



No breakaways, no running away, no diversions - Thatcher out

A SINGLE NATION DIVIDED BY CLASS

Editorial

IN THE Govan by-election many saw the result as a foregone conclusion in a safe Labour seat. In Govan, Labour's enemy turned out to be complacency. The SNP candidate in by-election conditions fought a passionate campaign and reaped the benefit.

Maybe it was a protest vote but it was protesting at more than just the Thatcher Government which lacks credibility in Scotland anyway. The Tory candidate just held on to his deposit. Labour ought now to look to their laurels: opposition in Britain as a whole, but Establishment north of the border. It's a condition of opposition that you oppose.

The new Scottish Nationalist MP Jim Sillars sees his victory as a defeat for English Toryism. But if the English working class held power in Westminster he'd still be for a Scottish breakaway. Surely, that's the essence of it. In 1979, the SNP was instrumental in the Commons vote that forced a general election and brought the Thatcher Government to office.

After the 1987 general election the Conservatives were left with just 10 MPs in Scotland; Labour had 50; the then Alliance had 9; and the SNP, with its 14% of the vote, three MPs. Sillars now makes that four. Sillars' breast-beating amounts to verbal militancy in pursuit of a diversion for anti-Thatcherism. The SNP is opposed to the reality of the British working class; its policies encourage the fragmentation of the British labour movement, the unity of which is vital to the defeat of Thatcher.

Destruction of industry and jobs

The people of Glasgow Govan know Thatcher's policies have destroyed swathes of their industry and with it their very existence is at issue. Ships, coal, steel and engineering have been hit. The Green candidate with his guitar had a bloody nerve. But what has happened to the River Clyde that hasn't also devastated the Tyne, the Wear, the Mersey, or the Thames? Govan's problems are more about capitalist exploitation than English disregard. Scottish workers are not alone in their predicament.

The SNP would have them alone 'in the context of a wider Europe'. If 56 million of us are increasingly denied national sovereignty by foreign takeovers, Japan, US, or the EEC, how would one tenth of that number in Scotland under the SNP hope to survive or prosper?

Govan electors probably know this very well. From being taken for granted they have forced the rest of Britain to sit up and take notice. Labour stopped listening, so the workers have made themselves heard. Thatcher has exacerbated divisions in Britain, but workers should unite and rise above them. That way we can save Scotland, England and Wales.

The terrible price paid for putting profit before public safety

PAPERS relating to the Kings Cross underground fire have been passed to the Director of Public Prosecutions, who could decide to bring manslaughter charges, or simply charges of negligence, if relatives of the 31 dead are to be satisfied that justice has been done. A number of people also suffered terrible injuries in the inferno.

Eagerly awaited

An estimated 700 million passengers a year use the London Underground so naturally the report of the inquiry, chaired by Desmond Fennell QC, was keenly awaited. Since the tragedy on 18 November last year, a number of incidents have seen London's fire brigade rush appliances to various parts of the underground network. In the first six months of this year

there were 21 serious fires in the underground, compared with 10 for the whole of 1987. People have lost faith in the way the system is run.

Laying the blame

Fennell's report was scathing about 'the ethos of London Underground, its organisation and management', blaming management for much of what went wrong on that fateful night. Leading managers had told the inquiry that on the world's oldest underground system fire was 'an occupational hazard'. Fire precaution rather than fire prevention summed up their outlook.

An Association of London Authorities report highlighted the results of London Fire Brigade inspections which uncovered more than 50 fire risks at half

a dozen big stations, including the continuing failure to clean up fluff and grease, a major cause of the Kings Cross fire. It also pointed out that the Underground is not cleaning out the 'suicide pits' running between the tracks, allowing fires to spread into the tunnels.

Doing their best

The staff response to the fire was 'uncoordinated, haphazard and untrained'. Staff members had done what they could. 'In my judgment, none of those who were concerned with evacuating passengers by way of the Victoria line escalators up to the tube ticket hall are to be blamed for the action they took. In the absence of any evacuation plan, they were simply doing the best they could.'

Fennell makes 157 recommen-

etc, but in education they have been careful to target the attack on areas which have received deserved, but sometimes preferential treatment in the past. So, schools which Labour recognised as having special difficulties in functioning without extra staff, are now set to lose them and plummet into the quagmire again.

