown of coal, steel and rail jobs, we need a socialist alternative to the vapid Toryism of Mrs Thatcher and the inadequate policies of Neil Kinnock.

*We need a sliding scale of hours. Divide available work with no loss of pay.

*We need a workers' plan for the energy industry, transport and steel. Such a plan would have to be a plan for energy, transport and steel throughout Europe. We need to fight for a Socialist United States of Europe.

*We need training and retraining under workers' control.

*We must open the books of the nationalised industries, expose the profits of the money-lenders and suppliers.

*We must nationalise the banks and financial institutions, and the supply industries without compensation.

What future for coal?

By John McIlroy

THE slump and the consequent blitz on manufacturing industry mean that there isn't the same demand for coal as a staple raw material for production. That's part of the reason why there are such massive unsold stocks of coal.

Between 1965 and 1979 coal stocks were always below 30 million tonnes. In 1980, stocks were 38 million, in 1981 43 million, in 1982 53.3 million.

Investment has been increasingly concentrated in areas like Nottinghamshire, which has massive reserves of accessible coal.

South Wales and Scotland, broadly nearer geological exhaustion, have been gradually run-down. The South Wales area has made an operating loss every year since 1976.

Whilst NUM leaders have called for more investment, that investment has been concentrated in labour saving technology.

Since the early '70s, the NCB have developed Mine Operating System (MINOS), a standardised computer system for surface control of all mining operations. This has tremendous implications for jobs.

The NCB argue that the implication of a MINOS sub-system, Face Information Digested On Line (FIDO) could mean that half of today's miners could produce the same amount of coal.

The introduction of new technology is related to the introduction of the new super-pits at Selby and the Vale of Belvoir. Selby will be able to produce almost the entire production of Scotland and South Wales employing a tenth of the labour force.

Arthur Scargill estimated that the NCB strategy involved the closure of 95 pits with the loss of between 70,000 and 100,000 jobs.



JOHN HARRIS

Such a strategy required a man with a strong stomach for butchering to implement it. One man immediately came to Mrs Thatcher's mind, a man who believed completely in the Thatcherite vision of the free market; a man who was instinctively anti-union — whilst on the Board of BL he had persistently urged Michael Edwards to victimise Alan Thornett — and a man with a superb track record of job mutilation. That man was Ian MacGregor.

In his previous job at the British Steel Corporation, MacGregor was like a starving fox in a well stocked hen coop. Former NCB chair Norman Siddall was still protesting at the end of 1982, 'I'm not here to cut the industry back.' So out he went and in came MacGregor, who had cut the workforce in steel from 166,000 when he put on his apron, to 90,000 in December 1982 when he left for the next abattoir.

The structure was ready for Ian the Knife. The Tories had

tricity Generating Board (CEGB) — the NCB's biggest customer — to give orders to the nuclear industry rather than use far less expensive coal — a decision aimed at further weakening the miners' bargaining power.

Just seven weeks after retreating on its attempt to speed-up closures, the Tory government in March 1981 announced big improvements in the pit redundancy schemes.

And control of the mines will not only mean closure and speed up. There is a bigger prize. The Tory aim is privatisation.

They want to hand the mines over to a group of hard-nosed vampires who will make the old coal owners appear pillars of indulgent philanthropy and whose regime will, by comparison, make working in the mines in the 1920s and '30s a passage in paradise!

Examples of typical manpower savings schemes which have been introduced over the

years are:

*mechanisation at the face and in drivages to eliminate hand filling.

*Double/treble shifting at high productivity coal faces to reduce the number of faces.

*Elimination of men at transfer points.

*Remote control of pumping and ventilation.

*Elimination or reduction of hand picking in coal preparation.

*More automation in washeries.

Then the real 'restructuring' can get under way. Oil and gas are running out. Enough coal lies beneath Britain's surface to last another 300 years. Coal has a future.

The question is what sort of future. A future of the most ruthless exploitation seen since the dawn of capitalism? Or a future where the workers will own and control and plan the industry and its resources in the interests of the community — a capitalist future or a socialist future?

FIGHT FOR WORKERS' CONTROL

By John Douglas

Organiser, class collaboration) dreamed up by the Fabians or IWC.

The revolutionary implications of the demand for workers' control, linked to actual class struggle — for example during the current action — are nowhere considered in the pamphlet. In fact demands for the opening of the books, linked to such actions as occupations are mentioned but without comment.

Scargill and Khan write about the 1979 Plan for Coal and the tripartite body set up to implement it as an area where the union 'could exercise its influence through the process of collective bargaining'.

Surely tripartite bodies are just as damnable as the consultative committees, working

against the membership? In fact, even more so, as rank and file struggles over wages and pit closures were sold out by Joe Gormley on the pretext of preserving the Plan for Coal.

Now even this has been torn up by the Tories and Tebbit has again been hinting at the denationalisation of the coal industry.

Arthur Scargill and Peggy Khan are right to pillory industrial democracy when it is an attempt to evade (as they emphasise), the 'conflict in the relationship between labour and capital'.

They are also right to call for the building of a left wing political movement to resist attacks on the unions, and for those unions to construct a left-wing Labour Party 'which is accountable to its members'.

The pamphlet's main weakness is that it does not spell out policies around which such a movement should be built.

Socialist Organiser does support workers' control — but in the context of it being a demand in the class struggle to be organised around and fought for, for example in the current fight against pit closures.

Whatever the outcome of the strike, government appointees will still be in charge of the National Coal Board, with the right to close pits. Remember even Joe Gormley was offered that job by Tony Benn!

The following words were written by W.F. Hay of the South Wales Socialist Society in 1919.

While for obvious reasons

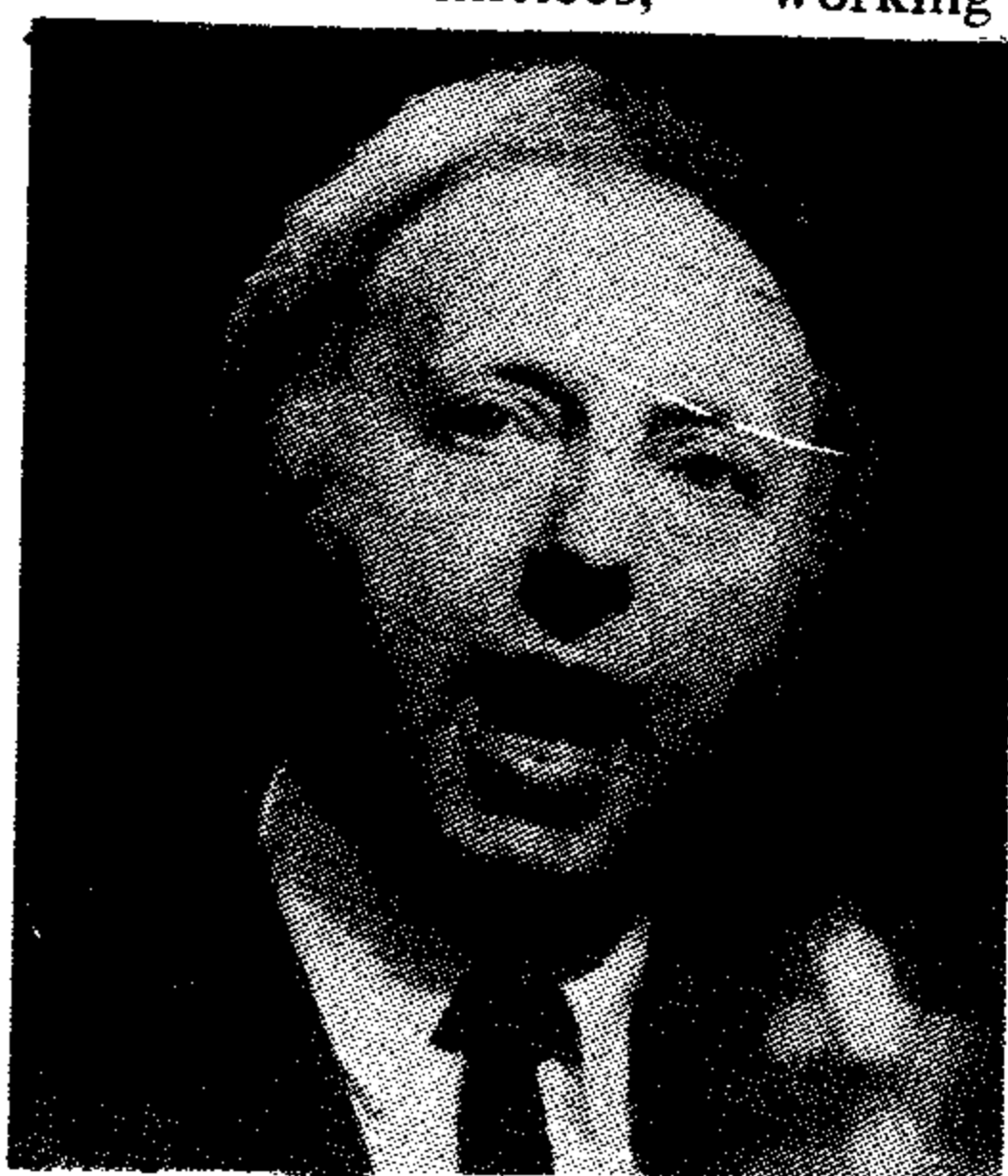
control with the state offers an alluring prospect to 'leaders', to the working miner it is simply a change of masters.

Socialists like Hay were feeling their way away from syndicalism towards a revolutionary policy for the members of the miners' unions, where the State owned the mines, and the miners controlled them.

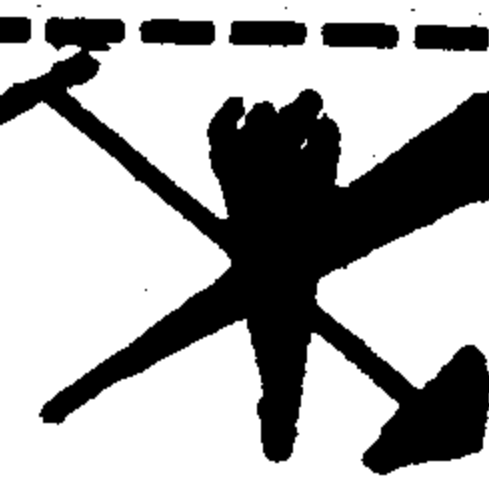
Nationalisation is under attack and we mobilise to defend it. But if the current fight, by its own logic, does develop towards a general strike, then the demand for workers' control must be central if such a momentous struggle is not just to result in a cobbled up tripartite committee deciding which pit to close, or the participation schemes of the Alternative Economic Strategy which reinforce class collaboration.



Two pamphlets summing up the ideas of Socialist Organiser. 'Where We Stand' - 20p plus 16p postage. 'How to fight the Tories' - 10p plus 16p postage. Or the two together for 45p including postage. From Socialist Organiser, 28 Middle Lane, London N8



Arthur Scargill



Join the Labour Party. Write to: The Labour Party, 150 Walworth Road, London SE17 1JT. Subscription is £7 per year, £2 unwaged, 50p OAPs.

Miners

**"It's for
the whole
working
class"**

Kent NUM area executive member John Moyle was speaking in Birmingham last week.

NO-ONE should be in any doubt about what is at stake in this dispute.

We are fighting the government and we are up against the most basic facts of this government's philosophy — they care about profits, not people.

At this very moment they are preparing the denationalisation and creaming off of the profitable parts of our industry. The rest can go to the wall.

It is the same philosophy that is behind the health service cuts.

But unfortunately not all miners see things like we do. The Midlands are a real problem, but we are determined to continue our campaign and build up support in Leicestershire, Warwickshire, and Nottinghamshire.

At Baddesley pit there is a pond, and I am told that even the ducks there swim around quacking "ballot, ballot, ballot".

I blame the local leadership — and not just the leadership of recent years. It goes right back to the Spencer union of the '20s. There has little or no tradition of solidarity, no education in basic trade unionism.

But I take my hat off to the substantial minority — about 30% — of Notts miners who are bursting at the seams to support us and are being constitutionalised out of giving that support.

We mustn't get the situation out of proportion. We want support from the Midlands, but we can win even without it. Notts have never supported a national strike, but that didn't stop us winning in 1972 and 1974.

Solidarity from other workers will be crucial to winning this dispute. We are very pleased with the backing we are getting from other unions, especially at rank and file level.

I understand that Bill Sirs has been making certain comments that have, let's say, not been as supportive as they might have been. Well, I say to Bill Sirs, remember that you have still got a rank and file, and it's them that we're looking for support.

They led the steel strike, and you sold them out.

And our links with the steel workers are very good. When the steel strike was on, 3000 Kent miners contributed £1500 every week to the strike fund. We sent 300 pickets to the Sheerness steel works.

Now that solidarity is being repaid, and very generously. Last week, for instance, Sheffield steelworkers came down to Betteshanger with an £800 cheque.

That's the kind of solidarity — rank and file solidarity — that we're building on.

Perhaps there will be a national ballot, but if there is it will take place on the miners' terms, not the media's. The important thing is that we are not constitutionalised out of a fight, and the NEC must not try to stop the rank and file fighting.

The rank and file will fight on under any circumstances, and they will win. The only question is how long it takes.

We are not looking for a victory for the miners, but for the whole working class — for every trade unionist.

By Ivan Wels

IMAGINE that you are driving along a quiet country road when suddenly, around the corner comes a convoy of 20 police transit vans and a couple of coaches filled with police. Imagine being stopped on a daily basis by the police, asked where you work, where you are going and proof of identity — if there happens to be more than two of you in the car, being forced to turn back, even if, as in one instance, on your way to a job interview.

That is life in the police state of North Nottinghamshire at the moment.

If you come from Yorkshire unofficial immigration laws operate round here. One Yorkshire picket who was a bit slow in opening his car door had his windscreen smashed with an iron bar — the glass narrowly missing his eyes.

If you insist on going on after being stopped — even if you are miles from any pit, you have two options, you will be arrested on a bail charge which acts as a very effective injunction to stop you coming into Nottinghamshire, or a transit van blocks your way and you are threatened with a beating.

There are 57 varieties of policemen here! Sussex, Dorset, Metropolitan — you name them, we've got them. Looking for a picket? Then look for a very large group of policemen, at least three-deep and cocooned inside them you will find the heavily-outnumbered pickets.

It's a good idea to protect your shins and genitals if you are in the front row.

If you're a branch official at that pit there is no guarantee that you will be allowed to speak to your own members — one was threatened with arrest if he went on a coach crossing the picket line.

Even Henry Richardson, the Executive member for Nottinghamshire, who had earlier advised members to cross picket lines, was arrested — until the police realised their mistake.

If you are really lucky you may be allowed six pickets to stand on the pavement holding placards and ineffectually waving placards at cars between rows of police.

However, if you shout 'scab' you may be arrested for behaviour likely to cause a breach of the peace.

A smattering of CID officers in your ranks doesn't help to breed confidence — if a stranger speaks to you the first reaction is usually suspicion.

At Babbington pit on Monday, 2,000 pickets effectively carried out a peaceful demonstration, albeit a noisy



30 Kent miners are marching to Nottingham. Last Saturday, 7th, supporters joined them for the march through South London.

one, with lots of shouting.

Then police snatch squads waded in and arrested anyone they could lay their hands on — 90 people in all. Some are still in custody.

In the face of this it might seem incredible that the police committee of the County Council should give a unanimous vote of confidence in Chief Constable McLoughlin. That is why Labour Party members and trade unionists are demanding that the County Council call for the withdrawal of police from other forces; non-payment of extra policing; and a public inquiry into what has happened over the past few weeks in North Nottinghamshire.

The events in Nottinghamshire are a foretaste of events in the future. It is important to make things as difficult as possible for the police.

Build for the demonstration on Saturday.

Take a collection in your workplace.

Send cheques and postal orders to Miners' Solidarity Fund, St James's House, Vicar Lane, Sheffield.

Or pay by bank giro credit to Miners' Solidarity Fund, Co-op Bank, Sheffield branch, account number 30000009, bank sorting code 08-90-75.

Wales

Links made

THERE are clear political motives behind the NCB strategy to run-down so-called peripheral coalfields. With the Tories behind them they are out to break the miners and put coalmining back into private hands.

This was Tyrone O'Sullivan, Lodge Secretary, speaking at the Support the Miners rally called by Cardiff Trades Council and Cardiff West and Central Labour Parties on 6 April.

He went on to point out that there was plenty of anthracite and coking coal waiting to be mined in South Wales, including massive reserves at Margan, near Port Talbot steelworks.

But, he argued, there was a political strategy to starve the coalfields of investment to make it easier to hand over to private industry.

He called on the meeting to organise solidarity action in support of the strike.

Speakers from the NUR and the seamen pledged their support, not least because their industries would be decimated in Wales if MacGregor was allowed to put through his closure programme...

The NUS hadn't been able to prevent coal ships from docking at Port Talbot, because they were staffed by foreign crews, but they had got support from the Finnish seafarers' union.

A speaker from NUPE pointed out that links had already been built between miners and health workers during the NHS pay dispute and weekly collections were now being held at the Heath Hospital, Cardiff. NUPE locally had given £5,000 to the miners and health workers had gone on picket lines with miners.

Labour prospective parliamentary candidate Ann Clwyd condemned the unprecedented control of working class liberties by the police.

Scotland

NCB uses threats

IN Scotland, none of the pits are working, but the Coal Board is doing everything possible to force a break in the miners' strike.

Albert Wheeler, the NCB's Scottish area director, is using scare tactics, saying that Polkemmet and the Ayrshire mines, are particularly under threat of closure.

At the same time, the NCB itself is endangering the future of pits by failing to allow proper safety cover during the strike. Even before the start of the national strike, the NCB had allowed the Bogside pit to be flooded in an attempt to justify closure.

