

SOLIDARITY

● No 2

*for workers'
full control*

PUNFIELD 9. PAPS
**NO
SURRENDER**
TREAT EVERY ONE
AS HUMAN BEING



ITALY
The Economic League
Furniture Workers
N.W. Polytechnic

Punfields: the struggle continues

6D

EDITORIAL

On Thursday November 6th Barbara Castle delivered one of her celebrated 'fiery' speeches, this time addressed to her friends in the Institute of Directors.

The phrase that made the headlines was - "Whether management like it or not real trade union power had returned to the grass roots from which it came."

The reaction was predictable and immediate. That evening Martin Jukes, director-general of the Engineering Employers Federation, and one of our less sophisticated industrialists, attacked Barbara Castle and accused her together with Scanlon and Jones of being too soft on the working class. But she was merely stating the obvious. Jukes' attack blurs the issue, creating a conflict where none exists. In making this point Barbara Castle was not declaring that she and Harold Wilson had decided this was a good thing and had decreed it should happen. She was simply telling the directors that there is more than one way to skin a cat, and that both they, the union bosses, and the government are in danger of being outflanked unless they all adjust themselves to the fact that increasing numbers of workers, realising that the full time trade union officials can no longer be trusted to defend, let alone extend, the class interest of their members, have begun taking action on their own behalf.

Since its election the government has unsuccessfully attempted to solve the country's economic problems by resorting to long-term capitalist planning - the encouragement of big business at the expense of the working class. The Prices and Incomes Policy, a crucial part of the plan, was specifically designed to freeze wages and boost profits, which it was hoped would encourage investment.

At first it was possible to keep the rank-and-file quiet by appealing to party loyalty. When this wore thin trade union officialdom was quite prepared to help Wilson and British capitalism by disciplining trade union members for ignoring a disputes procedure imposed on them by management and full time union officials.

In the recent past this tactic has frequently failed* as workers have become increasingly aware of their own ability to extend their power. This development if allowed to proceed unchecked threatens the employing class, the union bureaucracy, and the government itself.

This is what Barbara Castle really means when she talks about the dangers of the "new power on the shop floor" degenerating "into anarchy". To remove this danger she suggests that working people should be involved to a greater extent in decision-making at work and stresses the 'shared responsibilities' this would entail.

*This failure still hasn't registered however in the executive of the A.E.U.: "The Executive Council shall have the power to call, and terminate, a strike of members, other than provided for in Rule 14,, Clause 15, when in their opinion it is in the best interests of the members concerned". This is taken from a list of rules to be submitted by the Executive Council, A.E.U., to the 1970 Rules Revision Meeting.

The Times editorial of Friday November 7th takes this line of thought a little further:

"It is obviously necessary that unions and employers should take account of what workers think, but they should not necessarily truckle to it. Equally, if workers will no longer delegate proper responsibility to their unions, they must exercise it themselves."

In passing it's interesting to note that The Times recognizes three separate and distinct forces at work, the management, the unions, and the rank-and-file, and it links union officials with the management against the membership. Yet it still manages to sound surprised and a little hurt that workers will no longer delegate responsibility to an organisation "which should not necessarily truckle to them." Finally The Times adds, letting the cat out of the bag, "As a first step there must be regulation so that people who exercise power - on either side - have some training and defined responsibility."

In fact Barbara Castle's speech together with The Times' editorial show which way the wind will blow in the future. 'Training' and 'responsibility' are repeatedly emphasised and can only refer to the shopfloor representatives of the rank-and-file - the stewards. Management, government, and union bureaucracy hope to neutralise shop floor power and avert the threat to their own positions by gradually absorbing militant shop stewards into the industrial relations hierarchy.*

If they get their way, to become a shop steward you won't just have to be elected from the floor. You'll have to go on a course, pass an exam, read the rule book at twenty five yards, and study the intricacies of bargaining your mates out of a job - productivity bargaining. Where in the past your union official attempted to enforce an 'agreed' disputes procedure - agreed between him and the Employers' Federation - on you, in the future the shop steward might end up doing it to you instead. The whole shop steward training scheme, as envisaged and organised by the trade union bureaucracy, is designed to undermine rank-and-file power; cut the direct democracy links between shop floor and militant stewards; and finally to make stewards answerable to the officials rather than to the people electing them.

If the workers of this country are to keep what power they've gained, and more important, if this power is to be extended then attempts to neutralise shop floor militants should be fought tooth and nail. We should now be thinking in terms of nationwide rank-and-file link-ups of militants within and across the boundaries of specific industries. Barbara Castle and the big business press can call it what they like, 'anarchy' or 'bloodymindedness', but we know that the fight to control our own lives against parties, union bureaucracies, and employers is the embryo of workers' power, the prerequisite of real socialism.

*This is the logic behind the recent move on the part of Jack Jones, General-Secretary of the T.G.W.U. to give shop stewards and workers committees a bigger say in negotiations on pay and conditions. See the Daily Mirror of December 8th, "Bigger Say for Workers to Curb Strikes". The T.G.W.U. bureaucracy has never previously had attacks of conscience about its extremely undemocratic structure, nor do we remember Jones objecting to being elected General-Secretary for life.

PUNFIELD

AFTERMATH

Punfield and Barstow (Mouldings) Ltd. employs about one hundred people and is situated on the Queensbury industrial estate (Middlesex). The firm, a wholly-owned subsidiary of the Slough-based Capseals group, produces precision plastic mouldings for a variety of customers around north-west London; the best-known being Kodak (Harrow Weald), Hoover (Perivale), Smiths motor accessories (Cricklewood), and the General Motors subsidiaries Frigidaire (Hendon) and A.C. Delco (Dunstable).

In 1968 the Capseals group made £343,000. In 1969 returns are unlikely to be anywhere near this figure. As the Business Guardian put it in November: "Torn by a lengthy strike in one division, Capseals turns in a bleak set of half-time figures. Pretax profit slumped from £184,000 to £116,000 in the six months to June." The strike at Punfields, one of the longest in local history, finished after fifteen weeks on September 12th 1969. Throughout the summer and autumn forty-two Indian and Pakistani workers fought police, scabs, management, and some of their full-time union officials for the right to control their own destinies at work.

This article, based on interviews with the men involved, examines the part played by both the police and the union bureaucracy (AEF); dealing in particular with the attitude of the second to the initiatives taken by the strike committee during the strike. It then goes on to look at the power struggle now being waged on the shop floor, and finally weighs the gains made to date since June when the men were provoked out on strike.

BACKGROUND TO THE STRIKE

It was sparked off on the evening of June 11th when the management used police to evict the night shift for beginning a sitdown protest. They were merely following the example of the day shift who had sat in on the shop floor in retaliation for the arbitrary sacking of a press operator.

Many other grievances had piled up concerning low wages, bad working conditions, extremely long shifts and the victimization of shop stewards and those known to be trade union members. Demands presented to the management in February had been subsequently ignored. The men saw the sacking as the last straw. The day following the police eviction brought the organized section (mainly press operators) out to a man.

THE PICKET-LINE STRUGGLE

At 6.30 a.m. pickets would begin arriving for duty. At 6.55 a.m. the police would arrive for duty. This was repeated each day for fifteen weeks. For seven weeks the men stuck it out without strike pay, on their own resources - incidents with the management, and the predominantly white workers still inside, occurred daily. One morning in a clash before the police arrived a setter pulled a knife on the night shift shop steward. On a

*For a detailed account of the men's grievances and events leading up to the strike, see Solidarity, North London Vol.5, No.12, "The Punfield-Barstow Strike"

separate occasion a picket narrowly missed being nipped by an electrician waving a piece of lead piping. On the credit side the pickets came off decidedly better in the fist fights that occurred with the junior management.

