



# CALLAGHAN ATTACKS UNIONS

CALLAGHAN is leading a yelping pack of capitalist supporters - politicians, archbishops, law lords and the like - in an all-out attack on trade unions. The organised workers of Britain are demonstrating all over the country their determination to win wages based on their needs and united strength rather than on the Labour Government's line defending profits, and it has never been more obvious that any real advance by workers has to be in the teeth of government resistance, whether Labour or Tory.

As workers in the public sector moved into industrial action over their just claims, brushing aside Callaghan's 8 per cent-£3.50 limit, he told the Commons angrily: 'I myself would not hesitate to cross a picket line.' He defended the right of workers to defy picket lines which, he said, were not sacred objects. In his fear that organised workers are wrecking his chances of re-election he has taken the extreme anti-working class position of urging people to cross picket lines.

At a meeting on January 26 Callaghan gave his capitalist view of the great campaign which has activated the whole labour movement to demand a say in the pricing of its labour power. 'Free collective bargaining', he insisted, 'is free collective chaos.' But capitalism's chaos is the working class's order - a new socialist order we have to establish in the place of capitalism which has always meant destructive chaos for us.

He also resorted to the old divide-and-rule tactics of trying to set poorly paid against less poorly paid. 'Does the trade union movement want to help the low paid or does it want to maintain differentials?' he asked. This is like the question: 'Have you stopped beating your wife?' We do not accept the divisive terms in which Callaghan catechises us. We demand decent wages for all, so that all can live in dignity; and adequate rewards for skill, so that our skills, the guarantee of a better future for

Britain under socialism, shall not be destroyed.

Callaghan's hysterical charges against the unions - that they are using 'force not reason', that they are strike-happy and 'strike first and talk later, if at all' - are simply the measure of the damage the organised working class is beginning to inflict on Callaghan's master, capitalist profit. His henchman, Healey, expressed his revenge on the working class by saying that he would see to it that price rises and tax increases would wipe out anything workers got beyond the Government's 5 per cent.

Silkin took the same line as Callaghan, saying that lorry drivers who wished to drive past a picket line were entirely free to do so. And if such a driver is 'unlawfully obstructed or intimidated or assaulted, he should report the matter to the police'. Acting on this line a High Court Judge has banned picketing outside the United Biscuit Company on the grounds that it is an illegal use of secondary picketing. We do not recognise the class enemy's scholastic definitions of 'primary' and 'secondary' picketing - any more than we allow them to define what is an 'official' or an 'unofficial' strike.

Nor has the Government hesitated to back up its threat of using the army and police as strike breakers. It has called in army and police vehicles to break the strike of the ambulancemen.

Even the forces of religion are being drawn into class

struggle. The Archbishop of Canterbury has made a sweeping attack on the 'pitiless industrial action' of the unions and has said that 'enough is enough'. He appealed to the three political parties to sink their differences and work together in a new holy trinity.

But, of course, Callaghan's real attack on the unions is his attempt to get the TUC to agree to another social contract. He would even be prepared to make concessions on paper to get another agreement before the nearing election because such an agreement, if honoured, renders the trade unions redundant. That would be the ideal revenge against organised workers.

The unions have decisively rejected any such social contract in favour of collective bargaining, which the unions were founded to carry out in their members' interest. We must make sure we do not ever again fall for the arguments in favour of a social contract. The General Secretary of the TUC may say that 'the absence of agreement (between the Government and the TUC) makes it more difficult for the trade union movement to operate in a coherent way', the truth for us is that the actions of the movement have never been so coherent.

It is that coherence which is so frightening the Prime Minister that he is outdoing the Tories in calling for people to scab and strike-break. We have to see to it that the TUC reflects that coherence in its stand vis-a-vis Callaghan.



110 000 march against Government. Photo: A. Ward(Report)

## Public sector strikes

SINCE January 22, public sector workers have added their very considerable weight to the working class revolt against government guidelines on pay. There was sufficient warning it would be done.

Platitudes about 'the plight of the low paid as first priority' pay no bills. The Labour Government had its chance during the period of Social Contract, on all four conditions of which it reneged, to tackle low pay and increase living standards.

The Social Contract is now seen for the self-delusion it was, a lesson we should keep in mind during current desperate attempts by the Government to have it resurrected.

