

THE WORKER



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WAGE RESTRAINT ROAD TO FASCISM



Striking firemen outside the TUC, December 21, 1977

Govt fans flames of firemen's resentment

AFTER several days of almost continuous negotiation the executive of the Fire Brigades' Union has had to recall a national delegate conference of firemen for January 12th to announce the Government's bootfaced rejection of the principle of collective bargaining. It will be for the firemen at that conference to vote on whether they wish to continue their strike action.

The firemen throughout the two months period of their strike have shown themselves well-disciplined and united. They have handled with restraint all questions of picket-line-crossing by those not members of the FBU. Particularly in their relations with the public have they shown a consideration and compassion which has continued to guarantee them enormous popular support.

The Government and its local authority stooges have shown no concern for anyone but the capitalist masters they so obediently

serve. So fanatic are they in holding the line for profits by not giving an-inch on the limits they have imposed on wages that they are blind to the indignation they are arousing among the whole working class. Not only have they refused to recognise the value of the service the firemen give by not even considering their demand for a reasonable wage, they have shown their contempt for the public by allowing an enormous increase in property loss and risk to life by fire which could have been ended at any time by a reasonable settlement.

The firemen will decide on the 12th whether to carry on with their present action or whether, still united, to call off this strike and continue the struggle by other means. In either case they will have the full support of fellow workers who are being united as never before by the attack the Labour Government, in capitalism's name, has launched on all of us.

Social Contract - 'False trails, illusions still remaining'

IN 1978 workers have one principal task - to sweep away the foundations upon which yet another policy of self-imposed wage restraint can be built. In 1977, following upon the decision of the AUEW in May and the groundswell of revolt against the social contract, the gathering of unions at the TUC had no choice but to reject further restraint.

They were forced to say NO and that was a great step forward. Yet because it meant an advance it also meant that it can now only be consolidated by going further or face the prospect of retreat.

There is need for clarity about the wages struggle today. Take for example the so-called 42-month rule. Why so much fuss? Wasn't it merely part of

the 'package' of Phase 2 which workers, at practically all levels, accepted without opposition? Since it was only part of Phase 2 the fight against it was more than lost at the outset. So why, since the Trade Union Movement agreed to it with few exceptions, do 'militants' want to dissipate forces now by fighting a divisive battle over a dying issue? Why do they want to do this when the task is to unite and prepare everyone in the battle which is being joined now to ensure that Phase 2 is not followed by Phases 3, 4, 5 and so on. If workers have been so stupid as to allow such a policy would we be so liberal now as to say that those who agreed to it should not all have to endure its terms equally? Lessons have to be learned. If the working class has created a dam which now contains their resentment let us at least ensure that when it finally bursts the pressure released is sufficient to wash away the base upon which another such policy can be built.

Our primary aim must be to win what we can and in order to do this we must ensure that our trade union machinery works to that end. Nothing positive will follow from unrealistic demands, and from by-passing of machinery. Nothing positive will follow from wasteful and ill-conceived disputes other than disillusionment.

Similarly we must ensure that there is no by-passing of issues
contd. p.3

Burglars visit the UK

ON January 1st the transitional period of Britain's membership of the European Economic Community ended and Britain not only waived any right to regulate by custom-duty trade with other members of the Community but also surrendered to Brussels the power to act against the dumping of industrial goods and the right to take emergency economic action.

It is obvious that the main advantage we were promised, less unemployment, was a pipe dream. Britain's unemployment has soared to the near two million mark and over six million are unemployed in the whole community.

And we have seen a steady decline in growth ending last year with complete stagnation. Far from a stimulus to growth, what the EEC has been involved in doing is running down the basic industries like steel and shipbuilding and assigning the biggest cuts to Britain.

Those who were such keen proponents of the industrial advantages of joining the EEC, like Maurice Corina, may be very surprised at this, but it is exactly what we warned would happen. The EEC is a capitalist organisation; capitalism is not about production but profits; therefore the EEC is not concerned with maximising produc-

tion among the member states but maximising profits for the multinationals.

Far from helping to stimulate world trade, the EEC is becoming more and more a protectionist circle for excluding goods from the so-called developing countries. This is not being done with any idea of saving jobs in the Community but only from the point of view of increasing profits. So much for the theory of 'Second World assistance to the Third'!