BEYOND THE CALL OF DUTY

From the start the police played a blatantly political role, in spite of their assurances that they had no intention of taking sides. To them the management were somehow more respectable because of their easy identification with the company's property. Consequently the pickets were looked on as criminals and treated as such whenever the police thought they could get away with it. It was not long before the pickets came to realise that police and company were on the same side, against them.

Lorry drivers were encouraged to go straight through the picket line and the police set time limits for the stewards attempting to persuade drivers to turn round without delivering. On one occasion a picket was shoved all over the road to prevent him getting to a driver's cab. Two strikers talking together on a little-used pavement would be threatened with arrest for obstruction, while scab lorries unloaded on the road without the police batting an eyelid.

Offences committed by pickets were jumped on with commendable zeal. Those committed by scabs were usually ignored.

In the fifteen weeks, fifteen arrests were made, only one involving a non-striker. On September 8th Inspectors from Wembley police station, impatient to wrap up the strike, dropped in to chat with management. Two days later, police under the direction of an inspector arrested ten pickets for blocking the firm's lorry by sitting down. In collaboration with the management, the police were continuously operating to weaken the strike.

INNOCENTS IN COURT

The cases were finally heard on the 24th October at Hendon Court, by which time the police had added a charge of "obstructing officers in the course of their duty" to the original "wilful obstruction of the public highway". Each of the ten were found guilty and fined £18 apiece largely as a result of the personal efforts of the clerk of the court, a character by the name of Cargill. In a brush with one of the arrested in the lobby before the case was heard, Cargill made it quite clear that he regarded the pickets as "workshy troublemakers".

Not surprisingly the hearing turned into a 'kangaroo court', the clerk dominating the proceedings, the prosecution, and the 'learned' magistrates who remained virtually mute throughout. The strikers left the court under the impression that the judicial system of this country is geared to the defence of propertied privilege against those lacking it.

THE ROLE OF THE UNION

Throughout the strike A.E.F. officialdom's attitude to initiatives taken by the strike committee remained ambiguous. The divisional level was more interested in getting the men back inside to negotiate "on their behalf" than in supporting the pickets by blacking incoming raw powder and outgoing components.

In the early days officials at district level were obviously counting on a quick kill. So in late July there was an official demonstration. Officialdom marched at the head of a worker column once round Queensbury circle and duly got its face on the local press. The 'demo' ended with a chest-thumping rally, numerous pledges of solidarity, and threats to close the factory down. Men from several factories came out to hear speech after

speech from the full-time officials. The pickets came a poor last, the Punfield's convenor only getting the megaphone when the big men had exhausted themselves.

By September it was a different story. The management, feeling the growing pain of disappearing business, gave significant concessions for the majority of the men but still refused on final points. The men resolved to struggle two weeks longer for the additional demands in the face of increased difficulties. The pickets were being pressed more harshly by police and free enterprise lorry drivers who specialised in picket-crashing. The union after fourteen weeks still hadn't blacked the goods.

On Friday, September 5th the strike committee held their own demonstration. The megaphone passed from picket to picket and the union bureaucracy was attacked for its continued inaction. Not surprisingly no full-time officials were able to make it to this demonstration.

Up to this time deputations of strikers had careered around the Home Counties by car distributing a list of components made at Punfield's and requesting informal blacking at the relevant factories. Luton district A.E.F. offices were telephoned early on in the strike in an attempt to get the workers at A.C. Delco's of Dunstable to refuse to handle components from Punfield's. Late in August the General and Municipal Workers Union convenor at Delco's was still assuring the strikers that he'd black incoming components as soon as he got the word from above. It never came. A picket deputation to the offices of the A.E.U. General Secretary Brother Conway was blocked by his secretary. The local branch telegraphed Conway requesting blacking from the National Executive in support of the strikers.

While this was going on the General Purposes Committee met the strike committee on two separate occasions. Both times it attempted to persuade the men back inside and let the negotiation be done by the full-time officials and the Engineering Employers Federation.

Towards the middle of September the men were talking in terms of breaking off relations with the union. They were attempting to make their last two weeks the most militant. All but four labourers had won the major part of their demands on pay and hours; these four were being told by both the company and all of the union officials to accept far less pay and longer hours than the others. Deciding to stay solid and continue the struggle for another two weeks, the men experienced repeated obstruction from the officials, the most blatant they had yet seen.

DIVISIONAL ORGANISER TALKS TOUGH

On Thursday 11th September, the day of the mass arrest, a deputation of shop stewards from the neighboring factories of Rotaprint and Injection Moulders joined the strike committee and turned up at divisional organiser McLoughlin's city office demanding to know what the hell was going on. They were more or less told they had no right to stick their noses in, and then in complete contradiction were accused of taking a long time to act for parties supposedly interested in the outcome of the strike. Understandably the stewards left Mac's office angry and pissed off. The strike committee themselves were told that the Executive had been asked to declare total blacking and had not responded. McLoughlin either could not or would not explain his behaviour. He pointed out that the pickets were also prolonging the strike by their inability to cut supplies and close the factory down. This was said even though the strike committee had received a letter, in response to a request for union help with picket expenses, suggesting that the picket line be cut down to economise. "Heads I win, tails you lose"?

The following day a pub meeting was held in Kingsbury called by the divisional organiser. At the beginning he refused entry to shop stewards

from Rotaprint and Injection Moulders. In his speech he insisted the strikers return to work to struggle from inside. Had there been any intention to stay out longer, it was clear which side he would have been on.

BUREAUCRATIC IN-FIGHTING?

Why the National Executive of the A.E.F. didn't declare blacking remains a mystery. The most likely answer is that it would have immediately brought them under pressure from the T.U.C. General Council to get the men back inside. Quite obviously the men would have rejected such a suggestion. The easiest solution might have been to ignore the requests for blacking and so slowly throttle the strikers while evading their questions. One informed steward of the local branch mentioned that some infighting bureaucrats foresaw delays discrediting an ideologically-antagonistic incumbent in upcoming union elections. However this is only surmise. Whatever the motives, the rank-and-file trade unionists at Punfield's will never know them. The whole episode is a supreme example of bureaucratic attitudes of the officials sabotaging needs of the workers. Not only were the strikers not helped by full-time officials, they weren't even considered worthy of an adequate explanation.

FOR THE FUTURE

From this mess some obvious conclusions can be drawn. With regard to blacking there is a crying need for the extension of rank-and-file contacts between related factories. This was proved by Frigidaire's at Hendon where informal blacking was total after a deputation of shop stewards came down to the picket line and talked with the strike committee following information received from the local branch.

The Queensbury estate already has the nucleus of a joint shop stewards committee in the three-factory deputation that visited Brother McLoughlin. Such link-ups ought to be encouraged if rank-and-file workers are ever to begin managing their own lives in the future. The relationships with the full-time officials during the fifteen weeks out on strike makes the point crystal clear: to wait cap in hand on the deliberations of union bureaucracy is to invite defeat, demoralisation and the risk of being used as a political football. If there are to be workers' victories only rank-and-file initiatives and rank-and-file militancy can ensure them.

