



UNITED WE CAN WIN

Vote Labour in Greenwich

THE LONDON Borough of Greenwich sits along the River Thames. On a clear day and with a good imagination a worker can see seven years of Thatcherism from the Observatory in Greenwich Park.

Murdock's union-free fortress Wapping is to the North; a workless river runs its course to containerised Tilbury in the east and, below, the builders' cranes build a 'nothing' out of London's docks. County Hall with its FOR SALE sign, the vacated home of the Greater London Council, is to the west; the Palace of Westminster and the City of London sit on the horizon shrouded in mist but presiding over the destruction of everything civilised and progressive.

Within the borough of Greenwich itself (famous throughout the world for its people's contribution to navigation, to science and to industrial progress) unemployment is high and what jobs there are are mostly in the public sector, continuously under threat. The Dreadnought Seamen's hospital is gone, and our two remaining hospitals are on red alert.

Young people

Our young people, like everywhere else, are cheated of optimism and only the Ministry of Defence offers a limited number of engineering apprenticeships.

The industrial history of our country, including its industrial decline, could be charted from this borough, all of it connected to the river and the sea. We can boast the Thames Barrier - a magnificent piece of engineering, a permanent reminder of the GLC's good work, the like of which could probably not now be repeated. Its beautiful silver domes climb out of the water towards the sky. Without an industrial base it might become famous as the last wonder of British workers' skill and become a monument to nostalgia. It can best be seen from the Woolwich ferry, a free ferry wrested from employers to take the workers of Woolwich and Greenwich to work in their thousands in the docks; now to be made into an airport for asset-strippers in designer jeans.

The London borough of Greenwich could again be an important place. It could mark a turning of the tide in British politics. There is to be an election soon; an election which is the subject of much media speculation and analysis - much of it nonsense.

The message from Greenwich will be clear. We want no more of this government, with its fascist intent. The vote for Labour needs to be resounding - so that the view from the Observatory might be a London once again bustling with industrial life.

THIS COUNTRY invented something in the last century which has been patented worldwide. Necessity caused it to be invented, continuing need has encouraged its subsequent growth. That invention was the trade union.

Today the trade unions have a major role to play in the removal of the Thatcher government, because that government represents a grave threat to trade unionism and all whom it protects. Hoping she will go is not quite the same as actively working and organising for her government's departure.

Her many enemies need to be organised in active opposition, in pursuit of this main task. For if we fail, then what are the prospects for Britain, for where we live?

What we have to rely on is the organised working class, organised mainly in the unions but taking in all those organisations that combine to defend and advance our class interests. That is what she must beat, though after seven years she has not succeeded yet.

Thatcherites hate the existence and talk of an 'organised working class'. Workers with a class perspective, independent, organised together in mutual interest, hate Thatcherites.

Organised working class

What she wants is our disorganisation, so she is anti-union. The collective strength of workers has won us many battles, so she is opposed to collectivism. Her policy of mass unemployment has aimed to divide workers, to impoverish, to intimidate. We want the right to work; she pushes the back-stabbing right to scab. But cultivating individualism, selfishness and short-term thinking, she hopes to undermine our class solidarity with fellow workers who need it.

'Organised working class' is an expression commonly used, but it is far more than just an expression. It is an historical construct: From conspiracy and illegality, despite prison, deportations and hangings, workers combined to form a labour movement. Imagine a Britain without that 'organised working class'. Thatcherites have.

Grumbling dislike of her policies must be turned into organised opposition to her government. In their various ways, unions have done that. The miners turned the tide; in a manner of speaking, they parted the Red Sea. Teachers, at their best, have united against government cuts, and in defence of state education. The tenacity of printworkers has been inspirational. The workers at British Telecom could not be pushed around.

Workers have organised to save industries and services that capitalism in absolute decline has tried to destroy and asset-strip. Thatcher leads a counter-revolution. They are organised, class conscious and they mean to hang on to power.

We must build on our strengths. Her government niggles away at our weaknesses; lack of ideological clarity is a weakness. We follow diversions and, just occasionally, we welcome sugar-coated bullets fired by our enemies. Now is the time to press on until her government goes.

Civil servants begin fresh pay battle

"KEEP YOUR heads down. Negotiate a few deals on the side. Wait till after the election" Those were the objectives of a lot of civil servants a few months ago. Some still hold that view.

"Pay a bit of money to buy peace in the civil service. Divert them into 'regrading and restructuring'." Those were Thatcher's views.

What a happy coincidence! What a good basis for destroying civil service trade unionism once Thatcher had taken advantage of this desperate level of class collaboration to retain power.

What an upset, therefore, when members of four unions, including well over half the civil service, rejected siren calls for peace with the enemy.