Now the same tactic has been tried at Bilston Glen, where power to the pits' pumps and ventilation system was shut off, and at Polmaise, where management would allow only one pump to maintain cover while the NUM insisted on sending two.

But coal supplies for domestic consumption in Glasgow are now exhausted, and will run out soon in the rest of Scotland.

And picketing and blacking have also been effective at the Avonbridge open cast mine near Falkirk, now prevented from supplying coal; at Clydebank, where miners supported by health workers, have been picketing South African coal deliveries; and at Leith, where NUS members have been blacking a ship which unloaded coal at Fraserburgh before sailing up to Leith.

Dundee

DUNDEE will strike on the day when the miners' dispute comes up on the agenda at this year's Scottish Trades Union Congress, which begins on April 16 in Aberdeen.

This was the pledge given by Stan McLauchlan, convenor of Kestrel Marine shipyards in Dundee, at a 1,000-strong rally in support of the miners which the Triple Alliance held in Glasgow last Thursday, April 7. The Dundee Confederation of Shipbuilding and Engineering Unions is already backing the strike.

From back page

miners, and help develop the movement into a general strike.

Steel union leader Bill Sirs has rejected active solidarity with the miners, saying that it could lead to steelworks being closed. This view is disastrously short-sighted.

Only by joining up with others can any group of workers beat back the rampaging Tories. If the Tories are allowed to pick off groups one by one, then we will all lose.

The Labour Party leadership should also be giving the miners solidarity. But they have chosen

only to agitate about the police brutality — and then without committing themselves to a clear demand like 'Police out of the coalfields'.

According to the Observer, Labour Party leader Neil Kinnock has devoted most of his energy to adding pressure for a national ballot. And Kinnock has certainly said nothing to suggest that the Observer has got it wrong.

Ballot or no ballot is a question for the miners. The job of the Labour Party is to support their struggle, loudly, unambiguously, and actively. Stand on the line, Neil Kinnock!

ORGANISE FOR A GENERAL STRIKE!

'Maybe a general strike'

Union busters!

By Judith Bonner

NALGO members are in their fourth week of a strike to reinstate a victimised colleague.

Siobhan Stokes was sacked on the spot on Friday March 16 for acting in line with NALGO policy and refusing to sign a "loyalty oath".

Siobhan, who looks after children in council care, was asked to change her place of work from Camberwell, South London, to Sidcup, 13 miles away.

Siobhan lives in Tufnell Park, North London. Moving her place of work would mean over four hours travelling to and from work each day.

Although her terms of employment ask her to be prepared to move, NALGO has an agreement with the Council that members can in fact refuse such moves.

But 22 minutes before her six month probationary period ended Siobhan was sacked - without notice of dismissal, without a disciplinary hearing, without pay in lieu of notice and without right of appeal.

She was called to the Social Services department head office and asked to sign a "loyalty oath" to the effect that she would observe the terms of her contract i.e. work when and where she was told, or lose her job. Siobhan was on probation she had no formal rights, not even an industrial tribunal or an appeal to councillors.

NALGO asked management to consider moving Siobhan to a unit in Southwark. They refused.

Would they, NALGO asked, give her the weekend to think over matters? No.

NALGO's choice was to come out on official strike. The strike is solid and supported by the overwhelming majority of NALGO members.

Although management started the dispute, the role of Southwark's Labour council has been scandalous. They are condoning the decision to dismiss Siobhan, and they are trying to break the union.

NALGO was on strike for a whole week before councillors even agreed to start talking.

Siobhan has been accused of being a member of the Workers Revolutionary Party (she isn't, but so what?); of being seven months pregnant and ready to leave (she obviously isn't). NALGO are being portrayed as obstinate and unwilling to negotiate, which is not true.

The Council have even admitted to using an amendment in Tory legislation under the Employment "Protection" Act which makes it easier for employers to dismiss workers quicker.

Some members of the council have set up a campaign against Siobhan and NALGO, so vitriolic as to be unbelievable. Management and some councillors have also urged staff still at work to sign an anti-strike petition: "If the council was to ever give way... and consider the reinstatement of Ms Stokes, we would feel betrayed and totally demoralised in a way we cannot find words to describe."

The Labour Council was elected as a "left" council. But its refusal to take on the Tories is pushing it into taking on the council unions. NALGO is first.

Support for NALGO has been flowing in from the labour movement in Southwark. The Trades Council has on paper given its wholehearted support. NALGO has given full support at district and national level and strikers are receiving up to 85% of take home pay.

UCATT is meeting this week to decide further action in support.

Mass pickets are planned for Friday 13 April, with a local day of action and other unions being asked to come out in support. A march is planned from the Elephant and Castle to a rally in Peckham.

Messages of support to Southwark NALGO, 34 Peckham Road, London SE5. For more information phone 708 0232 or 703 6311 extension 257.

Steve Shukla (Armthorpe NUM, Yorkshire) spoke to Dan Duncan and Dave Ayrton.

I haven't seen any of the national leadership yet, and the same goes for the area leadership. It isn't there. If it hadn't been for the militant action of rank and filers, there would have been no picketing of the Notts coalfield, no picketing of power stations, no motorway protests.

Having said that, it's all to Scargill's credit that he has resisted calls for a ballot, because he must be under a lot of pressure from the right wing on the NC. He has had a very hostile press, and no doubt he's receiving all sorts of threats, but he's consistently argued against a national ballot.

Undoubtedly, lessons have been learnt. When the South Wales miners came up last time, they just appealed to officials and not the rank and file. If they had come to the rank and file it would have only taken one South Wales picket to bring out the whole of Wales.

I disagreed with the call for a ballot then. It is national conference policy to oppose pit closures and the national conference is the ruling body of our union. No threat to any pit should be passed by while they mess about with official procedures.

The call for a national ballot now is a strikebreaking effort. MacGregor's tactics are divide and rule. He's given the Notts miners the feeling that they're safe, so they keep working and think their future is secure.

We can't win this battle alone, but with the NUR and other transport unions we can be successful.

Action around power stations can be effective. It's sheer propaganda to say otherwise, because they just haven't got the capacity to stock such huge amounts of coal as they claim. Remember, a stockpile is useless if you can't move coal from the pile and they need the TGWU for that.

As the strike gains momentum the state will feel more and more threatened and will employ even tougher tactics against the miners. That should bring a lot of sympathy from other sections of the working class, and it could very well develop into a general strike situation.

I have no doubt that if the police can't cope, the army will be called in.

The Tory government will be seriously threatened, and perhaps a lot more than that. This is what it's coming to. People can only take the failings of the present economic system for so long.

Support on the Mersey

LAST week the whole of Mersey-rail came out on strike against two drivers being sent home for refusing to move coal.

Since then, British Rail drivers have not been asked to move the coal stored at the Victoria Dock, Birkenhead.

Attempts to move the coal by road have been countered by a regular picket line. Unemployed TGWU members and the Birkenhead Unemployed Centre have staffed the pickets, joined by miners from South Wales and Yorkshire.

200 dustmen, themselves on strike over holidays and bonuses following privatisation of their service last year, also joined the picket line on one day.

The picket has turned away most union drivers. A few scab lorries are however getting through.



Over 700 Anti-Apartheid demonstrators marched through Cardiff on April 7th in response to the Welsh Rugby Union's decision to play against an international side which included three South African players.

How we launched the march

THE demonstration and rally in Nottingham on Saturday, 14th, is set to be very big, with miners and other trade unions coming from around the country, and with Tony Benn MP and Yorkshire NUM President Jack Taylor speaking.

Yet it started as a modest idea only two weeks ago in inauspicious circumstances.

First of all when Steve Battle-much, a Socialist Organiser supporter and EC member of Nottingham Trades Council proposed that the Trades Council set up a sub-committee to support the miners, he couldn't even find a seconder amongst other EC members. Some said it would

cause problems for the Notts NUM; others said it would be "substitutionism".

Secondly, Ivan Wels, also a Socialist Organiser supporter and secretary of Sherwood Branch Labour Party, proposed an emergency resolution against police activity in North Notts at the March meeting of East Nottingham GC. This motion condemned the police committee for its unanimous vote of confidence in the Chief Constable and called on the County Labour Party to hold an emergency meeting on the issue and press the County Council to make the Chief Constable withdraw all police from other forces and make him



Ivan Wels

explain his activities. It also said that the County Council should not pay a penny towards the costs.

This resolution gave rank and file Labour Party members and trade unionists nothing to actually do straight away. In any case we were not sure how effective a special County Labour Party meeting would be (especially since the Labour Group usually takes no notice of it).

From the GC meeting we were given the name of the secretary of Newark Labour Party, Sue Rolestone and her husband, Chris Taylor, who live in the thick of the police state in North Nottinghamshire.

Both these comrades had extensive contacts with Yorkshire NUM, since many of them lived locally.

It was decided that speed was essential and that to get things moving we would ourselves have to call an ad-hoc "Co-ordinating Committee Against the Police

North Staffs

ONE of the main factors which brought miners in North Staffordshire out on strike was the activity of the police on the picket lines. The miners had voted in the area ballot not to strike but also agreed not to cross picket lines.

When Welsh and local miners organised pickets at the five pits in the district, they were met by masses of heavy-handed police.

Such was the reaction that within a week meetings at all five pits had voted by massive majorities to come out.

All the pits in the area are now tied up, and miners are concentrating on picketing wharfs and Meaford Power Station.

A small number of Power Group members are still turning up for work. The NUM Power Group is based in Stoke, and its extreme right wing leader Roy

Otley was the leading light in organising the meeting of NEC scabs for a ballot.

The day after Otley's secret meeting with the other scabs, about 100 local miners, including some Power Group members, turned up to his Hanley office chanting for him to resign.

Local Socialist Organiser supporters have been making a film about the strike and producing a weekly 'Collier' bulletin. Nearly 750 copies a week have been snatched up on picket lines.

We have also been active in the Labour Party trying to win support with some success, although the soft left are more concerned about the local elections.

"We have more important things to spend our time on," said one. "The miners' strike is just a mirage."

YOUTH FIGHT CONSCRIPT LABOUR



Jel Coulson

THE Youth Training Scheme is part of the Tory government's strategy against the working class.

With YTS they want to create, among young workers, a pool of cheap labour, available to work without the rates and conditions that have been won by trade unions over decades. And they want to carve up education.

In place of the concept of all-round education for everyone – feeble though the resemblance of the present system to that ideal is – they want to move to a two-tier set-up, traditional education for a (dwindling) elite, and job-centred 'training' for the rest.

The Tories want to expand YTS to cover all school-leavers. Already they are moving towards making it in effect compulsory. Young people who 'unreasonably refuse' to go on YTS, or who leave a scheme halfway through the year it is supposed to last, can have their dole cut by 40 per cent.

For years the Tories have been trying to push down youth wages. The entrenched strength of the unions stopped them – until they brought in YTS, forcing hundreds of thousands of 16-17 year olds to work for a year at £25 a week, less than half the current average wage for under-18s of £50 to £60. Now under-18 wages generally are beginning to fall behind adult wages.

YTS links up on the one hand with the Tories' New Technical and Vocational Educational Initiative (presently at the pilot-scheme stage), which will put a whole chunk of 14-18 year old school students into 'work experience' instead of proper education; and, on the other, with the Tories' proclaimed drive to abolish all time-served apprenticeships by next year.

Yet the TUC supports YTS. "The trade union movement", it says, "has long campaigned for training opportunities for all young people. The YTS is a mighty step in that direction".

In fact the 'Mode B1' YTS schemes which might provide some real training are being shut down, while 'Mode A' schemes which do no more than provide cheap labour to small cowboy employers are encouraged.

'Training' on the schemes will (generally) lead to no recognised qualification, but only to a mickey-mouse 'YTS certificate'. Most of it is done not in local authority colleges, but by profit-gouging private firms.

"The Manpower Services Commission will monitor schemes", says the TUC. Not even that is true. The MSC carries out practically no inspection of most schemes. Safety-at-work provisions are nil on many of them.

The YTS is not what the TUC claims it is – and the trade union movement is beginning to wake up to that fact. This special Socialist Organiser/Class Fighter supplement provides the facts to expose YTS, and ideas on how to fight it.

Class Fighter

Socialist Organiser

The answer: get organised!

YTS is well under way. It isn't as successful as the government would like.

The low take-up rate is a headache for them. There are too many schemes which are community or workshop based, they reckon, and not enough which are led by an established employer.

Unions like the NGA, NUM and POEU have stopped schemes from starting. And all over the country unions have boycotted schemes where they involve job substitution, undercutting union rates, or a reduction in the number of apprentices being taken on.

There is formal agreement that no scheme can start in an unionised workplace without the unions' consent.

Youth have boycotted the schemes themselves, but as YTS becomes compulsory and schools more geared up to channelling youth onto schemes, more and more youth will be going onto a scheme.

So trade unionists and socialists can't stop at condemning YTS. We need campaigns to unionise trainees, to monitor the Manpower Services Commission, to stop rip-off schemes from even starting.

Socialist Organiser and Class Fighter supporters have had a special campaign against compulsion: organising pickets, leafleting vulnerable youth, and supporting careers officers in NALGO who refuse to report YTS 'refusers' to the Department of Employment to have their benefit cut.

Many trainees will spend time at a Further Education (FE) college, and the National Union of Students is ensuring that the MSC does pay trainees' student union fees. In some better organised FE trainees have their own union committees and officers on the Executive, and are trying to work out their own grievance procedures.

But while a lot of local work is going on, and activists have grouped together for rallies and working conferences, there is no well-organised national campaign able, for instance, to give weight to the demand that the TUC withdraws its backing for YTS and pulls out of the MSC.

Over 80% of trainees are in non-union workplaces. They are at the mercy of unscrupulous employers, backed up by the MSC, which does not even visit all proposed schemes to check out their safety and suitability before they start.

This rank exploitation of youth must stop, and social-

Jane Ashworth looks at how to fight the scheme.

ists and trade union militants have a duty to help youth organise to stop it.

Socialist Organiser argues that the TUC should withdraw its endorsement for the Youth Training Scheme, and end its collaboration with the Tories in the Manpower Services Commission.

No compulsion — stop benefit reduction for 'refusers'.

Unions must demand full information on where schemes are operating in their area, and set out to recruit the youth involved.

The basic non-negotiable demands should be:

* Trainees' pay to be topped up to trade union rates.

* Union membership for trainees.

These demands strike at the basic cheap labour purpose of YTS, and are a starting point for further demands. They can be won.

Where they are not conceded, the unions should campaign openly and strongly against the schemes being introduced.

The most important other demands are:

* A guaranteed job at the end.

* No job substitution.

* Employee status for all trainees.

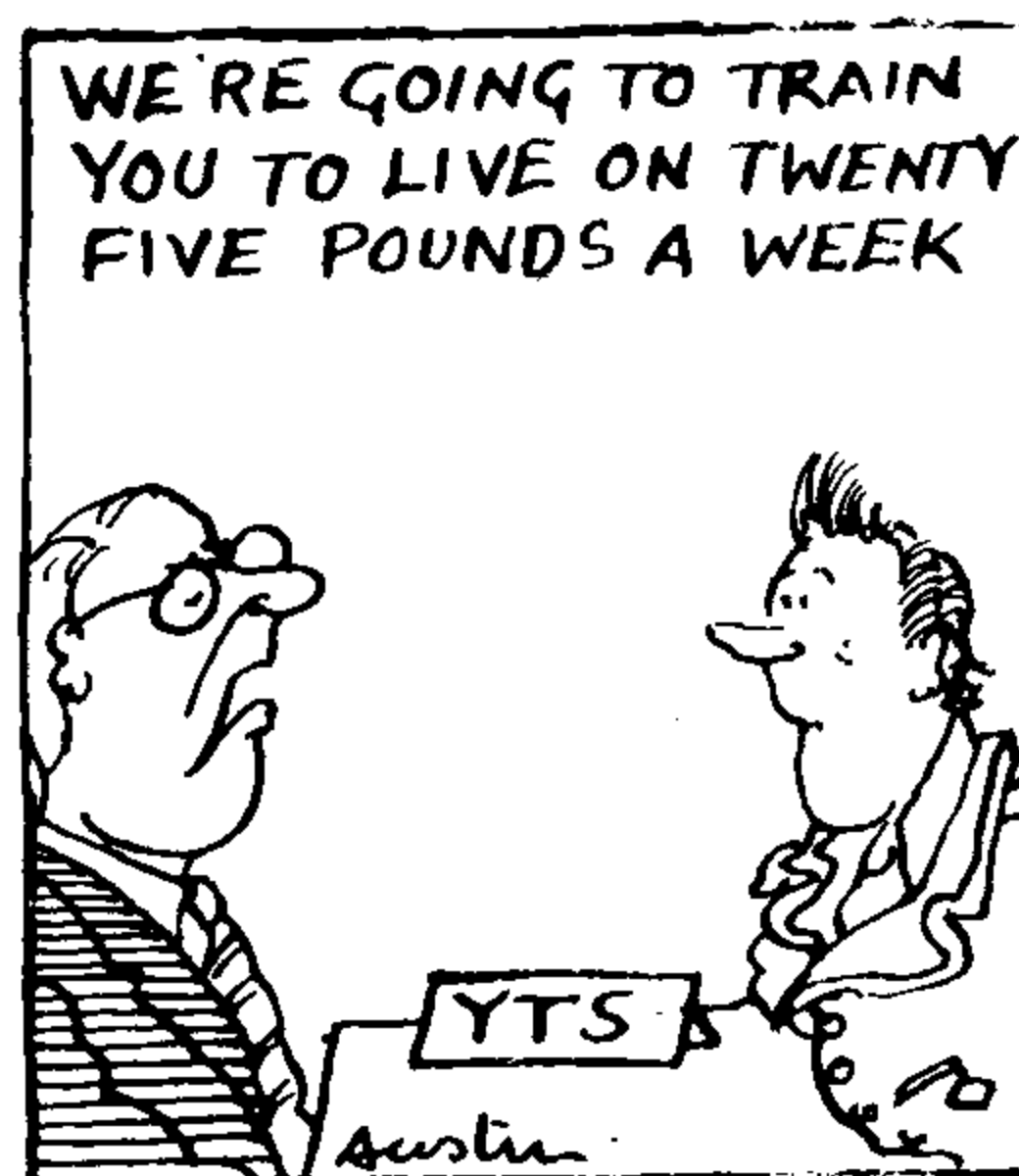
* Training to be done in local authority colleges and to lead to recognised qualifications. Dual membership of trade unions and the National Union of Students. All trainees to take up their rights of student union membership.