CAN PUNFIELD'S AFFORD ITS JUNIOR MANAGEMENT?

The men returned to work on the 22nd of September. Since that time the shop floor has been the scene of a power struggle between the organised workers and the junior management. Basically the petty hierarchy are finding it hard to adjust to the idea of any opposition on the shop floor. The strength of the rank-and-file is being continually provoked, the stakes in the game being the non-organised workers.

Already several women from the finishing shop have joined the union while others in the machine and grinding shops, fed up with being pushed about are waiting to see who comes out top dog. Fearing that coloured workers would automatically join the organised section, the management have virtually stopped taking them on. Newcomers to the factory now are usually 'safe' whites, friends of friends of the junior management.

Since the return to work one foreman in particular has been intent on provoking the shop convenor into staging a walkout. He deserves special mention.

DEREK "THE GRIN"

Some time back Derek ordered the shop convenor to leave his machine

and do some grinding. Previously shop committee and management had agreed that union press operators would be called from their machines for grinding only when non-union people were unavailable. Arguing that at the time several non-union men were available, the convenor refused and accused the foreman of making trouble. With this he was clocked out and ordered home. The watching workers wanted an immediate walkout. Derek, grinning at the shop convenor, repeated several times, "You haven't got the courage." Not rising to the bait the convenor went home.

Arriving the following morning he demanded to see the works manager, related the incident and underlined the point that he had intentionally prevented a walkout. In return he demanded an end to all arbitrary suspension in the future. The works manager conceded the point and Derek spent an uncomfortable couple of hours standing up for a dressing down in the office with the shop steward present, and sitting down.

The question the works manager and director are beginning to ask themselves is whether they can afford the luxury of such a disruptive underling. Although it took a strike to do it, both now realise that the company remains in business by grace of the press operators and not the foreman.

THEN AND NOW

Before the strike, press operators earned a basic 6/9 per hour and the chance of pitting themselves against management-imposed job rates for an incentive bonus of 8d. per hour which was frequently denied on numerous technicalities and fiddles. At the end of a 55 hour week of five eleven hour shifts they took home £23 on average. In September as part of the return to work agreement the management offered to up the basic rate to 7/3d per hour and link it with a potential bonus of 3/6d per hour to come into practice after the mutual re-assessment of all job rates.

While re-assessment was taking place management offered the men a flat rate of 12/- if they combined grinding with their normal work. They agreed. By the end of October the job rates had still not been re-assessed. The shop committee delivered an ultimatum and the following day the management agreed to drop the re-assessment entirely and offered the operators the flat 12/- per hour as the permanent wage while leaving grinding to non-union workers.

The eleven hour double shift system has now been replaced by three eight hour shifts. In June the men worked 55 hours for £23. Today they work a 37½ hour week for £24-15-0d. Before the strike operators allowed themselves to be used as makeshift labourers. Today they are no longer prepared to be taken off their machines. Victimisation, arbitrary suspension, and on-the-spot sacking, while prevalent before June 1969, are now almost things of the past.

At present the management are resisting attempts by A.E.F. officialdom to draw the setters into the three shift system. However it will only be a matter of time before the setters realise that working 55 hours a week for the management is a mugs game when the organised workers work 37½ hours.

While the struggle for shop floor power is by no means over, it is quite obvious that valuable gains have been made. Less obvious is the fact that these gains are the direct result of the Pakistani and Indian workers' determination to begin acting for themselves. Management never give anything away, it has to be taken. It is a lesson that workers in this country, black and white, are beginning to realise.

Mike.

A QUESTION OF POWER

Few of us run our own lives. This is because we have no control over the main decisions that affect us. These decisions are made by small self-perpetuating minorities. This situation cannot be 'democratically' changed. What our rulers call 'democracy' is a system which operates for their own protection. As long as their 'democracy' is not seriously challenged, their dominating position in society is secure.

Their threatened use of violence is intended to frustrate any challenge. It is implicit in the large police force, the courts, and the armed forces which they control. The limited freedom that their 'democracy' allows us is further restricted or curtailed altogether whenever they think their power is seriously threatened.

They hold the power to maintain their power. This is the key to their security. They determine the kind of education provided, and the ways and means of providing it. By controlling what and how people are taught, those who rule us seek to preserve the structure of existing society. Children are educated first through the family - through the already conditioned parents. Then the education factories, called schools and universities, take over. Their aim is to produce people conditioned to fit into this rat-race society.

Workers created Trade Unions and Political Parties to change all this. But by gradually adopting similar patterns of organisation to those of their oppressors, and by concentrating the struggle almost solely on improving working conditions and living standards, the original revolutionary intentions have been bypassed. Working people have gained considerable material advantages but they have lost control of their own organisations. Today the hierarchies are in control. They can neither be removed nor brought back to the initial aim of freeing people.

Those who dominate production dominate society. So long as they have their kind of industrial stability, control will remain in their hands. This control enables them to continue deciding what is to be produced, who is to produce it, where, when, how, and in what quantities. All this conflicts with the interests of the real producers - the workers. Those who run our lives continually seek ways of blurring the conflict and of manipulating workers into accepting that management alone is capable of making these decisions.

The union hierarchy assists them in this fraud. While acting as middle-men in the labour market, the union bosses do all they can to frustrate any awareness in workers of their own ability to run industry. In fact, so-called working class organisations are today an essential part of the set up. The formation of new unions or parties would not solve the problem. In today's conditions, they would suffer the same fate as the old ones.

But the system is contested. There is a constant struggle in which the

objective is self-management. In a large majority of disputes, workers have taken real democratic decisions to act without the consent of the union bureaucrats, during so-called unofficial strikes. This is one of the signs that our rulers' 'industrial stability' is under strain. The strain is also visible in the education factories, where students are increasingly demanding the right to take decisions on fundamental issues. There are many other signs of the crisis that is affecting every aspect of this society.

Solidarity participates in the struggle wherever possible. We try to expose the true situation. We seek to strengthen the confidence of working people in their own ability to manage their own lives - at work and outside of it. People's reliance on others to do things for them has led to defeat after defeat. It is time for victories! Victories depend on people consciously taking action themselves. To help in the development of this consciousness is the only reason for the existence of Solidarity. We do not consider ourselves yet another self-styled working class leadership.

Solidarity is an organisation of rank-and-file activists with new ideas expressed through a set of papers and a flow of pamphlets. Our purpose is to develop and extend these ideas, to promote their discussion and, wherever possible, to act upon them.

We invite support and collaboration with our paper from all those in basic agreement with us. We welcome comments, letters, and articles on struggles whether about housing, schools or from the shop-floor. If you know others who would be interested, send us their addresses and we will send them an issue free. If you want to subscribe, send 10/- for 12 issues post paid to M. Duncan, 15 Taylors Green, London, W.3.

Solidarity needs active members. If you are interested in joining contact any group near to you. But in areas where there are at least three people in basic agreement with our ideas, form an autonomous Solidarity group. We will help if needed.