Public sector workers, members of NUPE, GMWU, TGWU and COHSE, have decided to grasp the nettle of pay with selective strikes to underline the contribution they make to the quality of life. Dustmen, nurses, ambulance drivers, airport firemen, water workers and grave-diggers, to list but a few, have by their strikes condemned this Government, allegedly so concerned about their welfare. That hundreds of thousands stopped work on January 22, while a hundred and ten thousand marched in

London against incomes policy, has acutely embarrassed this Vichy government, causing its morale to plummet. Election defeat with large abstentions now stares Labour in the face.

Government rhetoric is no match for the facts. Enormous reductions in public expenditure by the Labour Government has low pay as a necessary consequence. Pre-election promises of 1979 are mocked by post-election practice. We were promised higher pensions, improved housing and, of course, more schools and hospitals. In fact, public spending in 1977-78 was £7 billion less than promised at the beginning of 1975. Deliberate underspending amounts for half this sum, expenditure cuts for the other £3.5 billion.

The end result has been declining services, increasing unemployment and very low pay for those who provide such essential services. It is little wonder that in the past decade union membership in local authorities has risen from one-third to two-thirds of those employed. It is this increasing organisation that has provided the basis for the

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# Historic Notes - 16th century expropriation

ROBERT CROWLEY, the Archdeacon of Hereford between 1559 and 1567, was a man who constantly annoyed the church authorities and rising bourgeoisie with his political poems and pamphlets and popular printing presses. He annoyed them because he identified with those oppressed by the accumulation of capital and because he articulated a critical understanding of political ideas and events. Though he professed to hate rebelliousness, the impetus behind his work, the tradition and contemporary movement of which it was part, were revolutionary, working class.

Of the expropriating bourgeoisie he said: "Yea, there is not so much as a garden ground free from them. No remedy there, we must nedes fight it out, or else be brought to the lyke slavery that the French men are in." He doesn't blame vagrancy, caused by the enclosures, on personal indolence so much as class oppression. When he tells beggars to find work he is condemning the system, exactly like our own, which deliberately creates unemployment.

... there are pore people  
Welmoste innumerable,

That are dryven to begge  
And yet to worke they are able.

Crowley could see only two classes and the ruling class was characterized by its individualistic, self-seeking corruption:

The charitie of rich men  
is now thorowe colde  
And this is a Citty  
in name, but, in dede,  
It is a packe of people  
that seeke after meede  
For officers and al do seeke  
their owne gaine,  
But for the wealth of the  
commons  
not one taketh paine  
An hell without order I may  
it well call  
Where everye man is for him  
selfe,  
And no man for all.

He plainly denounced those stealing land for profit to their faces and asked them to 'Caste down the hedges and stronge mowndes, That you have caused to be made Aboute the waste and tyllage growndes.'

He called the class enemy 'Cormerauntes and gredeye gullies' What pained him was their callous destructiveness:

They take our houses over our heades, they bye our growndes out of our handes, they reyse our rentes, they leavie great (yea unreasonablie) fines, they enclose our commons... These idle heallies will devour al that we shall get by our sore labour in our youth, and when we shall be old and impotent, then shall we be dryven to begge and crave of them that wyl not give us so muche as the crownes that fall from their tables.

And it is this insight, rather than the contradictory, weaker side of Crowley's politics where he calls for compassion, charity and obedience, that is of most relevance to us today. Capitalism is destroying our country in its absolute decline as it did when it first appeared. No less terrifying than the enclosures are the closed factories and schools and hospitals. No less horrifying than the emergence of wage slavery is its problematic continuation. Crowley only partly recognised that the dispossessed peasants were the future fathers of revolutionary theory and practice, but he did fully realise that they had claims on each other and material resources far in excess of those who stole from them.

# Guns not butter from USA

PRESIDENT Carter's State of the Nation speech in Washington last week shows precisely how inflation is rapidly replacing the Devil as an object of universal dread. And in America, as here, the fight against it is being pursued with all the fervour of the Spanish Inquisition.

"Inevitably," said Carter, "real sacrifices must be made if we are to overcome inflation." Jobs, wages housing, education, all is to be sacrificed in the cause of this Holy War - except, of course, spending on war itself, the so-called defence budget.

