



## NALGO

- \* DOCK WORKERS SET TO RE-GROUP
- \* OIL WORKERS WIN KEY BATTLE
- \* LOCAL GOVERNMENT WORKERS SUSTAIN ACTION

# NEW PHASE OF STRUGGLE

INDUSTRIAL action by local government workers is gaining momentum, and the employers are already showing signs of cracking under the strain.

At national pay talks on August 1, the employers miraculously discovered they could increase their 'final' offer, and drop one of their onerous strings. The pay increase wasn't good enough, however. And the employers still want to abolish the national grading system.

### Divisions

Even with the protection of the existing staff, it is quite clear that this would quickly lead to individualised and lower pay. It would also create divisions in offices.

These are all good reasons for the employers to do their best to get rid of the national grading system, but they won't get away with it. Indefinite strikes by small sections of the NALGO membership will soon be biting. At Waltham Forest, for instance, staff responsible for rate payments, pursuing bad debts, and negotiating the council's borrowing and lending are on strike. Those dealing with planning

applications and searches for land and property deals will soon be joining them. Similar action is taking place in many areas.

Under this sort of pressure, some councils have already crumbled. Last week, in a significant breakthrough Swansea City Council joined the growing ranks of local authorities prepared to drop the service condition strings from the pay talks. Local NALGO members had kidnapped council mail for three weeks until a statement was forthcoming. This move is likely to prompt further defections from the Thatcherite ranks.

Now both sides are gearing up for a new round of negotiations on August 11. Local union branches will be balloting on further action. They will also be lobbying and negotiating with the local employers to reject the gradings string. These local negotiations can be very revealing and will be important for the future plans of each branch.

NALGO members have, however, had to cope with some divisions within their own ranks. Most notable have been those who have fallen for 'militant' rhetoric for all out indefinite strikes.

The real leaders of the dispute have long argued that this battle would be a long, drawn out affair, and that an all out strike by all members could not be sustained and would end in division and recrimination.

Instead, they have pitched it to maximise members' involvement, with some on indefinite strike for maximum effect, and other balloted for further national strikes. This way the whole membership will be involved, and the 5% or so on indefinite strike will not be isolated.

As the signs of weakness in the employers' ranks show; this approach is working. It is also helping to bring together the two key unions, NALGO and NUPE, in joint action, joint ballots and joint publicity. That's good news for their forthcoming merger.

### Signal victory

Steps have already been taken towards a signal victory in the first ever national pay dispute by local government non-manual workers. Unity, discipline and organisation have been seen to pay off, and if we maintain them, the outlook is good.

industry where there are over 40 ports outside the registered scheme, and where thousands of non-registered workers work in registered ports, the term 'national dock strike' was a misnomer anyway. Both registered and non-registered dockers need their union, the TGWU, more than ever.

Guerrilla struggle is the order of the day now: struggle to re-establish union organisation and local agreements, port by port, employer by employer.

### HOWZAT!

IN JUNE Geoffrey Howe wrote to the NUM: "We firmly believe that a strong and independent trade union movement is an important and powerful force in helping to create conditions for economic, social and political change in South Africa." Well, after that, she had to sack him, before he started talking about us having some of that in Britain.

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## Strength of union in North Sea

NORTH SEA oil workers have called off their series of strikes after achieving a breakthrough in forcing the contractors - and behind them the major oil companies - to negotiate on union recognition. Recognition and safety as well as pay were all demands in the series of rolling 24 hour strikes in the North Sea gas and oil rigs.

Threats of dismissal had been successfully countered by sit-ins. A sit-in on a gang-way linking the Shell Brent Charlie platform to its accommodation unit prevented the company from isolating the men.

Over 3000 workers on 22 rigs had taken part in the strike action in face of threats of dismissal by Mogul. Action spread after talks broke down between the contractors and the workers'

Offshore Industry Liaison Committee. Distancing themselves from the dispute, the oil companies began dismissing the subcontractors - but in marching to the BP National HQ in Glasgow workers pointed the finger at the Government - in tandem with the oil companies.

The action was coordinated with workers onshore at terminals such as Sullom Voe, Mossmorran and Grange-mouth, with workers in the Newcastle area as well as with support from Norwegian oil workers.

The safety aspect has been uppermost in these workers' minds especially following the recent anniversary memorial to the dead of the Piper Alpha rig disaster. It has been a year of turbulence and struggle in the North Sea industry's 25-year history.



British troops enter Ireland - August 1969. Photo: Press Association

## Editorial

### END THE OCCUPATION OF IRELAND

IRELAND is not West Britain but another country. Not another race but a different nationality. And it is one nation, not two.