By its membership, Britain is even being forced to agree to supply North Sea oil to the other members at fixed amounts and prices in exchange for the right to reduce the crude and refined oil stocks it is compelled to hold by EEC law.

The EEC is a profit-maximising political cartel. It suits British capitalism and its Government fine. It does not suit the British working class nor the workers of the other member countries: we will continue to work for its total destruction.

Correction

In the last issue of 1977 the quotation from Reg Birch, Chairman of the CPB(ML), in the article summing up the year should have read:

"Our Party does not subscribe to the view that world war necessarily brings revolution. I would prefer to put it the other way: revolution prevents world war."

HISTORIC NOTES Joseph Arch and the birth of agricultural unions

IN the early 1970s agriculture was still employing more male workers than any other industry in Britain, despite a reduction of its labour force by nearly 200,000 since 1851.

It was not surprising that so many farmworkers were forced to abandon the miserable conditions of rural life. Wages were at least 45 per cent below those of manufacturing industry, employment was irregular especially during winter. Cottages were cramped and insecure, while hunger and malnutrition were common due to a basic diet of bread - meat being a rare luxury. On top of all this obedience of a feudal nature was expected from the local landowner.

Despite a timid exterior, the impoverished and often illiterate farmworkers learnt that conditions in other industries were gradually improving while their lot remained miserably stagnant. It was with this background that there was a growing movement to form agricultural trade unions. In the village of Harbury in South Warwickshire, farmworkers met to consider forming a union. Rather than approach a sympathetic urban trade unionist to

help with leadership and organisation, the farmworkers of Harbury sought one of their own ranks who would understand the problems of organising the rural workforce and would be trusted by them. The man they chose was Joseph Arch, a farmworker well known locally for his plain speaking, and renowned in several counties for skilled hedging and ditching. He was also fortunate in owning his own cottage so he could not be evicted by an anti-union landlord.

So it was on Wednesday 7th February 1872 that Joseph Arch walked the few miles from his home in Barford to the village of Wellesbourne where a meeting was to be held. There were far too many people to meet in the local pub, so the crowd of over 500 farmworkers assembled under the branches of a huge chestnut tree. Opponents of the meeting ensured that the gas lamps round the village green were turned off, so it was by the light of flickering lanterns suspended from the chestnut tree that the meeting commenced. Standing on an old pig-killing stool, Joseph Arch urged the formation of a union in order to

fight for better wages, conditions and housing. He suggested an increase of 6d a day on the present rate of 2s, and a reduction in hours from 12 to 9 per day. This speech from a fellow farmworker aroused the enthusiasm of the crowd, and a decision was reached to form a Union. From this bold start, many more local unions were formed with the help of Arch's newly fired enthusiasm. The various village unions soon amalgamated into a County Union, then only four months after the first meeting at Wellesbourne the National Agricultural Labourers' Union was founded, Joseph Arch being elected President.

There had been Agricultural Trade Unions before and indeed were to be others later, but it was Joseph Arch, the hedger and ditcher, who first inspired farmworkers to unite and take militant action. Indeed the bitterly fought struggles of Arch's time are a reminder to British farmworkers today, with their claim for a 50 per cent wage rise, that it is only by using their collective strength to bargain with that any real improvements will be made.

WORKERS OF THE WORLD, UNITE

ALL over the colonial and semi-colonial world wherever capitalism rules either through the imperialist master or through imperialism's local bourgeois henchman, the working class suffers repression as well as exploitation. The real key to the progress and independence of these countries is the condition of the workers there who create the values.

In Multan, Pakistan, on January 4th many more than the admitted dozen workers were shot dead when police fired on strikers at a cotton mill.

In El Salvador, Central

America, where trade union leaders have often been assassinated or imprisoned on the orders of the military dictatorship a new 'Guarantee of Public Order Law' passed at the end of 1977 enables the Government to dissolve trade unions altogether and all strikes whatsoever are made illegal.

At the beginning of 1978 we salute our working class brothers throughout this murky capitalist world of oppression and slavery and assure them that in Britain we will never cease in our active opposition to the partners in crime of their oppressors.

The dictatorship of the bourgeoisie

THE Labour Government is prepared to go to any lengths to impose its extra-Parliamentary and completely arbitrary limits on wages. The kind of sanctions applied to Mackey's of Belfast would have been applied to Ford's for granting a wage increase above the Government's 10 per cent if Healey hadn't backed down when

Ford brought pressure to bear.