In addition to the West London group, autonomous Solidarity groups are:

Aberdeen:	c/o P. Roy, 138 Walker Road, Aberdeen
Clydeside:	c/o D. Kan, 43 Valeview Terrace, Dumbarton
London (North)	c/o H. Russell, 53a Westmoreland Road, Bromley
London (South)	c/o A. Mann, 79 Balfour Street, London, S.E.17
No. thwest	c/o P. Cockcroft, 102 Carter Street, Manchester 13

Other Solidarity journals are. like ours, just starting. Recent issues include:

<u>Solidarity Aberdeen</u>	Contents of No. 3:
Inside Consolidated Pneumatic; Housing in Aberdeen; Germany - K.A.P.D.; Technology and Workers' Control	
<u>Solidarity Northwest</u>	Contents of No. 1:
A Woman's Place; Building Workers; Turners Asbestos; Miners' Militancy Returns	
<u>Solidarity South London</u>	Contents of No. 7:
War at Aberthaw; Kingsnorth Untouchables; Dustmen Break Through; Teaching Machines; Manpower Limited	
<u>Solidarity North London</u>	Contents of Vol. 6 No. 2:
Fords, Round Two; G.E.C.--The balance Sheet; K.A.P.D. in Retro-spect; The I.S.R.A.C.A. Demo	

ITALY: THE NOVEMBER STRIKES

On the 24th November, 1969, Francesco Tolin was arrested at his home in Padua. He was taken to Rome's 'Regina Coeli' prison and given a rushed trial resulting in a seventeen month sentence. Tolin has been charged with condoning crimes of violence, damage to a factory, personal/private violence, resisting the police, and also "of having incited workers all over Italy to rebel against the State and in particular Fiat car workers in Turin to damage vehicles belonging to the above factory". He is the first newspaper editor to be placed under preventive detention since the fall of Mussolini's Fascist state.

The official explanation was that "the acts for which Francesco Tolin is responsible are unusually serious because they were intended to encourage disorder and to create an atmosphere of revolution all over the country." The charges were based upon a series of articles in Potere Operaio* 7 and 8 but the reasons for the arrest and preventive detention have to be sought for in the events preceding that date. And it is only one instance in an evolving pattern of repression for which the recent bomb attacks have provided further excuse.

The context of the arrest of Tolin has been an autumn of intense working class struggle in Italy centring on the renewal of three-year contracts covering almost the entire economy between the major corporate managements and the three large confederations of Communist, Catholic, and Social Democratic unions. The conflict was foreshadowed by the early wildcat strikes, entirely outside existing contract-dispute periods, during June and July in Fiat**. From September strike activity has been focused by the confederations directly on the contract re-negotiation.

Intensity and militancy increased through October, and by November the trade unions wanted to start bringing the strikes to a close. Bosses and the T.U. officials attempted during the first two weeks of November a few 'guinea-pig' agreements in selected industries to test workers' reactions. By quickly signing sell-out contracts with Pirelli and the building corporations, they hoped to set precedents for other agreements, thus rapidly concluding all struggles. The process of isolating industry by industry was modelled on De Gaulle's attacks against the Renault and Citroen car factories in June, 1968. The most crucial and militant industries of cars, privately-owned engineering, and chemicals were, for the first time in contract-negotiation rounds, held for last, squeezed into isolation from each other, and eventually forced to fight on alone. The long autumn strikes were beginning to be wrapped up by mid-November.

To end the labour disputes with a massive show of strength, after which it would be announced that "the bosses had given in", the Communist, Catholic, and Social Democratic unions agreed upon a General Strike of the

*Translated as Workers' Power, it is the paper of an organization of that name with views quite close to those of Solidarity.

**See Solidarity, South London No.4 "Fiat Workers See Through Unions" No.5 "In and Outside the Fiat Racket"

entire working class for November 19. This was to signal the close of industrial disputes over organisation of the work process so that the next phase could be opened, that of the agitation for social welfare reforms in housing, medical care, education, social security, and perhaps taxation. This would not only change the objectives, but also "lift" the struggle from the shop floor to the union and party offices. The General Strike of November 19th was designed, as the first in Italy since 1960, to be a massive proof of the trades unions' powerful control over the masses and its ability to set the tone of a political situation.

That was the plan, but November had become politically scorching. During the last few weeks before the General Strike the workers' struggles had appeared extraordinarily solid, shop-floor based, unanimously militant and strikingly offensive. Moreover, the struggle was getting still hotter particularly in Fiat in Turin.

Affected by this tense atmosphere, the T.U. officials suddenly beat a retreat: the General Strike would ask everyone to stay at home with the indispensable meetings to be held indoors, everybody under cover rather than out on the streets in open air demonstrations and assemblies. The whole character of the 19th was changed from one of a national protest to that of a grand national holiday. The workers' response to the new directives was one of hostile passivity concealing angry explosiveness. They were waiting to attack the fast closing network of labour agreements.

The explosion occurred on the 19th when a heavily-policed procession of Maoists greeted workers pouring out of a meeting in a Milanese theatre. The crude provocation from the ranks of riot police, the ensuing clashes and the death of a policeman produced a sharp state response.

The ideal solution would have been, for the authorities, a massive drive against the core of working class militancy, a raid by the police on all known "extremists", while defending the "responsible" T.U. local officers. But the state machine has been clumsy, its vicious attacks haphazard and confused. The neat distinction between rank-and-file activists and respectable trade unionists has been blurred. The lower echelons of the unions and the independent militants have both been attacked by the police, the right-wing press, and the state officials who identify the whole process of struggle with a few "extremist" left groupings buried in the workers' ranks or scattered on the fringes. The Communist Party and the T.U. bosses have resisted, not because of any love of revolutionaries but because their need to keep minimal contact with the base has forced them to fight repression. As a total solution appeared impossible, the attack became a long drawn out process, under the trappings of justice, of summonses to the local magistrates' courts for long-forgotten minor offenses. Workers, publicists, and printers have been arrested, charged, questioned, and then "conditionally discharged". Hundreds of militants are being threatened in this fashion. Because of its continued support to the still-struggling workers of Turin, Potere Operaio was pinned down as the main target, its editor arrested and charged with "inciting workers to destroy Fiat cars in the factories".

The concern of the state in this case reveals its interest throughout. The workers' attack on Fiat cars was taken as a direct assault against the state. The fusion of capitalist production and state planning is perfectly illustrated: Offense against Fiat = Offense against the State. But this unity between the state and the planned production of its cars is its Achilles heel. When this modern integrated structure rests upon the labour of the worker, the worker can use the lever of his labour to smash the capitalist state.

A Friend from Potere Operaio

WEMBLEY FURNITURE WORKERS MAGIC ROUNDABOUT

The Sheffield Cabinet Company with a work force of 150 men engaged in the manufacture of built-in bedroom furniture is the most profitable of Londall Holdings' numerous subsidiaries.

In 1967 the "Sheffield" alone produced dividends of £45,500 and the directors gave themselves £16,222 (a rise of some £5,500 on the previous yearly director fees). Maxie Wrobel, Francis Basset, Willy Carr, Ferrel and Basil Hyman are quite pleased with themselves. As the Sun newspaper put it early in the year, "Fitted furniture has become all the rage and is comfortably beating off the effects of the squeeze on consumer spending. One of the first companies in the field, Londall Holdings should therefore produce record figures for '68. Profits for last year should top £300,000 Londall are not likely to be content even with this splendid show."