* All trainees to receive a card stating their rights. (This is supposed to be an MSC rule).

* More than the minimum 18 days holiday.

* Positive discrimination for women and blacks.

* All schemes to be vetted by qualified safety inspectors before they start.

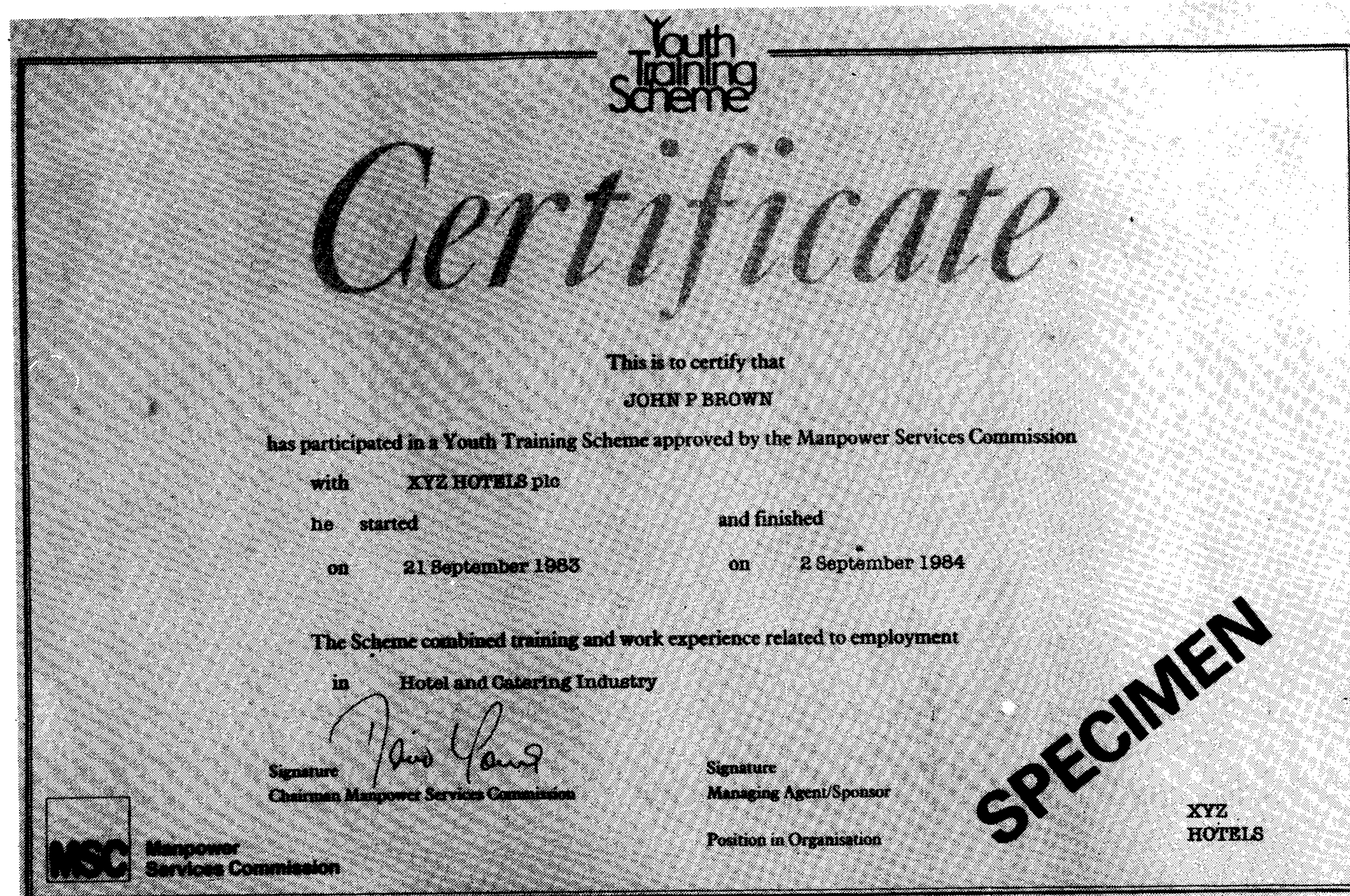


"The essence of the proposal is to reduce the size of the labour force by raising to 17 the age of entry to the normal labour market. We estimate that the Training Year would reduce the level of registered unemployment by about 200,000 above the 130,000 reduction resulting from YOPs."

Published in Time Out (May 20 1983), from the confidential government Think Tank report.

"In the first year [of the Young Workers' Scheme, which pays subsidies to bosses employing young workers on low wages] three quarters of the subsidies are believed by the Department of Employment (which runs the YWS) to have gone to employers who would have taken on someone anyway."

(Times Educational Supplement, March 4 1983).



Solving bosses' problems

ONE quarter of the youth who started on the Youth Training Scheme this year, YTS's first year, have dropped out.

Youthaid, a campaigning charity which specialises in youth employment, expects only 350,000 people to go on schemes — 110,000 short of the Manpower Services Commission's (MSC's) target of 460,000 for this year.

Part of the reason is that the whole scheme went ahead before the bureaucracy and details were worked out.

But the more basic reason is that YTS is a con, and young people and trade unionists working with youth know that. So do workers in other unions, like the NUJ and the NUM, which have stopped any schemes in their industries.

YTS is a con because in most cases it does not provide a real training, and a con because it is based around and justified by two great lies.

Firstly, that youth have priced themselves out of a job.

And secondly, that YTS will give youth skills to get jobs.

YTS came out of YOPs, the Youth Opportunities Programme.

YOPs had been opposed by the unions. It was highly dangerous, and about 30% of YOP 'trainees' were directly substituting for workers on normal wages.

YTS was unveiled in a White Paper in December 1981 — just a few months after the summer riots which had put the fear of god into the government. Unemployed youth on the streets meant trouble, and the government needed to put a stop to it.

Norman Tebbit proposed that trainees be paid an 'allowance' of £14.40 a week. (The average 16-year-old wage was £47.50 a week).

Tebbit proposed that this

Training Year should be compulsory, and provide a permanent bridge between school and work.

Negotiations with the TUC raised the wages to £25 a week, and — temporarily, as it turned out — ensured that YTS should be a voluntary scheme.

So YTS went ahead and the TUC cheered it along, with union leaders appearing in advertisements urging employers to take on trainees and young people themselves to go on a scheme. The TUC said that the education and training component of YTS justified it.

The government's aim is to provide the bosses with cheap and non-unionised labour.

As for real training: the Tories have been party to the running down of the Industrial Training Boards (only seven out of 17 still exist). And YTS doesn't generally provide a skill.

What it does do is train youth to accept the discipline of working life. It also trains them to expect less — less money, less security and less union protection.

The 'profiles' employers fill in for trainees leaving schemes don't concentrate on the person's skills but on his/her good behaviour and willingness to take orders. In fact, there is no adequate supervision of schemes to ensure that trainees are learning skills.

YTS pits young worker against young worker. On the Mode A schemes, which are on employers' premises, youth competes for the few promised jobs at the end of the year.

There are far fewer Mode A schemes than the government would like to see, and Mode B1 schemes — the ones run in workshops or colleges — are now under attack.

The MSC is encouraging

the schemes which directly and immediately benefit an employer and/or the private training organisations.

The government wanted 70% of all YTS to be genuinely employer-led Mode A schemes. But in the Birmingham area, for example, only 12% of all YTS schemes are genuinely employer-led.

YTS contains an element of off-the-job training. It was presumed that this training was to be in state-run colleges of further education. But it isn't happening quite like that.

Some of the private training agencies, often set up and supervised by people who have no teaching qualifications, no experience and not even a track record in successful management (yes, you too can be a managing agent) are doing the off-the-job training themselves, and so are some of the other sorts of schemes.

Further education colleges like Exeter budgeted for and arranged courses for vast numbers of trainees who never materialised. That college was in danger of bankruptcy.

A new grade of lecturer was created, undercutting the rate for the job and with insecure contracts of employment.

The further education colleges are being drawn into this mopping-up of unemployed youth. And as a result the academic freedom of tutors has been restricted.

Politics and discussion about social problems are not allowed on a YTS course!

Because the government and its monster, the MSC, are in the business of giving youth new moral standards, standards which will fit in with their plans for a new sort of industrial Britain, with its free trade zones, shackled unions, and de-skilled low paid workers, they are following up YTS with a raid on schools.

The Technical and Vocational Educational Initiative (TVEI) selects a band or stream of school students from 14 onwards and prepares them for work by sending them to employers' premises and gearing part of the curriculum around work.

Who's in this 'technical stream' varies from area to area, depending on the needs of local industry. So, for instance, if you live in a mining area the stream might be connected with the pits.

Neither YTS nor its junior partner, TVEI, offers an answer to the problems of young unemployed people face, but they may provide an answer to the bosses' problems of wages, unions and self-respecting workers.

They are also intended to provide an answer to the government's problem — what to do with potentially rebellious youth, otherwise unbroken by work discipline and what to do with the soaring unemployment figures.

"In short the YTS offers a fresh start to our young, and at the same time is attractive financially to employers. You now have the opportunity to take on young men or women, train them and let them work for you almost entirely at our expense, and then decide whether or not to employ them. I know that we will soon start to have better trained, better motivated young people coming into industry."

David Young, director of the Manpower Services Commission, in 'The Director', October 1982.

Death traps are still there

ALTHOUGH 'trainees' have now been brought into line with employees when it comes to their legal rights to safe working conditions, it isn't the end of the matter.

Being covered by these laws is okay after you've had an accident — you'll get compensation. But it isn't going to stop them happening in the first place.

The MSC presided over 17 deaths on YOPs. During the first week of YTS David Brookes died after falling down a disused mineshaft on a YTS outward bound course. That scheme had not been vetted by the MSC.

In fact most schemes don't get vetted. In the final year of YOPs, there were only 12 full-time and 50 part-time MSC officers responsible for safety in the whole country.

That made each officer responsible for the safety of 12,000 YOP trainees!

Derek Cain also died on YOPs. Not only had his factory not been vetted, but the MSC hadn't even bothered to check that the factory was registered with the Factory Inspectorate.

Trainees are being sent to death traps. The MSC has refused to hold inquiries into the deaths and serious injuries on its schemes. Instead it published a report which blamed everyone but itself for deaths and injuries; "investigations have revealed that inadequate supervision on programmes as well as the lack of concentration on the part of trainees were the most likely contributory causes."

Maybe the MSC doesn't think it is at fault for sending trainees into dangerous places with "inadequate supervision".

MSC staff are not all trained to deal with safety questions. But the officers who visit schemes (and there are still no plans to ensure that every scheme is visited) are expected to 'advise' on safety.

The MSC doesn't even closely liaise with the Health and Safety Executive, the body which really does know about safety at work.

Young workers are more likely to have accidents at work than older employees. That fact in itself should surely have been enough to force the government and the MSC to be extra cautious. But it hasn't sunk in; neither have the facts compiled by Youthaid which show that someone on a YOP scheme was twice as likely to suffer serious injury as an 'ordinary' employee.

The chance of being killed was 1.5 times that of an average industrial worker.

Choose your union

By Jim Denham
UNIONISING YTS trainees can be difficult.

Many youth have a pretty cynical attitude towards unions, and to a large extent that cynicism is justified. Under YOPs many unions recruited trainees, and generally did nothing for them.

The TUC's full support for YTS has identified the trade union movement with the bosses of the MSC in the eyes of many trainees.

But trade unions can improve the lot of trainees, as the experience of Massey Ferguson shows.

There, the shop floor trade unions agreed to YTS only on condition that the trainees are paid £74.86 a week, and that all the trainees will be guaranteed a job at the end of the scheme.

It is important to avoid the trap of simply signing trainees up into the first union that comes along. Much better is to get youth together to discuss their problems and what they require of a union first.

This can be done through a trainees' council on a particular scheme, or through a trainees' action group covering several schemes.

Union representatives should then be invited along to explain what they can offer to trainees and what rights the youth would have within the union. Would they be allowed to elect their own representatives? Can they organise their own branch or committee? Will they have full rights to benefit, to vote, to send delegates to conference, and so on?

The attitude of the unions on these matters can vary greatly from area to area, so shop around!

The only rule of thumb is that



Far from keeping schemes safe, the MSC even blunders in the pictures in its own 'Youth Training News'. One of the trainees above is wearing a woolly jumper likely to smoulder from sparks from the welding.

for Mode A schemes at organised workplaces, the trainees should normally join whatever union the 'ordinary' workers are in. Even so, it would be useful for them to link up with other trainees through an umbrella trainees'

action group.

Some unions (notably the AUEW and AUEW-TASS) offer trainees free membership, which obviously makes recruitment much easier.

But it might make more sense

to pay out a few pence a week in order to get into a union that gives trainees a better deal locally.

Briefly, the position of the major national unions on YTS is as follows:

rates have been negotiated. They charge the normal minimum rate of 30p a week.

*USDAW charge their lowest scale rate of 37p per week.

*FTAT charge £2.50 per year.

*AUEW, AUEW-TASS, EETPU and Metal Mechanics (NSMM) offer free membership. The AUEW has set up a special Section 5 for trainees. The Metal Mechanics played a prominent role in negotiating the Massey Ferguson deal.

*TGWU and GMBU charge 10p a week and seem keen to recruit. Both have produced very good handbooks on YTS.

*APEX charge 5p a week.

*ASTMS charges 50p a month.

*NALGO normally recruits trainees only where trade union

*POEU charge a 20p single payment (but since November they have had policy to boycott YTS, so are refusing to allow any more trainees into British Telecom).

*NUR charge a £1 single payment. Trainees join the appropriate area branch.

*NUPE presently charge 35p per week, but this is likely to go down to 5p in line with conference policy. Individual branches can organise special trainee section.

*The Bakers' Union only recruits trainees when 'a satisfactory pay rate is negotiated'. They charge 70p per week.

Why schemes shut

By Jane Ashworth

MODE B1 Youth Training Schemes, the ones which are based in the community or in a workshop, are being cut back or closed.

In February Tom King announced that community projects are to be cut and B1s are being closed down. Metro Action Central in Doncaster will have all their funds stopped from April, even though some trainees only started there in January.

Two schemes in Birmingham are threatened with closure (the two schemes where the YTS Action Group

is most involved) and so is Crossover in Newham, East London.

A host of other schemes across the country face the chop, too.

B1 schemes are more expensive than the employer-led Mode A schemes. They also tend to provide places for youth who have been rejected from Mode A schemes — black youth, ex-offenders, or youth with special problems, perhaps learning difficulties.

Most of the 15 trainees from Crossover lobbied the London Area Manpower Board, demanding that their scheme be left alone.

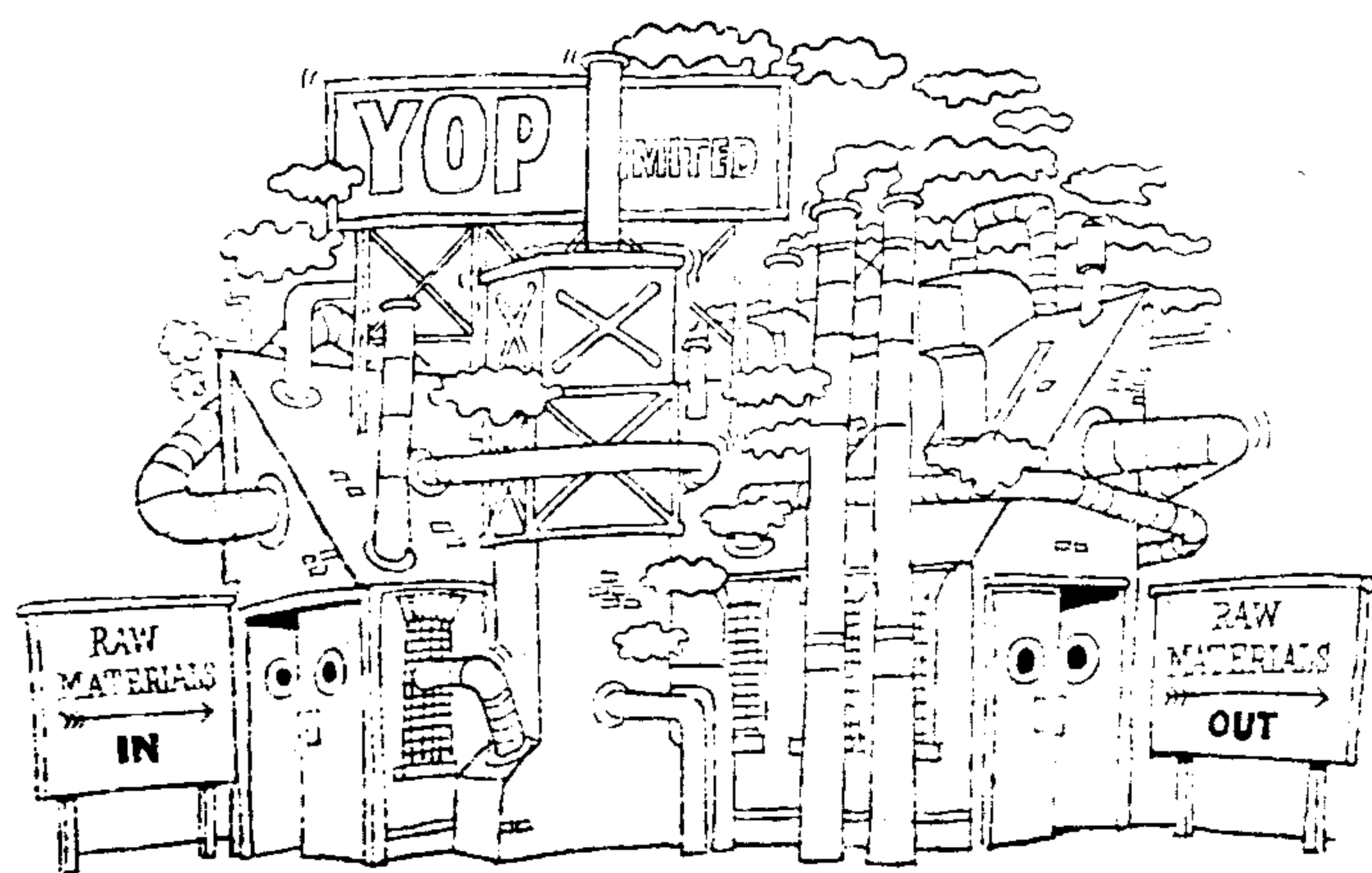
On this scheme the youth learn silk-screen printing and dress design among other things. On Metro Action Central some trainees are helping to build a new centre for the local Society for the Deaf.