On the defence front, the budget is to be increased by 7 per cent,

making it the largest peacetime defence budget in America's history. Billions of dollars are being poured into developing a new generation of nuclear submarines, more nuclear weapons and ballistic missiles.

Meanwhile, over 35 000 federal workers are to lose their jobs, many because the social programmes they work on are to disappear. These are the sacrifices to be made. But how they fit in with a fight against inflation only British Prime Ministers and American professors seem to know. The abiding principle is that the best way to make a capitalist country

rich is to impoverish its people.

Carter campaigned for the presidency on a platform of defence cuts. Now, of course, he has changed his mind - it might be good for votes, but it's not good for capitalism. As in Britain, it is standards of living that must be cut instead.

In the midst of all these domestic issues, Carter still found time to send a lone oil tanker to poor beleaguered Iran. It used to be said that the Shah was the one with oil power. Now the oilfield workers are showing where the real power lies. Carter must send coals to Newcastle.

# Capitalist chaos in China

IN CHINA the anti-Marxist Teng Hsiaping regime has decreed that all money and property confiscated from capitalists must be returned to them. Former business men and industrialists must be paid large sums of money to make up for the cuts in their huge salaries made during the Cultural Revolution.

There was a time when only Yugoslavs could say: 'We have a problem other socialist (?) countries have not had to cope

with - so many millionaires.' Now China is moving into the same situation.

The excuse for recreating all these millionaires is that it will ensure greater unity in China's modernisation programme. Of course it is going to have a great unifying effect on the country as a whole for vast sums of money to be taken away from the people and handed over to the capitalists. Obviously what is meant is greater unity between the present

regime and the capitalist class.

It is also being said that this policy will harness the special talents of these bourgeois money-grubbers to the modernisation programme. And indeed they do have special talents like capitalists everywhere - talents for robbing and exploiting people. Winning them over to the modernisation programme tells us all we need to know about whether that programme is socialist or capitalist.

# More opposed to Devolution in Scotland

"EVERYONE is worried about the the turnout. We are going to need something in the order of a 70 per cent turnout in order to get the necessary 40 per cent of the total electorate to say 'yes'." So said the spokesman of the Scottish pro-Devolution MPs. They have reason to be worried, for in the only previous referendum, that of the EEC, only 60 per cent turned out - and that in spite of massive publicity. There was never a majority for the EEC.

This explains why, when the idea was floated that 40 per cent of voters must approve Devolution, the present government opposed it furiously, but to no avail. Such

is their concern for democracy. Since then, support for the EEC and its twin, Devolution, has dwindled. Opinion polls are notoriously unreliable. Nevertheless, the latest poll shows what Scots already know to be the case. According to the poll, in March last year 46 per cent were for a Scottish assembly. The figure is now 39 per cent. The Glasgow Gazette has just reported the

same trend.

The poll itself was held in December, before much organised opposition, such as the Scotland Says No Campaign, got under way. But the real basis for a victory of the NO vote will be the recognition by the Scottish working class and labour movement, that a so-called independent Scotland would be the precursor to cutting Britain's united trade union movement to pieces.

# Teachers

TEACHERS are about to begin wage negotiations with their employer. They are putting the final touches to their claim which is likely to be in the region of 35 per cent. This disregards the Government's 5 per cent guideline and is a positive feature of the teachers' policy. Teachers must believe they are worth a 35 per cent increase. They need not look to other trade unions to see how they have fared in their battles with the employer. They have only to look to their recent history to realise the enormous power they have at their disposal when they choose to use it. Last Spring in a highly disciplined campaign the teachers broke through the 10 per cent limit.

Teachers can expect a tough battle with the Government and they must be prepared. Although the Education Secretary has hinted that teachers will get more than 5 per cent we cannot expect much more out of her without squeezing hard.

While it is unlikely that the Government will move the Royal Artillery into our schools teachers must be on their guard. There may come a reasonable offer with heavy shackles attached.

Lessons of the past few years should ensure that teachers will treat such an offer with the contempt it deserves. Government shall not pay for increases in teachers' salaries from other sections of the education budget. More pay for teachers should not mean fewer books for their pupils.

Teachers must consider the tactics they will adopt should they have to take industrial action. A clear indication of the support there is for the claim must come from the branches. There will only be a pittance unless there is a fight.