The sanction the Government intended in this case was to rescind an order for 1,500 Cortinas ordered for the Ministry of Defence as part of the Government's switch from using mainly British Leyland vehicles. When asked in the House of Commons whether sanctions were being applied to Ford and if not why not, Healey said: "We regret the Ford settlement, but after consideration it has been decided that there is no discretionary action which would be appropriate to this case."

The chairman of the state-owned National Freight Corporation was threatened with the sack for agreeing to a settlement for the Corporation's lorry drivers in breach of the Government's guidelines.

Stooges

And now we have had the spectacle of the local authority stooges of the Labour Government daring to say that they're "fed up to the teeth with the firemen's demands". It's about time we let these gentlemen know that we're fed up to the teeth with their claiming for themselves powers for fixing wages which we do not recognise.

Meeting on armed forces

THE TITLE of the meeting held at the Bellman Bookshop on Friday 9th December was 'The Changing Role of the Armed Forces'.

The forces have changed to a large extent by their use of technical equipment, machinery, organisation and numbers. 'Beat bobbies' have disappeared over the years, along with their 'tardis'. They now travel in panda cars and communicate by walkie-talkies. It is quite alarming to hear that there is approximately one policeman to 300 people.

Legislation backs them to the hilt - the Prevention of Terrorism Act, the Criminal Trespass Law (Criminal Law Act Ch. 45) etc. - all aimed at the socially undesirable working class!

The Army, Navy and RAF together have 170,000 men at present. Northern Ireland has 14,000 of these, and we here in Britain

have a mere 90,000 at any one time - in case of rebellion?

Their 'Special Branch' (the SAS) one of whose mottos is "We shall always go a little further", were very much under cover in northern Ireland in 1975. Today they are broadcast as being there "for training purposes only".

Investigation is very much on the increase and by 1983 probably everyone in the country will have a personal file in the computer: within ten minutes of arrest police will have access to information regarding personal health, tax, driving licence, birth, marriage etc. It is also clear that a 'Third Force' is emerging, not decentralised as now, but state controlled to be more effective.

The speaker concluded that the 'role' of the forces hasn't really changed; they have always been against the working class!

Voices prophesying war

ECONOMIC depression is a fact of life, according to our political masters, as they plan stages 4 and 5 of wage restraint and unemployment in the millions for years to come. The real threat is no longer lack of hospitals, industrial production or education, as events show that we can do without them. Things have changed now and the only real danger is the threat of Soviet military rule.

And whom are we to believe, when they say that this is so? Our military rulers in Western Europe, of course. An expert on the front page of a leading German paper accuses the British Government of doing too little for NATO. Alexander Haig, NATO supremo, is reported in a Sunday newspaper as disagreeing with those in the Labour Government who give social needs a higher priority than the military. And yet Labour ministers have been cutting schools and hospitals, closing steelworks, attempting to decimate the ranks of civilian firemen while training troops to

do their jobs. Is it that for some these sacrifices to the god of war are not enough?

The stupidity of the military is such that they foresee that Europeans, be they Russians or no, will blindly obey their superiors and plunge into a war with a destructive capacity such that "it will be like shooting fish in a barrel" as an American general is reported saying "with relish". Let us hope this vision of things to come may be no more than a bad dream.

Certainly the reality, according to Haig, is that the armies of East and West alike are beset by disciplinary problems. It is up to us, like the Frenchmen and Germans who increasingly refuse military service, like the Russians who first of all refused to fight for capitalists in a capitalist war, to ensure that we see the death of the military, not of civilians. New Year under capitalism brings nothing new - only the old murderous refrain of "guns, not butter".

British agriculture - Focus of EEC attack

THE cost of intervention buying British butter and skimmed milk is expected to treble in 1977-78, predicted the Minister of Agriculture, John Silkin. As if the destruction of our Dairy Farming Industry is not enough, the British taxpayer is going to be charged an increasing proportion of intervention costs. Last year, EEC funds accounted for all but £2.7 million of the cost: this year the taxpayers' bill is £57.4 million. Intervention buying is a means of limiting supply in order to maintain high profits in the EEC, it is of no advantage even to British farmers, since it is inefficient German farmers who make huge

profits through exporting butter to Britain, while contributing two thirds to the EEC butter and skimmed milk mountains. It is EEC policy to export increasing quantities of dairy products to Britain, at the expense of our own industry: the Milk Marketing Board, which maintains a degree of stability unknown in other EEC countries, is to be disbanded under EEC rules. Dedicated farm workers have no truck with EEC and its destructiveness: they only want to save our Dairy Farming to feed Britain - we must all fight to save our Agriculture to build a self-reliant, socialist Britain.