It was not easy. The immediate narrow interests of

members of different unions pointed to different claims, different objectives. However, clear thinking won through. This week CPSA, SCPS, IRSF and NIPSA go forward with a claim for:

- a minimum wage of £115 a week
- £20 a week increase for the lower paid
- 15% increase for the rest
- a 35 hour week
- six weeks holiday for all.

There are no illusions; there is no waiting for a formal response from the employer. Campaign committees are being set up throughout the country. Joint office meetings are being called from 23 February. Ballots for a rolling programme of industrial action across the regions are to be held in late March.



More support Caterpillar fight

DOCKERS at the Greenock container terminal have agreed to back the work-in at the Caterpillar factory in Uddingston where 1,200 jobs are at risk. Workers at Caterpillar had called for action to prevent management from re-directing cargo bound for Uddingston to the company's Leicester factory, and despite being under threat of closure themselves the dockers have agreed not to handle any cargo which they identify as having been re-directed.

At present all Caterpillar parts are imported through Greenock, but in anticipation of management attempts to use other ports the Caterpillar workers are also seeking similar undertakings from dockers in Liverpool, Southampton and Teesport.

Their morale will have been given a boost by last Friday's decision in Brussels when workers at Caterpillar plants throughout Europe voted not to accept any transfer of work from the threatened earth mover factory. Socialist MPs in

the European Parliament have played their part in this latest move to help the 800 workers occupying the plant.

A meeting in Glasgow of 300 shop stewards from all over Scotland has decided to give total support to the occupation. There was also a call to stop components entering Britain and Europe which would normally be supplied to other Caterpillar plants by the Glasgow factory.

At the meeting Mick McGahey of the NUM called for the campaign to spread throughout Scotland so that there will not be a town, nor a village where the closure is not discussed. The only point to add is that there is no reason why this should be limited to Scotland; it should be taking place throughout Britain. He also made clear that the opposition to the closure is not just about Caterpillar but about the whole question of industrial decline.

'JOC' the Caterpillar tractor built by workers occupying the plant. Photo: Anthony Brannen

Telecom union strike victory

THE NATIONAL dispute in British Telecom came to an end last Thursday with a return to work by the still strong and united National Communications Union engineering section.

Just as the dispute illustrated the depth of ill-feeling between Telecom workers and the management of the privatised company, so the return to work was marked by new BT dirty tricks. Across the country District Managers made a concerted attempt to claw more concessions out of the returning workers. From Brighton to Liverpool the response was the same - the engineers simply walked out again.

One target was the '9-day' fortnight, a prized concession won in the past by the NCU. Engineers were told that they were back on a straight five-day week or worse. Some were asked to give guarantees of working overtime or so-called 'good behaviour'.

By the end of the day it was fairly clear that the attempt had failed. For example, in Manchester where engineers had anyway voted heavily against settling at all, the new dispute was settled with the management backing down completely in the face of the strength of the engineers, and threats of sympathy strikes from the

clerical section of the NCU and the Society of Telecom Executives.

The return to work now seems to have settled down in most places, with management failing to break the 9-day fortnight. The fact that they would try such bad faith, having just agreed the opposite with national negotiators is a warning for the future.

As to the settlement itself it was an achievement for the NCU. While some of the terms were not what the engineers wanted, BT did not succeed in bull-dozing through its absolute right to order its workers to do anything it wants to.

The issue was whether unions had any place in the privatised company or could simply be brushed aside by an aggressive management. BT's managers had calculated that that resistance would rapidly collapse if they forced the union into a battle and they calculate wrongly.

The company demands the more intensive exploitation of its workers, resulting in a loss of jobs for some. That demand will not go away. Now a guerrilla period will follow around the terms of the new settlement. All BT unions will expect a return to major conflict before too long.

'We won't be pawns in their games'

THE FOLLOWING is taken from a speech given to a recent East London print workers support group public meeting. It was presented by Jean Gittins from Women against Pit Closures.

ONCE UPON A TIME ... about half a century ago... There was born, in Yorkshire, a baby girl. Her father was a humble coal miner. His livelihood depending on the need for his labour.

When the nation needed coal. He was exhorted to work hard. His patriotic duty. When the owners of the mine didn't need the coal, he was nobody's responsibility. Yet, these were good people.

So afraid of debt were they, that nothing that could not be paid for immediately was bought. Even medical assistance was expensive. So, they often suffered needlessly, in fear of the dreaded debt. And yet, theirs was a happy home.

Even a world war, which was declared when the child was three years old, and which was fought in places that they had never heard of, was not enough to spoil that family's happiness. The little girl grew up, learning all the working class virtues.