# Inflation caused by capitalism

ONCE AGAIN we are being told that double figure inflation is on its way. Of course the capitalist government says this is as a result of excessive wage demands. It is a small minority of workers, they say, who are sabotaging things for everyone else.

We know better. Inflation is not a direct result of wage demands, if it were we would not see such astronomical inflation in, for example, some S. American countries where the workers are paid a pittance. What causes inflation is capitalism's absolute insistence on maximum profit and exploitation.

Inflation is an incurable disease of capitalism. Capitalism, through the Labour Government at present, will strike the next blow in the class war by taking all we have gained through wages away in taxes, price rises and inflation. It is not up to us to help capitalism solve this contradiction by another social contract or any other concession. We must continue our undiluted and constant attack. The only way we can stop inflation (socialist countries do not have inflation), is by destroying capitalism. Under Socialism, production is no longer aimed at making profits or confined to what is profitable.

# The Week

ONE OF the instances of behaviour which Callaghan said should be reported to the police was action by pickets at Liverpool docks. They extracted a 'price' for allowing through a cargo of cucumbers and tomatoes. The price was that lorry drivers should give their pay for that job to charity, the Liverpool importers' association should give £1 000 worth of the produce to pensioners and deprived children and the Mersey Docks and Labour board should contribute £1 500 to a worthy cause.

RAIL fares have risen 168 per cent in the last five years. The government, having driven custom off the railways onto the roads (so that we are poisoned with lead in exhausts) now wishes to axe 40 000 jobs. Now that ASLEF have won their demand, the way is clear for united action to defend the rail system.

THE GOVERNMENT, not content with the reintroduction of the means test for children to receive schools meals, has so depressed living standards that the number of children receiving free dinners because of low family income rose over the million mark for the first time last year.

BRITISH shipbuilders, in addition to provoking industrial strife by recognising the Engineers' and Managers' Association, which is not a member of the Confederation of Shipbuilding and Engineering Unions, is proposing to close the Haverton Hill shipyard on Teeside, and the repair yard at Falmouth, with a loss of 2 000 jobs.

ENNALIS, Social Services Secretary, sued by four patients, was not held responsible and could not be said to have "acted unreasonably" according to the judge. One of the plaintiffs had waited for 28 months for an operation, another three years for a replacement hip, while a third, confined to a wheelchair, had waited 2 years.

A MONTH after the pre-christmas bombings, a number of suspects have been detained under the Prevention of Terrorism Act, it is reported. Some may wonder why it takes so long to detain anyone. Whoever planted the bombs was guilty of an inhuman act. But we are not even clear if those detained are being charged with the deed. We all remember the terrorists' white Opel Kadett car, which seemed to cover distance with the greatest of ease, and in pursuit of which troops closed down and searched a whole suburb in Scotland. The car has just been found in Ireland, they say, and "has been eliminated from the actual bombing enquiries".

THE RIGHT to finger-print anyone over 14 who has been arrested is demanded by the Police Federation in evidence to the Royal Commission, along with the right to enter premises without a warrant. They also want a general power of arrest when they suspect an indictable offence has been or is about to be committed, and support a proposal that a suspect could be detained for up to 72 hours without being charged.

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## Editorial

"THE ABSENCE of agreement (between the Government and the TUC) makes it more difficult for the trade union movement to operate in a coherent way." So said the General Secretary of the TUC.

How wrong this is. Nothing is more coherent than the present movement, which has smashed the Government's attempts to impoverish us with its five per cent, and has helped us catch up a little in wages, of what has been lost in government-fuelled inflation.

Incoherence there is. But it comes from those in the trade union movement who are holding back in this fight.

There is talk of a "going rate" of 15 per cent - the figure itself of no importance. Would trade unionists then withhold support for unions asking for more? Nothing could please the Labour Government more.

There is the demand, raised in many quarters, for 'comparability'. What workers have won in the private sector would become the yardstick for the public sector, the whole thing established by Government statistics. Is such wage fixing more acceptable because the demand originates in the Union movement itself.