We shall never forget you, comrades!

AT the start of the new year as we, the Communist Party of Britain (Marxist-Leninist) prepare ourselves to struggle ever harder against the enemy - the capitalist class and its state - we remember our comrades in five continents being tortured and punished for their revolutionary allegiance.

Naturally nothing is said about the persecution of communists by Carter and his minions as they hypocritically prate about 'human

rights' nor is there any reference to the anti-communist laws and practices in countless states which are dressed up as ostensibly progressive and militant. It makes no difference whether the label is one of a 'democracy' as in the case of India or a military junta in the case of Chile, an outright colony like Northern Ireland or an allegedly 'socialist' state like Yugoslavia the suppression of communism is constant.

At a time when it is becoming

increasingly common to write off the international communist movement we hold high the banner bequeathed to all of us by the countless martyrs of our cause who gave their lives fighting for the liberation of the working class and remember our valiant comrades. We salute those behind bars and pledge anew our determination to express our solidarity in the only meaningful way - by stepping up our fight against our common enemy.

Hanoi statement-Viet Nam & Kampuchea

"VIET Nam and Kampuchea (Cambodia) are two neighbouring countries, two fraternal countries. A great friendship, built and fostered in a long struggle lasting almost a century against colonialism and in the struggle against the US imperialist aggressors and their henchmen in particular, has bound the peoples of the two countries and the two communist parties of Viet Nam and Kampu-

chea. "... The peoples of the two countries have for decades struggled shoulder to shoulder against the imperialist aggressors to recover the independence and freedom of each country, and have won glorious victory. Both the immediate and long-term interests of the Vietnamese as well as of the Kampuchean peoples require that they continue to maintain

solidarity and friendship on the basis of respect for each other's independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity, non-interference in each other's internal affairs, and cooperation and mutual assistance in the cause of defending their countries and the revolutionary gains which each nation has obtained at the cost of tremendous sacrifice and hardship." Hanoi, December 31st, 1977

EDITORIAL 1978 THE PROSPECT FOR WORKERS

NEVER have the two roads for the working class in Britain been so clearly marked.

On the one hand there is the capitalist road with Healey like an animated road sign pointing with one hand along an endless vista of successive Government wage policies, phase one, two, three, four, five, six ad infinitum, while with the other hand he doles out oil money in the form of tax reductions to try to bribe us into going his way.

Let us consider the consequences of allowing ourselves to be bullied or cajoled into taking that capitalist road. For one thing our trade unions, created as our main defence and weapon in class struggle, deprived of their proper function of bargaining with employer and state over wages and conditions, will fall into disuse and cease to exist as working class organisations. The farther along that road we go the more naked and defenceless we become.

For another thing, a closer look at where that capitalist road is going must alert the working class to danger. Under fascism, which is simply capitalism in its last vicious throes, there are no effective trade unions, no collective bargaining and the price of labour power is fixed arbitrarily by state decree. Isn't that exactly what the present Labour Government on behalf of capitalism in decline is trying to get us to accept? No wonder Healey quotes as his model for what he wants for Britain the example of West Germany where the trade unions were not created by workers but by the US State Department. The capitalist road today can only lead to fascism.

What about the other road, the road of continuing class struggle, of strengthening our trade unions, of insisting that we shall have a say in what we are paid for our labour and how we exert it. More obviously than ever before that has become the road to socialism. Capitalism cannot afford to leave us our unions and our capacity to struggle. Capitalism in decline needs obedient slaves. Therefore the fight for our right to work and our demand for a decent wage is a fight against capitalism itself.

In the present situation all real struggle is revolutionary. Therefore all struggle has to be directed toward revolution. There can be no revolutionary movement without the revolutionary theory formulated for our class out of its own experience by its own proletarian party - the CPB(ML).

In this situation where our strategy can be no other than revolution, our tactics of struggle and our working class organisation for struggle are bound to be revolutionised. This revolutionisation of our day-to-day struggle depends on the ingenuity of our class acting under the revolutionary inspiration of its Party.