It cannot be in Britain's interest to remain in Northern Ireland, although it still forces its unwelcome attentions on a country with a mind of its own. And hankering after the British Empire is like hoping to revive that music hall years after the cinematic demise of the Regal, the Odeon and the Gaumont.

When, as in the case of Ireland, people fight for their country's freedom, they don't just fight for a sod of turf or for green fields, but for what they envisage being able to do with their country once they have removed the blot on the landscape. Ireland has been Green for ages; it's time it was Red.

Ireland since the 1920s has wasted opportunities to develop its economy, to separate Church and State (without which national unity is not possible), and to encourage forward-looking social policies. Still its major export is people. Failure to build an economy to meet its people's needs, robs Ireland of its vitality as young people build other people's countries instead. Republicans in Ireland have argued thus for decades.

### Irish unite

But there can only be a united Ireland if the Irish unite. Too many in the south have turned away from events in the north, preferring to think of their fellow countrymen and women as a breed apart. So Irish duplicity has assisted the continued occupation.

In Britain the demand should be for the troops to go. Although we have had a destructive decade of Thatcher, twenty years with thousands of troops in Ireland, and all that implies, have helped rot British society. Britain has been brutalised by a war it cannot hope to win. There is no policy for victory in Ireland because there can be no victory.

The problem is not about a few troublesome housing estates where, for peculiar reasons of ancient history, the inhabitants are anti-British. And just as misleading is the media coverage that places every soldier's funeral within the narrow aperture of 'personal tragedy': he had just arrived; he was about to leave; his daughter gets married next week. Spurious significance to add melodrama to News at Ten and tabloid TV, and thoroughly dishonest.

This party in 1969 opposed British troops being sent, when others imagined it was about 'protecting Catholics' or, later, being 'anti-internment'. The truth must be faced in this country in 1989 that it is time to go.

## Patients fight SA apartheid

LAST WEDNESDAY (August 2nd) witnessed a key event in the struggle against apartheid in South Africa. At several hospitals in Transvaal and Natal provinces, black people in need of medical attention presented themselves at "whites only" hospitals. Many were treated.

At one hospital, Addington, 140 people arrived for treatment while 2000 township supporters cheered outside. No one objected, even the police could only stand and watch.

There is an acute shortage of hospital beds for blacks and a glut of them for whites. The whites-only hospital in Johannesburg, for example, uses only 830 of its 1,800 beds.

The moral point, courageously made and won, is a political milestone in South Africa (who, unless a declared racist or fascist, could not agree?) and will contribute enormously to the struggle there.

Like the civil rights stands taken by blacks in the southern US states earlier this century, there can be no going back. When humanity asserts itself in this simple and clever way its political mark is indelible.

# Writing with a purpose - to change things

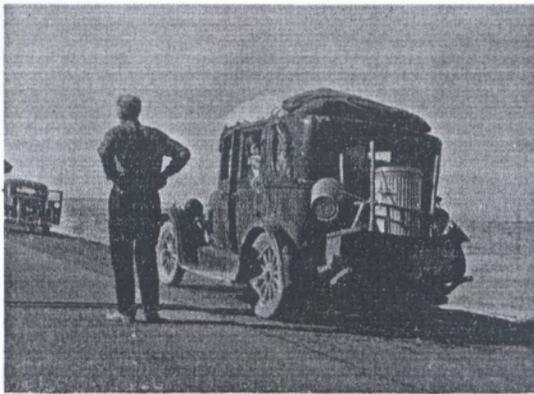
SO WHAT'S new? On yer bike, for work - property reclamation for non-payment of mortgages (up again!!) Plenty of work elsewhere but never where you want it.

This year is the 50th anniversary of the publication of John Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath*. The epic novel of the Okies flight to California from the Dust Bowl.

A lucky few saw a brilliant production of *The Grapes of Wrath* at the National Theatre recently. What a shame that it only ran for one week!

Steinbeck's classic novel was adapted for the stage by Frank Galati of the Steppenwolf Theatre Company, Chicago. He states, "it was never my purpose to turn this novel into a play, to change its modality; I sought instead to find out what the novel itself would feel like if it took the stage."

The Hollywood film of *The Grapes of Wrath*, starring Henry Fonda, has always been praised but it does make several significant departures from the novel. Galati refers to the film to support the notion that though the spirit of a work may be preserved through certain structural changes, the very



"Well the sun came shining and I was strolling  
Through wheat fields waving and dust clouds rolling  
And a voice was sounding  
As the fog was lifting  
Saying this land was made for you and me." Woody Guthrie

meaning of the work may be altered. Steinbeck was urged by the publishers to change his ending i.e. Rose of Sharon giving her breast to the starving man in the barn. Steinbeck refused, "I have tried to write this book the way lives are being lived

not the way books are written... I know that books lead to a strong deep climax. This one doesn't except by implication and the reader must bring the implication to it. If he doesn't, it wasn't the book for him to read."