There is the notion of a 'national minimum wage', and the idea, which some believe in because they are themselves lower-paid, that the lower-paid should have priority in the so-called share-out in wages. Callaghan is keen to encourage the notion. To accept this is to accept once again the 'social contract' idea that there is a fixed share of the national wealth to be distributed to the 'poor workers' by an impartial government. Don't we know, or do we refuse to face the fact that profits form an ever-growing portion of the national wealth which is rightfully ours, and is denied us in the form of wages only because of the employers' greed?

Why did one of the banners in the recent wonderful demonstration of public service workers carry the slogan "5 per cent may be all right on your salary but it isn't on ours"? How many unions are pressing for special status treatment? How many are delaying claims in the hopes that others may gain, so that we may reap without the struggle? How much false militancy is there in struggles which by their tactics of desperation inhibit organised, protracted struggle? Above all, how many of us are prepared to tolerate agreement with a Labour government (is wage restraint at 15 per cent any better than at five?) out of fear that there may be worse to come in the shape of the Tories?

### Let's carry on the fight

Incoherence in the Labour movement comes only if we turn away from supporting each other in the common fight against this present Labour Government. The inducements of something extra (nothing in reality) for the lower-paid, of a so-called fair agreement between the trade unions and the Labour Government, have come at a critical time for us. Callaghan's is a cunning appeal.

Nothing would suit this reactionary Government better than that we should restrain our fight against their policies - more vicious than any since the war, more destructive than at any time. Why? Out of fear of greater repression to come?

Whether the next attack be in the form of increased unemployment promised by Labour, or further repression of the trade union movement, whether imposed before or after an election, by Labour or Tory, makes no difference. By opposing this Government's policies, as we so successfully are, we are strengthening ourselves for the fight against what will come next.



THE EMPEROR'S NEW CLOTHES

## Governments destroy more houses than Blitz

'STOP the Blitz' was the slogan of squatters who occupied 43 terraced houses in Pymont and two other roads in Ilford in the London Borough of Redbridge. Between 1939 and 1945 200 000 houses were destroyed. But in the six years 1971-1977 700 000 have been destroyed.

The houses were occupied to mark the 10th anniversary of the squatting movement. Early last December a small army of skilled people descended on the boarded up properties, which were scheduled for demolition and conversion into a car-park. Within a day or two, water and gas were connected basic repairs carried out, and the houses rendered fit for habitation. Yet in the New Year, after promises of a public enquiry and rehousing, the squatters moved out. Immediately, the houses (pictured above) were systematically rendered unfit for habitation. Roof tiles were removed, concrete poured down the drains, flooring joists sawn through. The council insisted that the plans of demolition for a carpark would go ahead. Such is a Tory borough.

The deliberate nature of this vandalism illustrates what we are up against. Capitalism in Britain has destroyed more houses than Nazi fascism. Their policy has continued by Labour and Tory governments alike. Liverpool has had the heart ripped out of it like London. It is the same in a Labour borough like Southwark.

Southwark has one of the worst records for housing destruction,



Ilford houses occupied before their destruction. Photo: The Worker

yet the Labour Council wants to spend £50 million rates from what inhabitants are left on a new Town Hall. If Southwark people reverse the decision, it will be because of their unity. First a demonstration through the streets and then a picket of hundreds up to 2.30am outside the Council chambers where the decision was taken. Police had to hold the people back, and more and more councillors are being forced to vote against the ruling Labour group - which could only manage a 29 per cent vote in the last election.

Yet the government plans for such destruction to continue. The National Economic Development Office in its construction forecasts notes that housing output has fallen each year since 1974, with

the exception of 1978. Here the boom was a mere 6 per cent rise half of which is accounted for by maintenance, and is forecast to die out. Completions are estimated to fall from 135 000 this year to 130 000 next and 125 000 in 1980. Starts in private housing are likely to drop by 10 000 to 140 000. In the public sector it is, if anything, worse. At 110 000, starts this year will be 20 000 down on last, with the latest figures showing a drop of 31 per cent in the number of council houses begun. Meanwhile, the price of the existing and often wantonly destroyed stock of housing rises 20-30 per cent per annum. There is profit for no-one but the ruling class for whom bad housing is a political objective - a means to demoralisation and repression.

## Public libraries threatened

HOW important is it to preserve the public library as a service free of charge? Many local authorities in the name of economy would introduce charges but for the law. Many workers would not object, as they find the service as it is provided rather old-fashioned, with its Carnegie buildings, somewhat inefficient with its queues for new titles; or even irrelevant, now that telly and the paperback are everywhere.