The working class of Britain, the oldest and most experienced in the world, has shown itself in the past to be outstandingly skilful, inventive and well-organised in making things which have been supplied to the whole world.

What we are making now, what we have to make is revolution. May 1978 see us squaring off and marking out our materials for this major piece of social engineering.

Social Contract - Out of the maze

... from p.1

In the way demands are framed. Why, for instance, would we be seeking as a priority improvements in overtime premia when the priority should really be a reduction in overtime hours? Or why should we be by-passing bargaining altogether by submitting a 'schedule eleven' claim to an industrial tribunal? Or will we be by-passing the issue of a basic money increase in favour of luncheon vouchers or some fringe benefit which in reality is just a basic aspect of employment. The real issue is quite simply money.

Let there be clarity too about issues such as productivity bargaining. If we do not believe in sharing out our sacked work-mates' wages, then do we believe that the false productivity deal is the clever thing - if such a thing exists? Who in the end is kidding who? The idea that workers can cheat capitalism is just another form of servile self-deception.

We do not accept the argument of the employers and their government that workers' sacrifices make a stronger Britain. Britain is our working class; their health, skills, intellect, employment and general well-being; poor workers make a poor Britain. So we cannot forego more money increases to defend the 'gains' of the social

contract which in fact are a dramatic fall in real wages and a record number of jobless. Neither will bring new investment to re-establish our capacity to prosper as a manufacturing country. Poor workers consume less and warrant less investment.

Workers must face the fact that nothing can be won through slick negotiation, through complex industrial relations machinery or through cleverly argued parity claims. For instance, we should not imagine that settlements achieved by workers in one place as a result of their struggle and conviction can automatically be achieved elsewhere by those who base their case, not on their own strength, but on spurious arguments about equality with others. There is no alternative within capitalism but the sacrifice which is necessary to secure improvements and which very often negates the effect of the immediate benefits thus secured.

Let all unions unite their members in realistic claims which can advance their position and challenge the Government's policy. Secondly, upon that base of understanding to ensure full and correct participation in the policy-making machinery of our unions to secure a policy of 'free collective bargaining'. Every union conference must be presented with a mass of resolutions which say 'no' to wage restraint. The task facing the working class is simple: no more wage control. Never again a social contract;

Lives lost at work - Profit before people

PROVISIONAL figures quoted recently by the Chairman of the Health and Safety Commission show that during 1976 154 workers in the construction industry were killed whilst at work - 27 fewer than in 1975. Nevertheless total reported accidents (fatal and non-fatal) in the industry actually rose by one per cent in 1976 - and here it should be remembered that between October 75 and October 76 employment of workers actually on site fell by 5 per cent.

These figures confirm that in comparison with manufacturing industry the construction industry has an appalling accident record - leading to a much higher incidence of death and injuries which result in serious and permanent disability. For instance the annual incidence of fatal accidents per employee in construction is about five times that associated with average factory work and twenty five times that for steel erectors.

Not only do these figures prompt the question of just how

dangerous construction is - but how dangerous work is in general. A recent article in the Journal of Occupational Accidents revealed that out of 1000 workers drawn from all sectors of industry, at present accident rates, after a working life of 40 years, 4 would have died as a result of an accident at work (if the death rate from industrial disease was included this figure would of course be higher).

A considerable number of industries are much more dangerous. For instance, the same calculations show that out of 1000 workers in the steel industry 8 will die in the course of a working lifetime: 40 in coal mining; in railway shunting 45; in construction 67 and in aviation 250.

Are fatal accidents part of the inevitable human costs of industry? Or are the people involved victims of the indifference and shortsightedness which spring from putting profit before people? This is a question only workers can answer.

Economic forecasters see further decline

ECONOMIC forecasts these days are in broad agreement - the recession in world capitalism is now seen as a normal part of the business cycle. The "miracle" economies of a few years back are as infected as the rest and, it is suggested, we should all settle down till the fever passes away. Both the National Institute of Economic Research and the Organisation of Economic Co-operation and Development have recently published reports in this vein. Unemployment is to increase - a sort of bleeding of the patient to establish the basis of a sound recovery - and industry in Britain particularly will be further destroyed. In the rarified air of these economic studies it would seem that everything revolves around oil and money. Industrial decay is politely termed a marked

slow down of growth and the only real growth - unemployment - is considered not wanton waste of a valuable economic resource, but as needing to be watched in case of undesirable social consequences for the future of capitalism. In all the gloom of the reports we are offered one bit of comfort - there won't be so much inflation. Could it be that monopolists have achieved a rate of profit that keeps them from too much debasement of our currency?