## Documenting the people and their struggles in the turbulent 20th century

JORIS IVENS, one of the great progressive documentary film-makers of the 20th century, died recently at the age of 91. Always ready to support working class struggles, he worked tirelessly in Europe, the Soviet Union, America and the Far East making over 60 films portraying the efforts of working people to build a better life.

One of his first films in the 1920s covered the reclamation of the Zuydersee in his native Holland. In 1932 he made his first trip to the Soviet Union to film 'Song of the Heroes'. The next year saw him in Belgium documenting the terrible conditions

of mining communities there - communities that are fighting today to preserve their last remaining pit.

He covered the Spanish Civil War from the Government side, making one of his best films, 'The Spanish Earth'. Next began his long association with China with his film, 'The 400 Million'. Exiled from Holland during the war, he made a number of New Deal films in the USA. He also charted the revolutions in China, Vietnam and Cuba over the course of many years.

Perhaps his best known series on China was made in the early 1970s, under the general title of

'How Yukong Moved the Mountains'. These films covered various aspects of life in rural communes, fishing villages, factories and schools.

A memorable scene involved a professor of metallurgy relating how he had been sent to a steel works during the Cultural Revolution. It was a profound shock for him, he said. At one point he was asked to go out into the stock yard and draw out supplies of a particular type of steel. All his knowledge of the chemical formulae of steels could not help him identify what he was looking for from among the stacks of steel.

A worker came along and asked why he was looking puzzled. He explained his problems and was amazed when the worker took a hammer and began tapping the steel. He soon found what he was looking for by the particular sound it made.

The lesson he learned from this, said the chastened professor, was that all the theory in the world was not enough, if it was not wedded to practical experience.

It is tragic that since these films were made, so much progress has been rolled back in China - the communes abolished, individualism encouraged and

One may recall that the film closes on Ma Joad's speech (transposed from a much earlier chapter in the novel) "We're the people that live. They ain't gonna wipe us out. Why, we're the people - we go on."

Galati, being very conscious of the meaning of the work, kept to Steinbeck's chosen closure.

Elaine, John Steinbeck's widow, had for the past 20 years, as caretaker of her husband's estate, fought shy of a theatrical presentation of the book. Her main reason was that she did not believe that the theatre and the theatre-going public could cope with a novel of such breadth on stage. She could not ignore this dramatisation however, and actively supported it.

In her introduction to the play she recalls that Eleanor Roosevelt told her and John Steinbeck how she was often asked on a visit to the Soviet Union if the events of *The Grapes of Wrath* could happen again in the United States. Eleanor said she always replied "No! Franklin Roosevelt and John Steinbeck have made sure of that!" John Steinbeck said quietly to his wife "That's why I write."

corruption, unemployment and crime once again rampant. The recent massacres in China had a profound effect on Joris Ivens. Summoning up all his strength, he took part in protest demonstrations in Paris against the killings only days before he died.

Joris Ivens will be remembered for his deep humanity, his technical skill and ability to draw out the best from ordinary people who were the stars of his films. His films will live on as a true monument to his achievement. Those who watched 'Spanish Earth' on Channel 4 on August 3 will have seen Ivens at work.

## Setting out the path of revolution in South Africa

'Comrades, we have come a long way' said General Secretary Joe Slovo, opening the recent 7th Congress of the South African Communist Party (SACP). 'This congress,' he continued, 'is a most significant measure of what we are. It is the biggest since the re-establishment of our party in the underground in 1953. For the first time in our post-sixties history we are having a Congress with the participation of delegates from every region of our underground.'

Held under the slogans 'Build the Party' and 'Build the Home Front', Congress took stock of the current situation in South Africa, put the strengthening of the underground centre stage and adopted a new programme 'The Path to Power'.

### Fragile unity

The programme is based upon the quality of the apartheid regime's current crisis. South African capitalism is facing an economic impasse exacerbated by its growing international isolation. This has forced it to restructure itself and this has shattered the fragile unity of interests within the minority white population.

While 'South African capitalism seeks a more stable better qualified and higher consuming workforce, some sections of the white working class and small business owners, together with non-monopoly capitalists from the agricultural and manufacturing sectors, are resisting. Some are in favour of greater reform to ward off revolution, while

others are pulled towards the growing ranks of the ultra right and neo-fascist forces.

Increasing numbers of whites are, however, turning away from thoughts of how best to maintain white minority rule and are questioning whether apartheid can ever bring peace and security to South Africa. Pressure from these whites, making common cause with the continued resistance and struggle of the black masses in the face of the most vicious repression, deepens the political crisis.