But this doesn't readily generate concern outside those particular areas, amongst the mass of workers in the city or in the city's employ. We will have to make sure we defend each other for the right reasons; not because we're black, or white, male or female, but because

we're workers and we either provide a service to other workers or use that service. To do otherwise would be to exacerbate petty divisions which have already contributed to the mess we're in.

Making allies

That means taking cognisance of what our action in defence of the city means for those we wish to draw in as allies. Teachers will have to ensure that what they do can be seen to be and is a genuine defence of the children and not the pursuit of some talisman, resurrected under cover of saving our schools.



Bradford people know the cost of electing Thatcherites and turned out in force to defend what is theirs. Photo: The Worker

Unity in Bradford against privatised squalor

BRADFORD Council workers are to ballot on industrial action against the Thatcherite plans for breaking down the city into privatised squalor. The Nalگو and NUT branches are conducting ballots of the members over strike action.

Not so simple

Winning these will not be straightforward, in spite of vociferous opposition from all quarters to the 'Pickles Plan'. The Thatcherites have been nearly as clever with their cuts as they were with their election gambits.

They have not only hit at the hoary questions of race, gender,

dations, mostly to London Regional Transport and its subsidiary London Underground Limited. Fennell wants immediate implementation of many of them because public safety is at stake. Relatives of the dead have little faith that LRT or LUL will act as the report recommends.

Warnings ignored

For some years warnings were being made about the physical dangers and the human problems at Kings Cross. However, such warnings by the emergency services were not acted on seriously. As a speaker from the Fire Brigades Union told the TUC Congress in September, disasters have to occur for there to be any chance of legislation; ASLEF reiterated the point and, where rail travel is concerned,

they should know.

Belated resignations by Sir Keith Bright of LRT and Tony Ridley of LUL are rumoured to have involved golden handshakes. LUL's new managing director, Dennis Tunnicliffe, who is critical of key parts of the report, has said recently of the underground, 'the lines are our brands, with well understood separate identities,' so the profit maximising mentality still rules at 55 Broadway.

GLC a great loss

When the Greater London Council had responsibility for London Transport it reorganised the fare system and brought imagination to public transport that pleased Londoners. Who says the passing of the GLC has made no difference to the running of London?

NUJ acts

JOURNALISTS have scored an important coup in the battle against Thatcher's attempts to gag the media. In an unprecedented display of unity, top brass from all the major broadcasting organisations (the BBC, World Service, ITV and Channel 4) joined the National Union of Journalists' platform to denounce Thatcher's ban on broadcast statements by Sinn Fein. They were supported by MPs of all parties - including her own.

The ban has widely been described as the beginning of a slippery slope for press freedom and even democracy. It may well be. But the united stand forged by the NUJ's Day of Action sowed the seeds of something different. Thatcher's continuing attack on the media could be turned into the beginning of the slippery slope for her. As nearly every speaker pointed out at the NUJ meeting, she is losing the argument.

There has been some criticism of the NUJ's leadership for calling off the strike element of the Day of Action but then people rarely like real leadership when they get it. The key point of this battle is the political isolation and defeat of Thatcher, not "action".

The fact that large numbers of chapels voted for strikes was instrumental in persuading broadcasting authorities to join the NUJ's protest. The fact that some chapels voted not to strike shows that the moral and political battle is intense. The debate surrounding the Day of Action means that this battle has now been joined.

All the broadcasting organisations have now promised to carry Censorship Health Warnings on items affected by the ban. That will acutely embarrass Thatcher and ram home the political point. Broadcasters will now come under intense pressure to retreat from that standpoint.

Poly success

PORTSMOUTH Polytechnic students went to the polls last week. In a ballot called by Portsmouth Polytechnic Students Union executive, students were asked to confirm their commitment to the National Union of Students. As one of 70 Student Unions on the DES enquiry into student union activities Portsmouth wished to maximise the publicity over the issue of affiliation to the NUS.

The results of the ballot show that students are overwhelmingly in support of their National Union. 89% voted for no change to the present system of affiliation while only 11% wished to disaffiliate. In this, the first ballot on affiliation this year the National Union of Students has again been shown to have mass popular support.

Once the euphoria of the result has died down there are several steps that need to be taken. It is important now to move beyond time consuming ballots of this kind. The reason the ballot was called was as a reaction to the Government's attack on Student Unions and the NUS. We mustn't let Thatcher and Baker set the agenda for us in this way. Student Unionism is under siege this year, but the best publicity for Student Unions and the NUS is the day to day work they do.