What is certain is that we should be clear about our own interests. If there is no carrot there is certainly no shortage of sticks; but, if we continue to organise our defence against capitalism, there will be no donkey. After all capitalism's strength lies in our lack of ideological clarity and organisation.

Need for clarity in NALGO

IN accordance with its 1977 Conference decision branches of NALGO have been asked to submit their comments on the NEC proposals for industrial democracy. These proposals call for 20 per cent staff representation, with full voting rights on all Council standing committees. It is further suggested that staff representatives should sit on the full council, with the right to speak but not to vote.

NALGO members must be clear in their rejection of these proposals. They represent a diversion away from the basic function of the Association, the furtherance and protection of the interests of its members.

Rather than attend to basic union work representatives would be expected to be present at one of the endless and debilitating sessions of this or that 'centre of power'. The idea has other dangers. How could members oppose a decision taken by their employer if their own representatives had been involved in making that decision? How would members ensure that their representatives were responsible

to the branch?

NALGO members should also be clear on their role in a capitalist society. In the private sector the main beneficiaries of the organisation workers help to run are not the public, but capitalists. In the case of local authorities it is the merchant bankers, with their monopoly of capital, who make the killings. Also one of the main functions of local authorities has become that of carrying out the state's curb on public expenditure, thereby increasing unemployment and cutting living standards.

Branches would be much better served discussing the NEC recommendation for shop stewards systems which were ratified by the 1977 conference. These point the correct way forward for NALGO, the strengthening of its own internal organisation.

The concept of industrial democracy in a capitalist society is meaningless, whether applied to workers in the private or public sector. The only industrial democracy worth having is socialism when the working class has control of its own destiny.

Step up the wages fight

AFTER a year of falling interest rates the minimum lending rate has increased to 7 per cent.

The government clearly does not see any need for further funds for investment in industry, not surprisingly as a shortage of funds was never the problem for British capitalism, which remains one of the largest overseas investors. It is argued in the bourgeois newspapers that the increase is needed to restrict an increasing money supply and prevent inflation. The opposite is the case.

It was in 1976 that the minimum lending rate increased to 15 per cent - representing nearer 20 per cent to those who borrowed money, and the rate had steadily increased over the previous months. Each rise in interest represented the stimulation of increases in prices. The result was called inflation and laid at the feet of the working class who accepted responsibility. By agreeing to the social contract they suffered the only real inflation, a cut in their own living standards and a reduction of the exchange value of the labour power.

As the social contract neared the end of its term, interest rates steadily fell and although there was no significant change in the level of unemployment or any improvement in output, inflation rates fell. The government claimed success for its policy and sought agreement for a third phase of its attack on the working class.

Now, following the rejection of further wage restraint, the successes in breaking the 10 per cent guidelines and the consequent rejection of backdoor fetters on collective bargaining, interest rates are increased to create price rises and hold the threat of galloping inflation over the heads of the working class again.

We must not be deceived! Our fight for wages must continue for it is more than a fight for wages. It is also a fight to preserve the sovereignty of our unions, a fight to protect our skills and our jobs; and in the end it is a fight which calls for the solution of living with a capitalist class which can no longer afford the working class and increasingly tries to restrict our productive energy.

SPCS wage fight to reject civil servants sloth

WHILE the other eight unions on the National Staff Side continue to pursue the forlorn hope of a pay settlement for April 1978 based on a system of fair comparisons with the private sector, the Society of Civil and Public Servants is preparing a wage claim of at least 20 per cent to be submitted in the New Year.

This is a fight for wages which their members should pursue to the full, deflected neither by spurious arguments for unity (read capitulation) by the Civil Service unions nor by calls for parity with other increases, from within or without, nor by false promises for the future.

This fight for wages is a fight for the right to bargain and for the autonomy of the union and, although very elementary, challenges the Government's pay guidelines and all that they imply

Primitive medicine - no cure for disease

UNTIL this week, when I was admitted to hospital, I hadn't properly understood the meaning of health cuts. Health Authorities "each been given a share of inadequate funds which can't keep pace with rising costs, and have the 'freedom' to decide how to spend them and what to cut. If they exceed their budget, they have less the following year. So much I knew, but not what it meant in practice.