At church, which she attended three times each Sunday, she prayed that her beloved country should triumph over its enemies. Dear uncles and friends went away to be soldiers, and were killed in battle, or maimed in mind and body. Our little woman collected scrap metal to make aeroplanes, and did her childish 'bit' in the great war effort.

At the end of the war, she was surprised to find that the prisoners clearing the street of snow were hardly distinguishable from themselves. For, were these not 'monsters' for whose downfall she had prayed. Still, right had triumphed, and, she was proud to be on the side of the 'good guys'.

Her parents talked a lot about getting on, the need to better oneself, and education was one of the things held in high esteem. Sometimes, the little girl noticed that the school book's version of historical happenings varied somewhat from the story as related by her father. Yet in general she

was eager to learn about the Great Empire that she felt so much a part of, and she couldn't help feeling, how lucky were all those patches of red on the wall map, to be British.

When the war ended, many changes occurred in the lives of the little family. The coal mine, for which her father worked, became public property. Everybody who needed medical treatment was entitled to it, whether they could afford it or not. The family's outside lavatory underwent a 'conversion' and became a W.C.

Following the family tradition of working down the mine

was obviously out of the question, and, shortly after leaving school, our heroine, now a 'know it all' young lady, married her handsome young man and prepared for the 'happy ever after' that she had read about.

No sooner had this 'twosome' become a 'threesome', then National Service took our girl's man to be a soldier, and unable to bear the heartbreak of parting, the little family moved into married quarters, and 'daddy' signed on as a regular soldier.

Time went by and four years and another baby later...the subject of this story found herself married

to a policeman, (same man different uniform). And life went on.

Over many years she brought up her family of three boys to be decent, honest, hard working men. The eldest became a school teacher. The two youngest followed the family tradition of working in the coal mines.

They had nothing to offer the world, but their labour. But, they didn't ask much of life, and if they could 'pay their way' and stay solvent, they were content.

Then, it happened. From out of the West, came the destroyer of their peace. The very means by which they lived was threatened. As in years gone by, British young men prepared to protect their traditional way of life.

But, where was the state that their father had served so faithfully? Only months before, British young men had been sent out to kill and be killed in defence of the way of life of the Falkland Islanders, and now, this same state turned and called our girl and her men 'The Enemy Within'. Well, that was the end of my fairy story.

From that time on, I watched the beliefs on which I had built my whole way of life destroyed.

Everything I believed in was proved a fallacy, from the conviction that honesty is the best policy, hard work is the passport to success, to the belief that our policemen are wonderful.

I began to realise, that, if I had been wrong on these two counts, there could be other flaws in my reasoning. I began to question everything I saw on T.V. and in the papers. If our boys could be hassled for just 'being there', perhaps, some of the other troubles in the country and in the rest of the world were not quite as we had been led to believe.

I watched the 'British Bobby' that I had admired turning into something that I didn't recognise, and I didn't like the change.

I'm not a rebel by nature. In fact I spent the first 48 years of my life with blinkers on. We didn't start Ledston Luck Support Group to start a revolution or to overthrow the government. We just wanted to survive until it was all over.

But looking back to March '84, I realise now that the beginning of the mining strike marked the beginning of my real education. Perhaps I will never see a society where people such as myself really matter. As anything more than a "Workforce", that is. But I no longer think that 'they', whoever 'they' are, know better than I do about anything.

When I heard the phrase 'Enemy Within' I realised whether I wanted to believe it or not, that they, the establishment, had declared war on us. We were to be eliminated.

Well I knew that I had always been honest, hardworking and loyal, so what did that make them? Granted they had the power. But so did Genghis Khan.

The things that really matter, is deciding for oneself what is right, then struggling against all odds to put things right. We will make our share of mistakes, God knows, they have made plenty. But at least they will be our mistakes, we won't be just pawns in somebody else's power games. I salute all workers who struggle, despite the odds.

I salute the print workers who have held out for a year, who wouldn't sell their principles for Murdoch's 30 pieces of silver.

I salute the women who decided that their place was in the front line of the struggle, and who no longer are prepared to leave their destiny in the hands of others.

Maybe at long last the world can become a place for people not profit. A place where we can ensure that our children have a future. Because it is a fact that we do not inherit the world from our parents, we borrow it from our children. It is our duty to see that we retain for the next generation the rights to a decent life that our mothers and fathers bought so dearly, and bequeathed to us.