The issue this year in Student Unions will be one of voluntary membership of the NUS on an individual basis rather than the affiliation system that operates now. If we are to be successful in defeating this threat then involving as wide a base of membership in Student Unions is a priority.

AUT jobs and pay action stepped up

A SPECIAL Council meeting of the Association of University Teachers (AUT) held on 15 October decided to step up action on pay and for the reinstatement of a sacked tenured lecturer.

Following an 80% positive vote in a national ballot AUT is withdrawing from all aspects of staff appraisal in response to the lack of a pay offer for 1988. The Council meeting also decided to ballot members on withdrawing from the 1989 examination process should the Government not provide more money for academics' pay and preparations for the disruption of admissions procedures for the 1989/90 academic session were endorsed.

A joint AUT/CVCP

(Committee of Vice-Chancellors and Principals) survey has shown that one out of every three professor posts and one out of every five lecturer posts remain unfilled because the pay is not enough to attract recruits. A 22 year old policeman now earns at least £11,400 per year whereas a newly appointed university lecturer (aged at least 25 or 26, after completion of a PhD) may earn as little as £9,260. (Lenin's definition of a police state was where the police were paid more than teachers)

Following the sacking of philosophy lecturer Edgar Pese, the academic boycott of Hull University is being tightened with the resignation of dozens of external examiners. A national

petition calling for his reinstatement has been raised, his teaching duties are set to continue, part-time assistance having been arranged and, following the successful march and rally held on October 3, another national demonstration is planned for the occasion of the Hull University Council meeting of 10 November.

Two notices of compulsory redundancy have been withdrawn at Cardiff where the local association unanimously passed a motion calling for strike action in support of its threatened colleagues and a lobby was held of the University Council at Brunel University where four AUT members are threatened with redundancy.



Photo: The Worker.

NURSES EARN THEIR MONEY DAILY

HEALTH SECRETARY CLARKE'S announcement at his Party's conference of additional money to fund the nurses' clinical grading structure is, as Robin Cook said, a welcome climbdown. Back in March, Thatcher recommended 3% on average only to the Review Body, while Chief Secretary to the Treasury, John Major, called for pay increases to be pegged at 2% immediately after the budget.

Now, it seems, nurses and midwives are worth every penny of a £1 billion pay settlement. The Prime Minister told the Commons on 21st July that £803 million was sufficient for full implementation of the award, and we have that, plus £138.5 million, plus £4.5 million (for nurses in hospices and other non NHS hospitals to which authorities are contracted); and all from the Treasury's Contingency Reserve.

Clarke, when Health Minister in 1983, attacked nurses

publicly on the Ji. Young Programme, intimating that there were too many of them, in his view. Thanks to pressure from all the nursing organisations, and consistent and incisive attacks from Labour in the Commons and the media, he has been forced to change his tune.

Vigilance

There is a need for vigilance though, because the regrading is being imposed, when we should have brought it to a conclusion and kept the initiative. Any major change involving 487,000 workers and £1 billion is bound to create anomalies.

77,000 ward sisters rightly aspire to the higher of the two grades (F and G), and at least 7,000 mainly in intensive care, special care baby and maternity units will be left with less than they deserve. After his announcement, 100 nurses in London were moved to the lower of the two grades to meet revenue

targets.

Nursing auxiliaries and staff midwives (with 18 month's additional training) have made too little progress. None of this should detract from the general settlement. All are matters for local appeal and grievance procedures.

Nurses will be rightly elated with back pay in their pockets and a decent structure agreed before Christmas. Clarke and his minister Mellor, will claim credit for this, the biggest settlement ever in the NHS.

Clarke said at the Conference of the National Health Service that it was the best system in the world. If he was ill, he would rather be treated in Britain than anywhere.

This is true thanks to all health workers and the class. Thatcher is going to use this settlement to convince the public that all this is her doing, if we permit it. Next year's pay round, cuts and closures await to be addressed.

CBI wants it all ways

CBI MEMBERS want the Government to put a stop to the growing tide of foreign take over bids which is threatening to sweep them away.

Two thirds of firms surveyed by the CBI said there should be an automatic investigation into bids which could damage British companies and when the foreign bidder is almost immune from any counter-bid. The majority also want the Trade and Industry Secretary to refer contested bids to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission.

CBI firms are conscious of having to fight for their lives, especially now that their shares are so undervalued by the City after the stock market crash.