### Increased tempo

The Government realises it can no longer rule in the old way, hence the increasing efforts to secure some form of black participation in a subordinate form of civil government, the latest manifestation being F W de Klerk's 'give me five years' plea to reform South Africa. The essence of the crisis is the failure of these efforts. The announcement of every new initiative only serves to increase the tempo of revolutionary struggle.

The demand for fundamental change grows as the struggle increases. A real change can only be achieved by the destruction of existing state institutions and the creation of a united, non-racial and democratic South Africa. This National Democratic Revolution has been the subject of much criticism from those both inside and outside South Africa who argue that the establishment of socialism should be at the top of the agenda.

The SACP's programme has this to say on the matter: 'The character of any revolution is determined by objective realities and not by the wishes of individuals or parties. In our situation, the unity in action of the oppressed and democratic forces around the basic national democratic demands constitutes the most powerful revolutionary weapon against the ruling class. To weaken this unity by placing the attainment of socialism on the immediate agenda would, in fact, be to postpone the very attainment of socialist transformation.'

This does not, of course, mean that discussion of socialism should be 'postponed' until after the national democratic revolution, and the SACP has played the leading role in ensuring that socialist ideas have permeated all levels of the workers movement. 'Achievement of the national democratic revolution constitutes a major guarantee for socialist advance, while on the other hand growing numbers are realising that many of the revolution's major objectives can only be fully accomplished in the process of socialist construction, for example complete racial and sexual equality and the elimination of capitalist domination of the economy.'

### Strength sapped

Congress also considered the role of the armed struggle, led by the people's army Umkhonto We Sizwe (MK), recognising that a continuous armed struggle over a protracted period is necessary in order to sap the enemy's strength.

However, this armed struggle 'could not be a classical guerrilla type war, primarily based on the winning of more and more territory. Nor are there immediate prospects of inflicting all round military defeat on the enemy.' The armed struggle has to rely on the people in active struggle, taking the war to the nerve centres of the regime and creating the conditions in which guerilla units can operate and create new units.

### Combat

Combat, says the programme, 'must be primarily guided by the needs of political struggle. It must be designed to weaken the enemy's grip on the reins of power and to reinforce political mobilisation, organisation and resistance.' Thus the importance of prioritising the strengthening of the underground can be seen, providing organisational and political leadership at local and national levels, linking the armed struggle with the mass action of workers. The underground needs to be in place in every locality, at every point of production, and Congress dedicated itself to achieving this goal.

### Mass action

The work of the revolutionary movement needs to be geared towards the seizure of power for which 'all round mass action, merging with organised armed activity led by a well-organised underground, and international pressure are the keys.' This insurrectionary perspective does not, says the SACP, conflict with the

possibility of a negotiated transfer of power. Those observers who believe that the increasing efforts by some sections of the ruling bloc to negotiate a settlement is a 'problem' for the liberation movement confuse 'the strategy needed to help create conditions for the winning of power with the exact form of the ultimate breakthrough' says the Party.

The SACP's 7th Congress proved both that it is well capable of analysing the country's present complex situation, and that it is playing a leading role in the struggle. The new Party programme clearly identifies the tasks of South African Communists and workers, and also re-emphasises the importance of our own struggle to oust Thatcher, Pretoria's greatest

### Test of good policy

ally. Our task should be relatively simple compared to that of the movement in South Africa, and that it is our shame that it has taken us 10 years to come to grips with Thatcher while such advances have been made in the struggle against apartheid,

Closing the Congress, Joe Slovo said: 'The test of a good policy is that it becomes negated by its own achievement. We have fulfilled the mission which exile gave us. Less and less can we hope to lead effectively from the outside. This growing limitation is not a measure of failure. It is a measure of success. It is ever more vital that more and more of us should be where the action really is.'

# Electricity behind schedule

PARKINSON IS SACKED from Energy in the Commons, Baroness Hooper is sacked from Energy in the Lords. Sacked is spelt reshuffled. What are the major difficulties facing the new Energy Secretary Wakeham?

The Electricity Bill is behind schedule. The proposals contained within the Bill have splintered the interests of the electricity supply industry and public, with managers and would-be owners feuding publicly, loudly and brutally.

A number of unanswered questions face the government and successor companies to the CEB, Area Boards and the Scottish Board.

On the environment; who pays for the clean up required by public and international opinion? Are the costs required to overcome Acid rain, pollution and power station gaseous emissions going to be met by private generators when it will fundamentally conflict with the interests of the shareholders and dividend returns?

## Soaring costs

In the area of nuclear power; who pays for the soaring and inestimable decommissioning costs?