Principally, after hospital closures, it means less staff. So at this moment, in my ward, two qualified nurses are rushing between putting one man on a respirator, and unblocking another's drain bottle and drip. Fortunately, the other 30 patients are reasonably calm, apart from an old man of 96, who wets himself, feebly calling "Help! Nurse!" but there is no one to attend to him at this moment. None of the heart patients are in trouble; the man who earlier returned from theatre shaking, then had to be sat up as he was about to vomit and could choke, is now attended by his visitors.

This is the emergency ward, but it's rare if more than a sister, a staff nurse, and two trainees are

on duty at any one time. The nurses have been patient, cheerful, dedicated, but it's wearing them down, and nerves become frayed. The faster turnover of patients (a hernia is now released after 4 days, instead of a month, for instance) means greater number of patients are seriously ill at any one time in the ward. Any delay in answering a patient's buzzer, or noticing something wrong, can be disastrous. Many patients have just had stomach operations and need two nurses to move them for a day or two. So it can take three hours for the two night nurses to get around the ward before bedtime (some sheets to change, backs to wash, temperatures, pulses and pills, bottles and bedpans, cups of cocoa drip feeds and so on) and that's if nothing upsets the routine. Patients in hospital easily get depressed, and it amazes me how harassed nurses find time to cheer them up. But sometimes it's impossible. Patients have to be moved from this hospital to make way for greater emergencies - and old man who'd had a stroke and burnt himself was in tears the other day, unsure what was happening as his belongings

were piled into a plastic sack, and he was loaded, in spite of burns and bedsores, into an ambulance to a hospital two miles away, because he was no longer receiving emergency treatment.

Of course, other things are cut. Pre-cooked meals, warmed up rubbery eggs, mistakes in special diets made by unskilled cooks; the ambulance that brought me here, an emergency appendicitis case, made a detour to collect other patients on the way.

It appears that the man on oxygen has just died, but the nurses have cast no shadow over visiting time: even the man's relatives have been looked after and the other visitors leave cheerfully unaware.

Contrast this with our shameless government, out to wreck our National Health with no concern for human suffering. They cynically claim that the sick too must play their part in Labour's programme of cuts, and must share in the sacrifices. "There is no money in the kitty", they say. Lies! Callaghan's outlaws rob the poor to pay the rich.

The future of the Health Service depends absolutely on its workers. The nurses are acutely aware that they must do something to save our hospitals, but paths are blocked by their fear of causing greater suffering by conventional industrial action. They will somehow find a way. Other workers must give what help they can.

Wage claim challenge to NHS underfunding

THAT the destruction of the health service is the main issue facing all health workers is obvious. What might not appear obvious is the way in which these attacks manifest themselves. We have said that wages are an essential part of the fight for the NHS but although more wages is our aim there are right and wrong ways of getting them.

The fight for a higher basic rate necessarily involves conflict between us and the employers and is the right way forward. Productivity deals and bonus schemes are wrong for they demand a higher rate of exploitation and divisiveness, setting worker against worker.

At present ancillary workers in the Confederation of Health Service Employees (COHSE) are faced with a simple problem: It should be clear to every class conscious worker what the correct way to get more money is, but it seems that this is not the case if this year's national claim is a fair reflection. One demand

calls for the imposing of penalty payments on authorities which do not introduce bonus schemes. These schemes are in no way contributory to the saving of health nor to advancing our living standards as a section of our class.

Firstly they must be self-financing with the view to increasing efficiency at no extra expense to the unit involved. This denies the underlying problem, that of underfunding. No wonder the government likes this. Secondly, it reduces the workforce through "natural" wastage. And it divides us into the bargain.

These bonus schemes must be rejected out of hand, and preparations begun for 1978 conference to secure policy that commits us firmly to the line which says: "Never again must we accept wage restraint. We will set our own guidelines and stick to them. To do otherwise denies the fundamental reason for our union's existence."

Teachers in action - ILEA standards up

EDUCATIONAL standards are up in the ILEA Primary schools. The standards are measured by verbal reasoning tests (devised by the National Foundation for Educational Research) taken when children are eleven.