But their cries fall on deaf ears. The Thatcher Government is not interested in fair play for British firms, nor does it want to help British industry to survive. So pathological is its hatred of the British working class, it would rather see their employers out of business here and taking their capital to invest abroad.

Interesting that capitalists want an end to free-market capitalism, and the woman they champion wants an end to them. The CBI are much clearer about the stock market than they are about Thatcher. Their director-general, John Banham, described it as a casino where fund managers would be ready to 'sell their grandmothers'.

Patronising postal workers doesn't pay

THE POST OFFICE has serious problems recruiting new staff and retaining existing staff, which includes those with many years service. The Post Office is committed to dealing with this problem in the light of the important service it provides and the increasing competition, or is it?

Both sides recognise that London weighting is an important part of the problem. The board has responded with an offer of what it considers to be a substantial increase, £1.40 per week. Not only is this an insult in isolation, but in the context of the increase in travelling costs in January 1989 it represents a reduction in real terms.

It is clear to all post office workers (scabs and opportunists excluded) that management cares nothing for the 'quality of service' (sic) or the workforce. It has the resources, and given the nature of the business, it is engaged in a protracted campaign to reduce the real level of wages and conditions of the workforce. Given the real level of unemployment and the low cost of overtime, relative to overheads, it can make the conditions for postal workers so unattractive that only those prepared to tolerate this situation will remain or be attracted. The end result of this campaign will be yet another industry ripe for privatisation without a murmur.

What is necessary first, however, is this acquiescent workforce. What stands in the way of this is the UCU (Union of Communication Workers). Its role in the current situation is vital. We have the experience of the many recent valiant struggles from which to draw. It is clear that the membership wishes to fight but what is important is that the nature of the struggle must be on our terms, not those of the Post Office. A careful assessment of the situation and the type of action most appropriate will be required if we are to be successful. We must emerge from one battle capable of fighting future battles.

Fiddlers look into fraud

EVEN with the cordon bleu chefs cooking the books, this summer's drop in unemployment figures is hard to swallow, and it is easy to see why. DOE figures show a growth in employment of 43,000, producing a fall in unemployment of 128,700. Either there is some serious jobsharing going on or large numbers of people are signing off for some other reason.

The Campaign For Work has concluded that the Government's tough measures against fraud has terrorised large numbers of genuine claimants off the register. From last April, every new claimant has had to fill in an availability for work test form, and all are called back after six months to a restart interview.

In the six months from April, the DOE has spent £9.35 million on investigating 223,500 claimants. Of these 1,960 prosecutions were carried out - a success rate of under 1%. At the same time the wage council investigators have been run down although it is estimated that 25% of employers covered by the councils break the law by underpaying their employees. Of these employers only 9 were prosecuted last year.

Referring to those overclaiming benefits Norman Fowler said "there is no reason why the public should pay taxes to support these people". We feel just the same way about him.

CECIL DISHES UP A DUFF ONE

Sudden black out hits sell-off bill

THE CONSERVATIVE Party Conference has come and gone. Cecil Parkinson has maintained his search for stardom by reference to privatising the coal industry in a fourth term of office. If the sell off of electricity were a success, then the privatisation of coal would be a mere formality. If electricity privatisation stalls or stumbles then not only is Cecil in trouble but so would be Thatcher's Government.

Cock up

So, where is Cecil and his electricity privatisation? It is reported that the privatisation bill is in its second draft, and that 25% of that draft is not yet written, not just incomplete as rumoured. Of the 75% already written, apparently 50% is unacceptable. Not much left of Cecil's dream legislation therefore.

The CEBG, whom one would believe Cecil would consult or inform on matters nuclear, have still heard nothing from the Department of Energy. Most surprising, since the CEBG and its proposed successor, Big G, runs most of the nuclear generation in England and Wales.

The risk factor of nuclear generation is sending shock waves through the City. How will the 20% of nuclear generation be contractually established (as specified in the White Paper) the City wants to know. Who picks up the tab? Cecil sees nuclear generation as only electricity, calmly forgetting

the other parts of the cycle—nuclear waste, recycling, decommissioning, insurance, etc.

The City sees the full cycle and sees the costs. Costs as witnessed in this year's annual reports of the Scottish Boards—losses due to decommissioning in the region of £180 millions. The Scottish Boards delayed publishing their accounts for nearly seven months with this bombshell in.