It would be a disaster if we were to allow the introduction of charges. As with the health service, so often those people who need it most, like the young and the old, are also those least able to pay. But more important than that - the right to free access to the storehouses of knowledge and culture is as important a weapon in the hands of the working class

as that of literacy. Both were won through the struggle of our class in the last century, the first big victory for public libraries (1850) preceding and paving the way for the first big victory for education (1870). Both arose largely through the impact of the Mechanics Institutes created by our class.

Ready access to the facts is a weapon of incalculable value. Employers can have their own private information service: when workers need a public one. The local reference library, even when it is not used, must be there, and the person in charge required as now by law to provide a 'comprehensive and efficient' service to all who enter. If it is not comprehensive and efficient it is time workers took the local authority to task.

Many local authorities have blatantly ignored their statutory

obligation to provide 'materials sufficient in number, range and quality to meet any requirements both of adults and children, and they have been allowed to get away with it. Many have taken advantage of loopholes in the 1964 Public Libraries and Museums Act to bring in crippling fines for overdue books and charges for any non-book materials (like sound recordings) which may be provided. Book funds have been kept static or cut while book prices soared (up to 84 per cent in 4 years). Staffing has been cut and branches closed, or opening hours cut.

There is a real danger that the current strangulation of the service will cause such a decline in its quality that workers will not defend it against the final death-blow, which would surely be that of introducing charges. We must not allow, by negligence, the destruction of this great institution

## Best hospitals are axed first

"THE RADCLIFFE Infirmary Oxford is facing a crisis such that the service it provides could not only be inadequate, but dangerous to patients." This warning comes from a management team report to the Oxford Area Health Authority. They also recognise a serious shortage of nurses, but even if nurses continue to work harder they cannot cover the shortage of beds.

The Radcliffe Infirmary already has the fastest bed turnover of any British teaching hospital. The report speaks of repeated examples of patients not being admitted when admission would have been advisable, or being sent home so early that they were at substantial risk. Hospital workers have seen the use of camp beds in holding wards and the reluctant clearing of

main wards to make way for patients at even greater risk. As hospitals struggle to cope with acute admissions, the waiting lists for elective procedures lengthen so increasing morbidity, inconvenience and discomfort.

Undoubtedly the fears of the management team will soon be realised and "tragedies resulting from this enforced policy will soon reach the headlines." Such an enforced policy speaks of a ruling attitude which does not care for the health of workers. Oxford has been accused of practising elitist, extravagant medicine. It does not, nor does the Hammersmith Renal Unit, which is at present in mothballs. They simply practice good medicine, for people not for profit.

## Gravediggers

THE GROWING crisis of capitalism in Britain has caused many more workers to take to struggle in defence of their wages. As capitalism cannot care for the wages of workers neither can it care for their lives. Testimony to this is the fact that the death rate in Liverpool at this time doubles to around 400 people a month.

The local Area Health Authority has come up with the ingenious plan to put into cold store the 'excess corpses', to put them in an empty factory in that infamous industrial graveyard of Speke.

If we are to prevent this callous squandering of our lives and industries by capitalism we must take on our proletarian role as the gravediggers of capitalism and by revolution bury it.

# Worker Interview

ON THE day of action of the public service unions for their pay claim, we interviewed ambulancemen on strike at the Northfleet, Kent, station.

"Unlike the police and the firemen, we have not yet won recognition as an emergency service. Now, a fireman is paid £81 a week at 19, and £85 a week at 24 years old. An ambulance man at any age receives £38. 80, which goes up to £44. 80 after 12 months. He then receives a supplement of 60 pence after 5 years' service, and if he is able to carry out roadside repairs to the vehicle, there is a bonus of 25 pence a week."

"Overnight, two crews are in the station, but as soon as one of them is called out, another crew on standby have to come into the station from their homes. This standby duty involves staying indoors for 63 hours during the week, including Saturday and Sunday nights, and for this we are paid £6."