Miners' wives march through Rotherham during the Miners' Strike
Photo: The Worker

MARCH BACK

To...Thomas and Bryan 3rd March 1985

So, you're back at work mi darlin'
And the Unions in shreds
But you'll be marchin' through the gates
Wi' proud uplifted heads

It's bin a year
The likes o' which the country's never known
When in the face of all the odds
The miners stood alone

And now, they're 'crowing' at your pain
And think that they are winning
But brothers, this is not the End
just End of the beginning

Poem from 'Striking Stuff', by Jean Gittins. From 1 in 12 Publications, 31 Manor Row, Bradford. Price £1.50 plus 25 p.p. Cheques payable to: NUM Solidarity Fund

THE STATE OF BRITAIN Education

LECTURERS SET TO RESIST BAKER

THE MONTH long overtime ban by college lecturers in pursuit of a pay claim has raised the climate in the colleges at a time when the government is planning a further attack on higher and further education.

When Baker failed to include the college lecturers in his dictatorial proposals for determining teacher's pay, leaving them instead to negotiate directly with the local authorities, some might have been naive enough to see this as a victory for free collective bargaining. But it is necessary to look beneath the surface of things.

In a spring White Paper on higher education, the government proposes to take the bulk of public sector higher-education out of the hands of the local authorities to form a new sector funded by direct grant from the DES and under the control of a restructured National Advisory

Body.

Similar proposals were put forward in 1981 as a shameless exercise in destruction. The body to be responsible for this was to be appointed by the Secretary of State, its members representatives of no-one.

Such was the opposition of the lecturers' union NATFHE and the local authorities that the NAB came into being as a compromise. Now the original plan is being resurrected, doubtless because the NAB has shown at least some concern for the good of education and has failed to 'rationalise' enough.

In a typical example of Thatcher-speak, Baker is putting forward the plan as a means of freeing the Colleges of Higher Education and Polytechnics from political interference and holds 'trumped up little councillors...the little tyrants who have now got into positions

of power as a result of our democratic processes', responsible. This is irony indeed when one considers the role of assorted secretaries of state in the present teachers' dispute and the contempt that their patron has for real democracy.

If Baker gets away with it, the local authorities will not be our employers for much longer. Non-advanced education is increasingly controlled by the MSC and the Department of Employment

With advanced and non advanced further education split off from each other, and under the direct control of different departments, the lecturer's union which has for so long represented the interests of all teachers in public sector further and higher education would be in serious difficulty. It is no wonder that for the time being we have not been included in the proposed new legislation.

Students struggle for grants

OCCUPATIONS, work-ins and demonstrations swept Britain last week as students protested about inadequate grants, bad housing, and attempts to remove them from the benefit system.

Some colleges, like Liverpool and Central London Poly, staged 24 hour occupations of college premises; others, like Essex and Bristol Universities, staged work-ins. The offices of the Department of Education in Cardiff found themselves swamped and occupied by angry students.

Not only the scale, but the diversity of action signals the beginning of a new phase within the National Union of Students. Manchester Area NUS occupied County Hall where they were joined by other trades unions and those involved in the local housing rights campaign. In Perth, 250 students at a small and supposedly 'underdeveloped' further education college walked out of lectures to present a petition to the local Tory Head-

quarters. The Wessex and London areas staged pickets outside the DHSS and the DES.

This week, actions must be intensified and widened in the run-up to Saturday's national demonstration. A squat, more occupations, pickets and a 'Fight for Education' public meeting have been arranged.

More and more colleges are identifying the Government as the enemy of education, and the NUS campaign must now be used to build students' confidence in the face of intensifying attacks. Middlesex Poly, for example, are fighting the Thatcherite directorate's proposal to close two sites, while Sussex University students' union face a vicious attack on their autonomy, which has implications for every student in the country.

Now is the time to seize the opportunity to go on the offensive against the government. Build the actions, show our strength, Thatcher must go!

THATCHER stands accused of conspiracy to destroy the health and the health service of the British people.

Health is first a social matter. In Thatcher's Britain, one child in nine will grow up in a family wholly dependent for its income on state benefits. No such society can be healthy.

In Thatcher's Britain, an increasingly aged population depends on an ever-shrinking workforce, especially manufacturing workforce. No such society can be healthy.

In Thatcher's Britain, millions of workers are made into paupers by unemployment and poverty wages. No amount of dietary advice will turn their waag into a source of health.

In Birmingham this year an old man was found in his flat. He had been dead for six months. Such is Thatcher's society.

This year, as in every year in Britain, thousands of old people will die of cold and malnourishment at home, of hypothermia. No-one will die at home of hypothermia in Sweden.

Thatcher's malign influence will be felt for generations to come.

NHS under Thatcher axe

LAST YEAR the government's capital spending on the NHS was far lower in real terms than spending in 1973-74. Spending in the seven years before Thatcher averaged £843 million; since 1979 it has averaged £825 million: these are the government's own figures.

millions cut

Further, the government plans to cut £450 million a year from housing benefit for the cold, old and needy. It is slashing loans for building and improving GP's surgeries.