Many voices in the City are now saying that Big G nuclear as an investment is unsaleable. Parkinson's nightmares are about to pass into the light of day. The 'Electricity' Bill is expected to be put to the House of Commons in January, an enabling bill devoid of content. The Select Committee Report on Energy in July tore Parkinson's White Paper to shreds in language thoroughly unparliamentarian.

Skull-duggery

That Select Committee had a Tory majority, containing notable leading rightwing backbench Tory MPs. The enabling bill in January is in for a rough ride, presumably with hundreds of re-written clauses and much skull-duggery at Committee Stage being the order of the day.

Michael Spicer, Parkinson's sidekick, is reassuring though, a voucher system as recompense for declining or deteriorating service is planned for the privatised service. It speaks volumes for Parkinson and his plans.

Bright sparks mock £5m hype

THE CEBG has continued its advertising of electricity, especially the 'Energy for Life' series, even though the advertising and PR hype is now geared to privatisation. The latest series of adverts on television run to a cost of over £5 million.

They take the 'Energy for Life' theme but are, or rather were, to introduce the names of the privatised successor companies to the CEBG. Certain snags have been hit in this

proposal. Nearly every name suggested by Lord Marshall of Goring, CEBG Chairman, has been vetoed by Cecil Parkinson—they smack too much of the CEBG re-born.

Ridicule

Nearly every name suggested in the 'staff' competition run by the CEBG has either demonstrated a total lack of respect for the proposed privatisation

(how shocking), or have bordered on the inane (more stand up and salute the flag than the Japanese) or have been so ridiculously pro-nuclear to have swamped the ranks of Greenpeace/Friends of the Earth with new recruits.

Further, enterprising swine in the City have registered at Company House hundreds if not thousands of company names with permutations of 'Electricity' in the title. This caused grief to Parkinson and his CEBG collaborators who when they actually agreed a name found someone had beaten them to it.

Devious

The naming of the companies apart, the real scandal is that a tiny clause in legislation used to enable privatisation proposals for the water industry to go forward, is now being used as a convenient catch-all which allows Parkinson and friends to spend millions of the public's money defrauding the public.

The enabling legislation is allowing £5 million to be spent hyping up the new companies. It is allowing the division of buildings, power stations, and other assets of the CEBG between the two successor companies and the grid company. It is permitting the 'divisionalisation' of the CEBG along with its human assets. The Electricity Privatisation Bill will be an enabling piece of legislation to assist Parkinson stumble into 1989. Electricity privatisation is queuing up to join further scandals—Westland, Royal Ordnance, the Belgrano in Thatcher's closet.

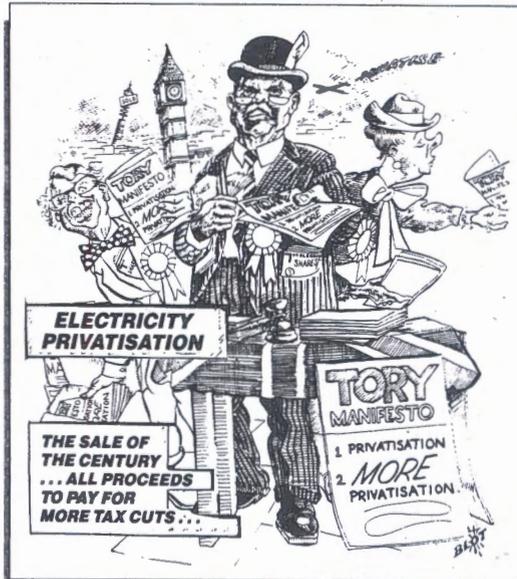


Illustration: Unite (Unions in Transport and Energy)

Money back guarantees for asset strippers

THE DECISION announced by Cecil Parkinson that the CEBG was now not going to build Fawley 'B' Power Station at Southampton should come as no surprise to anyone within the Electricity Supply Industry (ESI). Since the privatisation of electricity was announced the death knell has been ringing over planning permission for conventional power stations. Expect in the near future the abandonment of the proposed power stations at West Burton and Kingsnorth (coal fired)

The privatisation proposals of Parkinson have meant that the successor companies to the CEBG will not commit the investment required to build new power stations if there are no guaranteed takers for the electricity generated. This raises questions about the proposed nuclear station at Hinkley Point C and construction work at Sizewell B. Thatcher's political commitment to nuclear power is far greater than coal fired stations; CEBG management have always been very good

at obeying their political masters.

The abandonment of these coal fired stations raises questions about the shortfall of generation by the end of the century. If there is to be a generation shortfall why stop building power stations?