The commentator was right. Profits for 1968 came to £334,972 compared with the £244,955 for 1967, and Londall are not content with this splendid show. As the Chairman's 1968 statement puts it, "During this year the company began to feel the benefits of the manufacturing and marketing techniques which had been planned long beforehand in connection with the development of Limelight "Space-fitta" and "Easifit" built-in furniture.... The potential for further growth is considerable and with this in view additional modernisation of production equipment is being undertaken and new 'flowline' specialised machines installed at the Wembley factory." (Londall Holdings. Report and Accounts 1968)

In fact speed-up, rationalisation and modernisation have hit the Wembley factory with a vengeance. Since February 1969 the management has been making larger and larger inroads into job control on the shop floor. In doing this, they have been helped considerably by the collaboration of the shop secretary and the docility of the majority of the shop stewards.

The only organised opposition has come from the unskilled workers, and the woodcutting machinists in 'The mill'. The phased introduction of 'flowline' machines has already reduced the non-skilled work force by one-fifth, the packers suffering the severest cuts. The labourers' attempts to defend job control have been attacked as 'unofficial' by the shop secretary and have led to repeated sackings of labourer militants. In the mill the solidarity of the woodcutting machinists has enabled them to successfully defend job control against the management so far. In September the steward "Wally" was booted upstairs out of the way into a foreman's job. It remains to be seen whether in the future they can resist both the management's and the shop secretary's attempts to smash what little job control still remains with the shop floor.

Written by a labourer, the article below should be seen against this general background of management attempts to destroy what is left of shop floor power to create a docile work force, and of course even more splendid profits for Basil and his daddy.

On the 29th September a man started work in Despatch in the Sheffield Cabinet Co. For nearly three weeks he was like the three wise monkeys in one. Saw no evil, heard no evil, and spoke no evil. In fact Johnson, his

foreman, thought it was his birthday getting such a good, well-behaved worker. Johnson was as surprised as any one else when two weeks later Herr Vosper, production manager and ex-Oberleutenant of the Gestapo, sacked this poor man on two hours notice. "What dastardly crimes had he committed?" everyone asked. "What has he done to deserve such a fate?"

THE MAGIC ROUNDABOUT

Of course the men asked Herr Vosper why he had been sacked. It was as if Herr Vosper had been hypnotised the way he kept on repeating, "The Company, in their wisdom, feel that in the overall picture you are not suitable." AMEN. Being under the impression that he was employed to carry out orders to the best of his ability, the poor sinner pointed out that as far as his immediate foreman and the people he had to work with were concerned, he was very suitable. Herr Vosper then said, "The Company, in their wisdom, feel ...", etc, etc.

Feeling rather puzzled and pretty angry the poor fellow went to see Bert King, the shop chairman and explained the situation to him. (Here I must point out that he wasn't actually a member of the union. He had filled in a membership form and paid his entrance fee but he hadn't as yet been formally proposed and seconded. Of course he didn't think this little detail would make any difference.) So off they went to see Herr Vosper and tackle him again. He repeated yet again the magic formula. Then Bert King, Champion of the Underdog, Defender of the Oppressed, said and I quote, "It's not up to the Union to dictate to the Company whom they employ, and if you're not satisfied with that you can see Segal the shop secretary". When the poor fucker picked himself off the floor he went and told "Zebedee" about it. "Zebedee" said he would have a go. Now while this was going on the bloke thought it would be a good idea to acquaint as many people as possible with his situation. So he told the few friends he had made since he had been there and they told their friends and a lot of people got very upset about it. The sawmill men were ready to walk out. But as the chairman and secretary were still negotiating and it was nearly finishing time it wasn't worth it. Just before knocking-off time "Zebedee" told the 'criminal' that there was nothing he could do but if he wanted to go further up the Union hierarchy he could. By this time the fellow was beginning to feel he wasn't wanted so he went to see his friends again and everybody thought it would be a good idea if he came in the following day and addressed a lunchtime meeting.

FRIENDS, ROMANS, COUNTRYMEN

The following day he made a quick dash past the gateman into the canteen where he asked the chairman's and shop secretary's permission to address the meeting. To his everlasting amazement he was told that they weren't even going to discuss his case, and it was only when some of his supporters persisted that Segal and King relented, although they insisted that as he wasn't a member of the union he could not even be present at the meeting, let alone speak. However, he was assured by his friends that he would be well represented so he left it at that.

GUILTY OR NOT GUILTY?

It was at this meeting that the secrets, known previously only to a few, started to come out into the open. It was suggested that this bloke had been a militant shop steward at his last job and when the Sheffield Cabinet Co. had written to his ex-employers they had heard he was a 'labittirrer'. Worse than that it turned out that he was also a personal friend of an ex-employee of the firm because of his militancy as the labourers' shop steward had been a thorn in the side of Segal and the other bosses of the Sheffield Cabinet Co. Obviously they didn't want another militant on their hands. However, as one of the woodcutting machinists pointed out, who he mixed with shouldn't make any difference, and if it did then one of the women who was the grand-daughter of a Suffragette should get the sack too.

In the end it was agreed that the whole committee was to go back into the office, and find out why he had been sacked, reporting back to the shop the following day, Friday. So all that Thursday afternoon and the following morning they were in the office.

"WE'D LIKE TO DO SOMETHING, BUT ..."

At lunchtime Friday the chaps tried to get in the gate but the security man stopped him saying that it was more than his job was worth to let him in. It was announced at the meeting that the management had offered more money and better conditions provided the shop drop the case. It was pointed out by "Zebedee" that the bloke had only been there three weeks; that he wasn't a union member; that he didn't think there was anything he could do about it; and if they did try to do anything they would jeopardise the management's offer of better money and conditions. In fact Segal pulled in everything but the kitchen sink making it quite obvious that regardless of what the shop felt, he as their elected representative was more concerned in doing a deal with the management to make life easy for himself and Basil Hyman, than in doing what the shop floor wanted.

Sadly but not surprisingly the shop reacted in the way they've become resigned to doing each time Segal returns from the office after selling them out. A vote was taken and they decided to drop the case.

Now I'm not suggesting that Segal is getting a payoff from the management, on the contrary he's too stupid to ask for it, but the fact that he works hand-in-hand with the management is indisputable. At first he said he couldn't do anything; he then attempted to prevent the case reaching the shop floor for open discussion; and when forced by the shop to hold a meeting he refused to let the sacked man address the floor or even sit in on the meeting. Coupled with this he virtually suggested that being a militant shop steward was a crime in itself and that the bloke deserved the sack for being acquainted with the previous labourer shop steward. Finally he dangled the ludicrous bribe of better conditions and higher pay offered by the management if the shop floor dropped the case. On the whole very suspect behaviour for a shop floor official who as a Branch Secretary of the National Union of Furniture Trade Operatives ought more than anybody else to be on his toes against management. We get used to the union executive 'big boys' collaborating with management to discipline 'their' workers but it's a lot more disturbing to get it in Branch Officials who after all are supposed to be in much closer contact with the rank-and-file. In this case Johnson, the bloke's foreman put up more of a fight than "Zebedee".

The solution to the problem is quite simple. All that was needed was a threat of shop floor militancy. The management didn't have a leg to stand on. Both Segal and Bert King knew this yet they refused to do what any self-respecting trade unionist would have done in this position.

Of course "Zebedee" isn't the only one to blame. King deserves his share but only in so much as he does what Segal tells him. It should be pointed out that neither of them had the guts to come out and tell the bloke the result of the meeting. As for the rest of the shop, with the exception of those that opposed "Zebedee" vocally, they deserve everything they get if at this stage they still ease their consciences by pretending to believe in the management's promises of better pay and conditions in exchange for their continued silence and servility.