"We have never, in my memory, taken action like this before over pay, but we are very determined now. In fact, our branch (COHSE Ambulancemen) voted for all-out strike, and we are awaiting further instructions from union headquarters on this. The situation has come to a head. You have the silly situation of ambulancemen paid by one arm of government such a low wage that they have to claim family income supplement from another government department. Enough is enough."

"We previously went along with government pay limits, but now the 5 per cent, if we accepted it, would sentence us to a life of poverty. Dedication doesn't buy food in a supermarket."

"We're having a lot of support from the public at present, but there are always some individuals who don't give us a second thought until an accident happens in their home. Well, we're not listening to people who spend out on large houses and private schools for their children telling us how shameful we are to demand a wage. There's got to be some justice."

"The local paper hasn't helped. Every day of the year, they phone the station to ask if we can give them news about road accidents for their columns, but today, when we phoned them, they refused to come to talk to us."

(At this moment, a former ambulanceman arrived who had left the service to receive a basic wage working in a local paper mill as industrial fire officer which was twice the ambulancemen's wage.)

"There's been a very high turnover here, which isn't doing the service any good. We've had very good experienced ambulancemen forced to leave because of the low wages. It's an open-ended funnel at the moment. And experience counts in this job, when you've got to make quick decisions which could mean the difference between life and death."

"Very few people realise what the job involves. As an ambulanceman, you're a driver, a nurse, a mortician, a social worker, a mechanic, a vehicle cleaner, garage sweeper, you rescue people from car crashes and pick up drunks that the police won't handle (it's now called "alcoholic poisoning"). There are violent psychiatric patients - and since it's supposed to be part of the job, the Criminal Injuries Board refuses compensation. There are a lot of men with bad backs, because they have to lift people in particular ways - it's not like lifting a solid object. And recently, we had a man leave with a nervous breakdown, after a particularly gruesome road accident he was called out to."

"We're not really surprised that the Government is behaving as they are towards us. We've grown to expect it from them. But we're determined to get ourselves a living wage. And the officers are right behind us too - they're refusing to take over any of our work during the dispute."

## Public sector strikes (Continued)

fight-back from public sector workers, 500,000 of whom are paid £42. 50 for a full working week. The Low Pay Unit's 'Rising Tide of Poverty', published in September 1978, showed that between 1974-76, early years of the Social Contract, the number of people whose family income was below the poverty line rose from 1.4 million to 2.3 million. Public sector workers are well represented in this figure. Resistance was inevitable.

A small general strike has occurred and is now being followed up with industrial action, guerrilla-style. Water workers have made their presence felt in parts of South Wales, the Midlands, in North East and North West England. An offer of 14 per cent has been rejected and strikes continue. Water workers earning £46.39 for a 40 hour week are not accountable to the gutter press if they decide a strike is the only way.

75,000 GMWU members in Scotland have prepared for a continuous stoppage if necessary, depending on the out-

come of further negotiations. 1,800 NUPE branches in Britain's 456 local authorities are deciding how best to press their claim. In London, Hackney and Southwark council workers are not collecting refuse or gritting roads. Hospital porters have conducted lightning strikes, while ensuring emergency cover. Laundry work has been affected by strikes in several Birmingham hospitals. All over Britain roads covered in snow and ice have been left untreated.

The Governor of the Bank of England has laid down the capitalist law on wage increases. He sees inflation and more unemployment. Healey does not just see it but threatens it. He says taxes will be increased, along with unemployment. Ennals, responsible for the closure of more hospitals than any other Social Services minister, leave alone all the casualty departments closed down, accuses ambulancemen of putting people's lives at risk. How long more the hypocrisy, the open threats and the low pay?



Ambulancemen picketing on the day of action Photo: The Worker

## 'Strife' at the National

WITH perfect timing the National Theatre has produced John Galsworthy's 'Strife', written in 1907 but completely in tune with industrial struggles today and the best description, indeed the only accurate one, of a strike.

It is difficult to praise highly enough the production, acting, lighting, designs and sound. The sound! When people were drafted into the factories for the first time in world war 2, they could accept the dirt, danger and boredom but the hellish noise was almost too much to bear. The end of the play is marked by industrial noise that is demonic. In contrast the actors, with immense skill, sound conversational, this is skill indeed on the immense stage of the Olivier Theatre. Even the set pieces of the Chairman of the Company and the impassioned plea of the convener of stewards are spoken not orated, and not one word is missed. Every actor is good. Many of us would go anywhere to see anything in which Michael Bryant played but his work is enhanced by the whole company. The 'crowd' is the best I have ever seen. The workers use their cues to show anger, fear, resolution and the young ones, a sexy cockiness; one man displayed emotion using his back.