Who pays for the soaring costs of reprocessing? Who pays for the investment required to store nuclear waste?

Without a planned energy policy, can nuclear power compete economically? Are nuclear power stations in the face of changing generating technologies and fuels, and the required rates of profit in the City, to be seen as 'uneconomic'?

Who pays for the 'nuclear tax' 20% extra on electricity bills (in addition to the 25% increase planned by Parkinson 1987-90)? Who can assure the public over safety? Who can assure the City financiers over the 'risk' factor?

The Worker has already reported Parkinson's retreat by which the taxpayer will pay to decommission the Magnox reactors.

Contractual issues are

a mess; an unworbable and illusionary contractual system between generators, distributors and customers has been the subject of unprecedented in fighting within the industry. By undermining the statutory right to supply these contractual arrangements will lead to blackouts, failure of supply, failure (bankruptcy) of the distribution companies and diversification by the distribution companies away from electricity supply into any arena which is profitable. The assurance of the lights coming on when the switch is pressed will be a thing of the past.

## Zero option

On the question of valuation, the existing ESI is valued between £37 and £50 billion. To sell off such a huge undertaking the industry is already being undervalued and devalued. For example the discussed zero option value for nuclear power stations writes off £9 billion plus. If the industry is given away the money required for Tory tax handouts will not be generated in time for election bribes. If the industry is too 'dear' City money will be frightened off by the risk factors and unacceptable timescales for returns on investments. Pitching the price for asset stripping will lead to major political embarrassment for the Thatcherites, for it will be seen not as selling the family silver, but stealing it.

Asset stripping is the key to the sale. In addition to the actual valuation and the gyrations of differing accounting systems, current stripping of electricity supply presents a huge cake to be gobbled. The CEB has over £600 million in stocks and strategic spares. Land and building valuation runs into tens of millions - numerous city centre and central London sites, and so forth.

By asset stripping the industry the Thatcherites will have created a problem

which will smother any supposed attempt at competition. Who will be able to find £500 million or more for a new power station when Powergen and National Power have almost been given such resources for free? Who will pay for new generation - not the shareholder shareholders for sure?

The Electricity Bill has been savaged in its entirety twice now by the Thatcherite Select Committee on Energy. The House of Lords have rubbished its proposals. The Parliamentary Labour Party have won every philosophical debate on its contents with Parkinson and his sidekicks.

The unanswered questions as to the actual cost of sell off - over £400 million rumoured to-date 'consultants' and the City advisors; the question

of the Regulator and his powers - more dictatorial than the existing Secretary of Energy; the impact on coal and related industries, the question of conservation of power and energy efficiency; the question of Britain having no national energy policy; the question of an EEC integrated energy market; the question of soaring prices, the list is endless.

The Electricity Bill addresses less than 1% of these questions and concerns it has created. The 99% of the unanswered questions points to an economic disaster looming over Britain as it enters the 21st century. It is reported that when electricity is privatised, the Department of Energy will be abolished, hence speaking volumes for Britain's future.

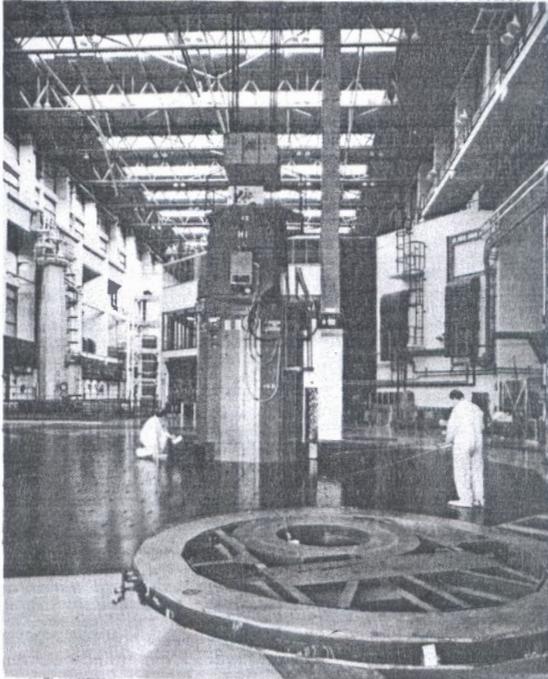


Photo: CEB

# No meals-only food for thought

THE GOVERNMENT is finally publishing a report entitled, "The Diets of British school-children" - six years after the research was undertaken.

A draft report was produced in 1986 but it has taken until now for the survey to be published in full. The survey was carried out just three years after the 1980 Education Act abolished nutritional standards for school meals and since then the government has further attacked by removing the legal obligation for local authorities to provide school meals at all, to offer meal service contracts to the private sector and has most recently removed the right to free school meals to those in need and free milk to the under sevens.