Its privatisation programme has been a disaster. Recent examples in South Cumbria the private contractor delivered damp linen to the hospital and lost patient's clothing. In Queen Elizabeth hospital Birmingham meals were served with dirty cutlery and crockery. At Addenbrookes, Cambridge, the contractor upped its price by over £250,000 making it far dearer than the hospital's own cleaner's quotation had been.

Hospital waiting lists have risen by 66,000 to 802,600 between 1981 and 1985: the number of NHS hospital beds was cut by 30,000 to 421,000.

VICTORY AT SELLY OAK

MEDICAL Secretaries at Selly Oak hospital have won a significant victory in the fight against low pay in the NHS. Following on the heels of their colleagues at Luton, Dunstable and Manchester they put in a claim for re-grading.

The claim would mean not only between £6 and £10 per week added to their maximum salary of £75 but a recognition of the value of their work in organising the clinical teams, out patient clinics, typing medical correspondence and liaising with patients and health service staff.

all out strike

After two months limited industrial action management threatened to cut their pay by a third if they didn't return to normal work. The 44 women responded with a week long all out strike.

Despite management attempts to bring in agency staff (at a cost of £200 per week each) and the faltering support of the consultants with whom the women worked, they remained solid and after talks with the unit general manager, all of the medical secretaries were upgraded with the increased pay backdated to February 1986.

YTS Nursing shock for NHS

THERE HAS to come a time when nurses stop listing the symptoms of what's wrong with nursing and embark on some active treatment.

There is now an impressive body of evidence about what ails nursing. It is difficult to recruit student nurses, at least one third of those recruited do not complete the course, qualified staff

are leaving for Australia, the USA, Saudi Arabia, or leaving nursing for work that is better paid and less stressful.

Throughout the past two years, as recruits have dwindled, there has been plenty of academic discussion about reforms in nursing education but no finance forthcoming for the positive aspects of the reform thus allowing the government to seize on ill-conceived ideas about unqualified "helpers" and pushing this forward as the direction that nursing should take.

The Government has now grown impatient with the discussion about nurse education (the consultation period on the proposed reforms is only just complete) and is now pursuing its own answer to the shortage of nurse recruits: YTS trainees on the wards, the new shock troops of nursing.

In less than a month from now, YTS recruits will be coming to work on the wards. The NHS Training Authority, under the chairmanship of NHS Management Board chief executive Len Peach, are establishing a £100,000 feasibility study for a Youth Training Scheme in "client care".

Depending on the results of this exercise, pilot YTS will start nationwide from September 1988. The trainees would work "alongside nurses" and "receive a vocational qualification, which would lead to entry into training for nursing."

frightening

The feasibility study comes complete with a questionnaire of frighteningly naive questions such as, "is it possible to have YTS trainees in all client care areas?" Patients on their way to operating theatre or in intensive care, please send your replies on a postcard.

The NHS Management Board admits that there "has been considerable resistance"

to the introduction of the scheme. Clearly not enough in the face of a Thatcher government.

The response of nurses has to be twofold. The feasibility study wherever it is implemented must be opposed and condemned. But much more importantly, the more fundamental problems facing nursing, which have allowed the government to even think of this terrifying scheme, have to be tackled.

low pay

What better place to start than with the topic of nurses' pay, particularly the pay of ward sisters/charge nurses. All the detailed evidence to the nurses pay review body, all the TV documentaries and the research documents, are agreed that the low pay levels are a major factor in the drift of nurses out of the profession. Many of the other problems such as lack of supervision of student nurses are a result of trained staff shortages which can be traced directly to low pay.

Since the 1982 dispute the question of nurse pay has been a matter of quiet debate in national committees of nursing organisations. Beautifully worded and well researched evidence has been submitted to the pay review body. This year it was sent along to the DHSS under the slogan: "No Nurses, No future!"

The government is under no obligation to pay what the review body recommends: it has regularly refused to honour the recommendation. At the moment local general managers are saying that there is nothing that they can do about nursing shortage... "it's a national problem". All of those managers must be made to put pressure on the government to fund the 1987 recommendation. That would be a beginning.



Workers on demonstration against implementation of Thatcher's destruction policies on London's health services. Photo. The Worker.

Bent figures conceal truth

IN THE late summer of 1986, a Commons Select Committee was finally forced to confirm what all in the service knew to be the case, namely, that DHSS claims of a 20% increase in spending on the NHS was fatuous.

It finally transpired that real spending had grown by 2.2% over 5 years, or 0.4% a year. Ministers had previously stated that health authorities need 2% a year just to stand still; 1% to keep pace with the increasing number of very elderly people, 0.5% for advances in technology and a further 0.5% to meet stated policy objectives eg: to improve renal services and community care.