All schemes are now coming up for review. Schemes run by the private training agencies, which are grossly undersubscribed, are being allowed to expand, while Mode B1 schemes, some of which have long waiting lists, are to be closed.

The Area Manpower Boards have few rights. Accepting or rejecting schemes is one of them. But not for much longer. Soon this power will lie in the hands of the central Manpower Services Commission itself.

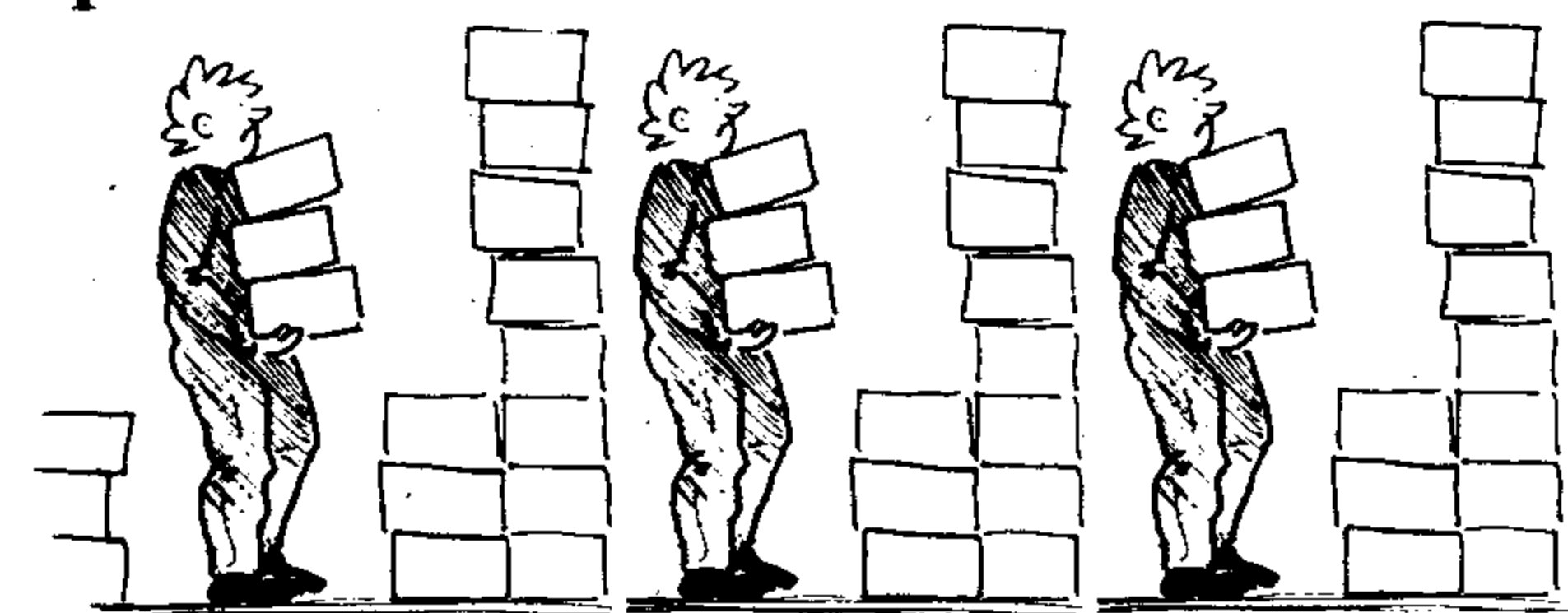
YTS is now becoming just what the government really wants, a scheme to encourage cowboy firms to grow and a way of subsidising other firms.

All this nonsense about trainees benefitting from the schemes has got to be exposed for the lie that it is.



From a pamphlet produced by the Network Training Group

Spot the Difference



From the 'Labour Research' pamphlet

SOCIALIST STUDENT

DEFEND OUR UNIONS!

Paper of Socialist Students in NOLS. 5p plus postage from Andy Bennett, c/o DSU, Dunelm House, New Elvet, Durham

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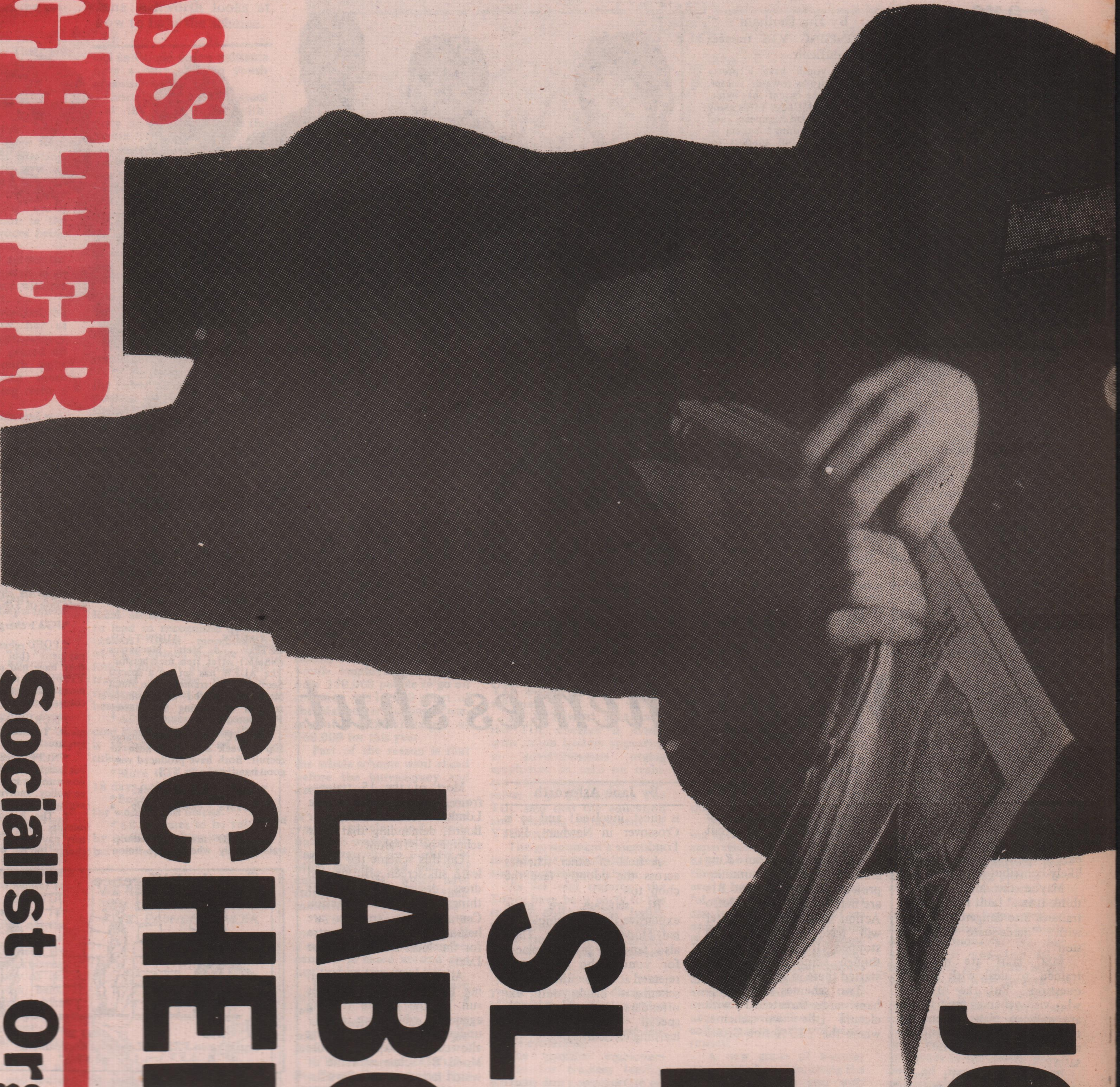
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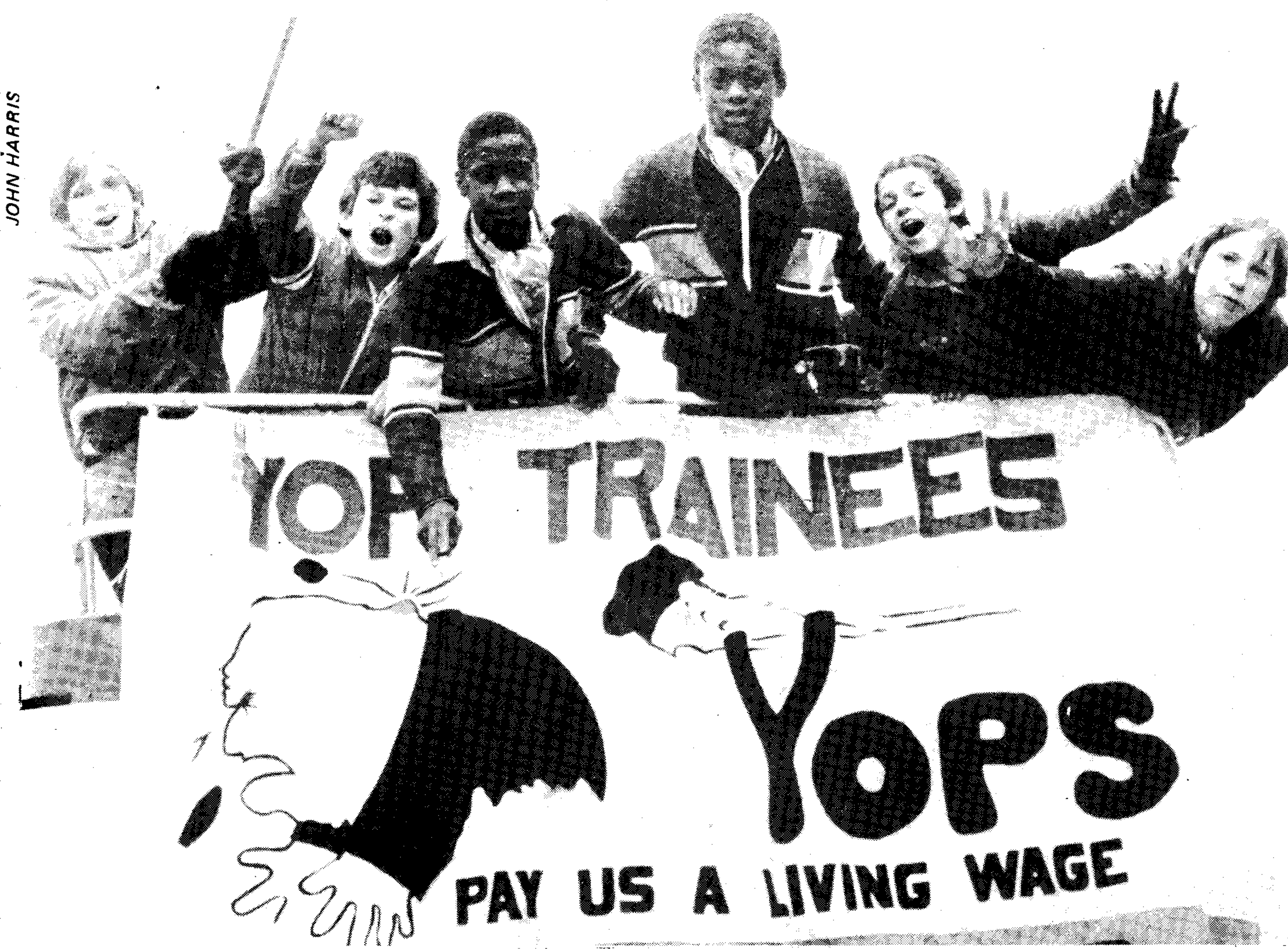
NO

YOUTH
WANT



IF THE
SCHEMES
ARE SO
GOOD - WHY
FORCE YOUTH
ONTO THEM??

JOHN HARRIS



Youth began to organise on YOPs, the forerunner of YTS

The rip-off merchants

By Jim Denham

ACCORDING to the manpower Services Commission, YTS was supposed to be an all-new, high-quality scheme which would eliminate all the abuses that had discredited the old Youth Opportunities Programme — job substitution, trainees being used as cheap labour, lack of health and safety monitoring, and so on.

In fact, YTS has generally proved to be no improvement on YOPs. In particular, the rise of the Private Training Agencies (PTAs) has ensured that all the worst features of YOPs have been carried over into the YTS.

PTAs are commercial outfits who take on trainees for year-long training "packages". They provide off-the-job training only and sub-contract to outside employers who provide the nine-months "work experience" part of the package.

The rise of the PTAs is a result of the recession. Employers have been in no mood to take on large numbers of trainees, and there has been a massive short fall of genuine "employer-led" Mode A schemes.

The PTAs have jumped in to fill the gap — and to make a profit for themselves into the bargain.

A PTA will receive money in three ways for each trainee taken on: a fee of £100 for acting as the managing agent, £550 for supplying the off-the-job training and £1,300 towards the trainee's allowance.

NATFHE, the college lecturers' union, commissioned a report on the PTAs in the Birmingham/Solihull area. The NATFHE report proves that "no systematic monitoring or audit of these agencies' accounts or training qualifications is made before they are in receipt of public money."

Of the 30 PTAs in the Birmingham/Solihull area, a substantial number are breaking the law — "a strange example to be set by agencies teaching life and social skills to the young people they are training", comments NATFHE.

Two of the agencies had serious queries regarding their accounts raised by their auditors. Seven had no filed, up-to-date accounts and were therefore breaking the law.

Of the remainder, one had filed incomplete accounts, three were not registered as companies at all, and seven had been formed within the last two years, and so were not required to have filed accounts.

ADM Limited for instance, had clearly been using the money it received from the MSC in order to stave off bankruptcy. Five

days before being approved as a YTS agency, ADM had registered their annual return with Companies House: this showed an adverse relationship between assets and liabilities. But still they were approved.

To make a profit out of a funding formula that was never intended to cover even the full cost to employers, the PTAs can only spend about half the amount per trainee that it costs a college. This means paying their staff less, taking on unqualified trainers, and cutting corners on training and work experience.

The only way they can make a profit is by cramming more and more trainees into each class and taking on unqualified teaching staff who don't expect very high wages. These agencies are, in a sense, privatised further education. They are taking work and money away from state-run colleges of further education, and the government and MSC are encouraging them.

So while the likes of John Pardoe, the ex-Liberal MP, is making money as a director of one of the biggest PTAs, Sight and Sound, the tech college down the road, which is equally capable of teaching office skills, is falling apart through lack of funds.