Killing

The answer is that various multinationals, existing Area Boards and other entrepreneurs intend to try to make a quick killing out of electricity.

The problems of electricity generation and energy requirements are going to be massaged by the government to demonstrate the success of privatisation. The existing holders of electricity generation will use what generating capacity they have to dominate the market. So why get into expensive and uncharted risk factors of new station construction and rates of return on new capacity?

Better to use what they have, run it into the ground and let market forces build

power stations. And in the next 10-15 years we all know who will pick up the tab—the public. Market forces will deem a 30 year return on investment as unacceptable.

So Fawley B is not to be, and Michael Spicer, junior Minister at the Department of Energy reconfirms that rebates will be offered for anticipated deterioration of electricity supply under the privatisation proposals. Britain nears the 1990s—the only country in Europe without a planned energy policy.

Deregulation?

IT LOOKS LIKE THE BACK END OF A BUS

TWO YEARS after the deregulation of bus services, the Government is claiming the whole policy has been a success.

The Department of Transport point to a 'massive increase of 13%' in bus mileage in the first year of deregulation and state that fares 'have generally been unaffected by deregulation'.

Figures are not always quite what they seem, however. With this government, the manipulation of figures is commonplace.

An increase of 13% in bus mileage does not mean that more people are using the bus. The growth of competing firms and minibus operations running along popular routes

goes a long way to explain the increase. This growth has been at the expense of less popular routes, where there are fewer buses and fewer passengers.

Greater Manchester Transport Action Group points to a fall in the number of passengers

from 355 million in the year prior to deregulation to 304 million in the first year after it. It also points to an increase in complaints received by Greater Manchester PTE, mainly about commercial services.

Another reason for the decline in bus usage is, contrary to the Department of Transport's assertion, the rise in bus fares. South Yorkshire were forced to abandon their cheap fares policy, and fares rose 238.5% in two years. Even in areas without a heavy subsidy fares have risen. In Merseyside fares have increased 100% while in Tyne and Wear they have shot up 30%.

Phony choice

Another claim made by the Department of Transport is that the increase of 400 private operators offers more 'choice'. But choice needs to be measured against ability to travel when

you want, not when it is profitable for the operator. Many of these private operators are simply ex-National Bus Company members: the ownership has changed not the size of the overall operation.

In fact, only a small number of 'private' operators have had any influence on the bus market, and these large firms are slowly swallowing up the minnows and re-creating monopolies.

Some of them are still finding it difficult to make a profit and are pulling out. The giant transport multinational, BET, established Manchester Minibuses in 1986, operating under the name BeeLine Buzz Company. Its aim was to provide competition in south Manchester against the ex-PTE company, GM Buses. This would be a trial operation for establishing similar companies elsewhere. It soon established a similar operation in Preston, under the 'Zippy' title.

Earlier this year Ribble bought out the Zippy operation in Preston after the firm had got into difficulty. Manchester Minibuses also got into financial difficulties and both GM Buses and Ribble made bids for the company. Ribble was successful and as part of its 'streamlining', has closed down one depot with the loss of 250 jobs. BET has now pulled out and two large companies now control the vast majority of services in Manchester. Some competition!

Monopoly

As things settle down, and firms find there isn't the profit which was hoped for, monopolies are created and 'choice' disappears. In most cases, the same operators from pre-deregulation run the services. But the situation is unplanned. Operators can pick and choose routes as they please. The principle of providing a service comes

second. Even where one operator dominates, as in the West Midlands, profit has to come before service. Jokes used to be made about villages having one bus on market days. There are now many urban areas of Britain where buses do not run in the evening or on Sundays.

Whether there is one operator or 100 operators, the success of the service is going to depend on local people having control of that service. That is why the integrated bus and rail services were so successful, why cheap fare policies were so popular and why the roads were not choked with cats. Competition is the great red herring of the past ten years. It is another word for destruction of anything planned or owned by local communities. The way public transport is provided is a reflection of the way we run our society. It's not just the service which is at stake.

RALLIES CELEBRATE THE RESISTANCE BY GCHQ WORKERS

ON FRIDAY 18 November, three people at Cheltenham and one at Cheadle in Staffordshire will leave their jobs: sacked!

They are, of course, GCHQ trade unionists. At Cheltenham they will be met with a band and a large number of union officials to cheer them on their way. A similar welcoming party will be at Cheadle.