Put another way, the hospital and community health services had a cumulative current account under-funding of £1,325 million, or £6 million for every health authority in England and Wales: or £1.2 million for each district per year. This is the reality behind staff reductions and ward closures which are taking place right across the country.

no privatisation

Thatcher has failed to persuade us that privatisation is the way forward. The NHS remains as a monument to what a socialised and collective system can achieve. Savings generated by cost improvements and contracting out are simply that much less of a service. It is a tool that is used to destroy.

Fowler talks of new beds, but doesn't say that the available beds decreased by 12,900 between 1980 and 1983; nor that this has continued since then. There is a backlog of essential maintenance and repairs to buildings costing at £2 billion.

The official figures for people waiting for hospital treatment are now considered to be a vast misrepresentation of the true facts. This is recently stated to be 79.9% greater than the official figures for a particular District General Hospital studied.

The same cosmetic attention that unemployment statistics have received is being applied to the NHS. The DHSS now instructs its staff to exclude various patient categories from the official figures. These are; day cases, patients who defer admission for 'medical and social reasons, and patients awaiting check and review procedures.

All targets for the increases in the numbers of operations: hips, cataracts, coronary artery by-pass grafts, and bone marrow transplants are all set for achievement by 1990-after the election. Likewise the 100 health building schemes, part of 380 projects with a total value of £5 billion-all due for completion after the election. Authorities have been slashing their proposed capital programmes to meet revenue deficits for years.

We are heading for a balance of payments crisis in Britain: up to £6 billion in the red by 1988, and hence a massive increase in the borrowing requirement to meet the cost of the service. At that stage international finance capital will decide the level of health care in Britain if Thatcher remains in office.

Lack of adequate funding and consequently appropriate development of the NHS are natural partners for a shrunken wealth creating an industrial base, upon which all services depend. The catastrophic decline in industry, prompted by Thatcher, must be halted and reversed if we are to increase the money available, as opposed to redistribution of a shrunken purse.

The health of a nation depends on a healthy manufacturing base to create the necessities for life. Poverty, bad housing and unemployment is at the root of ill health. What is the point in health workers defending hospitals, yet standing by while whole industries disappear? Has the link between prosperity and well being still to be made? Every factory closure is a nail in the NHS's coffin.

Cuts for Inner London

A STUDY published in January exploded the Government myth that closure of acute hospital beds in London would release money which could be spent elsewhere in the NHS.

Commissioned by the chairmen of the 12 Inner London health districts, the report, entitled 'Planned Health Services for Inner London', is subtitled 'Back to back planning'. It focuses on the period 1983 to 1993, for which the four Thames Regional Health Authorities have produced strategic plans. Of a planned reduction of 1,487 acute beds in this decade, over 1,100 have already been closed in the first three years. But the anticipated savings have not been achieved because the number of patients being treated continues to rise.

In the period 1983-85, the number of in-patients rose by 2.5%, outpatients by 6%, yet the number of doctors remained constant. Rather than 'liberate' funds badly needed elsewhere, the bed closure programme simply forces more intensive use of remaining beds, and greater pressure on the medical profession. Each Region has followed government demands that services be cut in London, but plans for this to be done 'painlessly' have gone

completely awry.

It is an attack on workers in the health service, disguised as prudent economic management.

Most damagingly, the report points out the vast gulf between Government utterance and reality. Health minister Newton claims that health service spending in Inner London would go up by 3% in real terms between 1986/7 and 1987/8, yet analysis of the plans for the four separate health Regions reveal a budget cut of £109 million or 13% by 1993 - equivalent to the total cost of St Thomas', St Bartholomew's and the Royal Free Hospitals combined. Even worse, the report concluded that there is no organisational structure which can plan for London's health services as a whole. Each region is 'back to back' with its counterparts.

Since London trains one-third of all doctors in Britain, the national significance of the capital's health service cannot be ignored. That Fowler has been unable to wreak further damage is a tribute to all who work in health, but his intentions are clear, and a third term for Thatcher would certainly put more time at his destructive disposal.

BT strike leaves NCU stronger to face future

"WE HAVE become an industrial union." That was one of the benefits of the dispute with British Telecom described by the speaker from the National Communications Union when he addressed Exeter Trades Union Council on Monday 9 February.

"It was a strike we didn't want and if you had told me six months ago that we'd all be out I wouldn't have believed you."

"It all goes back to the privatisation of Telecom. As a union we warned them that the result would be a higher price for customers and a lower one for businesses. More emphasis on profit, less on service. Charges for emergency services and repairs. Less jobs. We predicted and it happened."

"We accept change is inevitable. There is continual change in our industry. It is a modern industry that needs new technology."