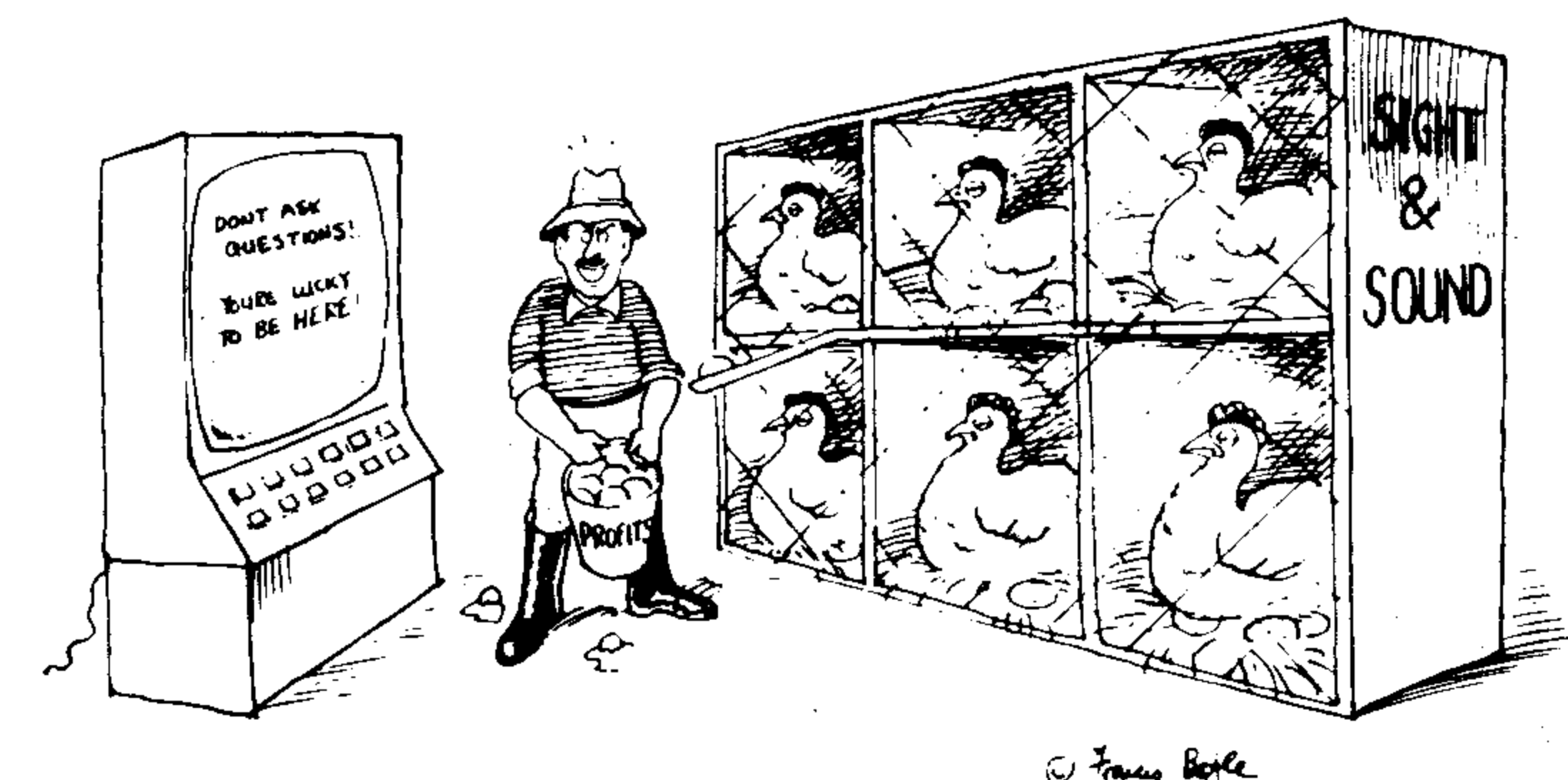
Pitman's Training Centre did not even supply their trainees with enough desks, pens, pads or typewriters. Pitman's trainees were being sent out on "work experience" only to find themselves being used as temps, and sent back to the agency after a couple of weeks.

But when the Pitman's trainees got together and submitted a petition complaining about their treatment, the management responded swiftly, and met nine of the 12 demands put forward by the trainees. They even thanked the young women for their "suggestions".

The explanation for this was fear of losing the approval of the Area Manpower Board, combined with the prospect of financial losses resulting from losing any trainees.

As the NATFHE report notes: "It is a strange and unexpected consequence of the rise of private training agencies that trainees find themselves in a stronger bargaining position than expected. For many of the agencies are already in trouble due to the low take-up of YTS. The loss of any of their existing trainees would be a loss of their main or only source of income."

The message for Class Fighter supporters is clear: seek out the PTAs, and make contact with the trainees. They're almost certain to have grievances. We should also be asking the union representatives on the Area Manpower Boards — what do you think you're doing giving approval to these cowboys?



"Students tend to have somewhat glazed, zombie-like expressions" during classes at Sight and Sound, according to the Sunday Times. The company treats students like battery hens, with highly routinised methods of teaching. Sight and Sound's YTS business involves around £8 million of MSC finance. Cartoon by Francis Boyle from the Labour Research pamphlet on YTS.

WHO CONTROLS?

What are the powers of the Area Manpower Board (AMB)?

When they were established we understood that they were to approve schemes within a budget. That budget and an area plan were both to be agreed by the AMB.

Now, we learn in the new guidelines published this year that "scheme contracts are with the MSC". Decisions to close schemes are therefore for the Area Manager to take. Boards will only be informed of closures and the reasons for them. They don't even say that Boards will be consulted.

Similarly, renewals of schemes which are "straightforward" will be done by the Area Manager and officers of the MSC, not by the Boards.

In Fife, last November, the Board rejected a scheme but were overruled by the MSC.

Mode B schemes run by local authorities and voluntary agencies are being cut — have you been able to stop this?

The government wants to move the running of YTS towards private companies. Moreover, Mode B schemes have been seen as a way of keeping off the streets kids whom companies don't want.

Trade union representatives in alliance with the voluntary sector representatives on the Birmingham Board rejected the proposals for cuts first time round and sent a letter to the MSC, saying that such cuts should not be made, especially in inner city areas.

However, at the next Board meeting, the chair informed us that Mode B places had to be cut as there was only a certain budget available. We found, in fighting to save two voluntary sector schemes singled out for closure by the MSC, that we were forced to make cuts in Local Education Authority schemes.

In effect, the Board was doing the Tories' dirty work in deciding where to cut.

At the same time, 42% of places in Birmingham and Solihull are with private training agencies, many of which are involved in YTS just to make a profit and are not necessarily providing good training.

In view of this, do you think socialists should be on AMBs?

My position from the beginning was that the TUC should not be involved in AMBs or in the Youth Training Board. As long as

Paul Mackney, president of Birmingham Trades Council, spoke to Andy Barrett

the TUC is involved, socialists should be on Boards but should campaign for withdrawal by the labour movement as a whole. We should withdraw collectively, not as individuals.

This was my position at the start of YTS. Since then, many things have happened to make this more important.

YTS came out of a compromise report called the Youth Task Group Report — if you look at that report and what YTS is now, you can find about 20 examples of where that agreement has been ratted on.

For example, job substitution is now rife in spite of a complicated formula called "additionality", which was supposed to prevent this. The trade union veto on schemes no longer exists. AMB decisions can be overturned.

There was supposed to be 13 weeks off-the-job training — now that's often as little as ten weeks or even less, and on some schemes this involves working at home from study packs or just writing essays which of course is quite cheap for programme providers.

The TUC thought they'd scored a major victory by making the schemes voluntary and ensuring the right to supplementary benefit of people who didn't want to go on them but now your benefit can be cut if you refuse to go on a scheme.

The £25 a week allowance was due to be inflation-proofed, but it has remained at £25. Also, examples of racism and sexism are becoming more apparent on schemes.

Private training agencies, not mentioned in the initial government report, have mushroomed.

To what extent has the fact that there have been trade union representatives on AMBs helped trainees and unions?

When schemes come before the Board, the most vocal opponents are the trade union representatives. We have managed to achieve quite significant changes in some schemes, but that has been detailed tinkering with a scheme that is in many senses rotten.

Within the limitations of the amount of work that the MSC

officers can do, almost all the information I have asked for has been given. Part of the problem for trade union representatives is the large amount of information they get, and, more important, what to do with it.

My view is that one of the important things for trade union representatives is to get information on schemes out into the trade union movement in general and use the information actively to campaign around YTS.

As with many Quangos you have pressure on you to keep confidentiality.

However, we're not there to get information that is interesting to us personally but to get it out to the movement.

How do you think the TUC sees its role in controlling what goes on in YTS?

The TUC has a two-fold strategy. Firstly, to control YTS through AMBs, and I think I've shown the limitations of that.

Secondly, they believe that they will control it in organised workplaces. Of course that's important, but many unions in organised workplaces have recognised YTS as an attack on the level of youth wages and rejected schemes. The vast majority of schemes are not in unionised workplaces.

This means we need an additional strategy that will draw trainees into the organised labour movement.

All trades councils, regional TUCs and County Associations of Trades Councils, should develop an immediate campaign to recruit youth, not just trainees, to unions. They should be given the resources and facilities to do this and perhaps some of the time that is devoted to publicity exercises about YTS could be devoted to recruitment exercises.

What saw the end of YOPs was the attitude of youth, not the attitudes of people on governing bodies for YOPs.

In January the government published a White Paper called "Training for Jobs". How do you think this will affect the development of YTS?

The first thing to say is that the White Paper is not about training for jobs, it's about training for employers.

The effect on YTS could be that the right to benefit could be removed entirely from those who don't go on it, and the government is going to look again at

whether the scheme should be voluntary. You can add to that the current review of benefits, where we can see that the government could stop the present rights of people to study 15 or 21 hours at colleges and still claim benefit.

Similarly, you can see that the Young Workers Scheme is likely to become year 2 of YTS. You could get people leaving school at 16 going onto YTS for the first year; YWS for the second year; then, if they're extremely lucky, a Community Programme for their third year and another Community Programme for their fourth year.

When Lincoln Steffens went to the Soviet Union he said, "I've seen the future, and it works". Having read the "Training for Jobs" White Paper you can say, "I've seen the future and it's work experience".

What other developments are likely to come out of the White Paper?

It proposes to take 25% of the money for "work-related courses" from colleges and local authorities who currently decide how it's spent, and to hand that decision to the MSC. This is yet another attack on local democracy, and the whole idea of "work-related" education cuts right across the idea of comprehensive, post-school education anyway.

It has many other features in it that socialists would oppose such as loans for adults involved in adult retraining which could be extended to replace grants for students at colleges. It also contains proposals to change the system of adult retraining so that twice as many go through on courses half the present length and a lot of the programme will be for people already in work instead of unemployed people.

You can see in the "Training for Jobs" proposals that once the MSC gets hold of the money from the local authority for "work related" courses they might then spend this money in private training agencies instead of colleges of further education.

I think the youth know the truth about YTS, and some of our trade union and political leaders should go down any street in any town in the country and ask the youth what they think of it.

We should try and link up with and organise the young people to campaign vigorously for an alternative to YTS.

YTS Action Special

Durham

SHEILA Hope is a NUPE Shop Steward on a YTS Scheme with Dragon Enterprises Ltd. in Durham. Her training is mainly clerical work. She is involved with a NUPE sponsored campaign to help improve conditions for YTS trainees on her scheme.

Sheila, what are the conditions like on your scheme?

Disgusting. Trainees are made to clean out toilets. Supervisors leave trainees for half days, or days on end without supervision. The whole canteen is disgusting. I wouldn't let anybody eat off our tables. The shopfloor in my view is unsage. There are bits of wood and sawdust lying all over the floor. It's just generally unhygienic and unsage.

What sort of training do you get?

Not much. I've learnt how to set up a home computer to draw 'Danger Mouse' Posters. I can do a bit of typing and I can use the switchboard. Ah, yes, and I know how to make confetti for people's weddings which I spent 2 days doing for one of the supervisors who was getting married.

How did you get involved with NUPE?

They came in and gave us a talk and told us that we were entitled to join a Union. If we joined we could elect some shop stewards and stand up for ourselves. It started with only a few members and then it gradually built up until we had twelve shop stewards. I went away on a shop steward's course. We sat and worked out what the problems were on the scheme and drafted a press release, a petition and leaflets about YTS.

The petition calls for Trade Union rates of pay that's £40 per week here. A minimum of four weeks holiday because at present we get 18 days. Free travel to and from work and a guaranteed job at the end of training.

We've had good support all round. The response of the General public and ordinary trade unionists has been to welcome it with open arms. We had a rally on March 3rd at which we had a good number of trainees. The support's still going for us.

How did the Management and the MSC react to the campaign?

The MSC were totally against everything and started trouble with the trainees. The supervisors started picking on me and

Kaye Anderson who was also involved in the campaign. One day they sat me down in front of twenty-odd trainees and pulled me apart. The Supervisors started trouble up at work. For 3 days no trainee spoke to us and I got beaten up by some trainees.

Rumours

The manager and assistant manager started rumours that I was trying to get the scheme banned so the trainees ganged up on us. I cannot prove it but I also think the management had a hand in calling a meeting of union members to try to get me kicked out as shop steward.

I was re-elected but now they've found a new way to get rid of me. I'm sent out on placement until the end of my time.

The union membership has fallen off and at the moment you're the only shop steward left. Why do you think this has happened?



Jane Ashworth (right) and Tony Dale at Class Fighter conference. Class Fighter has campaigned against youth being compelled to go onto YTS.

It's only because the trainees are scared of losing their jobs. There's also a bad feeling at work from supervisors. If you're involved in the union or with the petition you get a load of stick from the Supervisors. They say 'you don't want to be involved with the Union, it's nowt but trouble and they don't do anything for you'. As far as I'm concerned at work we have no rights as employees so we are on our own unless we have the union behind us.

Where's the Campaign going from here?

We're presenting a 'Youth Charter' to the MSC demanding the trade union rates of pay and all the other aspects of petition along with the right to be treated as adults and not immature children.

Forty trainees in NUPE are going down to London on the 1st May to present a draft copy of the petition to Norman Fowler. We will also be meeting Neil Kinnock. We've just got to tell them what we want and that we're intent on getting it. But as far as the Tories are concerned the schemes will never change while they're in government.

YTS campaigners in Birmingham

South coast

I'M working in a garage doing mechanics at the moment. I've been moved around, to the showroom, doing car-cleaning, on the forecourt, working on parts and now I'm in the workshop.

The garage Managing Director is the managing agent.

I've learnt most things at college; we used to do 2 days but now it's 1 day a week. We learn the operation of the garage at work, but we haven't done much practical work, which is what most of us went there to do. You get move into doing car-cleaning — where you don't learn a lot — except how to clean cars.

The only time you learn about mechanics is at college; unless you get a good mechanic who's got a lot of patience and will teach you things to do. The

A Labour Party Young Socialist member from Worthing told us about the scheme where he works

college isn't too bad. We work in an annexe next to the main building. It's a nice place we had a lecturer there who was teaching us life and social skills who was a local Labour Party officer. She was going to bring someone along to teach us about Trade unions. Our Managing director didn't appreciate that at all. He got hold of a questionnaire which she gave us. He told us we couldn't go to those lessons if she was there so we missed 3 weeks of teaching.

They got us another teacher who turned out to be one of the Managing Director's friends. It was a bit below the belt really. Some people wanted to know about

trade unions. We're obviously going to come across trade unions at some time. Just because it's a garage which doesn't have unions now, it doesn't mean we're going to stay there. You've got to learn how trade unions operate and what they can do for you. The Managing Director is hostile to trade unions because he runs a place which doesn't pay high wages, some of his places aren't exactly the best places to work in and if he doesn't have trade unions then he can keep wages back and more money in his own pocket.

Some people on the scheme didn't take much notice but some took it as a joke because they didn't like the teacher. No one apart from me wants to join a union.

Tower Hamlets, London

SEAN Ryan is a 17 year old trainee on a scheme run by the Urban Studies Centre in East London.

He is the TGWU ACTSS shop steward for this recently unionised scheme. His scheme is considered one of the best in Tower Hamlets by local trade unionists involved in monitoring.

How big is your scheme, and what kind of training do you do?

There are 17 of us altogether. The training is meant to be in community work — like looking

after elderly people — but many of us are doing ordinary jobs for community organisations, like working in bookshops or secretarial work.

I've had two placements so far. The first was with a group which visited elderly people to help them with various problems.

The first week I was taken round a number of elderly people and introduced to them, then after that I was left to myself. I was supposed to visit each person to do any odd jobs that needed doing for them, but I found that most of the people on my list no longer remembered me and would not let me in.

I was given no help or guidance on how to approach elderly people.

After that I was moved to a Methodist Mission to do work fixing bathrooms. This involved carpentry and tiling, skills I already had from previous jobs. Today I was up on the roof filling in cracks. This would be done by proper workmen, but they're too mean to pay them.

Where do you do your off the job training?

At the Urban Studies Centre in Bethnal Green. We are all there on Wednesdays. Some of us are studying for City & Guilds exams in community studies.

I understand your scheme 'tops up' your money and that you were given contracts of employment.

Yes. We get £32.49 a week, but it's still not enough to survive on. Most of us live at home and give £10 or £15 a week to our parents. After you have spent £5 or £6 a week on fares, you don't have much left for buying clothes or going out enjoying yourself.

The contract of employment seemed to be a good thing, but has caused us problems. Because we were trainees the MSC said it was up the Urban Studies Centre to pay our fares. Recently we heard that they had changed their minds, but we still haven't received anything yet.

The other problem has been with housing benefit. Most of us want to get our own places, but because we are 'employed' we can't get full housing benefit. Bed sit rents are high, and none of us wants to take a place only to find we only get a fraction of the rent in housing benefit.

How did your scheme get unionised?

Peter, who runs our scheme, encouraged us to join a union and arranged for two people from the Centre for the Unemployed to give us a talk on trade unions.

They got us to elect two reps and organise a meeting for the following week. All but one of us joined at that meeting, and the other person, who wasn't sure about joining, decided to join this week.

Some of us wanted to go on strike on Democracy Day, but we weren't organised in time. I think most of us will support any action like that in the future, though.

You said you had worked before going on YTS. What kind of things did you do?

I worked casually as a labourer, a window cleaner, and in a clothes factory. On all of these I was taking home between £60 and £70 a week, and up to £90 with overtime. Much better than on YTS.

I've got friends now working for only £30 or £40.

- * Ethnic minorities are twice as likely as white youth to end up on a college-based Mode B scheme.
- * Ethnic minorities are less likely to get onto an employer-led Mode A scheme.
- * There are only 1 in 500 youth with disabilities on Mode A schemes. On Mode B the figure is 1 in 60.
- * There are 40 per cent more men on YTS than women.

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CONTACTS

Information in this supplement has come from publications from: Labour Research Department, Birmingham Trade Union Resources Centre, and Youthaid.

Contacts

Youthaid, 9 Poland St, London W1. Up-to-date information about all aspects of youth employment/unemployment
Birmingham TURC, 7 Frederick St, Birmingham, have a YTS action group, a trainees' group, and a lot of very useful pamphlets and YTS knowledge.

Labour Research Department, 78 Blackfriars Rd, London SE1 8HF, produces a monthly journal which covers YTS, and occasional YTS 'specials' which are extremely good.

NO COMPULSION!