18 November will mark the end of 44 years of their resistance. All four trade unionists refused to budge from the beginning, despite enormous pressure to sign away their trade union rights. They have lost thousands of pounds each year; they have been denied promotion. They will leave GCHQ heads held high; their resistance an example to us all.

Bitter end

Two more already have leaving dates; others will follow swiftly now that Thatcher has decided that the last resisters have to be cleared out from the GCHQ bunker. All will resist to the bitter end.

At a packed London rally in Central Hall, Civil Servants' leader Leslie Christie declared he would sooner trust the GCHQ 17 with his security than any member of the present cabinet. Neil Kinnock underlined that to Thatcher every trades unionist represents the enemy within.

The workers who create wealth in a country, that run its services, that hold its pool of skills, that are its future, are called traitors. This is a strange perversion of the notion of patriotism. Those that suck out the country's wealth to invest it for higher returns on the international capital markets are to be protected from the enemy within. The only truth in Thatcher's words is the recognition of enmity between the two, of an irreconcilable clash of interests.

On November 7 there was no doubt about who were the honest patriots. They were the trade unionists who supported the GCHQ workers. Teachers, dockers, 200,000 civil servants all took part.

Thatcher fails pensions test

IF IT IS true that you can judge a society by the way it treats its old people, then Britain's track record since Thatcher has been appalling. Only hours after the announcement by the Government that pensioners have never had it so good, latest World Health Organisation statistics have revealed that severe poverty is partly to blame for a shorter life expectancy among Britain's elderly compared with other countries.

The figures reveal that 65 year old men can now expect to live longer in 21 other countries, including Sri Lanka and Uruguay than in Britain. Clearly, whilst Thatcher is busy destroying our 'Welfare State' other countries are improving fast in their health care.

Whilst the report states there is "severe poverty and disadvantage among a substantial minority" the Government would have us believe that only a tiny minority of the elderly have difficulty making ends meet. The figures speak for themselves and come at a time when the Government is talking of means testing benefits for all elderly people

One of the biggest cheers at the London rally was for the news that every pit in South Yorkshire was closed.

IUC General Secretary Norman Willis has worked tirelessly in support of GCHQ trades unions. Perhaps he summed up the mass feeling about it better than anyone when he recounted a conversation he had with one of the civil servants involved. Willis asked, "How do you feel about what's been done to you?" The reply was, "It's not right." - "Would you care to enlarge on that?" - "No."

Heroes

The workers at GCHQ who retained their union membership did not want to be heroes. They are simply honest people who would not give in to what they knew to be wrong. They have done us a great service in holding back a part of the attack on our organisation. They held out for long enough for us to recognise the mistake and vote Thatcher out. In difficult days ahead, we owe it to them to be dogged - and to use some of that same basic honest thought.

BRISTOL

BRISTOL'S GCHQ day saw the biggest demonstration in the city since the late 1970s. Over 6000 marched

through the city centre after hearing four speakers at a "standing room only" rally at the IGWC office's theatre.

The docks in Bristol were brought to a standstill early in the day by dockers walking out in support of the sacked GCHQ workers. Several hundreds of civil servants walked out throughout Bristol and surrounding counties, as did thousands of other trade union members and supporters.

In neighbouring Bath over 500 mainly MOD workers came out, addressed at a rally in Bath City Centre by civil service union leaders.

It was said that there would be more taking action but for the fear Thatcher's ideology and laws have engendered in the 'collective' mind of the people. The fear that allows her to rule; a position of strength stemming from our weakness.

"National security to her is the hatred of all workers - yes even Polish workers"; Ken Gill reminded the rally of Thatcher's hypocrisy in Gdansk. "They'll soon find they shouldn't listen to her"

"She did not take up a recent invitation to the USSR for a convention about human rights saying 'They had a lot to learn' - what hypocrisy. She stopped the seamen from taking solidarity action in defence of their industry the lifeblood, now a severed artery, of Britain. She seizes funds and occupies

11 offices and takes away our right to belong to free and independent Trade unions." "We wouldn't need to be here now if we'd supported better the workers at Warrington. Wapping and especially in the coal fields communities. Mick McCabe had said in 1985: 'if you don't run away, then you won't get chased'."

S. WEST

THOUSANDS of west country trade unionists and supporters joined the November 7 day of action in solidarity with the GCHQ trade unionists. In Plymouth the demonstration was described by the local people as 'one of the biggest labour movement marches the city has seen for years'.