The results show that children in London equal the national average for the first time since 1966. The national average is rising making the ILEA results even more significant. This improvement is to the credit of London teachers. London teachers know that small classes mean better teaching and that falling rolls should mean smaller classes. Past and present struggles in London have prevented the ILEA

from using the excuse of falling rolls to cut back their education service in the drastic way that other authorities have. This is not to say that there have been no cuts in the ILEA - there most certainly have - but to say rather that improvement and successes can only be bettered by more improvement and more successes.

Teachers in London must continue to call for smaller classes and the employment of teachers: we must oppose re-deployment and reject staffing reductions. Educational standards improve as the result of struggle in a capitalist society and not the opposite as some would have us think!

Education tests - no return to 19th century!

ONE of the most two-faced measures proposed by the Government's Green Paper on education last July was a vast increase in testing. Supposedly to raise standards, this 'monitoring' is an attack on the teaching profession.

Teachers would soon be hauled over the coals if their test results were below average, not to improve education but solely as a way of cutting down on the size of the teaching force.

The tests will be in 'basic subjects'. When the National Union of Teachers refuted the economic arguments for education cuts, saying that education is an investment in skills vital to Britain's future, the Government declared that only parts of education were vital. English, maths, science and a foreign language for some would be the core of the curriculum, which would be 'protected' - as if the rest could be thrown away! The 'protected' parts would be 'tested'.

In a circular to its branches, the NUT has rightly denounced these measures as a throwback to the 'payment by results' system of 1862. 'Payment by results' delayed the introduction of history, science, crafts by 30 years at least, as teachers concentrated all efforts on the annual testing of reading, writing and arithmetic. The NUT circular reminds us that arithmetic and English are being learnt during most school lessons. It also includes a warning that, whatever the Green Paper claimed to the contrary, testing might be used by local authorities to draw up league tables of schools and teachers based on the results they achieved.

Union advice to branches which fail to negotiate satisfactory safeguards with their local authority is to boycott the testing completely. Already Bexley NUT is refusing to carry out tests. Others must follow this lead.

Autonomy, grants, cuts - will the real students please stand up now!

THE aftermath of the December conference has left the NUS with problems to solve. Students who desire full grants for full-time students, and union autonomy to best facilitate such an end, have a fight to face. The Government has shown itself as their main enemy, coupled with a lack of political clarity within the national union itself. Those, who in reply to the Government demand for closure of 40 teacher-training colleges, say "please close only 30" and essentially ask for closures with a human face, reveal an abdication of leadership. They are plastic politicians. The Government also moulds them into acceptance of "public accountability", which is the doubletalk term for accountability to the Department of Education and Science, a Government agency.

The Government sees retreat amidst confusion and exploits it. Students must gather those class conscious sections of the membership and trap the Government. Political attack warrants political attack. In the NUS context, what should be our reply through which we advance the political understanding of the membership in struggle?

We stress three points. Put succinctly, they are union independence, full grants for full-time students, and the need to save education for our future as a working class.

Union independence has been threatened before. In 1972, Margaret Thatcher (the milk snatcher) Minister for Education tried it on, but the NUS campaign put her off. The students of 1972 were clear: she might take milk from 5 year olds but older students were more jealous of their freedom to defend themselves. It was a famous victory for the NUS. Frankly, the

climate was different then and students had important allies in trade unionists antagonistic to incomes policy and the Industrial Relations Act. The working class then was aroused to the general threat to its independence and used its unions to good purpose. Such a mood must flourish again for that success to be repeated and advanced further. Many believed then that only Tories could be so despicable. Weren't they proved wrong?

A full grants (tuition fees plus maintenance) policy flies in the face of an incomes policy. Tory or Labour style. Both parties in office have rejected it. Consequently, students have suffered. It's more than fashion that makes students dress like paupers. This demand must continue to discourage this country's youth from entering further and higher education. For those who are determined, it means financial hardship for wanting to learn a skill. What does a capitalist Government care?

That it does not care must explain its education policy. Closure, cut-back and run-down - nobody will hear of that in their election campaign. The third point, the salvaging of education, is essential for a working class in a socialist Britain. Education needs all in its defence. All three points of our policy are interlinked. Defeat for any one cripples hopes for the other two. For the NUS political maturity is required. The Government is aided by the time in our ranks, who still think in terms of the social contract. Such an 'historic compromise' will for us be an historic defeat unless we attack the attackers. There can be no place for quid pro quos in our ranks

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