In 1981, the Tories' Employment Secretary announced in Parliament that supplementary benefit to unemployed young people under 18 would stop as soon as the government could offer them all places in the Youth Opportunities Programme or a similar scheme.
(Times Educational Supplement, July 3 1981).

YTS is still officially "voluntary". The TUC only agreed to back the scheme in the first place on condition that there would be no compulsion involved.

Under pressure from the TUC and others, the Government dropped its original plan to make the scheme compulsory.

In reality, however, the scheme has been made effectively compulsory for most 16 and 17 year olds who cannot find a "real" job.

For a start, the scheme has been designated "approved training", which means that YTS places are treated as normal jobs by the DHSS. As a result, a youth who turns down a YTS place, or who leaves a scheme early, stands to have his or her benefit cut by 40% - taking it to below £10 a week.

Youth who have left schemes because of inadequate training, and others who have turned down places because they were already studying at further education colleges under the 21-hour rule (which allows a student to claim benefit so long as his or her studies take up less than 21 hours a week) have already been penalised in this way.

And all the signs are that this backdoor compulsion is being tightened up. Careers officers have been instructed to send reports on "refusers" to the DHSS.

At the same time, 21-hour students are now being called in by the careers service and "offered" YTS places. Again, if they refuse, the careers service has been instructed to pass their names on to the DHSS.

But NALGO members in the careers service are resisting these developments: in London, Sheffield and Birmingham NALGO members have voted not to report on "refusers".

This issue is going to become increasingly important. The government's recent White Paper "Training for Jobs" (!) makes it clear that they plan to step up compulsion still further.

Class Fighter has already initiated a series of lobbies against compulsion around the country. This campaign must be continued, and links with NALGO members in the careers service and CPSA members in DHSS must be established if the government's plans are to be thwarted.

Meanwhile, pressure must be put on the TUC to really fight for its own formal policy of opposition to compulsion, and to withdraw from the MSC if compulsion continues.

THE Birmingham policy commits careers officers to:

A) Refuse to complete any documentation or reveal by any other means information in respect of young people refusing to take part in the YTS which may be used by the Department of Employment to withhold or reduce the state benefits those young people would normally receive.

B) Refuse to enter into negotiations with unemployment benefit office staff on the circumstances of young people leaving a Youth Training Scheme.

C) Refer ex-YTS trainees to local welfare rights agencies with a view to making an appeal against any cut in benefit that may have been imposed."

Birmingham NALGO are also calling on the TUC to campaign for the withdrawal of "approved training" designation from YTS, so that "refusers" can no longer be penalised by the DHSS.



Trade unionists lobby an Area Manpower Board meeting in Birmingham against benefit cuts for YTS refusers

A labour inquiry

OVER 50% of under-18s, and 25% of under-24s, are unemployed.

A generation of school leavers face long-term unemployment or low-wage, deskilled casual work. They have little or no effective contact with the trade union and labour movement.

The TUC's call for vigilant monitoring of YTS has been taken up by a number of trade union and labour movement bodies, who recently came together at a national meeting on monitoring MSC schemes, sponsored by Sheffield and Rotherham Trades Councils and hosted by Sheffield City Council.

Following that, this Inquiry has been formed with three main aims.

1. To examine state responses to unemployment and training, including YTS, within the context of this government's attempts to undermine wage levels and reduce living standards for working people as a whole.

2. To exchange information on the various strategies being adopted, particularly within the labour

movement, to best monitor these schemes and to collate information about them.

3. To develop a national network to develop such strategies further in order to curb present abuses more effectively (e.g. health and safety, job substitution, the role of private training agencies, conditions of trainers, discrimination and lack of equal opportunities) and to further protect the interests of all young people.

The Inquiry's overriding aim is to bring together and pass on information from a wide range of sources, e.g. educational bodies, voluntary organisations, trade unions, trainees on the YTS, others involved in government measures on unemployment.

Anyone involved with MSC and other schemes realises the importance of this. We will be channelling information through to all levels of the labour movement, locally and nationally, including trade unions and Area Manpower Board members.

In particular we will be commissioning reports and discussion documents arising from this monitoring work.

We want this evidence to help inform future labour movement policies on youth unemployment and training as well as the day to day work of all those concerned with government special measures.

YOUTH TRAINING SCHEME

TRAINEES INFORMATION CARD

Name.....
Scheme.....
Supervisor.....

This card outlines your rights on the Youth Training Scheme

All the information given is based on your legal rights and the Manpower Services Commission's rules and guidelines.

THIS CARD IS PUBLISHED BY THE BIRMINGHAM TRADES COUNCIL'S YTS ACTION GROUP. Further copies of this leaflet are available for 2p each.



WE HOPE that you will support the inquiry in two ways:

1. Sponsoring it. Add your name to the bodies who have already made this commitment.
2. Submitting evidence. Send any information, including discussion and policy documents and other reports, to the inquiry at the address below, particularly about the Manpower Services Commission and the Youth Training Scheme in your area.

Please write to: National Coordinating Group, Labour Movement Inquiry into Youth Unemployment and Training, c/o Cllr Dave Morgan, Sheffield City Council, Employment Committee, Employment Department, Palatine Chambers, Pinstone St, Sheffield S1 2HN (0742 755215 x 232).

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SPOTLIGHT

Ireland long ago

By Mick Ackersley

ONE of Channel 4's good things is its Irish imports, like Radio Telefís Éireann's (RTE) "The Year of the French", an extremely good fictionalised account of the French invasion of Connaught and the Republican uprising in 1798. And last week saw the first of RTE's four-part series on World War 2 Ireland, "Caught in a Free State". Last week, too, ITV began repeating "The Irish RM" which first appeared on Channel 4 last year. But that's another story.

"Caught in a Free State" tells the stories of a series of German agents operating in southern Ireland during World War 2. The Irish Free State remained neutral despite heavy pressure from Britain and the 'Commonwealth' of which the Irish Free State was still a member.

Britain had only given up its military bases in the Free State as late as 1938. Free State neutrality was a precarious business.

The neutrality of a member of the Commonwealth was an unexpected gain for Germany, the loss of Ireland's Atlantic ports a major loss for Britain and her allies.

On the other hand, the Free State was, so to speak, neutral on Britain's side, letting British airmen who baled out over Ireland go home rather than intern them, as German airmen were interned, etc.

The De Valera government walked a tightrope. At different times during the war there were serious British plans (1940-3) and American plans (1943/4) to invade Ireland and a German invasion was a serious threat until the tide turned against Hitler mid-way through the war.

But De Valera succeeded in exercising and giving reality to Southern Ireland's political independence. No greater test of political independence exists than that which the Free State passed through from 1939 to 1945 when the powerful state it had separated from a mere 17 years before World War 2 desperately needed the use of its ports.

But it was a costly business for Ireland. The Six Counties, of course, were at war with Germany. That war shaped the Ireland we have today because Six County involvement and Free State neutrality massively reinforced partition. Even the Irish trade unions split along the border. (They reunited in 1961).

"Caught in a Free State" looks at De Valera's Ireland through the eyes of the German "visitors". The first episode was hilarious. The fastidious Nietzsche-quoting German agent, dressed (as someone tells him) like a Hollywood film director, tries to use both the IRA and its enemies, the "Blue-shirt" fascists.

Nazi Germany, of course, tried to use discontented nationalities in Europe (Croats in Yugoslavia, Flemings in Belgium, etc) for its own purposes - rather as Britain used minority tribes and Asian minorities in Africa. The IRA formed an alliance with Britain's enemy, Germany. One of its emissaries in Germany was the Stalinist republican Frank Ryan, released from captivity in a Francoist jail (he'd gone to Spain to fight fascism) by German influence on Franco, so that he could represent the IRA in Germany. A complicated business.

In fact, the idea that Ireland's national interests could be served by an alliance with Hitler's Reich could only occur to blinkered nationalists befuddled by hatred of Britain.

It was a disastrously stupid policy by political bankrupts. And what role would they have played had Germany, or Britain and Germany invaded Ireland? Almost certainly, out of hatred of Britain and the Northern Ireland protestants, some would have played the collaborationist role that Croatian nationalists played out of hatred of the dominant Serbs and the Flemings played out of hatred of the dominant Walloons.

It's not an obvious subject for jokes, yet "Caught in a Free State" is very funny. Niall Toibin is especially funny as the chief of



1943: IRA men interned in the South after escaping from the North. Today they might be sent back to the North...

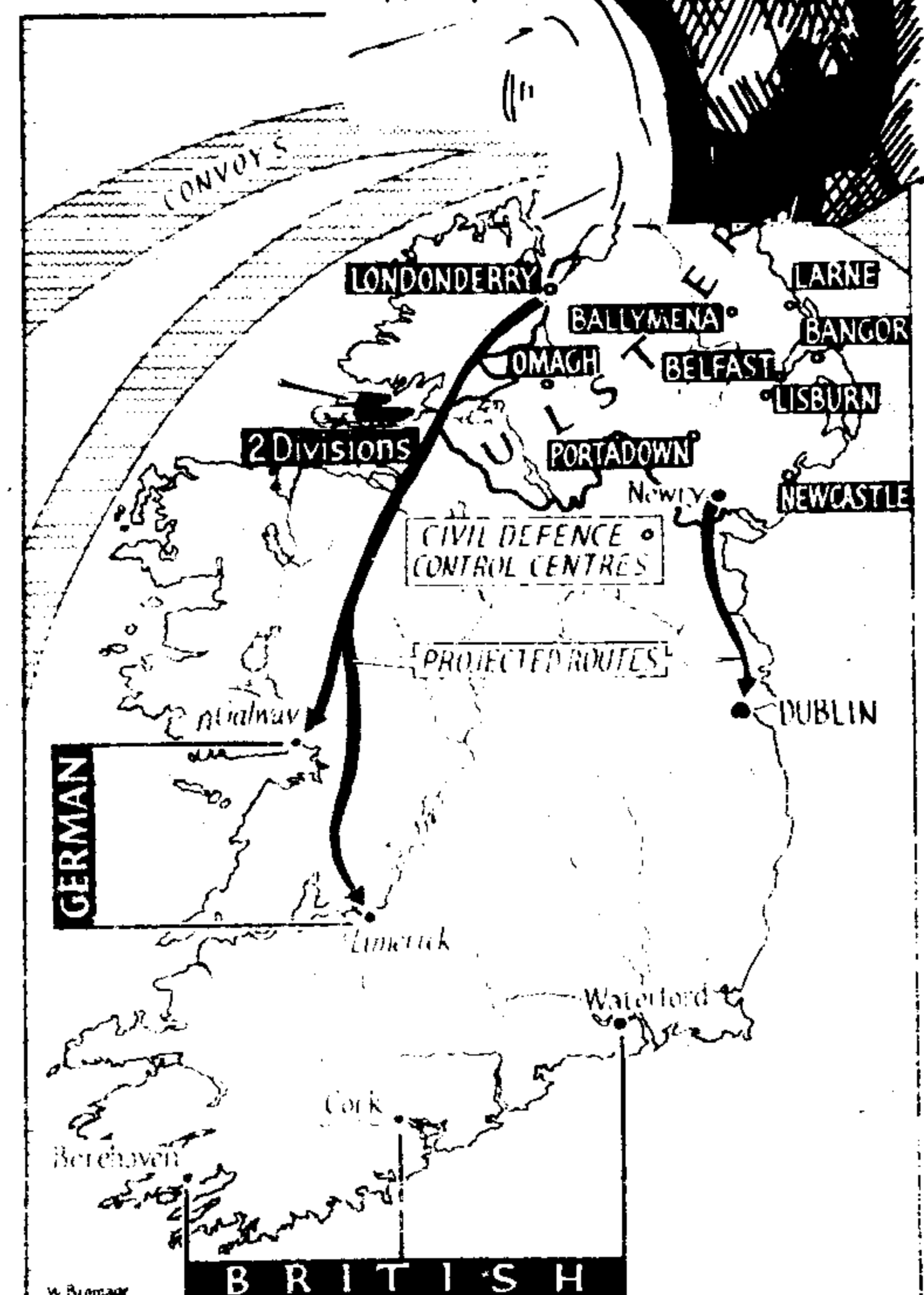
staff "Stephen Burke". Of course such debunking is a contribution to the campaign in the South against the present IRA. The subsequent episodes seem set to tell the tale of the real chief of staff

Stephen Hayes' kidnapping by Northern Republicans who think he is a spy.

Try to catch the rest of it. The Irish RM (Resident Magistrate), made jointly by RTE,

Channel 4 and Ulster TV is old-fashioned, comic stage Irish fare, set in the 1890s. The actors (Anna Manahan, Niall Toibin [again] etc) were wonderful, and it was funny if you forgot the

Both Britain and Germany made plans during World War 2 to invade Ireland.

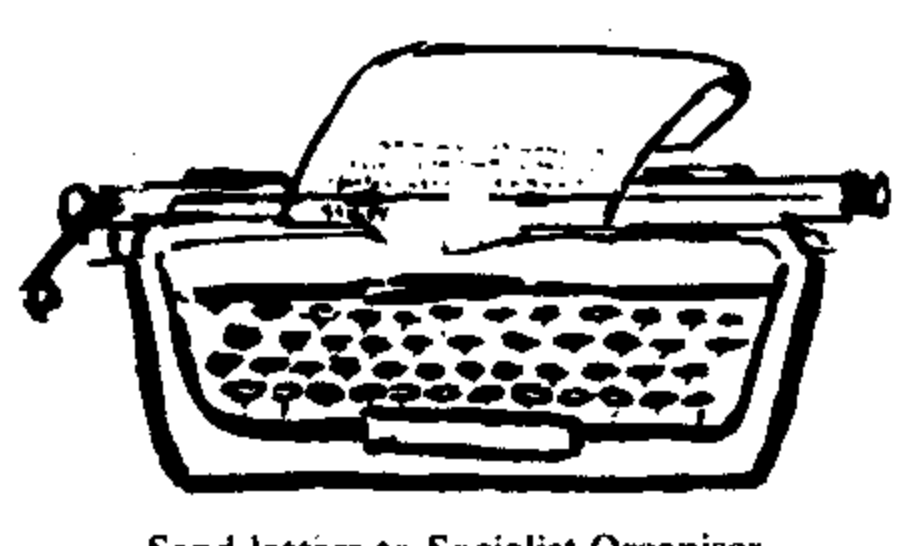


repression that was still British policy in the real Ireland of the 1890s, but it left a bad taste in my mouth.

What the two programmes together underlined for me is how

young modern Ireland is. The landlord-dominated UK Ireland of the 1890s belongs, of course, to a world far distant and long dead. But so does De Valera's Ireland of the '30s, '40s and '50s.

Writeback



Send letters to Socialist Organiser, 28 Middle Lane, London N8. No longer than 400 words please: longer letters are liable to be cut.

MIKE McNair's letter (SO 172) is, I fear, a prime example of the power of phrases and of 'ideology' (in the bad sense of the word) to shut out reality.

I have no space to deal with Mike's arguments about imperialism. But let's look at what he says about the USSR.

Ordinarily, if I met someone who said that the nature of the Russian Army - that same army which crushed the Hungarian and Czechoslovakian workers, which stood as a threat over Solidarnosc, and which is today terrorising Afghanistan - is defined by the alleged fact that this 'body of armed men' serves the working class, I would conclude that I was dealing with an especially obdurate Stalinist.

The further claim that bodies such as the KGB are defined 'in the first place' by their 'social ties' with the proletariat would make me wonder whether I had met a Rip Van Winkle who went to sleep before 1956.

Yet both these claims come from Mike - who, if I understand him right, considers himself a Trotskyist.

Mike's method is accusingly to ask me: is the USSR a workers' state? Yes or no?

Evidently he expects me shamefacedly to mumble 'yes', to take back all my unjustified attacks on the Kremlin bureaucrats, and to agree that since the USSR is a workers' state conditions there must be pretty good, whatever the facts say.

Such bulldozer logic flattens out Trotsky's dialectical analysis of the USSR as a "degenerated workers' state" into a nonsense Trotsky himself emphasised:

"It is necessary to understand clearly that sharp contradictions

are contained in the character of the USSR... It is impossible to free oneself from those contradictions with the help of terminological sleight-of-hand ('workers' state' - 'not workers' state'). We must take the facts as they are. We must build our policy by taking as our starting point the real relations and contradictions". ('In Defence of Marxism').

And Mike's yes-or-no method leads him very far from Trotsky's policy of working class revolution in the USSR.

When some writers in the late '30s wanted to redefine the USSR as 'state capitalist' or 'bureaucratic collectivist', Trotsky commented on this redefinition: "To those tasks of the revolution (in the USSR) which we have enumerated it adds nothing whatsoever" ('In Defence of Marxism' p.5).

Yet Mike presents his programme for the USSR as something less than the sort of revolution we advocate against capitalism: in the USSR, he writes, we "would expect to split the state machine, while in the West the army etc. will have to be destroyed by civil war."

Now in the West too we will have to split the state machine. Revolution does not mean slaughtering every last civil service clerk, or even every last soldier! So all Mike can mean is that he is against civil war in the USSR, and against a full demolition of the bureaucracy's structures of rule (as distinct from its personnel).

Gerry Hoffa (SO 170) has the advantage over Mike of starting from the facts rather than labels. Yet it seems to me that he uses the same method as Mike, only in the opposite direction.

Mike says: the USSR is a workers' state (Trotsky said so), therefore conditions there are pretty good. Gerry says: conditions are bad, nothing like our model of a workers' state. Therefore the USSR is not a workers' state.

Gerry concedes that Trotsky's analysis embraced the facts both

Contradictions of the USSR

of the USSR's post-capitalist basic property relations, and of its anti-working class political and social regime, in a single dialectical conception. But, he argues, Trotsky saw this contradictory society as highly unstable. The stability of the bureaucracy since 1940 forces us to revise Trotsky's analysis.