Telecom

"However, the change wanted by Telecom would have meant less secure jobs, lack of career prospects and a worse service to the consumer."

"Not only that, the management linked the changes to our 1986 pay deal. There were 16 strings attached in a 54 page document. In their £1 million adverts Telecom described these as a few minor changes."

"This is from a company that is making massive profits and whose board members have awarded themselves pay rises of over 100% over the last three years. Our members were none too pleased."

"Nevertheless we tried to negotiate. Telecom told us that we didn't represent our members. So we held ballots getting bigger majorities for action each time."

"We decided on tactics that would inflict maximum damage on BT and minimum pain to ourselves. We started by withdrawing goodwill and co-operation and moved on to overtime bans and work-to-rules."

"That is when the suspensions began. BT thought that by picking on a few in less militant areas they could get us to toe the line. But we kept solid and took strike action on behalf of the strike action on behalf of the suspended members."

"We were then asked to sign documents saying we would work normally. The way BT had treated us for the last three years had so incensed us that this insult was the last straw."

"Some of our members had worked nearly 40 years for BT and the post office before that. Some of them had tears in their eyes at the way they were being spoken to. We even had non-members pleading to join the union so that they could join in the action."

"Our 110,000 members stuck together. Now BT have come up with a new offer. It's not everything we wanted but it's certainly not all BT wanted either. We have got rid of a lot of the strings. The dispute was not just about pay and conditions - it was about the way BT were treating us. We stood up and have become an industrial union."



TELECOM workers picket in Exeter during their recent strike.

Photo: The Worker.

Reading DHSS Computer strike

WHEN READING DHSS computer specialists went on strike over two weeks ago, it was in response to a sorry history of mismanagement. Above all, it was the end of the road for dozens of skilled professionals who had been employed to implement Thatcher's attack on the whole unemployment benefit system with half the resources they required. They had worked overtime: they had been called out at night when the computer had gone down.

It was not that they favoured the attack on benefits, but it the computer systems did not work, the unemployed were likely to get no benefit at all.

Now the worm turned.

The discriminatory discretionary allowance was the last straw. Significantly, most of those offered the extra £600 -£800 a year have walked out along with those who were denied it.

Management, once recovered from the initial shock of their loyal servants revolting, have now used the standard "Plan B" carbon-copied to every Thatcherite boss. Letters went last Saturday to every striker's home offering an immediate review provided everyone returned to work. An identical "review" had been put to negotiators the previous Tuesday and rejected at a strikers' meeting next day.

DHSS management say they cannot negotiate under duress. The strikers' answer is simple: you will only negotiate if we put your legislative programme in jeopardy. That is what we are now doing.

The strike is being led by a committee some of whose salaries approach £16,000 a year. If they are in revolt, why are we not all in revolt.

Hold the line at Stocksbridge Steels

THE 600 redundancies announced at Stocksbridge Engineering Steels has not taken anyone by surprise. Some of the workforce came from Tinsley Park over two years ago, and must use their experience of what happened there to defend this plant, which is a national asset.

From a 6 million tonne engineering steel output in Britain in 1980, closure of the special billet mill on Shepcote Lane left a capacity of only 2.3 million tonnes, and a stated intention by the Corporation to meet a 1.7 million tonne target within two years. Stocksbridge should be able to make 317,250 tonnes on primary processing and 150,000 on cast. The sums are beginning to add up nicely.

The usual relationship between the plan and Austin Rover exists, and it is no coincidence that the closure of the carmakers' foundry and forge at Longbridge, with the loss of 150 jobs, has been announced simultaneously. If Stocksbridge loses a quarter of its workforce, the remainder would be fighting for survival.

Stocksbridge, part of United Engineering Steel (UES) was formed out of the special steels and forging interests of the BSC and Guest, Keen and Nettlefolds (GKN) less than a year ago. This project (II) is the final domino in the Phoenix Series. Phoenix II has always been shrouded in mystery, but the end result will be that GKN destroys the host and transforms itself from a steel producer to a pure consumer. The process is almost complete and its history is there for the record:

- Phoenix One (Allied Steel and Wire) shut the Castle Strip Mill.
- Phoenix Three (Gorgemasters) - out go the Norfolk and Atlas Melting Shops.

- Phoenix Four (Bright Bars) - closure of Flathers and Exors.
- Phoenix Five (Seamless Tubes) - Corby and Wednesfield down the drain.
- Phoenix Six (Cold Drawn Steels) - closure of Groom and Tatersgill and Acrow Tubes.
- Phoenix Seven (United Rings) - Ferron operations of Woodhouse and Dixon and Inco Alloys were shut.