CONCLUSIONS

There are two ways to stop the Sheffield Cabinet Co. being turned into

a stamping ground for management. Either the lads get rid of "Zebedee"*, or alternatively ignore him altogether and begin acting themselves to defend their own interests. For as long as "Zebedee" holds the shop floor reins for Basil all attempts to aintain some kind of job control, over and against the management's attempts to smash it, will be defeated.

This was made only too clear at the Wednesday meeting of October 15 when Segal informed everyone that Basil wanted to invest a quarter of a million pounds in the business, but as he couldn't get sufficient labour it would be necessary for everyone "to co-operate in full with the management." It never seemed to enter "Zebedee's" head to tell the management to use some of the spare money in making the pay and conditions more attractive, thus drawing in more workers. He obviously realises the implications of 'co-operation in full with the management'- but do the rest of the shop?

How long are they prepared to stand and watch workers with guts enough to speak up, sold out and sacked in return for ludicrous promises of better pay and conditions if they keep their mouths shut, which is what 'co-operate in full' means. In struggles over the past year on the issues of pay and increased job control** even the unskilled workers at the Sheffield Cabinet Co. have found that three things are never handed out to 'good boys' but are taken by workers who are prepared to act for themselves.

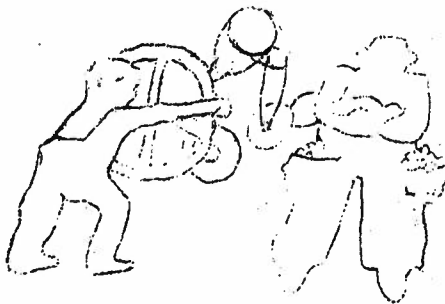
Ultimately it comes down to just that. If the shop are not prepared to start thinking and doing for themselves they might as well give up now.

As for the bloke who got sacked, he's gone on to fresh fields and pastures new.

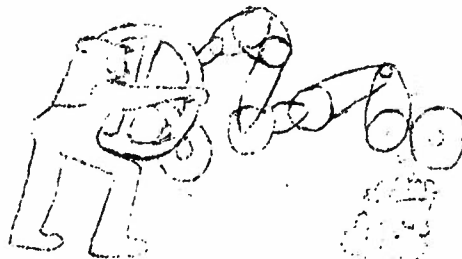
*At the beginning of July people had come to realise this. A general meeting of the lads overwhelmingly supported a vote of no confidence in the shop secretary. Of 130 people present only 14 believed that "Zebedee", whatever his past record, was still interested in delivering the goods. He got back on a technicality - no one else thought they could do the job. A classic example of making a job for yourself.

**See Solidarity, North London Vol.5; No.6 "Furniture workers show show the way"

Vol.5; No.8 "Furniture workers fight"



THE BOSS NEEDS YOU...



...YOU DON'T NEED HIM

DANGER! SPIES AT WORK

Most of the facts and figures in this article were drawn from the pamphlet published by the Labour Research Department, "A Subversive Guide to the Economic League".

The Economic League is an employers organisation well known to many workers. Founded in 1919 its stated objects are "To promote and improve the knowledge and study of economics...from the standpoint that the preservation of personal freedom and free enterprise is essential to national well-being. While maintaining its complete independence of any political party the League most actively oppose all subversive forces - whatever their origin and inspiration - that seek to undermine the security of Britain in general and British industry in particular."

THE OUTWARD SIGNS

For most people the only time they come across the League is when they are handed one of the 22 million leaflets which the League distributed last year. That's only a small part of their work. They also hold 24,250 outdoor meetings and group talks, covered 6,270 press column inches, organised 6,340 courses for apprentices and 3,750 for supervisors, employed 39 speakers and training staff, 71 leaflet distributors, nine part-time lecturers. The cost for this and their other activities was about £266,000.

HE WHO PAYS THE PIPER.....

The League does not disclose its sources of income but the Labour Research Department has collected information on about 154 firms who gave the League £61,000 between them over a twelve month period. The list of firms probably provides a reasonable sample of the League's support. Their claim to be non-political soon goes out the window when you see half the firms listed gave money to the Tory party as well.

For instance, Guest, Keen and Nettlefold which gave £3,780 to the League, gave £33,431 to the Conservative party. Tate and Lyle, which gave £1,575 to the League, gave £7,788, to the Tories.

.....ALSO CALLS THE TUNE

The majority of the 40 men who run the Economic League are company directors or former company directors. They include 30 who hold between them well over 230 directorships, five who were formerly company directors and two who describe themselves as 'industrialists'. The big banks are well represented - Lord Runciman, a League vice president, is also deputy chairman of Lloyds Bank; Col. J.P.Hunt, League Council member, is on the Midland Bank.

* 'We say we are going to oppose subversion, and by God we do. It quite frequently happens that trade unionists who feel as strongly as we do about the activities of subversives in their unions will give us information, and often anonymously'. - Harry Whelton, League publicity director. Business Observer, 19th October 1969

The Council includes some very big names associated with some very big firms. Chairman of the League, Eric Turner, is chairman of Birmingham Small Arms. Council members include additionally Raymond P. Brookes, chairman of Guest, Keen and Nottelfold, Sir Halford Reddish of Rugby Portland Cement, Morton Oliphant of Tate and Lyle and David Barran of Shell Transport and Trading. The League's political affiliation is obvious when you know that the President is a Tory peer and that three other members are ex-Tory M.P.'s.

THEIR PROPAGANDA

The crap they try to ram down people's throats is practically unbelievable. In their 1969 series they tried to tell us that redundancy is good for us, that we all benefit every day from the fiddling in the City of London and that because trade union funds and occupational pension funds are often invested in industry about 22½ million people are "indirect investors" and therefore "one way or the other we all benefit" from profits. What they haven't said is that 75 per cent of private property is owned by 5 per cent of the adult population or that since 2 per cent. The attitude they take to strikes is typical smear propaganda. They never blame the workers themselves for striking, it's always "outside influences" and of course they never name names. After all they might be talking about someone or something we know all the facts about and that wouldn't do at all. It's much better if we're ignorant, then we can hardly dispute anything they write. Their latest effort, Leaflet No. 23, smears several big struggles. Distinguished only by its vagueness, it lists the G.E.C. occupation attempt in Liverpool, the Barbican strike, and the Civil Rights struggle in Northern Ireland as "examples that show subversive groups are geared to go into action whenever and where-ever exploitable situations exist or can be created". Quite right too, in the case of Ireland it was extremist groups such as B Specials while in Liverpool the extremist who created the exploitable situation was one Arnold Weinstock, the Managing Director of G.E.C..

A SPECIAL BRANCH FOR BOSSES

The most damaging part of the League's work is secret. Extract from the Guardian, January, 1969 "It derives its income from industrial subscribers all over the country and provides in return a lecture service for apprentices and supervisors and a 'counter-subversive service' to employers. This is generally held by the trade unions to consist of information about militant trade unionists. In a circular instruction to the field workers in its ten regional offices the League says that when an approach is made to a potential industrial subscriber the firm should be told that much of the League's work is secret....The director must not be told straight away what the League does; this information is vouchsafed only at personal interviews. "If the director asks for details of our work, he should be told that some of it is highly confidential and therefore cannot be put in writing." " And from the Observer of 19 October, 1969...."One very large company which makes a four-figure donation says flatly that the League "does a hell of a lot of security vetting for us on political grounds"."