Gerry somewhat oversimplifies Trotsky's argument about the USSR's 'instability'. Trotsky in his later years actually argued that the USSR was 'stable' in the sense that no revolutionary upheaval could be expected there without the prior stimulus of revolutions elsewhere. He saw the USSR as unstable because he saw the world as unstable.

For sure Gerry is right that "the bureaucracy has beefed-out its roots within Soviet society".

But even in 1939-40 Trotsky recognised that the Kremlin bureaucracy was massively more weighty than any previous bureaucracy in world history. Can we not develop Trotsky's analysis to comprehend the increased solidity of the bureaucracy, and the long-term atomisation of the USSR's working class - rather than junking it?

I would prefer to try to develop the analysis - an analysis, which locates the USSR clearly within a Marxist view of world history, and answers the programmatic questions with sufficient clarity. For the alternative which Gerry seems to offer is to baptise the USSR as some new form of 'bureaucratic collectivist' class society.

It's a tempting way to get away from the difficulties of

understanding the USSR. But a new label isn't a new theory. The label requires a full reworking of the Marxist view of social development in order to accommodate this new historic class. And it leaves our programmatic conclusions absolutely unclear.

Is this 'bureaucratic collectivism' a higher form of society than capitalism? Is it even the next historic stage after capitalism: all over the world (so that the Marxist view of socialism succeeding capitalism was wrong)? Or is it parallel to capitalism? Or a historic regression - a new 'barbarism' against which we should support capitalism?

Until we get clear answers to these questions, I am not willing to discard Trotsky's analysis.

CHRIS REYNOLDS
London

Return of the rock column?

I WOULD like to give a warm welcome to the paper's new format and the editorial policy of encouraging greater variety and liveliness of content.

It's good to see poems, film and television reviews after what seems to have been a long absence. Since Socialist Organiser is almost unique among left papers in having a regular science column I'm glad the editors have started to give this proper weekly priority for publication.

Whilst on the subject of regular columns, I hope we will see the return of a regular rock column in the not too distant future.

Socialist Organiser has, and I hope will keep its progressive policies and record of campaigning on the issue of gay and lesbian liberation. To maintain this the paper needs regular if not weekly input on this subject.

Would it be possible for our gay comrades to be allocated specific space in the paper as is already the case for women? I seem to remember there used to be a weekly column for gays till recently. Is there any prospect of its restoration?

Finally I would like to draw attention to a proposal made about a year ago suggesting regular coverage and analysis of sport and related issues, what for instance would comrades view be on the subject of soccer hooliganism?

I hope that the comments and suggestions I have made will be a helpful contribution in the continuing debate about

our paper and its content.

Yours fraternally
Alex Simpson

Boycott the ballot

JOHN McILROY, in SO 171, raised the question of the proposed laws on the political levy and the choices facing unions once they are passed.

almost everyone on the left seems to be talking about the campaign that will have to be launched in order to keep a political fund. This campaign in itself will be no bad thing as it will be an opportunity to talk to members about the need for political answers to trade union issues.

Although John dismisses it in his article, I am not yet convinced that we shouldn't argue for a boycott of the ballots. On all the other issues we argue with having no truck with anti-union legislation, why should this be different?

I don't think to argue for a boycott is either avoiding the issue (the politisation of trade unions) or ultra-left. We support regular election of full time officials but that doesn't mean we back the Tories' moves on this issue. we argue that it is up to the union to decide.

If September's TUC conference censures Murray and the

right wing over the NGA reaffirms a firm stand against Tory laws and votes to continue the boycott of NEDC etc., I see no reason why we shouldn't argue for a boycott of ballots on the political levy. If my optimism is smashed, will reconsider, but until then when we say no truck with anti-union laws we should mean it.

STEVE BATTLEMUCH
Nottingham



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Eastern bureaucrats - defined by 'social ties' with workers?

Greenham hasn't failed

Angela Fraser recently visited the Greenham women's peace camp

ON WEDNESDAY April 4 at 6.30 am, the police moved in and evicted the Greenham women from their camp outside the main gate of the base. The other camps around the perimeter still remain, and, I think it's safe to say, so will the women.

The Greenham women pledged to stop Cruise being brought to Britain; they failed. They also pledged to stop Cruise leaving the base, but have failed even to stop practice runs.

They have been accused of being just non-political, middle class feminists, going nowhere, achieving little.

But is it true to say that little has been achieved?

I'm sure that anyone who has visited the camps recently will tell you that yes, there are hostile, middle class feminists there but there are also ordinary middle class women, working class women, young girls, grandmothers - and all doing something (some for the first time in their lives) that they feel is positive.

On Sunday April 1, I visited the camps with three men. While they were not abused, heckled, sexually harassed or any of the other things that women, gays, black people or people of minority groups have to face every day



JOHN HARRIS

'It's a real struggle, and real gains have been made'

of their lives, it was made quite clear that men are not welcome at the camps and are only tolerated.

It would have been very easy to say 'To hell with this: these men recognise women's oppression' and gone home, but you have to go into the camps and speak to the women to understand why men are not welcome.

I witnessed, for the first time in my life, real unity, friendship, humour, strength and such a bond between these women that it was almost frightening - all the characteristics that are portrayed as exclusive to men, and all under conditions that even the most hardened of us would find difficult to cope with.

If the camps had been open to men, these bonds would not have been formed. Taking a stance separate from men, has enabled the Greenham women to be independent and to build strength and confidence.

The women I spoke to had no illusions about what they could achieve by continuing their protest at Greenham, but they were very well aware that along with the miners, the Liverpool fight, the GLC fight and all the other disputes going on around the country, pressure is being put on this government, and surely that's a step in the right direction.

Some women were linking their struggle with the plight of the black people of South Africa and workers in Chile.

When I asked one woman what she thought about the CND leadership calling for a freeze rather than unilateralism, she said that it all depended on who I thought the CND leadership was. That sounds positive to me.

There have been links, although limited, with the trade union movement. The National Union of Miners has donated 40 tons of coal; the Fire Brigades Union gave jackets and other unions have sent things like metal plates.

Understandably, because the trade union movement is male-dominated, the women are loth to form too close a link with it. But just as we would support the trade union militant who mistakenly believes that politics should be kept separate from trade unionism and doesn't recognise that every strike is a political act, so also we should support the positive side of the Greenham women's struggle.

These women are in struggle and gains have been made - even if they are only personal to the women themselves.

What would we have them do? Go home like good little girls and some never experience a struggle again, apart from in the home where women are virtually isolated?

Or to stay at Greenham - and experience what unity, strength and comradeship is all about.

Support for Phillips

By Paul Muddle

THE 110 workers of Phillips Rubber Ltd, Manchester, have now been on strike for over 16 weeks. The strike was called because of the refusal of Phillips management to increase their present basic pay of £48 a week to a figure nearer £70 a week typical of the rest of the rubber industry.

The workers, all TGWU members, have been picketing ever since and occupied the factory on two occasions.

Recently they all received letters informing them of their dismissal. In the past few weeks management have been taking on scabs, and while some of these have been turned away by pickets about 30 regularly report for work.

As a consequence of this latest management initiative, the strikers have called for mass pickets at 7 am every Monday and Thursday.

Socialist Organiser spoke to some of the pickets.

"We've had financial support from places all over the country. On 4 April a load of Durham miners who had been picketing Agcroft colliery came over."

One striker told us how the night after the miners had been on the picket line several van loads of police came down and blocked off the road outside the factory. The pretext was a "bomb scare".

In the mornings the police have limited the number of pickets on the gate to three. The day we spoke to the pickets none of them were even allowed on the same side of the road as the main entrance.

We asked the strikers what conditions were like in the factory. "Victorian", we were told. "You have to handle a lot of chemicals without any protective gear. Lots of people get bad backs through shifting heavy loads. Some of the scabs have found that out already and packed it in. They think it's bad now but they should wait until the hot weather."

"We are more militant. We are more aware of things. We all support the miners."



Arguing for socialism

Lessons of Mitterrand

IN MAY 1981 Tribune described Francois Mitterrand's election victory in France as "the first salvo in the attack to drive back the madness of monetarism".

Nine major industrial companies and 36 banks were quickly nationalised. There were new controls over foreign trade, foreign exchange movement and prices.

Public spending was increased by nearly 30%. Unemployment was rising in 1982 at a quarter of its previous rate. The minimum wage was increased by 10% and 60,000 new jobs were created in education, health, and the post office.

This version of the Alternative Economic Strategy looks a lot more radical than anything Kinnoch and Hattersley will be likely to produce, still less anything Owen and Steel would be prepared to offer Professor Hobsbawm for a coalition!

Nonetheless, it left capitalist structures and values untouched.

In France, as in other countries, nationalisation is not anti-capitalist. Even De Gaulle had a small go at it.

Six months after the election, Prime Minister Pierre Mauroy was telling the bosses that "the government does not intend to question the right of owners to make decisions. There is no question of instituting a right of veto over redundancies."

The 35 hour week without loss of pay was first put off and then dropped. A 39 hour week was conceded after a rash of strikes.

A year after coming into office, the government was in deep trouble. There was a run on the franc. Increased demand inside France pulled in imports. Exports fell because of the world slump. The government was forced to resort to borrowing and to attacks on the working class.

It was Wilson 1964 and Wilson 1974 all over again, in essence - although Wilson never tried anything as ambitious as Mitterrand.

By June 1982 Mitterrand was throwing his programme overboard.

The franc was devalued. A freeze on wages and prices was introduced, together with a tough deflationary budget.

In March 1983 a second austerity package hit the streets of Paris. There was no growth in 1983.

Unemployment at the end of the year stood at 2.3 million, a post-war high. Real wages were falling.

Defeating inflation meant defeating the workers. With unemployment rising fast and 30,000 jobs going every month, Industry Minister Laurent Fabius backed an industrial restructuring plan which will destroy 200,000 jobs in 1984.

Steel will lose 35,000; coal 20,000; shipyards 12,000; the car industry 18,000; and construction 100,000.

The left was disorientated. The Right was made stronger. For the first time fascists made gains in local elections. Racism and attacks on immigrants moved to the heart of French politics.

Mitterrand's foreign policy has included support for nuclear weapons, sale of nuclear technology to Iraq, support for Thatcher over the Falklands, and maintenance of French neo-colonialism in Africa.

Mitterrand's 'socialist experiment' in France has been a failure - and a British re-run would be far more catastrophic.

Unlike Wilson and unlike the way Kinnoch is shaping up, Mitterrand did try to carry out some limited state capitalist policies - an alternative economic strategy. The bosses hit back.

Irritated, not really hurt, they soon dealt with a government which had no intention of mobilising the only people who could defend and extend a radical programme - the working class.

There is a clear lesson for the British left in Mitterrand's experiment. Any attempt to move towards socialism must base itself on the self-activity of the workers.

It must aim to replace capitalism, armed with an understanding that the bosses will hit back if their profits and prerogatives are even slightly endangered and that purely national solutions simply cannot succeed.

Revolt in CPSA

By Mike Grayson

THE right wing leaders of the Civil and Public Services Association (CPSA) have been moaning to the press about the number of motions to the union's Conference next month which criticise or censure their actions over the past year.

At a press conference on Monday 9th, general secretary Alistair Graham reiterated his 'healthy scepticism' as to whether conference resolutions really reflect the views of the membership. (In other words, when the censure motions are carried, he can pretend that they don't represent anything).

The simple facts of the matter are that Graham, Losinska and their acolytes on the Executive Committee face some 300 critical motions for the following reasons:

* ignoring previous conference policy to hold a special pay conference to determine the 1984 claim.

* ignoring policy which prevents the introduction of YTS schemes.

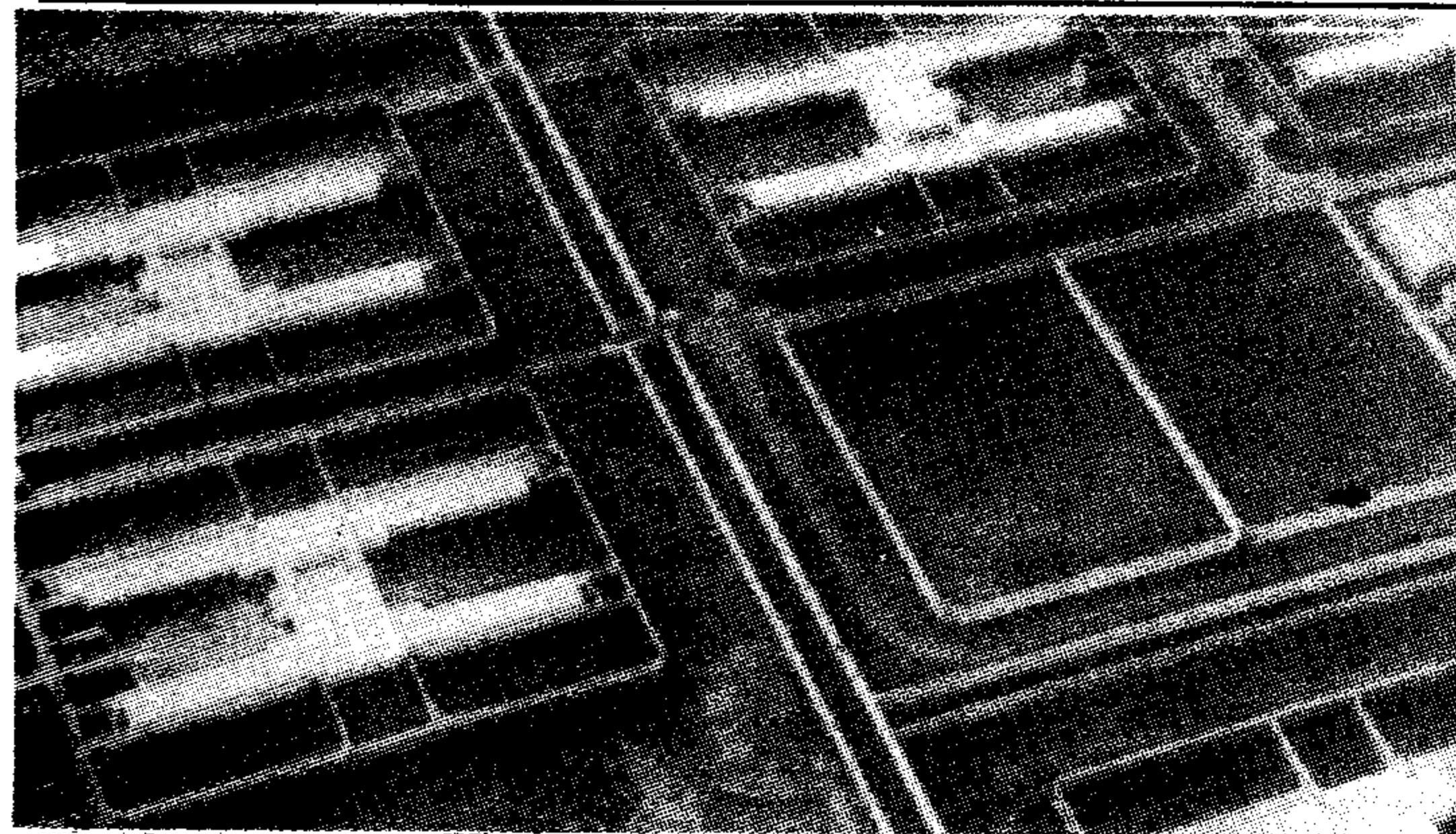
* Graham's attempts to usurp the independence of the union journal 'Red Tape'

* Graham's scabby role in the NGA dispute;

* Offering the notorious 'no disruption' clause in the GCHQ affair (90 motions on this topic alone).

The unprecedented number of such motions reveals the deep and growing anger felt by the membership at the antics of the right wing, and especially the arrogance of the general secretary, who sees himself as 'above' conference.

Alistair Graham thinks he is the leading avatar of the 'new realism' in the TUC, but CPSA conference may well give the nose of this pompous gnat a good rub in the dust.



Prisoners' rights

Gerry Moore, who is in H Block 7 Long Kesh, has not seen his sister Cathy in over a year. Cathy is on remand on the word of paid perjurer Raymond Gilmor and has been in Armagh Gaol for the past 19 months. Normally, inter-prison visits between relatives are allowed every three months, and during the past year both Gerry and Cathy have applied several times for this supposedly statutory right. On every

occasion the Long Kesh administration have granted the visit while the governor in Armagh Gaol has refused to allow what should be a normal family visit. Because of this, no visit is given.

Despite repeated attempts to have an explanation from Armagh Gaol as to why the Governor there has adopted this vindictive attitude, no progress has been made. It would appear to be a discrimination policy, since other inter-prison visits between Armagh and Long Kesh are continuing and this theory has been strengthened by a recent step up in censorship of letters between the brother and sister.

We feel that an issue such as this, though minor in comparison to the very dubious nature of Ms Moore's imprisonment and the degrading strip searches to which female prisoners are regularly subjected is an issue which deserves some support. That being the case, we invite your readers to write letters of protest to the Prisons' Minister at the Northern Ireland Office demanding that normal visiting rights be extended to Cathy and Gerry Moore immediately.

Is mise
OCP/PRO
Republican POWs
H Blocks



North
and
South

A letter from Long Kesh



Teachers

A HALF day national strike is taking place this Wednesday, 11th, called by the right wing National Association of Schoolmasters/Union of Women Teachers to protest against a 3 per cent pay offer.

Support has been pledged by the National Union of Teachers and by the National Association of Head Teachers, who have told their members not to cover for striking teachers.

The executive of the NUT – the largest teaching union, with 235,000 members – has decided on protest action of its own, and announced a one-day national strike to take place at the start of the summer term.