Finally:
● Phoenix Two (Special Steel and Forgings) - made up of Stocksbridge, Brymbo and Rotherham Engineering Steels. Shut Stocksbridge?

The firm has had heavy investment in modern continuous casting machines and it was

stated that this new entity, employing 10,500 workers, was secure because of a £65 million capital programme, including a new large bloom caster at Rotherham.

Asset strippers wait in the wings, however. Samuel Montague have just been appointed by the Department of Trade and Industry to give preliminary advice on privatising BSC. The Corporation has appointed Barclay's de Zoete Hedd to handle the financial arrangements.

In two years Britain will have no integrated engineering steel capacity. Draw the line at Stocksbridge - not one more inch of territory!

Harrods workers vote to fight

HARRODS workers continued their resistance to imposed changes in wages and conditions by voting to support the principle of industrial action by a majority of 290 votes (360 for, 70 against).

This was despite the company using all the traditional tools

of their class to intimidate the workforce by threatening various forms of legal action and attempting to interfere with the ballot.

However the implementation extended hours has been an issue which has united the workforce in their campaign against the company's attempts to drive the now strong branch out of the store.

Unless meetings with the store's management this week resolve the crisis, a ballot for specified industrial action is inevitable. Such action would be a first for shopworkers within the store and a boost to retail through-out the West End.

Ayr lace strike

LACE workers in the Irvine Valley in Ayrshire are standing firm in the face of attempts to divide them. The walkout by more than 800 has halted production in 14 factories in Darvel and Newmilns.

Some employers offered to leave the Scottish Lace and Window Furnishing Association if their workforce agreed to leave their union, the Scottish Lace and Textile Workers Union (now part of GMBTU). The offer has been rejected out of hand, and pressure on the employers for a pay increase acceptable to workers is gaining.

Notts printers get the Murdoch treatment

IN THE SAME way that Murdoch sacked 5,000 of his workers, Lionel Pickering - owner of such local papers as the Nottingham Trader and the Derby Trader - sacked 88 printers on 4 December 1986 and took their work to non-unionised printers.

The main plant at Heanor Gate in Derbyshire was immediately occupied by defiant NGA printers who spoke of their determination to resist the sackings and win back their jobs.

The occupation only lasted a few hours but immediately a round-the-clock picket was set-up. Since then, they have been gaining support in the area. Derbyshire County Council

are among the Trader customer who have withdrawn all advertising accounts from Pickering's papers.

A printworkers' support group has been set up in Derby and one is also being set up in Nottingham. Printers have asked the public to boycott the Trader, to send the Trader back to the owners as unsolicited mail. Each time it will cost Pickering 22p. The printers have also said that they are willing to speak at meetings.

It has recently been revealed that T Bailey Forman (the company that owns the local scab Nottingham Evening Post) has been printing the Nottingham Trader at its plant in Breston, Notts. On 26 January, sacked NGA printer picketed around seven scabs who arrived to print the week's Trader.

The dispute between the printers and Pickering had been going on long before the eventual sackings in December. During 1986 Pickering consistently broke the NGA's local and national agreements. In April he actually imposed a two year wages freeze. Eventually he sacked the printers who refused to accept his dictates.

Occupation to save Ancoats

THE CASUALTY department at Ancoats Hospital in North Manchester has been occupied since Sunday 1 February. After marches, protests and a 5000 petition failed to keep the unit open, local residents decided to take it over themselves.

They are organised in two shifts - women and children during the day and men at night. Donations of money and food have been pouring in and strong support has been given by the local health workers. NUPE and COHSE organised lightning strikes at Ancoats an Crumspall hospitals, including laundry staff, porters, catering staff and others.

Ancoats deals with 37,000 casualties a year and the nearest other casualty unit is at Cumpall Hospital, two bus rides away. Since the closure of Ancoats casualty, Crumspall has been unable to cope, and several occasions people have been lying on stretchers for hours, awaiting treatment.

Despite these facts, the Health Authority maintains the Ancoats casualty isn't needed, and that there aren't enough doctors to staff it. Local residents, however, see the problems of medical staffing as the result of a planned run-down of the unit - part of a deliberate policy aimed at leaving only two casualty units operating in the whole of Manchester. It was this, they believe that led the Royal College of Surgeons to withdraw accreditations for training junior doctors there.

Ambulance drivers have added their voices to the protest because, at a time when their numbers are being cut, they are having to make much longer journeys to reach an open casualty, putting them under increasing stress, and patients' lives at risk.

Residents organised a march, demonstration and lobbied North Manchester Health Authority last Wednesday, 11 February.

Public Meeting

Friday 27 February
7.30 pm

"London's Print - Press On against Thatcher".
Small Hall, St. Bride Institute,
Bride Lane, off Fleet Street, London EC4.