A packed rally heard a former GCHQ worker describe the Government's denial of trade union rights and the erosion of other civil freedoms as "the thin wedge of fascism".

Early morning commuters in Exeter hooted their support as placards-waving protesters picketed outside the DSS offices.

Speaking at a lunchtime city-centre rally, the President of Exeter trades union council said: "We praise the GCHQ trade unionists for their success in keeping the moral shabbiness of this Government in view for over four and a half years.

We must live up to their example. We must be active citizens too. We must look after each other, give each other a helping hand and

stand up for each other. For Thatcher there is no society and its all me first. We totally reject this. We must put the effort in and get her out!"

Particularly impressive was the high turnout from the Exeter College Students Union following a big vote in favour of support at a general meeting. The students showed that youth were not prepared to sit idly by as basic freedoms were destroyed.

Civil servants all over the region took strike action, even coastguards at Portland and Brixham dealt with emergency calls only.

LIVERPOOL

TWENTY thousand workers took part in the day of action in Liverpool with thousands marching through the city to a rally in Central Hall. Several speakers condemned Thatcher's heartless attack on the trade unions and the sacking of loyal trade unionists from GCHQ.

One of the seven members given until 30 November to accept compulsory transfer, was given a standing ovation when he pledged to stand alongside his colleagues who were sacked in October.

The other speakers reminded the audience of the determination of union members past and present who had lost their lives in pursuit of basic rights. How much more basic can the right to join a union be?

THREAT OF US TANKS

THE BRITISH army is set to order replacements for its Chieftain and Challenger Mk 1 tanks. The order for the replacements is in the region of £1 - £2 billion.

Tradition points to the purchase of British designed tanks and equipment, built here by the Royal Ordnance and its contractors. However, since the sale of R O to the Vickers Defence Systems, such custom and practice has become meaningless. There are now three options: the West German 'Leopard', the General Dynamics' Abrahams and the BA Challenger Mk II which is an improved version of the earlier Challenge;

Empress

The Cabinet Procurement Committee met last week and failed to make a decision partly because the Empress was in Poland. It is no secret, however, that Thatcher favours the American version, regardless of the cost to British manufacturing. That cost will be high indeed.

If the contract goes abroad, not only will Britain become totally dependent upon the Americans in all three service

arms, £12 billion of arms exports will be lost and so will 10,000 jobs in tank production and connected trades. About 2000 jobs would go directly at the massive tank factory at Barnbow outside Leeds. A further 900 jobs would go at David Brown Gears in nearby Huddersfield. Thus two of the few major engineering works left in West Yorkshire would go under. This wouldn't actually leave much worth defending! Allied works, large and small, such as special steels, would also go.

Ex-Defence Secretary Heseltine was quoted as saying, "We will be left with the lower end of technology, the metal bashing", were any deal to be done on licensing General Dynamics' design. And that's on an optimistic outlook. He even said, "This Government has never been able to understand the need for an industrial strategy."

Westland

Evidently the Westland Affair taught him a lesson or two. We need to absorb some too. We cannot rely, after all, on Tory dissidents.



THREE of the several hundred Haringey workers outside Wood Green Library who turned out to rally in support of sacked GCHQ workers on November 7; one of the many rallies around Britain. This rally was organised by Haringey Trades Council and was addressed by its president Barbara Levy and Nalگو's senior vice president Rita Donaghy. One of the sacked GCHQ workers, Mike Grindley, spoke for the entire labour movement when he said: "Membership of a free and independent trade union is a basic democratic right. No government has the right to remove this." On the evening of the day of the rally the CPBML held a public meeting in Wood Green Library entitled 'Can London Unite Against Thatcher?'. Photo: The Worker

Labour win control of Nottingham

'THE PEOPLE of Nottingham took one look at what is happening in Bradford and flooded to us.' So said Roy Hattersley when his Party took control of the Council there following the death of the Tory member for the Byron Ward and the ensuing by-election.

The Conservatives in Nottingham had previously relied

on the casting vote of the Lord Mayor until Alan Clarke for Labour captured what the Tories regarded as a safe seat. The (ex) Council Leader, Bill Bradbury, described the defeat as 'devastating' and cleared his desk so that Betty Higgins could move in. Top of her list is the Council's policy for compulsory competitive tendering.

Public Meetings

LONDON
Friday 25 November
Bellman Bookshop
155 Fortress Road
NWS 7.30 pm

"Congress 88: Changing Gear"

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