The NUT also intends to hold marches and demonstrations throughout the country on that day. Other forms of limited industrial action are also likely to begin in the summer term, including no cover for absent staff, a ban on lunch-time supervision, and withdrawal of after-school-hours activities. Extended strike action will be considered as a final option if there is then no response from the employers.

The NUT's annual conference in Blackpool at Easter will be considering the strike proposals and seems likely to back them.

Lucas

THE 2000 workers at Lucas Electrical alternator and starter motor factories in Birmingham were told this week that they had until May 18 to agree a company rationalisation plan that would involve the loss of 700 jobs.

£15 million is to be invested over the next five years, mainly at the Shaftmoor Lane factory, with workers transferred from the other Birmingham factory at Marshall Lake Road, which is to be run down over two years.

Lucas management are also demanding radical changes in working practices, flexibility in the use of labour, and new shift patterns, as a means of ensuring higher productivity.

Dimbleby

THE BBC is to seek a permanent injunction against the National Union of Journalists under the government's anti-union laws. The purpose of the injunction is to try and prevent the NUJ from carrying out its boycott of the broadcaster David Dimbleby as part of its dispute with the Dimbleby newspaper group.

Months ago the NUJ journalists employed by Dimbleby went on strike with the backing of their union executive. A month ago the NUJ executive backed down by complying with a House of Lords ruling that their members' action constituted secondary strike action, and was therefore illegal.

However, on March 30, after sustained pressure from the eight journalists and from support they had received, the executive made the strike official again.

Second national meeting for Labour Party workplace branches.

'WORKPLACE BRANCHES AND THE UNIONS'

Saturday May 12, Camden Town Hall, Euston Road, London.

Open to Labour Party members in workplace branches or who want to find out more about setting them up.

Details from Nik Barstow, 165 Liverpool Rd, London N1, or Geoff Dixon, 1 Pelham Court, 44 Hatherley Road, Sidcup, Kent.

Industrial SCOTT LITHGOW TAKEOVER No victory!

By Joe O'Rourke

AT A mass meeting in Greenock Town Hall on March 26, the workers of Scott Lithgow gave the go-ahead for the take-over of their yard by Trafalgar House and Howard Doris.

Duncan McNeil, secretary of the joint shop stewards committee, claimed that this deal was a great victory.

There are many things I would have liked to have seen in the agreement but none more so than some sort of job protection. We have no guarantee of employment in the new agreement.

The new company have said that they will employ all the workers in the yard – but for how long?

Their commitment applies only when they have sufficient contracts on hand. When the BP rig and the RN ship go away we will once again face redundancies, only this time without the support of the rest of British Shipbuilders workers.

I believe that the intention of the company is to keep a workforce of about 1,500 at the yard, and to boost these numbers with sub-contractors when necessary. The 'great victory' has cost us 3,000 jobs.

There is a lesson to be learnt here for the rest of the workers within BS: Never underestimate the ruthlessness of BS and the government.

I have no doubt that the cancellation of the Britoil rig was stage managed by the government and BS – simply because the privatisation of Scott Lithgow was more acceptable with an empty order book than it would have been with an £88 million oil rig to build.

All other yards within BS must organise now for the fight ahead. Don't do as Scott Lithgow did and wait for the axe to fall, then hope to salvage something at the end.

Don't place your faith in politicians, or in the celebrities of the shop stewards committees, or in the SNC. Do your ground work now.

Organise the rank and file workers. Meet with the people in the real community, not the ones who just want their picture taken.

Organise national meetings of rank and file workers who are prepared for the real fight, not ones who only wait to go to Tyne-mouth and shout boo at delegates going in.

To meet the attacks made on you, you must be strong and you must be united. So there is no time to waste.

Carousel

THE Carousel dispute for union recognition and reinstatement is now entering its ninth month, with the local TGWU bureaucracy continuing its waiting game of hoping that the strikers will become demoralised and jack in the strike.

The TGWU attempted to get the strike called off in the New Year. But the strikers refused to be brow-beaten into surrender. On paper the TGWU continues to officially support the strike but in practice it is doing nothing to help.

In fact, the strikers will again be appearing before the Scottish Finance and General Purposes Committee of the TGWU this month, where the union's 'support' for the dispute will again be 'reviewed'.

The strikers appeared before the same committee in late January for the same purpose. Since the strikers are still receiving strike pay, the committee must have agreed to continue union recognition for the dispute. But the strikers themselves are still awaiting official confirmation of this.

Donations and messages of support to, and more information from: Carol Rodger, 47 Cuthelton Terrace, Parkhead, Glasgow.



JOHN HARRIS

The 'hand-washing' strike last April.

Strikes are banned

UNDER Scott Lithgow's new Yard Agreement, strikes are banned. "In the event of any dispute... there shall be no stoppage of work, withdrawal of work, or industrial action of any kind." Instead, a long-drawn procedure is laid down to be followed, on pain of dismissal.

The "climax" of this two-month long procedural maze is a conference of "representatives of the employer and the relevant national trade union official of the signatory unions". Management will have the right of veto over whether or not the yard convenor attends this meeting.

The number of shop stewards in the yard, at present about 50, will be cut so that they "will not normally exceed twenty in number". A second yard convenor can be elected only if the number of workers exceeds 2,000.

The agreement even limits the size of the shop stewards committee: "The full-time convenor(s) and one shop steward from each signatory union".

The agreement is also "based

on the genuine and total acceptance of the principles of flexibility and interchangeability... there shall be no demarcation whatsoever...

"The employee will, at all times, show every willingness to undertake other work and will, at no time, be employed to 'wait' for work... From time to time the employer will introduce new machines or aids to production... total acceptance of such aids is a condition of this agreement."

Every section of the Yard Agreement is permeated with the stench of Managerial Absolutism with heavy penalties for even the most minor infringements of Port Glasgow's new Penal Code.

Convenor Duncan McNeil secured acceptance of the take-over at a mass meeting by presenting a single-page document listing six points (covering pension rights, a £600 lump sum for accepting transfer to the new employer, etc) and giving the impression that no more was involved. McNeil's six points are a long way away from this 35-page Yard Agreement.

Glasgow buses

By Stan Crooke

SOME 200 busworkers in Glasgow have decided to opt out of playing the political levy to the Labour Party in their union dues.

What media propaganda failed to do in years has been achieved in a matter of months by the determination of the Labour-controlled Strathclyde Regional Council to press ahead with plans for the closure of three bus garages in Glasgow, Ibrox, Maryhill, and Langside.

The Labour group on the council is a virtual autocracy, with Group leader Dick Stewart at its pinnacle. Dissent in the ranks, not that there is much of it anyway, is ruthlessly stamped on.

In recent years, the bus fleet has already been cut from 1200 to 800. Well over 1000 jobs have been axed, and fares have been raised once, if not twice, a year.

The council has already once been forced to drop its plans for closing the three garages. But at the close of last year, the Labour group leadership revived the plans without any warning.

Three strikes have been staged against the proposals in little over a month. The first was a two hour strike, to lobby a meeting of the Labour group. The two subsequent strikes were 24 hour stoppages. In each case, underground staff struck in support of the busworkers.

Shop stewards from Glasgow's nine bus garages have also agreed to a policy of non-cooperation

with the closures, due to be implemented on May 13, and strike action in the event of any disciplinary action being taken against workers.

Questions on Airlie

By Ian McCalman

WORKERS at Weirs Engineering in Cathcart, Glasgow, have emerged from their four week strike deeply disappointed with the role of Jim Airlie, a Communist Party member elected to the National Executive of the AUEW last year in a left wing upsurge.

The workers, engaged in a dispute for a £15 a week increase, had been locked out by management. They remained united and determined throughout, mounting a mass picket only two days before the strike ended.

Airlie, whose support for the struggle was lukewarm throughout, pressed the strike committee to give up the struggle, brandishing the threat of Weirs management to sack the entire workforce if there was no return to work on their terms. The strike committee voted seven-six to recommend a return to work.

Engineering workers throughout the Clydeside are not fooled by Airlie's talk of a 'tactical withdrawal', and are questioning the role of the man many saw as the standard-bearer of the Left in the union.

BL Cowley

BRITISH Leyland Cowley press shop workers voted last Friday, 6th, to reject management's demands for three shift working at Austin Rover factories, despite threats by the company that extra work to be brought to the factory would be taken elsewhere.

The existing two-shift system means that workers do either day shifts or night shifts (working four nights). The new scheme would mean a five-night week and a return to Friday night working, abandoned 18 years ago.

The workers were also told that if agreement was not forthcoming then the present night shift work might be ended at the Body Plant.

Islington

By Nik Barstow

ISLINGTON Council has yet again panicked under Tory pressure and started hitting out at its workers... adopting a style of 'negotiation' that would do Ian MacGregor proud.

The council agreed, when it set its yearly budget in March, that all council manual workers would receive the same London weighting as white collar workers. That meant a rise of £7.60 a week – directly helping the lowest-paid and overcoming some of the divisions between white collar and manual.

But those same councillors who posed as the workers' friends to introduce this increase took a different line in the Building Works Department, where they are trying to force through the re-introduction of bonus schemes scrapped last year.

The Personnel Committee decided in late March that the London weighting increase would not apply to the council's building workers. The councillors seemed to think that with a flat rate wage of £150-£160 a week the building workers are "too highly paid".

That message, of course, has been pumped out by the local press for months – because they want to see the council's direct labour scrapped.

To satisfy these attacks the Personnel Committee trampled all over its agreements with the unions to enforce a virtual wage cut, without even telling the unions that it was doing this, much less negotiating.

The Committee's chair, Victor McGeer, then refused even to see the unions.

In response, 200 angry council building workers demonstrated at Islington Town Hall on April 5 to demand the council talk to them.

Now negotiations look set to take place. But Islington Council has taken yet another step to destroying the unity between the council and its workers that is needed to fight the Tory attacks.

Cleaners versus looters

By Jenny Fisher

IF you're driving down past E London's Barking Hospital, beware of tooting your horn in support of the picket line. A car did that on Monday, 9th, and the police noted its registration number!

Police behaviour is hotting up. At Monday's mass picket, the women were arrested – one was hit by one of the scabs (obstructing the police); two were pointing out to the police that they had let the woman who was her go (threatening behaviour).

The court cases are set for June 6, with a condition of being that these women don't go on the picket line again.

The women on the picket line were furious at the arrests. They still remembered to ask why was looking after the child one of the arrested women.

One of the pickets went to fetch the little girl down to the picket line, so her father could get to work.

92 cleaners are picketing the Hospital. Cleaning has been practised for years but this year the contract was up for renewal.

Crothall's, a subsidiary of the hospital, took the opportunity given by the government's abolition of the 'fair wages agreement' to reduce their tender by an average of 35%.

*Abolishing sick pay entitlement.

*Cutting annual holidays from four weeks to three.

The cleaners didn't sign the new contracts and were sacked from April 2.

Crothall's send in vans with scab labour at about 7am, 2pm and 5pm every day. The morning picket is the largest, with many pickets every Monday.

Support is increasing as the message of the dispute's importance spreads. Kent miners and Barking teachers have been picketing, as well as Jo Richardson (the local MP) and MPs Harriet Cohen and Jeremy Corbyn.

Information from the 24-hour strike-line 01-595 4252. Messages of support and donations: AUEW House, 588, Rainham Road, South Dagenham, Essex RM10 7RA, cheques payable to Barking and Dagenham Health Emergency.

Witch-hunt

By Ronnie Clyde

AT ITS March meeting the heavily Militant-influenced Pollok Constituency Labour Party in Glasgow voted to rescind Socialist Organiser supporter Stan Crooke's membership of that CLP.

The complicated background to this decision, told briefly, is that in October 1982 Stan Crooke was expelled from Queens Park CLP for having written an article in Socialist Organiser critical of the MP, the late Frank McElhone.

After a series of unsuccessful appeals and attempts to rejoin Queens Park CLP (now, after boundary reorganisation, Glasgow Central CLP), Stan Crooke applied to join Pollok CLP and was accepted, having moved into the constituency.

By late February of this year Stan Crooke had returned to permanent residence in Glasgow Central. So he wrote to Pollok CLP asking it to write to the National Executive Committee (NEC) for approval of his membership, as is necessary in the case of the readmission of expelled members.

At the same time he wrote to Glasgow Central, asking it to approve the transfer. They wrote back to Stan Crooke, asking for a copy of the NEC's letter approving his readmission to the Party. They knew that no such letter existed.

At the Pollok CLP March meeting, Stan Crooke's case came up under 'correspondence'.

The CLP could have maintained his membership pending reply from the NEC, or, better, asserted his rights regardless. Instead they voted to play safe.

Socialist ORGANISER Stop all coal!



JOHN HARRIS (I/L)

Miners outside the Nottingham area delegate meeting in Mansfield last week

SOCIALIST Organiser goes to press the day before the National Union of Mineworkers' executive meets on April 12.

If that executive meeting decides to call a national ballot of miners on strike action, that will not be the end of the struggle by any means. So long as the striking areas stay out, step up their picketing, and make clear that they will continue to do so (on the authority of their area decisions) whatever the national ballot result, it is not impossible to win the 55% majority for action required by NUM rules.

But the militants in the NUM are right to oppose a ballot.

*The NUM right wing's campaign for a ballot is a trick. National ballots are for deciding on national strike calls.

The right wing are not seeking a mandate for a national strike. They are seeking a mandate against the existing area strikes.

*The pithead secret ballot is not the ideal democratic system, even apart from the obviously unfair 55% rule. The great majority of miners have voted with their feet by coming out on strike.

*Miners in relatively prosperous areas do not have a right to veto the fight of those whose jobs are more immediately under threat.

Solidarity

The principle of class solidarity says that Yorkshire, South Wales, and Kent miners have a right to expect other miners to unite with their struggle — and that principle stands higher than any formalities.

At the very best a national ballot will mean a loss of momentum for the struggle.

Ballot or no ballot, victory will depend on stepping up the pickets, especially at power stations, and spreading solidarity action.

Victory or defeat for the miners will have huge implications for the whole working class — both directly, in terms of the Tories' rundown of all heavy industry being beaten back or racing ahead, and in terms of the confidence of the working class and the authority of the Tory government.

Two Gloucestershire coke merchants have already begun proceedings against the NUM under the anti-union laws. The Coal Board has an injunction waiting to be used against the Yorkshire NUM.

If the NUM executive rejects a ballot, that could be the signal for heavy use of the anti-union laws. And that will be another reason why the miners' fight is a fight for the whole labour movement.

Trade union boycotts by transport workers are already giving vital help to the miners. Rail workers, power workers, gas workers, and water workers all have pay claims on the table. The best way to win this struggle would be for these workers to bring forward action on their claims, strike alongside the

Continued page 3

US out of Central America

A VOTE in the US Senate has made Reagan's war by proxy against Nicaragua more difficult.

The Senate voted to refuse the CIA \$21 million extra for undercover operations.

But the war continues.

What the Senate found too much to swallow was the mining of Nicaragua's ports — which, apart from anything else, is bad for business for the many capitalist countries which trade with Nicaragua. France had talked of assembling a fleet with Latin American countries to clear the mines.

The Sunday Times on April 8 reported: "According to one informant, the mines were placed by small teams comprising a half dozen CIA agents and a few anti-Sandinista guerrillas. He said the top-secret, high-technology venture was organised and financed by the CIA from bases in El Salvador and Honduras..."

But that is only one part of the war.

Counter-revolutionary Nicaraguan groups are financed and equipped by the CIA to carry out border raids and sabotage operations. The army of Honduras, based on US military aid, joins together with US forces to do 'exercises' in the border area.

And the US continues to finance and guide the armed forces conducting a bloody civil war on behalf of El Salvador's ruling class.

The US people are worried

and uneasy about Reagan's strategy. The answer is that the US should clear out of Central America and leave its people to determine their own future free of big-power bullying.

Striking in Notts

By Pete Radcliff

AT A meeting on April 10, striking miners from Ollerton, Beavercote, Bolsover, Bledworth and other North Notts pits formed a joint strike committee to begin their own flying pickets in the area.

Immediately mass pickets were planned to hit adjacent pits.

Up until then, the 7000 Notts miners known to be in favour of strike action have faced considerable intimidation — threats of the sack from management, physical attacks from miners opposed to the strike, and usually little support and often outright opposition from their own branch

officials.

This has coerced many miners to cross the few picket lines which got through the police blockades. In addition, Notts miners in favour of the strike have been divided in their response to the Notts Area vote against taking strike action, and the clamouring for a national ballot.

400 of the 1100 miners from Cotgrave pit, for example, who were on strike from March 30 to April 6, eventually went back to work in order to campaign for a strike vote in the national ballot, they thought inevitable.

Improved coordination of the miners in favour of the strike in Notts can only help overcome the confusion and isolation that led to the return to work at Cotgrave. The Joint Strike Committee of the Notts miners makes it quite likely that there will be considerable strike moves in Notts and a resumption of the strike at pits like Cotgrave.

Striking miners in Notts are particularly angry at the way the media has ignored them, falsely presenting Notts as a 100% scab area. The press has worked with the bosses to try and demoralise the strikers both inside and outside Notts.

That is why striking miners in North Notts and other Notts miners in favour of the strike will form an organised contingent on the April 14 march in Nottingham.

As one striker declared at the meeting at which the strike committee was formed, "We need our own area leadership for those supporting this strike. The scabs have got theirs in Chadburn."



ANDREW MOORE

Above: protest at Holloway jail after Sarah Tisdall was refused leave to appeal against her six-month jail sentence for leaking Heseltine's secrets.

FUND

Thanks this week to Cheung Siu Ming £150, Mary Corbishley £40, a Port Glasgow reader £10, Sarah Stephens £20, B. Moore £4, and Ellis Hillman £4.

That makes £308 so far this month. We need £1000 to keep on an even keel.

Send money to SO, 214 Sickert Court, London N1 2SY.