## No nutrients

The survey carried out for the report found that there were severe deficiencies (ie 70% below the recommended) in the intake of several nutrients of schoolchildren, particularly older girls. For example: 25% were seriously deficient in iron and 17% were seriously deficient in vitamin B2. There was also a generally low intake of Vitamin D and a serious deficiency in Vitamin A intake in 33 of all those studied. The report found that older children who tend to eat out in cafes, take-aways and fast food outlets were even more malnourished than those staying at school, indicating another area of concern which is, the poor quality of take-away foods and snack foods of which teenagers are so fond. Profit at the expense of health.

For many poor families the school meal was the reliable way of ensuring a reasonable diet for their children. Thatcher has taken away that expectation and she and her government can be held responsible for the lowering quality of life that ensues.

# Research cut-govt. intention exposed

THE UNIVERSITIES, through their Vice-Chancellors and the Association of University Teachers are appealing to the government for more funding for research. Present research facilities are often delapidated and morale is low. They are saying that without more investment through substantial pay rises for academic staff they will be unable to recruit the calibre of staff needed to undertake research. Basic pay in universities remains low compared with other employment sectors. Industry looks to universities for basic research and without it Britain will fall behind in world markets.

The government has different ideas, however. It wants to see some universities becoming teaching-only institutions, thereby breaking the vital link between research and teaching. In 1990-91 the Universities Funding Council will start to class research funding separately when grants to universities are calculated so that relative performances can be distinguished. A consequence will be that not all universities will be able to sustain front-rank research in all fields. The lesson has still not been learnt that good quality teaching comes out of research.

Currently the government spends £1.82 billion on research in universities and about 1% of Gross National Product is invested by industry on research and development. These figures do not compare well with other countries. The government thinks that industry should contribute more of its profits to research. However, many believe that industry looks to universities to provide its basic research needs.

Expenditure by the government on universities and polytechnics has fallen drastically in proportion to the number of students enrolled. In the last ten years there has been a 40% increase in student numbers in polytechnics with a fall in expenditure per student of 20%, widening the student staff ratio from 8:1 to 12:1 overall. In the universities there has been a similar pattern with student staff ratios worsened from 9.2:1 to 10.7:1.

The government thinks that it can continue to squeeze higher education with inevitable lowering of quality in both research and teaching. If it is so concerned about teaching - wanting to make teaching-only institutions - why does it continue to pursue a policy of increasing student staff ratios?

The real intention is to create second class institutions, where quality suffers in two ways, and makes them easy to dispose of. The hidden agenda of running down all of education is pursued.

# Channel tunnel

AS PROGRESS slows yet again in the construction of the Channel Tunnel, Thatcher must be wondering whether it is still going to be seen as her final triumph. The consortium building the Channel originally set their target cost at £4.5 billion. That rose last year to £5.5 billion and they had to return to the City to ask for further funding to the tune of £1 billion. Now another billion is being sought, taking the cost up almost 50% above the estimate in two years.

The City is now looking a little wary of further involvement, but stays loyal to Thatcher. Couldn't afford another embarrassing episode, could we? And yet the tunnelers now estimate a 1993 finish rather than the 1992 date originally sought. Too late for a face saving, electoral diversion.

# A QUALITY CON

A REVOLUTION is taking place in workplaces across Britain, or so we are led to believe. The revolution consists of a US import arriving via Japan; Total Quality Management.

At first sight TQM may well seem appealing to workers. We are generally interested in being allowed to do quality work. We are frequently appalled at the shoddiness imposed from above in the name of safeguarding profit.

However the new idea is as much political as it is to do with methods of working. The heavy emphasis is on identity of interest between worker and employer, and the desirability therefore of carrying out the employer's wishes without question.

TQM jargon is tedious and in the teaching it is usually reinforced by constant repetition. Thus the 'commitment to quality' is 'top down' - a message repeated ad infinitum accompanied by videos of senior executives expounding on their commitment. These testaments are thought sufficient to convince; we should not be uncharitable enough to notice this or that sacking, this or that piece of speculation or export of capital to the US market practiced by the same zealots.

Companies which have espoused the TQM philosophy

include British Telecom, the compute giant ICL, Jaguar and Tesco. Quality from all of these companies is mixed, as is their commitment to improving it. To use BT as an example; the company has made much of its improvement in pay-phones in the last two years. This is to ignore the fact that the drastic deterioration in pay phone standards was a byproduct of reduced concern for service to the public following privatisation.