Apart from the blacklists the League issues a weekly "Two Minute News Review" for management. It consists mainly of industrial news that has already appeared in the various left wing publications. In 1968 the League issued a booklet entitled "The Agitators, Extremist Activities in British Industry". This booklet illustrates their definition of an extremist. They even go so far as to list Hugh Scanlon and Jack Jones,

both members of the T.U.C., and the entire list of sponsors of Voice of the Unions which includes among other people thirteen Labour MPs. Their idea of an extremist is anyone who hasn't got their nose permanently thrust up the bosses arse.

Quite often firms that have a probationary period draw on the League to help vet newcomers to a factory for possible militancy. Paul Ferris, investigating the political contributions of big business, wrote in the Business Observer of 19th October, 1969, "Employers can ask it (the Economic League) for information about trouble-makers and 'subversive elements' - in particular Communists". It can of course be fought by the shop floor getting together and refusing to allow any newcomer to be sacked without apparent reason.**

SOCK IT TO THEM

The best thing to do with Economic League leaflets is to tear them up in front of the distributors. Never mind the fact that they might look like harmless old men and women. The fact is that they are not only paid to distribute that crap but they actually believe it. That's how best to deal with the problem. They'll soon get tired of coming round if everybody tears up their leaflets and if we support each other where necessary their blacklist won't be so effective either.

C.C.

*The whole topic is quite murky. "Fresh controversy is expected over the compulsory disclosure by companies of their donations to political organizations after an internal decision in the Board of Trade, approved by the President Roy Mason, against the prosecution of Lloyds Bank for not showing in the directors' report a £2,000 donation to the Economic League"- Times Business News, December 1, 1969

**See in this issue the article "Wembley: Furniture Workers Magic Roundabout" for a report on a specific case of this kind of victimisation.

"... lies, misrepresentation, defamation, character assassination ..." - Edward Short, Secretary of State for Education

Short was referring to militants at L.S.E. last year, but he might just as well have been describing the newspaper accounts of the struggle.

Now, two student militants have given their version of the campaigns waged against Lord Robbins, the Chairman of the L.S.E. Board of Governors and also of the Financial Times; Lord Robens, Chairman of the National Coal Board; Sir Aubrey Jones of the Prices and Incomes Board fame, the T.U.C.'s Victor Feather, and the rest of the L.S.E. Governors:

L.S.E.: THE NATIVES ARE RESTLESS
by Paul Hoch and Vic Schoenbach

Paperback book available for 10/- postage included from Solidarity
West London, c/o M. Duncan, 15 Taylors Green, London, W.3

GLASSO'S AGAIN

General and Industrial Paints in Perivale, Wembley employs about two hundred men manufacturing paints and varnishes much of it for the car industry (Fords, B.M.C., Vauxhall etc.)

Our first issue carried an article written by a Glasso's worker. Apparently it was a great success. We've recieved reports telling us that foremen not mentioned in the article have been taking the mickey out of those that were. This isn't that unusual because most members of any management hate each other's guts anyway, but we're glad to be able to add to the havoc.

Last issue we promised an article on the overtime question but as we recieved this piece from another worker in Glasso's we've decided to print it instead. We feel the writer makes a legitimate point when he says there is an unfair 'racket' operating in Glasso's. - Eds.

DOUBLE TAKE

Not all the lads realise that the management here are working a racket with our holiday entitlements. They 'allow' each worker a total of six unpaid days out. If the worker exceeds the six day limit by even half a day, he not only loses the pay for it but when his holidays are due the company steps in again deducting the day or days he's already lost once more, this time from his holiday pay. Not only is the management ratting on normal holiday pay procedure, they are also caning the worker twice. This practice applies not only to the two week summer holiday but to the one week winter holiday as well.

WHAT DO WE DO?

For a start we might as well face the fact that sitting and moaning about this will solve nothing. It's time that workers here began to realise that only by using their power and initiative will they correct this and other injustices.

Of course we don't expect the backing of the blue-eyed boys - the so-called men that run around making tea for the guv'nors. These men are weak and will continue to lick the bosses' arse till they die. Yet this ought not to prevent the majority from acting to improve bad conditions.

As organized workers of the Chemical Workers' Union there is an obvious first step we can take in fighting this holiday pay fiddle and that is the calling of a general meeting where we could put it to our chief steward Wally Lawless that we want this set-up changed and that he can rely on our full backing in the fight against management to get it changed.

Baron Askew

We understand that Glasso's management have photostated our first issue to try and find out about us. There's no need to go to all that trouble. Anyone who wants our magazine regularly send 10/- to:
M. Duncan, 15 Taylor's Green, London W.3
and we will send twelve issues post paid.

N W POLY

SKIRMISHES IN THE POLYTECHNICS

As the authorities are struggling to hold down workers with one hand and university students with the other, militancy is coming to the surface in a third area -- the polytechnics. Already this year polytech students have occupied a college (Bournemouth), struck and demonstrated in support of the teachers (Enfield, Kilburn, and others), and even locked their Governors in a meeting room for several hours (Enfield).

Student 'unrest' in this sector is particularly unwelcome to the authorities because:

1. by the Government's own admission, the system of higher education has resulted in a bad deal for polytechnic students, giving them second-class status in qualifications, teaching standards, buildings, libraries, union and social facilities, and most obviously post-graduation job possibilities.
2. while the press has found it easy to condemn university students' struggles as the antics of the privileged few, this will be more difficult with polytechnic students, since almost all of them go on to white-collar working class jobs, and many both work and study at the same time.
3. people who have learned the value of collective action and militancy while students are unlikely to put up with being shoved around when they start work.

Moreover, the growing awareness of polytechnic students is coming at a time when the whole polytechnic sector is undergoing a massive rationalisation, with administrators scurrying after the bosses' arse, trying to get the promotions that are opening up. In fact, at this very moment the authorities are busily installing new bar and common room facilities along lines recommended by the Parliamentary Select Committee in an effort to buy off student militancy. But young people who are starting to question the education they are receiving are unlikely to be put off by a pint or two in comfortable surroundings.

DIVIDE AND RULE

North Western Polytechnic is one of the more favoured colleges, yet it contains many of the defects that plague the higher education system's black sheep. The college's 3,000 students are split among four buildings - Kentish Town, Camden Town, Highbury, and Essex Road. The planned merger with Northern Polytechnic will add three more buildings in Holloway. With no direct public transport between many of the branches, travel time is a minimum of a half hour. Some academic community!

In addition to this physical separation, there is very little contact between students on different courses. In fact, social work students attend classes on two days only, spending the remaining three days on the job. Teaching studies students are out a part of each year doing teaching practice. And with nothing going on in the evenings, the college is very much a 9-5 place. (Even so, N.W. Poly is relatively well off: most colleges have students on day release or short sandwich courses who tend to be completely isolated from

the others.)

THE BEGINNINGS OF COLLECTIVE ACTION

But despite all these drawbacks to a sense of solidarity and the absence of any tradition of trade union and class struggle, the students at N.W. Poly have been active on a number of issues, and indications are that this is only the beginning.

When the N.U.T. held its one day strike several weeks ago, the N.W. Poly Students Union voted to strike in support. Students joined the N.U.T. demonstration, and sent in a message of support. Their contingent was one of the largest.

The students also participated heavily in the University of London anti-racialism demonstrations and sent a bus to Twickenham to help stop the Springboks tour. But in demonstrating in support of people outside the college, N.W. Poly students realised that direct action could be used on internal issues as well.