The director expressed what Galsworthy wrote; not two out-of-date dinosaurs fighting a battle but a factory of workers who make up their own minds regardless of leaders, logic or oratory.

The analysis of capitalism by the chairman is the clearest account of what is capitalism, and is spoken by Andrew Cruickshank in the reasonable manner of a convinced man who feels that he speaks for history. The slight Victorian monkishness of Galsworthy is toned down. When I saw the play last, sometime in the thirties, the death bed scene of the convener's wife, dying of respectable 'heart' plus starvation and cold, not something squalid like 'consumption', was harrowing but detracted from the sharpness of the battle. In this production, the wife played by Tamara Hincho, is beautiful and gently ironic, reclining gracefully on a chair; not one of Galsworthy's patient Griseldas, and it is clear that when the curtain falls she will be assisting the harridan. Madge Thomas, played by Brenda Blethyn, to tell everybody, strikers and bosses, that they are all wrong and let the women do the lot.

Of course these strikers, all skilled men though without jobs, food or heat, we are told elsewhere, are aristocrats of labour. We know the convener is because he does not wear a cap and the trade union organiser must be because he wears an overcoat, though obviously made by his grandmother. And why should Galsworthy, of the upper class, be despised by Lawrence, the son of a miner and an artist too; but it was the honest craftsman Galsworthy who told the truth about workers.

## NUM rejects 3 per cent

THE REPLY from the National Coal Board to the NUM's eight point wage claim has been a 3 per cent offer from the Board.

The claim seeks:

1. The U1 rate to be £110 a week and the surface minimum to be £66.
2. The introduction of a shorter working week.
3. The introduction of a Service Payments Scheme.
4. The introduction of provisions to protect the earnings of men downgraded because of injury, illness or age.
5. The re-evaluation of allowances.
6. Payment for bathing and changing times.
7. The establishment of Compassionate Leave provisions.
8. The agreement to run for eight months, from March 1979, thereby returning to the traditional negotiating date of November 1.

The NUM has stated that the claim is being presented without regard to any external policy restraints. Also the NUM, after allowing the degrading and divisive productivity schemes to operate, have moved in the right direction with a unifying call for a good basic pay structure.

With increasing evidence that higher productivity means less safety, and benefits only the employers, workers in the coal industry have realised that they are entitled to a decent basic wage without strings attached. This time there must be no compromise - workers throughout Britain are telling the Labour Government they cannot govern, so the miners with this claim and a principled struggle can drive yet another nail into the coffin of social democracy.

### 'STRIFE' by Galsworthy

Now available from:

BELLMAN BOOKSHOP  
155 Fortress Road  
LONDON  
NW5

A Duckworth paperback  
£1.50 plus 15p postage

## Public Meetings

### London

Feb. 9 Pay policy smashed: Conway Hall, Red  
What next? Lion Square, Holborn.

Feb. 23 Devolution and the EEC: whose benefit? Conway Hall

Mar. 9 Out with the Labour Govt. Bellman Bookshop  
All meetings are at 7.30 p.m., venue as stated.

### Oxford

Wed. 7th February The Struggle for Health & Education

Wed. 14th February Our Trade Unions, our decisions

Wed. 21st February Seizing the Assets  
All starting at 8.00 p.m., Cowley Community Centre

### Reading

Feb 22nd EEC, Devolution and Parliament.  
8.00pm AUEW Hall, Oxford Road.

## CPSA vote to act

THE CIVIL servants clerical union, the CPSA, has just announced that a ballot of its membership has produced a 2 to 1 vote in favour of taking industrial action in support of the civil servants' wage claim soon to be submitted to the Government. The claim will be for up to 25-30 per cent for some grades.

This vote for action follows the lead already given by the executive grades trade union, the SCPS. The policy is now for these two unions (and any of the other civil service unions who so decide) to co-ordinate a series of selective strikes, starting with a national one-day stoppage, probably at the beginning of February, as well as overtime bans and work-to-rules.