There is a contradiction between short term profit and long term quality. Quality in products comes from a skilled workforce trained beyond the bare minimum necessary to perform the immediate task. The best way to make a short term profit is, through property speculation, or, in the manufacturing field, through creating a facility on a green field site with the aid of state grants that can be closed down as soon as the grants cease.

Quality products are usually produced where workers have gained better than average wages and are organised. The best run hotels, the top shops; these are the ones that are unionised. In the long run we must be the judges of how quality is to be produced. Employers are interested in the words but not the reality.

# Workers set new strike date in London Underground pay fight

ONCE again, the London Underground network is due to grind to a halt this week as workers carry on with their series of one-day strikes. This time the management has tried to intimidate the workers by threatening to deny back pay on the agreement to anyone not reporting for duty.

The central issue now in the dispute is the question of pay for drivers and guards. The media continually say that the drivers want £64 a week more (to put that in perspective, Britain's bosses have been awarding themselves rises way over 10 times that figure). The drivers say that all they want is an hourly rate of £6.43.

London's commuters, meanwhile, have conspicuously failed to deliver the government's hoped-for "passengers' rebellion". They know how the management has run down the Underground, and besides, the habit of not working one

day a week has proved easy for many to adjust to. The government's attempt to beat the transport strikes by opening up parking spaces in London's parks has totally backfired. Even if they were filled up they would not account for more than a couple of a per cent of London's commuters. As it is, they are half empty.

## Growing confidence

The drivers have been showing growing confidence and unity as their action has progressed. Even those who at first thought that one-day strikes would not be enough now freely admit that they were wrong. They estimate that each day on strike costs the City and the big stores around £300 million.

One feature of the dispute as it has unfolded has been the unity both among the workers and with their national leadership. We no longer hear

on the radio or in the newspapers that the drivers are striking "against their unions".

Another feature has been the isolation of London Underground's management. This group of bosses believes not in one-person operation, but no-person operation - never mind the filth on the platforms, the fear of assault late at night or even in the middle of the day. Encouraged by the government, they charge more per mile than any Underground system in Europe.

## Roman values

And when it comes to its own staff, its values are not Victorian - they want a return to Roman values! The latest wheeze is to divide drivers and guards up into groups of 100 and have them controlled by (in their word) "centurions". Naturally, the drivers are none too happy about the idea of being conscripted into an

Underground Legion.

The government now faces a whole sheaf of problems relating to the Underground, principally as a result of the strength and unity of the workers. How can it ban strikes using the pretence of an "essential service" on the one hand, and sell the service to private capital on the other? How will it cope with yet another defeat on transport, following close on the heels of the overground and the buses? And in the long term, how will it cope with the increased support that is so evident for public transport in the capital?

Meanwhile, the South East Region of the TUC has written to all trades councils calling on them to campaign over the issue of transport, including the resources it gets and who runs it. With proper organisation and determination, transport will become a powerful weapon in the fight to kick Thatcher out.

# 'Rebel' cricket: the game is of hypocrisy

DELVE INTO the issue of the "rebel tour" of cricketers to South Africa and you emerge with a pretty good allegory on the current state of Britain. It is a sorry tale of mistaken enemies, undercover string-pulling and "punters" (voters/cricketers) too lazy, too stupid (cricketers only), too narrow-minded to identify the real problem and fight for change. Instead they choose what they think is the self-interested way out. There are also more hopeful signs in both stories.

There has certainly been connivance at high levels to seduce a team to South Africa. Officials of the South African Cricket Union (SACU), have been lavished with hospitality in Britain all summer. Is the English Test and County Cricket Board (TCCB) gullible enough to think they were here to watch the cricket?

## Helping apartheid

Perhaps most galling is the opportunity given the Tory Sports Minister to deplore the tour when his Government has done more to succour the apartheid regime than any other in the world. It is painful listening to cricketers saying that they have nothing to do with politics and then seeing them being blatantly used in a political coup.

There is also the indirect connivance of economic pressure. The TCCB's minimum wage agreement with the Cricketers' Association has, apparently, crumbled. A professional county cricketer can expect to earn about £10,000 a year. If you are not good enough to play at Test level you will never earn much more.

Here, though, one has to take issue with the players, as with voters. One gets the impression that many cricketers are Thatcherites (Mike Gatting is said to have lost money on the stock exchange; some of the current "rebels" are stalwart upholders of "knowing nothing about apartheid"). To then compensate for Thatcher's policies such as high interest rates, for which you have voted, by taking an option which is not only open to very few of your countrymen but which also prolongs a brutal inequality of life for millions in another country - apartheid is surely not too difficult to understand, even for a cricketer - is a more damaging version of the private "solution" sought by so many in this country.