THE CANTEENS

A week after the N.U.T. strike, a general meeting of the Highbury branch union decided to boycott their canteen for one week. The issues were, simply, "low quality, high prices, and bad service through bad management". Their action was in fact in line with developments in the other three branches. Last year, a boycott had been threatened at Essex Road, winning concessions on the morning of the scheduled day; and the beginnings of agitation on the issue had won gains also for the Camden Town branch. At Kentish Town, there was sufficient concern to generate a partial boycott in solidarity with the first day of the week protest in the Highbury building.

HEY DIDDLE DIDDLE, THE CAT AND THE FIDDLE

So success was the boycott that before the week was up, the Principal himself showed up to meet with a 'small group' of students. But the students weren't having anything to do with the Principal chatting up a few of their mates, so when the boss arrived he found that the small group consisted of 150 students and staff, all waiting to hear him. This sudden display of popularity took the poor man aback. Still, he managed to find a few interesting things to say.

The caterer concerned is Gardner-Merchants Ltd., a subsidiary of the giant Trust Houses group - whose chairman, Sir Geoffrey Crowther, formerly headed the important Central Advisory Committee on Education. Saunders-Harris admitted they received a tidy sum of £2,000 per year for 'managing' the N.W. Poly canteens. But that's not all. In addition, the college picks up the tab for any losses Gardner-Merchants incurs - last year, a modest £3,000. So Gardner-Merchants pulls £5,000 - a £3,000 loss and a £2,000 fee for their good management!

You may wonder why a canteen with free rent, light, heat, low staff wages, and no S.E.T. to pay makes a £3,000 loss. Probably has something to do with high materials cost. But before you go feeling sorry for Gardner-Merchants, remember that they get most of their supplies from other companies in the same Trust Houses group. It's called keeping it all in the family, or, God helps those who help themselves....

Saunders-Harris, the principal, couldn't stay. But before the meeting broke up, the branch union voted to request the dismissal of Gardner-Merchants and call for the future managers to be the staff and students themselves.

The canteen boycott certainly didn't help Saunders-Harris' chances for being designated super-boss of the coming super-polytechnic. But in fact, his troubles were just beginning.

The very next day, the students' union for all four buildings met at the Kentish Town building to consider what action to take in furtherance of their demand for a greater say in the running of the college. Seven months earlier they had offered to negotiate on the basis of their demand for 50% representation on the college's Academic Board. But the Principal and his fellow academic windbags had only found time for two hours negotiations all term. The last 'negotiating' session between student union representatives and the Principal had ended when the Principal chucked them out of his office after two minutes. Now, the Principal was saying that it was impossible to call an Academic Board meeting to re-consider the students' demand during the remainder of the term: there was "no procedure" for doing so. Students with long memories knew that the Principal had 'found' such a procedure when he called an emergency meeting last year. In any case, the Academic Board has no procedures - or even a constitution - because the whole thing was set up by the Principal as a way of consulting his retainers.

Students debated a motion to sit-in for twelve hours to show their determination that negotiations be resumed. After several hours of discussion the motion was amended to call for a twenty-four hour occupation and was then passed overwhelmingly.

The occupation began immediately. Over 250 people, including visitors from Borough, Woolwich, and Enfield polys, Hornsey, City University and Bedford College, took part in the seminars, film shows including one on the Columbia University revolt, free food, and general assemblies. A volunteer occupation committee held a strategy discussion all night. Its plan for barricading the corridors leading to the administrative offices, but for not interfering with lectures or classes, was approved by the 7:00 AM general assembly.

BARRICADES

Tables were piled up at either end of the corridors, and about 40 students manned each pair. Spirit was very high. Others sat at an information table and greeted arriving students with a special issue of the college newspaper, Stereo, produced that night.

Leaflets were also distributed at the other three buildings and at Northern Polytechnic. At Northern, the principle there asked the North Western student to leave. Despite the impending merger and a reciprocal arrangement between the Northern and North Western students' unions, he deemed it more prudent to try to keep his students ignorant of what was happening.

The occupying students did not interfere with lectures and classes. But in fact many of these were cancelled by the authorities. Despite this pressure tactic, most students agreed with the occupation, and many joined. That afternoon, another general assembly meeting decided to increase the amount of student 'representation' at a departmental meeting due to take place an hour later. About 40 students waited outside for the academics to appear. The academics, however, decided they didn't have to meet after all.

When evening came, students held another general assembly. Although many had had almost no sleep in 36 hours, there was strong support for continuing the occupation another twenty-four hours to force a meeting with the principle: Saunders-Harris and the entire administrative offi-

cialdom had stayed away from the college all day. After a long meeting, it was agreed to terminate the occupation as scheduled, and leave further action for later. The barricades were dismantled, the tables replaced, and the area swept up. Round one had ended.

UNITED WE STAND

Since the occupation, no overt victimisation has taken place. Various students have suddenly received warnings about their academic work. But the students are much too together to make disciplinary action feasible.

The students are in a very strong position. Having got some experience with collective action in support of their rights, they are beginning to glimpse their potential strength. Having tasted a feeling of community, they realise that education can be more meaningful than the empty relationships and hollow rituals that make up life at North Western Poly. The New Year should see some interesting developments.

Solidarity Arsenal

If you haven't read

THE GREAT FLINT SIT DOWN STRIKE AGAINST GENERAL
MORRE, 1936 -- 1937

you ought to !

This pamphlet deals in depth with how the American auto workers of 1937 planned, executed and internally organised their occupation of the Flint plants.

The role of the women; the tactics of management, police and state officials; and the role of the A.F.L. bureaucrats are all gone into.

Of crucial importance to industrial militants today!

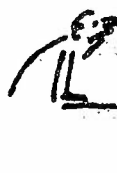
Available from Solidarity North London, c/o H. Russell
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And also recently issued:


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 BROTHERS, I HEAR YOU'VE STOPPED WORK...


☞ ☞ ☞ ☞ ☞ ☞ ☞ ☞ YES! WE HAVE! THAT'S RIGHT!

 IF YOU'VE DOWNED TOOLS YOU MUST HAVE A GRIEVANCE
I'M YOUR UNION OFFICIAL. DONT HIDE ANYTHING FROM ME...


☞ ☞ ☞ ☞ ☞ ☞ ☞ ☞

 IT'S YOUR WAGES, I BET. YOU WANTA RISE, DONT YOU?
THAT'S IT, EH?

☞ ☞ ☞ ☞ ☞ ☞ ☞ ☞


 OR IS IT BONUS? OR OVERTIME? I'LL HAVE TO SUBMIT
A REPORT TO THE GOVERNMENT AND TO THE EMPLOYERS. I'M
YOUR REPRESENTATIVE. TELL ME!

☞ ☞ ☞ ☞ ☞ ☞ ☞ ☞

 YOU FUCKING BASTARDS!
ARE YOU GOING TO TELL ME
WHY THE BLOODY HELL YOU'RE
ON STRIKE?

WE WANT THE REVOLUTION...

☞ ☞ ☞ ☞ ☞ ☞ ☞ ☞

 THE REVOLUTION?
YOU'RE NUTS!
THE BOSSES AND
GOVERNMENT WOULD
NEVER AGREE!

☞ ☞ ☞ ☞ ☞ ☞ ☞ ☞
WOLINSKI