Their fight is at home! How about putting some backbone into sports' trades unions, really fighting for a decent minimum wage for professionals, lobbying for proper investment, training of young people, so that the ignominy of grovelling for private sponsorship or depending on benefit seasons, or having to moonlight in the winter months are things of the past.

# Water: the rising cost of life itself

IT WOULD seem a shareholders' dream: to own shares in the monopoly of a life necessity. Yet the government fears a lack of buyers for water. Now they are offering the ten water monopolies with a guarantee of price rises averaging fifty percent over the next ten years - fifty percent, that is, over and above the increases promised to match inflation. And the deal is better still: there is to be a £6 billion gift to the industry from the taxpayer, a sum roughly equivalent to the estimated marketable value of the shares!

So you the British people give me the shareholder £6 billion plus the industry, and I'll give you £6 billion. It doesn't take a genius to work out that that means the industry is thrown in free!

## Squeezing hard

Interesting how they calculate a price for water. They work back from the profit which they estimate can be squeezed out of it to decide how much anyone would invest to get that "return on investment!"

And yet the city is still not exactly pleased with the prospect. Not interested in a "safe but dull investment," as one city commentator put it, the money men are really only looking at land assets to strip and leisure opportunities to exploit. Or in whether one or another of the ten water authorities offers a bonanza hidden somewhere in its "structure."

The Government has had to pay quite heavily for the cooperation of the money men. Its initial insistence upon at least an element of debt in the balance sheets of the water authorities had to go out the window.

The guarantee of big price rises was made at the outset, but Government had to give way over just how big. The "K Factor" they call it, to prevent the more common usage of guaranteed price rise.

For people who must use water to sustain life such terminology is pretty irrelevant. We will see the 50 percent real addition to our water rates and resent it sorely, whether or not we were fool enough to

vote Tory at the last General Election.

Thatcher seems to have forgotten that many people thought they were voting for tax cuts when they voted for her. But water rates are just like taxes: payment is compulsory. And workers can add up and subtract. She is definitely on to a big vote loser.

Government policy over the past ten years has actually exacerbated this. The water authorities have, over the

last couple of years, been required to provide the Government with a surplus of £500 million - and that is calculated on a current cost basis. That means that the authorities have had to work out how much it would cost to replace 139,000 miles of water mains, 141,000 miles of sewers, 6,500 sewage treatment works and 800 water treatment works, as if they were being built today, and not one hundred years ago. Then the Government has been fleecing them for a percentage of this huge figure. The accelerating collapse of the water system in Britain is a direct result of this deliberate neglect, and it has also brought the necessity of the big price rises just to shore up the system.

## Profit for free

Now they are handing it over to the City to profit from this mess two or three times over. When the sale of water was first mooted, proceeds of £27 billion were mentioned. By last week it was down to £7 billion, and that is before a debt write-off of £5 billion and a Government grant (the first for a decade) of £1 billion. In other words, it is all but being given away.

Those of us who were never taken in by Thatcher see in all this a grim warning. She'll have us paying for the air we breathe unless we stop her. And we must take down for the day of reckoning the fact that the water industry is being given away, not sold, even if it were possible to put a price on such a thing.

Out on the streets fighting for the water industry to stay in public hands. Photo Express and Echo Western Times and Gazette



# Dons and administrators sound the alarm over universities

BOTH university management and unions have recently pointed out the real purpose behind Thatcher's policies in higher education and the consequences of the continued underfunding of universities.

The Committee of Vice-Chancellors and Principals (CVCP) has expressed alarm at intentions to shift funding from block grants to tuition fees. The Government claims it intends to widen access but the CVCP warns that, taken with the replacement of student grants by loans, this could be the first step in transferring

responsibility for paying fees onto students and their families.

The Vice-Chancellors have also announced that many well qualified applicants will not get university places this year because of the measures.

## Recruitment

The Association of University Teachers (AUT) has pointed out the difficulty of recruiting graduates to teach in higher education, when a university teacher's salary buys 8% less than it did 10 years ago, and pay for comparable graduate professions outside universities

is 40% higher.

Already one in five recruits leave the profession before the age of 30, a trend intensified by the increasing use of fixed-term contracts (up by 71% in the last 10 years). Because of the age profile of the current teaching force there needs to be a 50% increase in recruitment to the profession simply to stand still.

AUT also warns that the current real value of the capital grant for universities is two-thirds of its 1979 value, with disastrous consequences for library, equipment and

research support budgets.

In the continuing fight against sackings the AUT is considering an academic boycott of Aston University, following the decision to ballot the university's Council on the setting up of a committee to select staff for compulsory redundancy. At the University of London, following a lobby of the Senate, the Senate has supported an AUT resolution reasserting the University's commitment to safeguard the interests of staff threatened by the closure of University College Dental School.

